

YOSEF'S DREAMS—BOW ADVICE

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Although Yosef's dreams—the brother's sheaves bowing to his, and the stars, moon and sun bowing to him—are at first glance two variations on an identical theme, upon examining their nuances we find that there are noteworthy differences. Moshav Zekeinim asks why in the first dream it is their sheaves bowing to his sheaf, while in the second dream, "the sun, moon and stars are bowing to me" (37:9)? He answers that in the first dream, the sheaves were being held by Yosef and his brothers, so that when their sheaves bowed to his, the implications were obvious. In the second dream, if Yosef were to have been a star, who's to say it was his star that was being bowed to?

Both dreams, it would appear, allude to Yosef's rise to greatness. Ba'alei Tosafos raise the following question: In next week's parsha (Miketz) Pharaoh also has two dreams—seven thin cows swallowing seven fat ones, and seven thin ears of grain swallowing seven full ones. Yosef correctly interprets this to mean that there will be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of hunger. "And as for the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh, twice, it is because the matter is already prepared before G-d, and G-d is hastening to do it." (41:32) Here too, we have essentially the same dream repeated, yet it took 13 years before Yosef would begin his rise to greatness in Egypt! In fact, it would be another nine years before the dreams were fully realized, when his brothers and father came down to Egypt and bowed before him. (See Rashbam *ibid.* who contends that double- dreams are only significant if dreamed on the same night; Pharaoh's were and Yosef's were not.)

How did Yosef allow all those years to pass—knowing full well the torture it must be causing his father—yet never bothering to send him a message? Ramban (42:9) answers that Yosef's dreams were a form of prophecy that he knew must be fulfilled. The first dream has all his brother bowing to him, without Yaakov. This is why, says the Ramban, he insisted that Binyamin come back with his brothers; until the first dream had been fully realized, he could not reveal himself—for doing so would bring Yaakov as well, and that was already encroaching on the territory of the second dream.

According to this Ramban, we now understand why Yosef's dreams were not seen as repetitive, a sign of their imminence (the question of the Ba'alei Tosafos). His brothers would bow to him twice; once without their father and once with him. Since the dreams contained discrete messages, they were in no way redundant.

It also helps us to answer the Moshav Zekeinim's question—why in the first dream they bow to his sheaf, and in the second dream to him. The first time the brothers (alone) bowed to him without knowing who he was. This is represented by the dream of the sheaves, in which their sheaves bow

not to Yosef but to his sheaf. Later the brothers return with Yaakov and they all bow to Yosef after he has already revealed himself. [Chavatzeles Ha-sharon]

While this helps explain the nuances of the dreams and how they played out in real-life, we must now address why it was necessary for them to bow to Yosef twice, and why the first time had to be without knowing to whom they bowed?

When the brothers first meet Yosef without Yaakov, they encounter him as the mashbir—the one who sustains. They need food; Yosef has plenty. They bow to him in awareness of his unique ability to sustain them during a ravaging famine. This is why, in the dream, it was their sheaves bowing to his; their deference is not to him but to what he has, food. Who he is at this stage is inconsequential. Thus, in real-life, they bow to him anonymously.

The second time the brothers bow to Yosef, they bow to him not because of what he has, but what he is and what he has become. From near death and slavery, he has emerged as a great leader in Egypt, yet he never forsook the Torah, his heritage. In the dream, their stars bow to Yosef. In real-life, they acknowledge him by bowing again (43:26) after learning who this great man is. [Ibid.]

Perhaps therein lies a great lesson. In life, there are two types of people for whom we must show deference: those who we recognize for what they have, and those who we recognize for what they are. Look at the dais of any important gathering—who are the guests of honour? Rabbanim, and the wealthy.

There's nothing wrong with this. While there are those who bemoan the honour consistently showered upon the wealthy, the honour they receive is not gratuitous. People with wealth, especially when they give generously to important causes, should receive recognition. Rabbanim and Torah leaders obviously deserve the honour they receive—and far more.

What the Torah is teaching us here is that while both those who have something that's important, and those who are important, deserve deference and respect, we should never perceive them as equals in our mind's eye. There are those two whom we 'bow' face-to-face, recognizing who they are and the great things they have accomplished.

When we 'bow' and give honour to the wealthy, it is not with deference to their personage, but to what they have and what they've done with it. Hashem gave them a gift. They have used it wisely, and well deserve the honour they receive. But their wealth does not make them wiser, and more importantly, does not give them authority over da'as Torah—the ability to view all aspects of life through the Torah's brilliant light. This is the sole jurisdiction of those who have spent their lives immersed in Torah study. To them we 'bow,' in a sense, namelessly.

Sadly, there are times when those funding yeshivos, kollelim, and other Torah institutions, seek to assert their views and opinions about how things should be done—and are ready to pull their support if things aren't done the way they think they should be. They fail to recognize that formulas

that may be highly successful in the business world can be disastrous when applied to Torah study and its institutions. In one instance, a revered Rosh Yeshiva was ultimately forced to abandon his position due to his inability to convince the yeshiva's wealthy patrons that certain students simply didn't belong in their yeshiva, and would have done better elsewhere.

Someone once quipped: "Why does everyone trip over their feet trying to get close to the rich and famous—it's not as if we really think they're going to give us their money?! You know why? Because they have something we like—money." From the brothers we learn that, while it's okay to 'bow' to wealth, we should never allow ourselves to worship its possessors.

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