**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT MIKETZ**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Mikeitz begins with the famous story of Pharaoh’s unusual dreams and his quest for a satisfying interpretation, which was finally provided by Yosef, who was brought out of prison for the purpose of interpreting the king’s dreams. Yosef prophetically informed Pharaoh that the images he beheld – seven lean cows devouring seven healthy cows, and seven lean sheaves of grain devouring seven large sheaves – foreshadowed a seven-year period of surplus, which would be followed by seven years of harsh drought. Yosef then advised Pharaoh to appoint an official to oversee and enforce the storage of grain during the seven years of surplus, to ensure the country’s survival during the ensuing period of drought (41:33-36). Many commentators raised the question of why Yosef allowed himself the right to advise Pharaoh, after having been brought before the king for the specific purpose of uncovering the message of his strange dreams.

The Ramban (41:4) answers this question by explaining that the storage of grain during the surplus years was not Yosef’s recommendation in light of the dream’s prediction, but rather part of the dream’s message. The large, robust cows and sheaves, of course, represented the seven surplus years, and the lean cows and sheaves represented the famine years. The Ramban thus contends that the images of the lean cows and sheaves consuming the large cows and sheaves indicated to Yosef that the surplus years would sustain the “lean” years of famine, because the stored grain would suffice to sustain the country during the drought. This is in contrast to Rashi’s understanding, that the images of the lean cows and sheaves devouring the large cows and sheaves foretold the severity of the drought, which would have the effect of “devouring” any indication of prior prosperity. The Ramban explains that to the contrary, these images symbolized the sustenance that the country would receive during the seven drought years from the previous seven years of prosperity. Therefore, Yosef’s interpretation of the dream included the storage of grain during the seven years of surplus. The Ramban thus explains that Yosef did not advise Pharaoh to store grain, but rather informed him that this would be done, as indicated by his dreams.

This debate between Rashi and the Ramban relates also to Yosef’s prediction to Pharaoh that with the onset of the drought years, “all the prosperity in the land of Egypt will be forgotten…” (41:30). Rashi explains that the prediction of the people “forgetting” the surplus years is the interpretation of the devouring of the large cows and sheaves by the lean cows and sheaves, which depicted the elimination of any signs of the surplus enjoyed by the country previously. The Ramban, however, disagrees with Rashi’s interpretation, claiming that this “forgetting” was Yosef’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s description of the lean cows appearing just as lean after consuming the large cows as they had originally (41:21). Yosef told Pharaoh that the joy of prosperity will not be experienced during the famine years, because the drought will be so severe that although the country will be able to survive through the stored grain, it will remain “lean,” and no sign of surplus will be seen.

Rashi and the Ramban thus disagree on the question of whether or not the prophecy shown to Pharaoh was ultimately fulfilled. According to the Ramban, Pharaoh was shown precisely what eventually happened – a period of seven surplus years that enabled the country to survive the seven ensuing drought years. According to Rashi, however, Yosef essentially succeeded in overturning the grim prediction that was revealed to Pharaoh. The dream showed Pharaoh that the country would languish from hunger during the seven drought years, and Yosef therefore urged Pharaoh to act to prevent this catastrophe. Pharaoh heeded Yosef’s advice, such that, in the end, the calamity foretold by the dreams was averted, and the country survived.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the question raised by many commentators as to why Yosef, after interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams as foretelling a seven-year period of surplus followed by a seven-year period of famine, proceeded to give Pharaoh what appears to be unsolicited advice. Having been brought from prison – to where he was condemned on false charges of attempted rape – for the specific purpose of interpreting Pharaoh’s peculiar dreams, Yosef explained to Pharaoh the dreams’ meaning and then urged him to appoint an official to oversee the storage of grain during the surplus years. It seems difficult to understand how Yosef had the gall to assume the role of royal advisor, extending beyond the role for which he was brought out of the dungeon.

We might add that it is hard to imagine Yosef adding this advice in the hope that Pharaoh would select him for the job of overseeing grain – which is, of course, what ended up happening – because Yosef could have hardly expected Pharaoh to consider him for this position. He had been imprisoned on serious charges of assaulting the wife of his master – a government official – and so there was certainly no reason for Yosef to anticipate earning a distinguished appointment by Pharaoh, even if the king accepted his interpretation of the dreams.

One answer to this question seems to emerge from the comments of Chizkuni, noting an oft-overlooked aspect of Pharaoh’s dreams. The Torah tells that Pharaoh saw seven large cows emerge from the river, which were then followed by seven lean cows that “stood alongside the cows on the riverbank” (41:3). Thereafter, the Torah tells, Pharaoh saw the lean cows devour the large cows. What is the significance of the fact that the lean cows first stood alongside the large cows, before devouring them? Chizkuni explains that as the large cows represented the years of surplus, and the lean cows represented the famine years, Pharaoh was shown all the cows standing together to indicate that there would be an overlap period, that would feature both surplus and famine. As we read later (41:54), when the famine first struck, the people in the surrounding countries found themselves without food, whereas Egypt still had plenty of resources thanks to the rationing that took place during the previous seven years. This period, when the region experienced severe drought but Egypt nevertheless had large amounts of grain, is represented by the brief period when the large cows and the lean cows stood alongside each other. Soon thereafter, however, the lean cows devoured the large crows – foreseeing the point at which the stored grain was no longer enough to offer prosperity, even as it sufficed to save the region from widespread starvation. (This explanation of the significance of the cows’ standing together was offered also by Seforno. Netziv, in his *Ha’ameik Davar*, offers an entirely different approach.)

According to Chizkuni, then, the storage of grain during the seven surplus years was included in the dream, which alluded to a period marked by a combination of wealth and deprivation. This easily answers the question of why Yosef felt it appropriate to instruct Pharaoh to appoint an official to oversee the storage of grain during the surplus years. Yosef was not, in fact, giving an instruction, but rather interpreting the dream as foreseeing the storage of grain. Since the dream included an indication that Egypt would have large amounts of food after the onset of the drought, Yosef informed Pharaoh that the dream foresaw the storage of grain during the surplus years in preparation for the years of drought.

Monday

Parashat Mikeitz begins with the story of Pharaoh’s peculiar dream which Yosef correctly interpreted as foreseeing the onset of seven years of surplus which would be followed by seven years of harsh drought. Pharaoh first dreamt of seven large cows swallowing seven emaciated cows, and then of seven large sheaves of grain devouring seven lean sheaves. Yosef informed Pharaoh that both visions foresaw the same sequence of events – a seven-year period of prosperity that would be “devoured” by a seven-year period of shortage.

In describing Pharaoh’s first vision, of the cows, the Torah tells that after the seven large cows emerged from the river, “*va-tir’ena ba-achu*” (41:2) – they grazed “in the meadow.” What is the significance of this detail – that the large cows grazed in the meadow – to the dream and its prophetic message?

The Midrash (*Tachuma Yashan*) answers this question by reinterpreting the word “*ba-achu*” to mean “in harmony,” associating the word “*achu*” with the word “*ach*” (“brother”). (See Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch’s commentary, where he suggests connecting the conventional translation of “*achu*” – “meadow” – with the word “*ach*” by noting that “grass is a ‘social plant’ which as a rule never grows singly.”) According to the Midrash, the vision of seven large, well-fed cows grazing in a harmonious, “brotherly” fashion represents the peace and harmony that generally prevails during times of financial prosperity, as people are content and have no need to compete with one another for limited resources.

The classic commentators, however, offer explanations for the significance of this detail even according to the plain meaning of “*ba-achu*,” as referring to a meadow. The Radak writes that this was mentioned to emphasize that the cows found large quantities of pasture in which to graze. According to the Radak, this detail foreshadows the abundance of food that would characterize the seven surplus years. The Ramban explains differently, noting that the Torah makes a point of mentioning the whereabouts of the large cows after their emergence from the river, but not the whereabouts of the lean cows that followed them and then devoured them. This distinction, the Ramban proposes, perhaps indicated that the surplus would be experienced only in Egypt, whereas the drought struck the neighboring countries, as well. As the Ramban cites, the Torah later seems to stress that the prosperity of the seven surplus years was enjoyed specifically in Egypt (41:29,48). It is clear, however, that the famine struck the entire region, for the Torah states explicitly that people from other countries – including Yosef’s brothers from Canaan – came to Egypt to purchase grain (41:57). Therefore, the Ramban suggests, Pharaoh saw the seven large cows grazing together in one location, indicating that the surplus would be experienced only in one location – Egypt – whereas the lean cows scattered about, foreshadowing the lean years which would be felt throughout the entire region.

A different approach is taken by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, who explains that Pharaoh saw the seven lean cows consuming all the pasture in the meadow, leaving nothing for the lean cows that followed. Cows, Rav Hirsch observes, are not cannibals, but the lean cows were forced to eat the other cows because there was no pasture left for them. And thus the dream presented not only a prediction of what would happen, but a sober warning to Pharaoh not to allow all the “pasture” to be depleted by the seven “large cows” – the years of surplus – and to instead store grain during the period of surplus in preparation for the “lean years” that would follow. This explanation of the dream answers the question asked by many as to why Yosef felt it appropriate to conclude his interpretation of Pharaoh’s dream by urging Pharaoh to appoint an official to store grain during the years of surplus. According to Rav Hirsch, this piece of advice actually constituted part of the interpretation of the dream, which specifically warned of the grave consequences of consuming all the “pasture” without putting some away for the years of shortage.

Tuesday

We read in Parashat Mikeitz of Pharaoh’s dreams which foretold the onset of a seven-year period of prosperity which would be followed by a seven -year period of shortage. Pharaoh first saw seven emaciated cows devouring seven large cows, and then seven lean sheaves of grain devouring seven large sheaves.

The Torah describes Pharaoh’s second vision as featuring seven large sheaves “rising in a single stalk” (41:5), followed by seven lean sheaves “growing after them” (41:6). Curiously, whereas the first set of sheaves is said to have “arisen,” the seven lean sheaves are described as “growing.”

Rav Shalom of Belz explained that the term “*tzomechot*” (“growing”) used to depict the second set of sheaves connotes a more evident and readily discernible process than the word “*olot*” (“rising”) used in reference to the initial set of sheaves. And for this reason, he suggested, the Torah speaks of the seven large sheaves’ emergence with the term “*olot*” – because the period of surplus set in less conspicuously than the “growth” of the lean years, represented by the lean sheaves. As noted already by the Ramban (41:2), the surplus was limited to Egypt, whereas the famine that followed struck the entire region. Hence, Rav Shalom of Belz explained, the onset of the famine years was far more widespread, and thus far more evident, than the onset of the surplus years, and so the Torah refers to the seven large sheaves with the term “*olot*,” which connotes a subtle development, and speaks of the seven lean sheaves with the word “*tzomechot*,” which connotes a very obvious and widely recognized phenomenon.

Symbolically, this explanation perhaps points to the fact that people oftentimes discern misfortune more quickly than they recognize good fortune. The “lean years” of our lives generally catch our attention and trigger anxiety and angst more quickly than the “surplus years” evoke feelings of joy and gratitude. The “lean years” – hardship and adversity – tend to feel like they “sprout” (“*tzomechot*”) everywhere, whereas our good fortune tends to feel “limited,” less significant, and insufficient, and so it affects us less profoundly than hardship. The subtle distinction between the Torah’s depiction of the large sheaves and the lean sheaves thus perhaps reminds us to feel at least as enthusiastic over our “large sheaves” as we feel despondent over our “lean sheaves,” to celebrate our good fortune with at least as much fervor as that with which we bemoan our troubles – and even much more so.

Wednesday

We read in the beginning of Parashat Mikeitz that Pharaoh dreamt two dreams which Yosef correctly interpreted as foretelling the onset of seven years of prosperity which would be followed by seven years of drought, when food would be scarce. As the Torah describes, Pharaoh first beheld the peculiar vision of seven emaciated cows devouring seven large cows, and then saw the even more peculiar spectacle of seven lean sheaves of grain devouring seven large, robust sheaves.

In interpreting the dream to Pharaoh, Yosef emphasized that “*chalom Pharaoh echad hu*” – “Pharaoh’s dream is one.” Meaning, the two visions foretold the exact same sequence of events – a period of material prosperity followed by a period of shortage. They did not predict two separate events or series of events, but both made the same prediction. The reason why this information was told to Pharaoh in two separate visions, Yosef explained, was to indicate that this sequence of events would definitely occur, and would be unfolding immediately, without any delay (41:32).

Netziv, in his *Ha’ameik Davar* (41:32, 41:5; see also to 43:1), surprisingly asserts that in truth, there was another reason why God showed Pharaoh two separate visions. According to Netziv, Yosef conveyed to Pharaoh only the information which he needed, but there was also additional information prophetically conveyed by way of the two different dreams. Namely, the different visions indicated that the drought would manifest itself differently in different locations. Later, the Torah tells of how people from other lands in the regions were forced to purchase provisions from Egypt, because only Egypt had stored grain before the onset of the famine, clearly indicating that the drought struck not only Egypt, but also the neighboring regions. (This is as opposed to the surplus of the first seven years, which was experienced only in Egypt.) However, Netziv claims that the drought was more severe in Egypt than in other areas, and thus the two different visions shown to Pharaoh represent the two different types of drought which struck the region. Pharaoh was first shown a vision of emaciated cows, indicating that the drought in Egypt was so harsh that even animal fodder was unavailable. In the second dream, however, Pharaoh saw seven lean sheaves of wheat – food normally fed to human beings, as opposed to animals. This foresaw the famine as experienced in other areas, where food normally fed to animals was still available, and it was only standard human food rations which were lacking. In the neighboring countries, according to Netziv, the poor were able to subsist during the drought years on the low-quality food to which they were accustomed, but wealthier inhabitants, who were accustomed to regular bread, were forced to purchase grain from Egypt. In Egypt, however, the drought devastated the entirety of the country’s agriculture, and it was only through the storage of grain during the previous seven years that the country survived, and was even able to sell grain to neighboring peoples.

According to Netziv, then, Pharaoh was shown two different dreams not only to indicate the certitude and imminence of the events they foretold, but also to foretell the different types of conditions that would be suffered by Egypt and by the other countries in the region.

Thursday

The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 677:1), based on the Gemara (Shabbat 23a), rules that an *akhsenai* – a guest lodging in somebody else’s home – fulfills the *mitzva* of candle lighting on Chanukah by giving his host a small amount of money, through which he participates in the host’s lighting. If the *akhsenai* has a member of his household back home, and that household member lights Chanukah candles, then the guest fulfills the obligation through the lighting back home. However, if he has nobody lighting back home – such as if he lives alone – then he fulfills his requirement by giving a coin to his host.

Some *Acharonim* understood that the purpose of giving money is to purchase a share in the materials (the candles, or wicks and oil), such that the guest is covered by the host’s lighting. This is the implication of the *Bach* (O.C. 677), who writes that the essence of the candle lighting obligation is a financial one, requiring one to use his assets to light Chanukah candles.

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/148_57_80.pdf), however, strongly disputes this explanation of the requirement of the *akhsenai*, raising several objections. First, he argues, the *mitzva* is always described as an obligation to light candles – not to pay money for candles. Thus, for example, the text of the *berakha* recited over the Chanukah candle lighting is “*…le-hadlik ner shel Chanukah*” – “to light the Chanukah candle.” The simple understanding is that the *mitzva* is to light candles, not to “finance” the lighting of candles.

Moreover, the Gemara and *Shulchan Arukh* state simply that the *akhsenai* gives a coin to the host – without performing any other action. A basic halakhic principle establishes that “*ma’ot einan konot*” – the transfer of money alone does not effectuate the legal transfer of ownership of moveable property from the seller to the buyer. Although the transfer of money effectuates the transaction of real property, it does not effectuate the transaction of a moveable object; this requires the buyer to physically bring the transacted item into his possession, such as by lifting it. Therefore, if *Halakha* requires the guest in this case to acquire a share in the materials, it would not suffice to simply give the host a coin, as the Gemara and *Shulchan Arukh* require, and he would have to take physical possession of the materials, which is clearly not the case.

Rav Weiss notes that some have answered this question on the basis of the Rama’s ruling in *Choshen Mishpat* (199:3) that when making a purchase for the sake of a *mitzva*, such as when purchasing wine for *kiddush*, paying money suffices to effectuate the transaction. The rationale for this ruling is that the transfer of money indeed suffices to effectuate a transaction on the level of Torah law, but the Sages enacted the need for a physical transfer of the object in order to incentivize the seller to properly care for the object in the interim. If the object would become the buyer’s possession immediately after payment, even as it sits in the owner’s property, the seller might not bother to protect it, as he has already received payment and has no vested interest in guarding the object. (In the Gemara’s words, “*Shema yomar lo, ‘Nisrefu chitekha ba-aliya*’” – “Lest he tell him, ‘Your wheat was burned in the attic’”; Bava Metzia 47a.) But for the purpose of fulfilling a *mitzva*, according to the Rama, the Sages suspended their enactment and applied the Torah’s rule, whereby the object needed for a *mitzva* legally changes ownership immediately when payment is made. This ruling appears to easily explain why a guest needs to simply pay money to acquire a share in the host’s materials for the sake of the *mitzva* of Chanukah candle lighting.

However, Rav Weiss notes that if anything, the Rama’s ruling makes it more difficult to accept this understanding. For one thing, many authorities disputed or questioned the Rama’s position. (Rav Weiss mentions specifically the Vilna Gaon and Rabbi Akiva Eiger, in their respective collections of notes to the *Shulchan Arukh*.) If the guest’s purchasing a share of the materials is grounded in the exception mentioned by the Rama, then this exception should not be subject to any controversy, as it is explicitly established by the Gemara, in requiring a guest to pay a coin to his host. This exception should also then be clear and straightforward – yet neither the Rama nor the *Terumat Ha-deshen* – the source of the Rama’s ruling – cited the law of the *akhsenai* as an explicit Talmudic basis for their ruling. This would certainly suggest that the *akhsenai*’s payment of a coin serves some other purpose, and is not intended to purchase a share in the wicks and oil of the Chanukah candles.

We will *iy”H* discuss this subject further tomorrow.

Friday

Yesterday, we noted the *halakha* relating to an “*akhsenai*” – a guest lodging in somebody’s home during Chanukah. The *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 677:1), based on the Gemara (Shabbat 23a), rules that if the guest has nobody at home who lights Chanukah candles, then he fulfills the *mitzva* by giving the host a small amount of money. As we saw, some understood that the guest is required to purchase a share in the candles, or in the oil and wicks, and this way he is included in the host’s lighting and he thereby fulfills the *mitzva*. [Rav Asher Weiss](http://beinenu.com/sites/default/files/alonim/148_57_80.pdf) challenged this perspective, however, raising several questions, including the famous rule of “*ma’ot einan konot*,” which says that paying money for a moveable object does not independently effectuate the transfer of ownership. The Gemara and *Shulchan Arukh* require only giving money to the host – despite the fact that, according to the *halakhot* governing financial transactions, moveable merchandise does not come into the buyer’s possession until he takes it or lifts it, even after paying the money. This would suggest that the purpose of the requirement to pay a coin to the host is not to acquire part ownership in the materials.

Rav Weiss cited a refutation of this argument by the *Imrei Emet* (Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter, the third Rebbe of Ger), printed in *Mikhtevei Torah* (12). The *Imrei Emet* cited his father, the *Sefat Emet*, as establishing that an exception to the rule of “*ma’ot einan konot*” is made in the case of partners who make transactions. As discussed yesterday, according to the accepted view (that of Rabbi Yochanan, in Masekhet Bava Metzia 47a-b), Torah law indeed regards a piece of merchandise as entering the buyer’s possession once he transfers payment to the seller. However, the Sages enacted a provision suspending the legal transfer of ownership until the buyer takes physical possession of the merchandise, as a means of incentivizing the seller to properly care for the item in the interim. If the buyer becomes the object’s owner immediately after paying, even though the object is still in the seller’s property, the seller has no interest in protecting the object, which no longer belongs to him and for which he already received payment. The Sages therefore established that the object legally belongs to the seller even after he received payment, until the buyer takes physical possession, so that he would need to return the money if anything happened to the object. The *Imrei Emet* noted that when it comes to partners, there is no such concern, as partners indeed have vested interest in securing their shared assets. When somebody wishes to purchase a share in somebody else’s possession, the seller quite obviously does not want the item in question to be ruined or lost after receiving the money, as he enjoys part ownership even after the transaction. In such a case, therefore, according to the *Imrei Emet*, we revert back to the level of Torah, according to which payment suffices to effectuate the transfer of ownership. Hence, when a guest pays money to his host, he legally acquires a share in the materials for the candle lighting despite performing no action with the materials.

The *Imrei Emet* proposes that for this reason, the Gemara and the *Shulchan Arukh* formulate the *akhsenai*’s requirement in this case with the term, “participate” – “*le-hishtateif*.” This word emphasizes the state of legal partnership (“*shutfut*”) that is created through this process, and this status, according to the *Imrei Emet*, is the reason why the mere payment of money suffices for the *akhsenai* to acquire a share in the lighting materials.

Rav Weiss countered by citing several sources that apply here the concept of “*lo pelug*” – that a Rabbinic enactment remains applicable even in circumstances when its reason is not pertinent. While it is true that one who sold a share in an object has vested interest in protecting it, nevertheless, once the Sages enacted the need for the buyer to take physical possession for the transaction to be effectuated, this rule applies even in the case of a partnership. Rav Weiss thus argued that the *akhsenai*’spayment is not made for the purpose of acquiring a portion in the materials.

Instead, Rav Weiss contended, *Chazal* required the guest to pay the host in order to become legally considered part of the household. The Chanukah candle obligation is one which rests upon the household (“*neir ish u-veito*” – Shabbat 21b), and so in the case of a guest, the Sages instituted a mechanism whereby the guest becomes halakhically part of his host’s household so that he can fulfill his obligation through the host’s lighting. By symbolically participating in the household expenses, the guest formally becomes a member of the household, and he is then naturally included in the host’s lighting, just as the host’s family members are.

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