

DREAMS

Many people are familiar with famous stories from the Scriptures regarding dreams. Here are a few well-known examples:

Abraham

“Now the sun was ready to set, and a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and behold, a fright, a great darkness was falling upon him. And He said to Abram, “You shall surely know that your seed will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and oppress them, for four hundred years...And the fourth generation will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites will not be complete until then” (Gen. 15:12-16).

Jacob

“And he dreamed, and behold! A ladder set up on the ground and its top reached to heaven; and behold, angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it” (Gen. 28:12).

“And an angel of G-d said to me in a dream, ‘Jacob...I am the G-d of Beth El, where you anointed a monument, where you pronounced to Me a vow. Now, arise, go forth from this land and return to the land of your birth’” (Gen. 31:11-13).

Joseph

And he said to them, “Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold, we were binding sheaves in the midst of the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright, and behold, your sheaves encircled [it] and prostrated themselves to my sheaf....And he again dreamed another dream, and he related it to his brothers, and he said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream, and behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were prostrating themselves to me” (Gen. 37:6-7,9).

Solomon

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and G-d said, “Ask what I shall give you.”....Give therefore Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this Your great people?”. And G-d said to him, “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked for yourself long life; neither have you asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked the life of your enemies; but have asked for yourself understanding to discern judgment. Behold, I have done according to your word; behold, I have given you a wise and understanding heart; so that there was none like you before you, nor after you shall any arise like you. And I have also given you that which you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there shall not be any among the kings like you all your days. And if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David did walk, then I will lengthen your days” (I Kings 3:5-14).

All of the above-mentioned dreams were “true” dreams. However, not only righteous people are recorded as having true dreams, but even wicked people as well:

Avimelech

“And G-d came to Avimelech in a dream of the night, and He said to him, “Behold you are going to die because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a married woman” (Gen. 20:3).

Lavan

“And G-d came to Lavan the Aramean in a dream of the night, and He said to him, “Beware lest you speak with Jacob either good or evil” (Gen. 31:24).

Pharaoh’s Cupbearer and Baker

“Now both of them dreamed a dream, each one his dream on the same night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison.... And [Pharaoh] restored the cupbearer, and he placed the cup on Pharaoh’s palm. And the chief baker he hanged, as Joseph had interpreted to them” (Gen. 40:5,21-22).

Pharaoh

“It came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh was dreaming, and he was standing by the Nile. And from the Nile were coming up seven cows, of handsome appearance and robust flesh, and they pastured in the marshland. And seven other cows were coming up after them from the Nile, of ugly appearance and lean of flesh, and they stood beside the cows on the Nile bank. And the cows of ugly appearance and lean of flesh devoured the seven cows that were of handsome appearance and healthy; then Pharaoh awoke. And he fell asleep and dreamed again, and seven ears of grain were growing on one stalk, healthy and good. And seven ears of grain, thin and beaten by the east wind, were growing up after them. And the thin ears of grain swallowed up the seven healthy and full ears of grain; then Pharaoh awoke, a dream” (Gen. 41:1-7).

Interestingly, in each of the above examples, the wicked person received a true dream not for his own benefit, but rather for the benefit of the righteous.

The examples above amply demonstrate that the Torah recognizes and gives credence to the notion of true, prophetic-like dreams. However, consider the following verses that seem to contradict this idea:

“Your thoughts came to you upon your bed” (Daniel 2:29).

This implies that one’s thoughts before going to bed are the source of dreams, which therefore have no inherent meaning other than revealing what’s on one’s mind.

“For a dream comes through a multitude of business” (Ecclesiastes 5:2).

This also suggests a similar idea, namely what one is occupied with during the day is the source of dreams.

"Dreams tell falsehood" (Zechariah 10:2).

This posits that there is no validity to dreams at all.

And yet, sources such as the following substantiate the validity of true dreams:

"In a dream, in a vision of the night...He opens the ears of men" (Job 33:15,16).

"In a dream I [G-d] will speak to him [a prophet]" (Numbers 12:6).

How can we reconcile these seemingly contradictory sources? Let's explore what our Sages teach about the sources of dreams:

Food

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto (Ramchal), The Way of G-d, 3:1:6

והנה, בהיות האדם ישן, כוחותיו נחות, והרגשותיו שקטות, והשכלותו גם כן נחה ושוקטת, ורק הדמיון לבדו יפעל וילך, וידמה ויצויר ענינים, כפי מה שיזדמנו לו, משארית מה שנצטייר בו בעת היקיצה, ומה שיגיע אליו מן האדים והעשנם העולים אל המח, אם מן הלחות הטבעיות, ואם מן המאכלים, וזה ענין החלומות אשר לכל בני האדם.

When a person sleeps, his faculties rest, his senses are quiet, and his mind is relaxed and hushed. The only thing that continues to function is his imagination, and this conceives and envisions various images. Some of these images...may be the result of substances rising to the brain either from the body's own hormones, or from the food that one eats. These images are the dreams that all people experience.

Thoughts

Berachot 55b, 56a

א"ר יונתן אין מראין לו לאדם אלא מהרהורי לבו שנאמר (דניאל ב) "אנת מלכא רעיונך על משכבך סליקו" ואיבעית אימא מהכא (דניאל ב) "ורעיוני לבבך תנדע". אמר רבא תדע דלא מחוו ליה לאינש לא דקלא דדהבא ולא פילא דעייל בקופא דמחטא. אמר ליה קיסר לר' יהושע בר' חנינא אמריתו דחכמיתו טובא אימא לי מאי חזינא בחלמאי אמר ליה חזית דמשחרי לך פרסאי וגרבי בך ורעיי בך שקצי בחוטרא דדהבא הרהר כוליה יומא ולאורתא חזא. אמר ליה שבור מלכא לשמואל אמריתו דחכמיתו טובא אימא לי מאי חזינא בחלמאי אמר ליה חזית דאתו רומאי ושבו לך וטחני בך קשייתא ברחייתא דדהבא הרהר כוליה יומא ולאורתא חזא.

Rav Yonatan said, a person only dreams about what he thought of during the day, as the verse says, "your thoughts came to you upon your bed" (Daniel 2:29), alternatively from the verse, "the thoughts of your heart have become known". Rova said, the proof is that people don't dream of golden palm tree or an elephant going through the eye of a needle. The Caesar of Rome (who was at war with Persia) said to R' Yehoshua, They say you Jews are very smart; tell me what I'll dream tonight. He said, You will dream the Persians take you captive and force you to pasture impure animals with a golden staff. He thought

of it all day and surely enough he dreamt it at night. Shavur Malka of Persia (who was at war with Rome) said to Shemuel, They say you Jews are very smart; tell me what I'll dream tonight. He said you will dream that the Romans take you captive and will force you to grind date pits in a golden mill. He thought of it all day and sure enough he dreamt it at night.

Note: The kings were certainly preoccupied with war against the other, a thought that significantly engaged their minds. Also note that in each case, the rabbi mentioned some golden object that served as a tantalizing, tangible item to stimulate and engage the kings' imagination.

Spiritual Forces

רבא רמי כתיב "בחלום אדבר בו" וכתב "וחלומות השוא ידברו" לא קשיא כאן ע"י מלאך
כאן ע"י שד.

Rova noted one verse says, "In a dream I [G-d] will speak to him [a prophet]" (Num. 12:6), while another says, "dreams tell falsehood" (Zechariah 10:2). Rova resolves the contradiction: true dreams are through an angel, false dreams are through a demon.

The Zohar, parashat v'Yashev (p. 412) states that during sleep, the soul loosens from the body and rises to upper spiritual realms. Ramchal, in The Way of G-d (3:1:6), explains that the levels of soul from *ruach* and above (see session on Soul) are severed from the body, and only *nefesh* remains. The freed portions of the soul can then move about in the spiritual realm. They can interact with angels who oversee natural phenomena, angels associated with prophecy and demons. These higher levels of soul then transmit their experience down step by step until it reaches the *nefesh* rooted in the mind. The imagination is then stimulated, forming the images in one's dream. If the soul interacts with a positive spiritual force, the person may have a true or prophetic dream. If it interacts with a negative force, one may have a false or disturbing dream.

Note: The Sages comment that true dreams are "1/60th of prophecy" (Berachot 57b), or "the buds of prophecy" (Bereishit Raba 17:7). Rambam, in The Guide to the Perplexed (2:36), explains that just as the bud is the actual fruit itself that has not yet fully developed, so the inkling in a dream is an incomplete and undeveloped prophecy.

According to the above, some dreams are insignificant or false, while some are true. Dreams caused by physical factors such as what a person thought, did or ate during the day or before going to sleep have no significance. Even dreams originating from the spiritual realm may be false and misleading, as when the soul is misled by demons. Dreams resulting from the soul's interacting with an angel, particularly an angel associated with prophecy may be true and even prophetic.

Now, let's look into what the sources say about some characteristics of dreams:

Even True Dreams Have Some Untruth

Berachot 55a,b

”הנביא אשר אתו חלום יספר חלום ואשר דברי אתו ידבר דברי אמת מה לתבן את הבר נאם ה'” (ירמיהו כג:כח). וכי מה ענין בר ותבן אצל חלום? אלא אמר ר' יוחנן משום ר' שמעון בן יוחי כשם שאי אפשר לבר בלא תבן כך אי אפשר לחלום בלא דברים בטלים. אמר ר' ברכיה חלום אף על פי שמקצתו מתקיים כולו אינו מתקיים. מנא לן מיוסף דכתיב (בראשית לז) והנה השמש והירח וגו'” וההיא שעתא אמיה לא הות.

“The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream, and who has My word, let him tell My word as truth. What has the straw to do with the wheat? says the Lord” (Jeremiah 23:28). What does chaff have to do with a dream? R' Yochanan said in the name of R' Shimon bar Yochai, just as it's impossible to have wheat without chaff, it's impossible for dreams to be without inaccuracies. R' Berachiya said, from where do we know this? From Joseph who dreamed that the sun (his father) and the moon (his mother) bowed to him, and at that time his mother had already died.

The idea that all dreams contain some inaccuracy recalls a story of Yankel the tailor and a treasure under the bridge:

One night, Yankel, the tailor of Pletstk, dreamed he saw a bridge in Krakow. By the bridge stood a sentry. Under the bridge lay buried a treasure.

When he awoke, Yankel took some food and a pick-ax and set off. After many days, he came to the bridge, and - Lo and behold! - the very sentry he'd dreamed of stood by it. Yankel took his pick-ax and began to dig. “What in blazes!?” cried the soldier. Yankel told the soldier of his dream, whereupon the soldier broke out laughing.

“You fool,” the soldier said. “If I believed in dreams, right now I'd be off to a little Jewish town called Pletstk, I'd break down the door of a little tailor named Yankel, I'd push over his cast-iron stove, and - if dreams were true - there I'd find a buried treasure. Why, that's exactly what I dreamed last night. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Yankel gasped. He snatched up his tools, ran home, pushed aside his cast-iron stove, and there it was, the buried treasure.

Note: An interesting *halachah* stems from the fact that even true dreams have some falsehood. Sanhedrin 30a says that if a person dreamt that his father left money in a certain place but that the money is forbidden to use such as *ma'aser* (tithe money), *pikadon* (someone else's deposit), or *tzedaka* (money designated for charity), even if he finds the money in the prescribed place, he can still use the money. Since the first part of the dream came true, we assume that the latter detail is the untrue part of the dream. This is the *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 255.

The Fulfillment of Dreams Depends on the Interpretation

Berachot 55a,b

אמר רב חסדא חלמא דלא מפשר כאגרתא דלא מקריא... ר' בנאה אמר: עשרים וארבעה פותרי חלומות היו בירושלים. פעם אחת חלמתי חלום והלכתי אצל כולם ומה שפטר לי זה לא פטר לי זה וכולם נתקיימו בי לקיים מה שנאמר כל החלומות הולכים אחר הפה... וכדרכי אלעזר דא"ר אלעזר מנין שכל החלומות הולכין אחר הפה, שנאמר (בראשית מא) ויהי כאשר פטר לנו כן היה.

Rav Chisda said, a dream that hasn't been interpreted is like an unopened letter.... R' Banah said, there were 24 dream interpreters in Jerusalem. I once dreamt a dream, I went to all of them, each interpreted my dream differently and they all came true, as it is said, dreams go after the mouth [the way it's interpreted]. And this is according to R' Elazar who said, from where do we know that dreams are fulfilled according to the interpretation, [as Pharaoh's cupbearer said about Joseph] 'as he interpreted to us, so it was' (Gen. 41:13).

Berachot 56a

בר הדיא מפשר חלמי הוה. מאן דיהיב ליה אגרא מפשר ליה למעליותא ומאן דלא יהיב ליה אגרא מפשר ליה לגריעותא. אביי ורבא חזו חלמא, אביי יהיב ליה זוזא ורבא לא יהיב ליה. אמרי ליה אקרינן בחלמין (דברים כח) "שורך טבוח לעיניך וגו'". לרבא אמר ליה פסיד עסקך ולא אהני לך למיכל מעוצבא דלבך. לאביי א"ל מרווח עסקך ולא אהני לך למיכל מחדוא וכו'.

Bar Hedyā was a dream interpreter. For one who paid him he interpreted favorably, for one who didn't pay he interpreted unfavorably. Abaye and Rova had the same dreams. Abaye paid him [and received good interpretations that came true], Rova didn't pay [and received bad interpretations that came true]. They told him, in our dream we heard the verse, "your ox will be slaughtered [by the enemy] in front of your eyes". To Rova he said, you will lose your business and you won't be able to eat on account of your anguish. To Abaya he said, your business will prosper and you won't be able to eat on account of your joy, etc. (see there for a long and interesting list of such examples).

Good Dreams and Bad Dreams

Berachot 55a

אמר רב חסדא חלמא בישא עדיף מחלמא טבא.

Rav Chisda said, a bad dream is better than a good dream (Rashi: it brings one to repent.)

Berachot 55b

אמר רב הונא לאדם טוב אין מראין לו חלום טוב ולאדם רע אין מראין לו חלום רע.

Rav Huna, a good person doesn't have good dreams, a bad person doesn't have bad ones.

The latter source implies that righteous people don't have good dreams. However, we've seen at the beginning of the session that many righteous people had good dreams, such as Joseph's dream, which portended his future greatness. The Maharsha explains as follows: good people have good dreams of prophecy through angels, but not good dreams of physical pleasure through demons. The wicked have these "good dreams" to punish them, while they don't have bad dreams that would bring them to repent.

Dreams Correspond to Three Parts of the Night

Berachot 3a

איכא משמרות ברקיע ואיכא משמרות בארעא דתניא ר' אליעזר אומר שלש משמרות הוי הלילה....וסימן לדבר משמרה ראשונה חמור נוער שניה כלבים צועקים שלישית תינוק יונק משדי אמו ואשה מספרת עם בעלה.

There are watches in Heaven and watches on earth. As R' Eliezer says, there are three watches in the night and there are signs for each of them: the sign for the first watch is the donkey brays; for the second watch, dogs howl; for the third watch, a baby nurses from its mother and a woman speaks (intimately) with her husband.

The Maharsha (3b) correlates the signs of these three parts of the night to the three types of dreams mentioned above: those resulting from one's daily affairs, from demons and from angels. The first part of night is represented by the braying donkey, which in Hebrew is *chamor noer*, and also means "the physical or material is stirred up". This means that the first part of the night is affected by the material activities of the day, therefore dreams at this time are influenced by our thoughts and deeds. The second part of the night, represented by "howling dogs", is a reference to demons which have an influence at this time of night, therefore dreams at this time are those affected by demons. By the third part of the night, represented by both the purity of mother and baby and intimacy of husband and wife, the world has been purified from negative physical and spiritual forces, and the soul is free to unite in purity and intimacy with G-d. Therefore dreams at this time are those that are influenced by G-d and the angels.

Hatavat Chalom, Improving a Dream

Berachot 55b

הרואה חלום ונפשו עגומה ילך ויפתרנו בפני שלשה...יטיבנו בפני שלשה. ליתי תלתא ולימא להו חלמא טבא חזאי ולימרו ליה הנך טבא הוא, וטבא ליהוי, רחמנא לשוייה לטב, שבע זימנין לגזרו עלך מן שמיא דלהוי טבא ויהוי טבא, ולימרו ג' הפוכות וג' פדויות ושלש שלומות.

One who had a disturbing dream should make it better in front of three people. Let him bring three [good friends] and say to them, I saw a good dream. They should say to him, it is good, it will be good, G-d will make it good, may it be declared seven times from heaven that it be good and it will be good. And they should say [certain verses]: 3 "reverses", 3 "redemptions", 3 "peaces".

Berachot 55b

האי מאן דחזא חלמא ולא ידע מאי חזא ליקום קמי כהני בעידנא דפרסי ידיהו ולימא הכי רבשיע אני שלך וחלומותי שלך חלום חלמתי ואיני יודע מה הוא... הפוך כל חלומותי עלי לטובה. ומסיים בהדי כהני דעני צבורא אמן.

One who saw a dream and doesn't know whether it was good or bad, let him stand in front of the cohanim at the time they spread their hands in blessing and let him say, Master of the Universe I am yours and my dreams are yours... Transform all of my dreams for goodness. And he should finish together with the cohanim as they finish their blessing and the community answers Amen.

The Meaning of Certain Dreams According to the Sages

Berachot 55-56

רואה **ישמעאל** בחלום תפלתו נשמעת ודוקא ישמעאל בן אברהם אבל טייעא בעלמא לא... הרואה **פיל** בחלום פלאות נעשו לו פילים פלאי פלאות נעשו לו.. **העונה** יהא שמיה רבא מברך מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא **הקורא ק"ש** ראוי שתשרה עליו שכינה אלא שאין דורו זכאי לכך **המניח תפילין** בחלום יצפה לגדולה... **המתפלל** בחלום סימן יפה לו וה"מ דלא סיים. הבא על **אמו** בחלום יצפה לבינה שנאמר (משלי ז) כי אם לבינה תקרא הבא על **נערה** מאורסה יצפה לתורה שנאמר (דברים לג) תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב אל תקרי מורשה אלא מאורשה הבא על **אחותו** בחלום יצפה לחכמה שנאמר (משלי ו) אמור לחכמה אחותי את הבא על **אשת איש** בחלום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא וה"מ דלא ידע לה ולא הרהר בה מאורתא... העומד **ערום** בחלום בבבל עומד בלא חטא בארץ ישראל ערום בלא מצות.

One who sees Ishmael in a dream, his prayer is heard, that is specifically Ishmael son of Abraham, but a regular Arab no. One who sees an elephant in his dream, a miracle will happen to him. One who answers 'yehei shemei raba' is promised to merit the World to Come. One who reads the 'Shema' is fitting for the divine presence to rest upon him. One who wears tefillin should anticipate greatness. One who prays in a dream is a good sign. One who has [certain forbidden relations, see Hebrew above] in his dream should anticipate understanding, Torah knowledge, wisdom, and the World to Come. But this is only when he didn't think about this at all during the day. One who is standing naked in his dream, in Babylon [i.e. outside of Israel] he is free of sin, in Israel he is stripped of mitzvot.