

Politics & Mysticism in the Weekly Torah Portion

Parshat (Portion) Miqetz

by Ariel Bar Tzadok

Originally written and published in 2000.

Revised and updated. Copyright © 2012 by Ariel Bar Tzadok. All rights reserved.

This week...

*** An In-Depth Review of the Art of Dream Interpretation**

Shalom & welcome all.

This week's Torah portion is called Miqetz (Genesis 41:1-44:17).

“Both dreams and myths are important communications from ourselves to ourselves. If we do not understand the language in which they are written, we miss a great deal of what we know and tell ourselves in those hours when we are not busy manipulating the outside world.” Erich Fromm

In this week's parasha, Yosef ascends to the leadership of the land of Egypt, second in command to Pharaoh. This remarkable elevation from slave to Prime Minister comes about due to Yosef's ability to interpret a dream. The parasha opens with Pharaoh's famous dreams of the sheaves of wheat and the cows. Yosef interprets these symbols as impending abundance and famine soon to come upon Egypt and the world. Impressed with his profound insight Pharaoh rewards Yosef.

We learn from this episode and others similar to it throughout the Bible that dreams have great significance. Rabbeynu Bahya writes in his Torah commentary to this section that dreams come from three different sources. Dreams can be caused by what we eat. Such dreams have no value or meaning. Dreams can be caused by our waking thoughts. Such dreams are exclusively psychological in nature. The third source of dreams is that they are messages. It is these dream messages that we will discuss now.

The Zohar (1,183b) states that “no occurrence materializes in the world that is not first revealed to one in a dream” and that “the edicts of the Heavenly Court are first shown to the children of man in dreams, then after a short time, the matter comes to pass.” (Zoh.1, 251b).

As we can see, the subject of dreams touches the core of the human soul. Our Rabbis (Berakhot 57b) have said that dreams are a small portion of prophecy. It is through dreams that we humans communicate with all kinds of non-corporeal entities, be they disembodied spirits, demons, angels or even God Himself. A dream also is a communication between our conscious minds and our Neshama soul, which dwells in the unconscious.

A dream can reveal to us our innermost thoughts, our aspirations or our fears (ref. Berakhot 55b). A dream can bring us a message of future blessing or of impending doom. A dream can reveal, or explain, to us thoughts that have not yet congealed in consciousness. Many modern scientists have claimed that the idea for their latest scientific theories or even blueprints for inventions first came to them in a dream.

A dream is a tool of power. Therefore, a dream master, one who has the power to understand and interpret dreams, has the power to control the fate and destinies of others. A master of dreams can be compared to a seasoned warrior in combat who recognizes the subtle movements in a fighting opponent; thus knowing his next move before does the person himself.

As a warrior precipitates movement, so a dream master precipitates human thought, behavior and action, on an individual or collective level. This was the case of Yosef. Pharaoh recognized this power within him. This is why Pharaoh elevated him to such a high position. Having a man of such power as Yosef at his “right hand” assured Pharaoh of his own power.

Our Rabbis teach us that government leaders in general often receive messages from above that pertain to their countries. This was true of Pharaoh as recorded in Parashat Miqetz. Yet, whether it is a Pharaoh of old, or a President or a Prime Minister of today, God (or His angel) communicates with them as they sleep to advise them of courses of actions.

It is public knowledge that the American President Ronald Reagan used the services of a professional astrologer to help plan his calendar. We do not know if he or any other world leader, past or present, uses a professional dream interpreter as Pharaoh used Yosef or as Nebuchadnezzar used Daniel. We see from the example of these two Biblical personages that for a world leader to have a professional dream interpreter could mean the difference between life and death for himself and for his nation.

We learn from the dreams of Pharaoh that messages are not always the most coherent or rational. Dream messages follow a language of their own. Their interpretation is paramount. Our Rabbis have said, “a dream uninterpreted is like an unread letter, it will be fulfilled even if one is not aware.” (Zoh. 1,183b; 199b). In the case of a world leader, the letter is coming to him from God.

The language of dreams (and of visions) follows a language of pictures, rather than one of words. Picture language is the most primordial form of human communication. Infants, before ever learning to speak a word, have already learned a lot simply by watching the adults around them.

Communication of the eye precedes communication with the ear. In the spiritual plane, this same rule is followed; one is shown symbolic images and pictures that have primordial meanings. Due to our developed logical minds, the vast majority of people have lost the sensitivity and understanding of the primal pictorial forms that we understood so well as infants. Deep within our unconscious minds their meanings are still known, but these meanings seem to be stuck in the unconscious and have a hard time surfacing into consciousness.

When we remember a dream, we have a gnawing feeling that we know what it means, yet we fall short of grasping its meaning. It's like an inch you can't reach to scratch. A dream master helps to remind us what it is that we already know deep down within our minds. This was the case with both Yosef and Daniel. Both could, as if, read the minds of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar respectively.

Yosef understood Pharaoh's mind and could tell him what his symbolic pictures were saying to him. Daniel did one step better and even told Nebuchadnezzar his dream and its interpretation. Upon hearing Daniel's words, Nebuchadnezzar immediately recognized them as true. Pharaoh too recognized Yosef's words as true, beyond anything anyone else was telling him. Pharaoh already knew the truth but it was "stuck" in his unconscious and thus could not bring it to the surface of his mind.

The dream message is unique in that its fulfillment can take on many different forms. Therefore, when Pharaoh heard Yosef's interpretation and that it meant vast wealth for Egypt, he was desirous for its fulfillment. Earlier the Torah relates the dreams of the cup bearer and the baker. Yosef interpreted one dream for good and the other for bad. Each dream was fulfilled in accordance to its interpretation.

Indeed the Talmud (Berakhot 55b) relates that in Second Temple times there were 24 professional dream interpreters in Jerusalem. Once Rabbi Bina'ah had a dream and he went to each interpreter for its meaning. Each of the 24 interpreted his dream differently. This might lead one to believe that dream interpretation is nothing other than subjective, however Rabbi Bina'ah relates that each of the 24 interpretations came true. The Gemara there states that dreams follow their interpretation.

The holy Zohar (Zoh.1, 183a) adds that, "One should never tell his dream to any one other than a close friend," for then one will be assured of a good interpretation and of a good outcome.

The Talmud Berakhot is replete with instructions for dream interpretation. Indeed in the 16th century, Rabbi Shlomo Almoli wrote his famous dream interpretation manual, Sefer Pitron Halamot (now available in English) which outlines a wealth of information. So valuable and respected is Rabbi Almoli's work that none other than Sigmund Freud makes mention of it in his work "The Interpretation of Dreams." Freud and especially Carl Jung recognized the symbolic nature of dream language and built their own systems based upon the principles that our holy Rabbis have used for centuries.

Dream interpretations are found in the Zohar as these examples show.

Seeing a camel (gamal) in a dream signifies that one has been sentenced to death but has been spared. (Zoh. 2, 236a; 3, 100b). The reasoning here is as follows: the word for camel (Gamal) sounds like the Hebrew word, "Gomel" which means to "compensate" or "bestow." A well-known phrase in the Amidah prayer (recited three times daily) refers to God as the "Gomel Hasidim Tovim" (one who bestows merciful good). Thus when God wishes to express the bestowal of His merciful good, He shows the dreamer the image of a Gamal, so that the dreamer would remember that God is the Gomel. The time when God bestows His merciful good upon a person is after a person is subject to punishment. God bestows His merciful good thus mitigating the forces of severity and judgment hanging over the person's head. Thus when a Gamal is seen, the implication is clear – the person was in trouble but is not any more. Upon awakening, such an individual has a lot for which to give thanks to God.

One who sees the letter Tet in a dream will see good. (Zoh. 2,230a). The reason for this is that the letter "Tet" is the first letter of the word "Tov" (good). Now, many other words also

begin with Tet, yet Tov is the word most associated with the letter, therefore seeing the letter means “seeing” good.

One who sees wine in a dream, if he is a Rabbi, then it is good, if not then it means judgment (Zoh. 3, 14b). Throughout the Bible, the study of Torah is compared to fine wine. Thus for a Rabbi, whose primary bond in life is with the Torah, to see a dream about wine is for him a symbol of Torah. This is not true of the layman whose does not have the same emotional and mental bond with Torah as does the Rabbi. The layman, therefore, must understand wine as it is interpreted elsewhere as a means to become intoxicated. As such, it is a sign of judgment for intoxication leads to improper behavior for which one is judged.

One might ask why does the interpretation of a dream symbol change from one type of person to another. Why does the symbol mean one thing to a Rabbi and a completely different, almost opposite meaning to someone who is not? The answer is that all dream symbols are highly individualized. As we are each different in our thinking, so are we each different in our unconscious minds. Nonetheless, there is a level of collective thinking where symbols mean the same things for a specific group.

In Jungian Psychology, he called these symbol groups “archetypes of the collective unconscious.” Jung went further to state that every national or racial group has its own “racial sub-divisions within the collective unconscious” of all mankind. This sounds very similar to a mystical teaching that states originally all human souls were united as one within Adam. Because of the fall, the souls separated into “nations” with Israel being chosen by God to be His. Thus, each nation or race sees things collectively in a way unique unto itself.

Only an individual well trained and able to penetrate into humanity's collective unconscious will ever be able to tap into raw, unconscious, psychic content and be able to make sense out of the many confusing and contradictory symbols experienced therein.

Essentially, in order to be a tried and true “dream interpretation” master, one must be intimately connected to the Universal Mind underlying mankind, this being what we know as God. Racial subdivisions in the collective unconscious often prevent an individual of one culture to penetrate and understand the archetypal symbols of others from another culture. Overcoming racial subdivisions in the collective unconscious requires a deep, almost prophetic-like meditative bond with Elohim, God as revealed through nature. It is only this deep psychic, clairvoyant, telepathic ability that enables the one so trained to transcend the visions of symbols, to penetrate to their very essence.

This is why the dream interpreters for Pharaoh and later for Nebuchadnezzar could not delve into the depths of the minds of their respective kings. There must have been some racial differences between them, which prevented them from understanding. Yosef and Daniel, however, both having communion with Elohim/God, did not suffer from this difficulty. Thus it is to this day with master dream interpreters. Only a one who is trained in these matters can understand dreams correctly.

One very important factor regarding dream interpretation is to know that not everything in a dream, even a message dream, is completely true. The Zohar (1, 150b) states that “there are dreams which are true and dreams which are lies.” More than this our Rabbis (Berakhot 55a) teach us that, “there is no dream that does not have some aspect of lies within it.”

When Yosef was young, he dreamed about the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing before him. This was interpreted by Ya'akov his father as referring to himself, Yosef's mother and brothers bowing before him. Yet, herein lies the problem, Yosef's mother, Rachel, died when Yosef was still a child. His dream, therefore, contained an element of falsehood (Reference Rashi on Ber. 37:10, Zohar 1, 183a). Whenever a dream is interpreted, the interpreter must seek to weed out the peripheral information that is of no consequence to the dream.

A dream interpreter must also be aware that not all message dreams come from holy sources. Many dreams are related to sleeping souls from the forces of evil. Rabbi Yehudah Fatiyah in his Sefer Minhag Yehudah (Parashat Miqetz) explains in detail how to distinguish between dreams that come from angels and those which come from demons. He gives a warning that demons are not stupid and know very well how to seduce mankind as they sleep.

These unclean entities have learned the art of replication and can show an individual in their dreams false Heavenly and sublime spiritual symbols. The person will believe that he is receiving a holy Heavenly message, whereas in fact the soul is being deceived into becoming an agent of evil. Just as there are unscrupulous people in this world seeking to dupe and deceive others for their own personal gain, so are their spiritual beings that wish to do the same. The dream world is the realm of the unconscious; as such, it is the rightful domain of spirits both good and evil. Therefore, each of us when we dream must be very cautious. We must learn how to control our dreams.

“When a man's soul ascend above as he sleeps, if he is sinful then his soul is cast about from place to place by the forces of the powers of evil, this is why one sees himself in a dream in another country or in another land.” (Zoh. 3,222b).

Rabbi Fatiyah brings down examples how demons appear in dreams in the form of tzadikim or as “ascended masters.” They can show dreamers images of the heavens, the holy throne, or even Kabbalistic symbolism. All this is their attempt to convince the dreamer to believe in that which they send to him. In this way, the forces of evil ensnare for themselves another soul. The demons always begin by showing one images of holiness to convince the person that what he is seeing in his dreams is kosher. Then after the soul is convinced and believes in what it is being shown, the demons then lead him step by step until eventually the person sinks into mental illness. In this state, the demons can control the person's mind and body.

The only way to avoid the onset of such a demonic attack is believed to be the recitation of the nighttime Shema Yisrael prayers, found in every Orthodox Jewish prayerbook. The Sephardic Jewish prayer books, coming out of Israel, usually follow the Kabbalistic order of the Shema Yisrael nighttime prayers. This version is the best suited for spiritual protection at night.

Rabbi Fatiyah explains the difference between angelic dreams and demonic dreams as follows. An angelic dream is a message dream. Therefore, during the dream the dreamer will remain calm and reposed, almost unemotional, regardless of what is seen. The dreamer will watch the dream vision like watching a movie, while the image's inner meanings will somehow be imprinted in his mind.

Upon awakening, the dreamer is not frightened or alarmed. Although he is perplexed about what to do next, the next step always seems to become manifest. Such was the case with Pharaoh. After he awoke from his dream, he knew he needed it interpreted. Intuitively he felt inside himself that the interpretations his wise men were giving him were all wrong. He knew something was missing. Only then does his cup bearer speak to Pharaoh about Yosef. Pharaoh had never heard of Yosef to that day. Yet, that day forever changed the lives of both men, and both nations. God gave Pharaoh his dreams. God inflicted Pharaoh's wise men with stupidity. God brought Yosef into Egypt, made him a dream master and brought him before Pharaoh, all in accordance to the Divine plan.

A demonic dream takes on a different form. During a demonic dream, one feels great agitation. One may feel a weight on one's chest as if someone is sitting on you. The dream images are confusing and blurry. No clear mental message is received. One awakens with feelings of anxiety and panic. One feels an inner conviction towards a certain course of action, yet no logical or permissible means avail themselves. The person then is led to believe that his family, friends or community is holding back from him some form of "unmanifest destiny." The forces of evil then return in dreams to confuse the person even further, making him suspicious of others around him. Eventually paranoia sets in and is soon followed by schizophrenia. All this occurred because the person opened himself to foreign outside influences without first being on a proper level of kedusha (holiness) to defend himself.

Many people see images in dreams that make them want to perform a ritual known as the dream fast, where one fasts the day of a bad dream to dispel some evil omen. The Zohar (3, 105b) states, "not for naught are matters revealed in dreams, one is supposed to pray and ask for mercy." Rabbi Fatiyah writes that the demons are also aware of the specific dream symbols that when seen in a dream one is to fast. Since demonic activity is so prevalent today, Rabbi Fatiyah writes that rather than fast it is better that we pray, recite Tehilim (Psalms) and give tzedaka (charity). These spiritual acts increase one's kedusha (holiness) and are great mitzvot in and of themselves.

Another point about dreams that is important to remember is that the psychological element and the spiritual factor are often one and the same. Therefore, one should not quickly dismiss the psychological influence dreams can have on us or the control that we can have on our dreams. Dreams and hypnosis are closely related in that both can plant thoughts deep within our minds that only surface at a later time, but with all the intensity and conviction of absolute truth. Such people are, as if to say, possessed by their dreams, fantasies, or delusions. All these types of images overlap with the dream state.

The psychological state is so important that the Zohar (1,199b) states, "one needs to remember a good dream, and then it will be fulfilled; however, if the dream is forgotten in a man's heart, then it will also be forgotten above." This seems to signify that dreams and wish fulfillment have a lot to do with one another. In other words, if one can materialize a reality in one's dreams, then one has the ability to materialize that dream into reality.

This is exactly what happened with Yosef. After interpreting Pharaoh's dream, Yosef suggested to him what to do about the upcoming plenty and famine. It is truly amazing that Pharaoh would have ever listened to what in his eyes was a "heathen" Hebrew slave. Yet,

Pharaoh heard the voice of God coming forth from Yosef's mouth. When Yosef proceeded to tell Pharaoh to appoint a Prime Minister over all of Egypt, he subtly intended that position for himself. Pharaoh was as if, under Yosef's spell. He could do nothing but to appoint Yosef to the position that he, Yosef himself, had created. For a moment, Pharaoh was shown a glimpse of the greater universe, one that was ruled by Yosef. He could do nothing but to overtly comply with Yosef's subtle power of voice. There are many secrets about the union of voice and speech, but this is not the place to discuss them.

When a person dreams a dream its reality predominates within the individuals mind and will change external reality to conform to the dream. This is seen clearly in the case of the dream of the Midianite guard whose conversation was overheard by Gideon (ref. Judges 7:13-14). When the guard interpreted the dream of his comrade to mean that the Children of Israel were coming, and that the Midianite army would soon be defeated, Gideon immediately knew to attack. Gideon realized that if the Midianite guards were already dreaming about defeat, then defeat was already in their hearts and minds. They could not win for deep down within them they had already lost their resolve.

"In a dream, in a vision of the night... then He opens the ears of men...that He may turn man aside from his conduct" (Job 33:16,17). Dreams are sent to us all in order to direct our behavior and help us return to G-d. Everyone dreams regardless of whether the dreams are remembered or not. While many dreams are caused by what we ate before we slept or by our waking thoughts, desires or fears, nonetheless the message dream is still a living and vibrant part of the psyches of most of us. Not having dreams is actually considered a sign that the soul does not ascend during sleep. The Zohar (3, 105b) states, "one who does not have matters revealed to him in dreams is called evil." Dreams implant a message deep within our psyches. When we awaken we may not know it, but we have been "programmed." We have received a message and that inner knowledge will direct the thoughts in our minds, the feelings in our hearts and the course of the events in our lives.

There are many more details to the interpretation of dreams that can not be discussed here. Cultivating awareness of the meaning of our dreams and their inherent power enables us to draw closer to our blessed Creator. What greater work than this is there?

Any comments? Please send them to me at koshertorah1@yahoo.com