

ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר בראשית

פרשת מקץ

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THE TORAH'S ACCOUNT OF THE DREAM OF THE COWS VS. WHAT PHARAOH TOLD YOSEF

Editor's Note: We have juxtaposed the Torah's account ("first version") of Pharaoh's first dream in verses 1–4 with Pharaoh's recounting of the dreams ("second version") to Yosef in verses 17–21 to make it easier to understand the Alshich's discussion of our passage.

Bereishis 41:1–4, 17–21

1) It was at the end of two years of days. Pharaoh is dreaming that behold! — he is standing over the river.

17) Pharaoh told Yosef, "In my dream, I am standing by the side of the river.

2) From the river are emerging seven beautiful-looking cows with healthy flesh. They grazed in the marshland.

18) "From the river are emerging seven cows with healthy flesh and a beautiful form. They grazed in the marshland.

3) Seven other cows are coming out after them from the river — ugly-looking and thin. They stood next to the [healthy] cows on the river bank.

19) "Seven other cows are coming out after them — poor, with a very ugly form and thin. I have never seen such terrible-looking cows in the whole of Egypt.

4) The ugly-looking, thin cows ate the seven beautiful-looking and healthy cows. Pharaoh woke up!

20) "The thin ugly cows ate the first seven healthy cows.

21) "They came inside them, but it was not noticeable that they had come inside them. Their appearance was as bad as it was before and I woke up."

(א) וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ שְׁנַת־יָמַי וַפְרַעְוָה חָלַם וַהֲנֵה עֹמֵד עַל הַיָּאֵר.
(יז) וַיְדַבֵּר פְּרַעְוָה אֶל יוֹסֵף בְּחִלְמֵי הַנְּנִי עֹמֵד עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּאֵר.

(ב) וַהֲנֵה מִן הַיָּאֵר עֹלֹת שִׁבְעַת פָּרוֹת יְפוֹת מְרֻאָה וּבְרִיאַת בְּשָׂר וַתִּרְשְׁנֶנָּה בְּאָחוּ.
(יח) וַהֲנֵה מִן הַיָּאֵר עֹלֹת שִׁבְעַת פָּרוֹת בְּרִיאֹת בְּשָׂר וַיִּפְתַּת תֹּאֲר וַתִּרְשְׁנֶנָּה בְּאָחוּ.

(ג) וַהֲנֵה שִׁבְעַת פָּרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן מִן הַיָּאֵר רָעוֹת מְרֻאָה וְדָקוֹת בְּשָׂר וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה אֶצְל הַפָּרוֹת עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּאֵר.
(ט) וַהֲנֵה שִׁבְעַת פָּרוֹת אֲחֵרוֹת עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן דְּלוֹת וְרָעוֹת תֹּאֲר מְאֹד וְרָקוֹת בְּשָׂר לֹא רָאִיתִי כַּהֲנֵה בְּכָל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְרַע.

(ד) וַתֹּאכְלֶנָּה הַפָּרוֹת הַרְעוֹת הַמְרֻאָה וְדָקַת הַבְּשָׂר אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַפָּרוֹת יְפוֹת הַמְרֻאָה וַהֲבִרְיַת וַיִּקְוֶן פְּרַעְוָה.
(כ) וַתֹּאכְלֶנָּה הַפָּרוֹת הַרְעוֹת וַהֲרָעוֹת אֶת שִׁבְעַת הַפָּרוֹת הַרְאֵשׁוֹת הַבְּרִיאַת.

(כא) וַתִּבְאֲנֶנָּה אֶל קַרְבְּנָה וְלֹא נֹדַע כִּי בָאוּ אֶל קַרְבְּנָה וַיִּמְרָאִיהֶן רַע כַּאֲשֶׁר בַּתְּחִלָּה וַאֲיָקֻץ.

Consider the following questions:

- In the first version (verse 1) it says that Pharaoh was standing *over the river* (עַל הַיָּאֵר); in the second version (verse 17) it says that he was standing *by the side of the river* (עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּאֵר).
- In the first version (verse 2) it says the cows *were beautiful-looking* (יְפוֹת מְרֻאָה); in the second version (verse 18) it says they had a *beautiful form* (וַיִּפְתַּת תֹּאֲר).
- In the first version (verse 2) it describes the beauty of the cows before noting that they have *healthy flesh*; in the second version (verse 18) it first mentions that they have *healthy flesh* and only afterward does it mention their beauty.
- In the first version (verse 3) it says that the thin cows were coming out after the fat cows *from the river* (עֹלוֹת אַחֲרֵיהֶן מִן הַיָּאֵר); in the second version (verse 19) it just says that they were coming out *after them*, without mentioning the river.

Pharaoh knew that both his dreams, of the cows and grain, contained the same message, although he did not know what the message was. This is why the Torah says (in verse 8) that when he reported them to his sorcerers and wise men, *Pharaoh told them his dream*, in singular form. After he did not accept their interpretation, which was that they represented seven daughters that he would father, who would then die, as well as his first conquering then losing seven countries, he was worried that Yosef would explain the dreams in the same way. He therefore changed certain details of the dreams to make it harder to explain them as his servants had.

For example, Pharaoh asked himself what details of the dreams had led his wise men to interpret that he would have seven daughters whom he would also bury. He concluded that it was because he had said that he was standing **עַל הַיָּאָר**, *over the river* (verse 1) and that the seven thin cows had emerged **מִן הַיָּאָר**, *from the river* (verse 3). It was this emphasis on the flowing Nile that the wise men had compared to the male power of producing offspring. Therefore, when he recounted the dream to Yosef, he said that he was standing **עַל שְׂפֵת הַיָּאָר**, *by the side of the river* (verse 17), which made his connection to the river less direct; and he omitted completely the detail that the thin cows had emerged “from the river.” **[This explains Differences 1 and 4.]**

Furthermore, he concluded that he should not have described the first cows as **יְפוֹת מְרָאָה**, *beautiful-looking* (verse 2), since this type of description is more appropriate for human beings than for animals, which would normally be admired for their shape or form. In addition, he decided that he should not have mentioned first that the cows were *beautiful-looking* and only afterwards that they had *healthy flesh*, because the first thing a person would notice in a plump cow would be its healthy flesh, not its beauty; only human beings are noticed first for their beautiful appearance and perhaps only afterward if they had “healthy flesh.” He felt that these details must have also led his wise men to interpret the dream as referring to seven daughters. Because of this, when Pharaoh came to recount his dream to Yosef, he described the cows (verse 18) as having **יְפֵת תֹּאֲר**, *a beautiful form*, which is more appropriate for animals, rather than as being beautiful-looking; and he mentioned that they had *healthy flesh* before mentioning their beauty. **[This explains Differences 2 and 3.]**

THE ALSCHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508–1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKadosh” (the holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. The Alshich is most noted for his monumental Tanach commentary.

The Alshich uses his creative insight and encyclopaedic knowledge of Tanach, Talmud, and Midrash to weave together his profound interpretations. He simultaneously focuses on the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all with one or two concepts.

These sheets, distributed in memory of Yental *bas* Yitzchok, have been drawn from either the Alshich on Avos or Alshich on the Torah, published by Feldheim. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich’s true greatness.

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