

The Month of Kislev: The Month of Dreams

חודש כסלו - חודש חלומות

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Introduction

Perhaps you may have experienced intense dreams recently? Sometimes you can get a feeling of what your dream is coming to teach you, while at other times you haven't gotten a clue? I find myself dreaming much more during the month of Kislev or at least remembering my dreams more. Being in touch with my dreams help me connect with my unconscious feelings and needs. They help me live more in tune with my deeper inner self. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach explains how a dream is much deeper than direct speech or even prophecy because it affects our heart in a much deeper way. There is nothing deeper than when we can't stop dreaming about something. Moreover, dream-language is intimate. You don't have to be close to her person for him to tell you something straight. However, there is certain language which is only given when you love somebody very much. On one hand, it's maybe not so clear. On the other hand, it's so much deeper!

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.¹ Dreams are sent to us all in order to direct our behavior and help us return to G-d. Everyone dreams regardless of whether we remember our dreams or not. While many dreams are caused by our waking thoughts, desires or fears, nonetheless the message dream is still a living and vibrant part of our psyches. Cultivating awareness of the meaning of our dreams and their inherent meaning enables us to draw closer to our blessed Creator. What greater work than this is there?

Read on to receive some tools from the Torah for understanding the hidden messages of your dreams...

Dreaming Ourselves to *Teshuvah* (Repentance)

The purpose of a dream is to reveal the thoughts hidden in our heart – in our sub-consciousness, in order to arouse us to spiritual growth and repentance (*teshuvah*)... Therefore the dreams constitute heavenly assistance to inform us of our inner thoughts in order that we may receive rebuke to think about good things that will help us grow.² *"In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men, in slumbering upon the bed; then He [G-d] opens the ears of men, and by their chastisement seals the decree."*³ It is actually preferable to have a "bad" rather than a good dream as the Talmud teaches: A bad dream is preferable to a good dream... The anxiety of a bad dream cancels it out. Likewise, the joy of a happy dream cancels it out... *"G-d made it that they fear him"*⁴ – This is a bad dream by means of which a person is aroused to Tshuvah.⁵

¹ Rav Ariel Bar Tzaddok, <http://koshertorah.com/PDF/dreams.pdf>.

² Based on Rav Eliyahu Dessler, *Michtav M'Eliyahu* p. 164.

³ *Iyov* 33:15-16.

⁴ *Kohélet* 3:14.

⁵ *Babylonian Talmud, Berachot* 55a.

Receiving Messages from Above

A dream is one sixtieth of prophesy.⁶ “No occurrence materializes in the world that is not first revealed to one in a dream.”⁷ Through dreams our conscious minds communicate with our Neshama (soul), which dwells in the super-conscious realm. The bond between our body and Divine Soul is somewhat loosened while we sleep. Our soul parts from Ruach and above rise from the body, and moves about in the spiritual realm. They can interact and associate with various kinds of angels. The soul can sometimes transmit these higher levels of perception, step by step, until it reaches the Nefesh (animal soul). The imagination is then stimulated to form images, which we call a dream. Dreams are at times greatly confused and intermingled with distorted images arising from the various substances that enter the brain, while at other times their messages are very clear. During a true 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. The Vilna Gaon teaches that there are certain boundless levels of Torah that the soul cannot perceive while limited by the physical body. G-d created sleep for the soul to access these levels. Even if we are not aware, sparks of what we have experienced in a dream trickle into our daily state of mind.⁸

Dreaming Mixed Messages

Not all dreams are prophetic. They may be intermingled with the distorted images originating in the imagination itself. Some dreams arise from our experiences while awake. Others may be a result of substances that rise to the brain, either from the body’s own hormones, or from food that eaten. These images are the dreams that all people experience.⁹ Our Sages thus teach us, “Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: just as there is no grain without straw, likewise there is no dream without nonsense. Rav Berchia said, although part of the dream is fulfilled, the whole of it is never fulfilled. We learn this from Yosef as it states: *‘behold the sun and the moon bowed down...’*”¹⁰ Yosef’s mother, Rachel, symbolized by the moon, died when Yosef was still a child. His dream, therefore, contained an element of untruth.¹¹ According to Rabbeinu Bachaya, dreams come from three different sources:

1. They can be caused by what we eat. Such dreams have no value or meaning.
2. They can be caused by our waking thoughts. Such dreams are exclusively psychological in nature.
3. They can be prophetic dreams with messages for us.¹²

Signs of Prophetic Dreams

The indication that a dream is in fact prophetic is if the dream is crystal clear, as if the dreamer were awake. However, false dreams are confusing and exaggerated.¹³ “Three dreams are fulfilled, a dream early in the morning, a dream which his friend dreamed about him, a dream which is interpreted

⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 57b.

⁷ Zohar 1,183b.

⁸ Based on Ramchal, *Derech Hashem*, Chapter 3, The Soul and its Influence, pp.183-185.

⁹ *Derech Hashem*, Chapter 3, p. 183.

¹⁰ Bereishit 37:9; Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55a.

¹¹ Rashi, Bereishit 37:10.

¹² Rabbeinu Bachaya, Bereishit 41:1.

¹³ Kli Yakar, Bereishit 37:7.

within the dream. Some say also a dream which is repeated as it states: *“As for the repetition of the dream to Pharaoh twice, it is because the matter is true from G-d...”*¹⁴ A person is not shown a dream except from the thoughts of his heart.¹⁵

The Dream Follows its Interpretation

Whenever you have a dream be careful about who you tell it to, because the dream follows its interpretation.¹⁶ Therefore, if someone tells me their dream, my first response is: “It is a very good dream.” I will also never say that I had a bad dream, because even if dreams may be challenging, we don’t want to label them as being bad, and thereby cause them to become bad. We learn from the Torah’s description of Yosef’s dream interpretation that it is the interpretation which determines the outcome of the dream rather than the outcome which determines the interpretation, as it states: *“And it came to pass as he interpreted for us, so it came to be.”*¹⁷ Yet, this is only if the interpretation corresponds to the content of the dream, as it states: *“to each man according to his dream he did interpret.”*¹⁸ Moreover, the interpretation must resonate with the dreamer as it states, *“But no-one interprets them to Pharaoh,”*¹⁹ meaning Pharaoh’s advisors did interpret his dreams, however, their words were not accepted by Pharaoh. Why does the dream follow its interpretation? Rabbi Chisda said a dream not interpreted is like an unread letter...²⁰ If I never open that wedding invitation, I may not get to go to the wedding. Rav Kook explains that the dream and its interpretation are part of one structure. Hashem has encoded within the dream that its actualization takes place according to its interpretations. This can be compared to the relationship between the Written and Oral Torah. The Written Torah was meant to be joined with the Oral Law, which brings down the lofty teachings of the Written Torah in concrete ways. Likewise, the interpreter actualizes the hidden interpretations of any multilayered matter.²¹

Dreams are Sparks of Light within Darkness.

Before ever learning to speak a word, infants learn about the world through the feelings of pictures. Because we have been programmed to develop our sense of logic connected to our left brain, we have forgotten our innate connection to the feelings associated with pictures, which were much clearer when we were children. Dreams return us to our senses by bringing us back to the primordial language of pictures. Through dreams we can maintain our connection with Hashem even within exile after prophesy is lost. Rav Shlomo Carlebach explains that you need to be broken to receive a true dream. In exile G-d cannot speak to us face-to-face, ‘cause officially he’s angry at us, and officially we’re angry at him. However, when nobody’s looking – we are sending love letters to each other, through dreams. Let us treasure our dreams – the sparks of light within the darkness!

¹⁴ Bereishit 41:32.

¹⁵ Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55b.

¹⁶ Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55b.

¹⁷ Bereishit 41:13.

¹⁸ Ibid. 41:12; Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55b

¹⁹ Bereishit 41:8.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Rav Kook *Eyin Reayah*, Berachot 55a.



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