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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DREAMS

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Rosh Yeshiva - YUHSB

Rabbi - Kehilas Zichron Mordechai

After Yosef has a second dream which depicts himself demonstrating superiority over his brothers, Yaakov gets angry at him and challenges the validity of the dream because it included, as apparently was understood and is explained by the Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah (parsha 84 siman 10), the fact that his mother Rochel would bow down to him (Bereishis 37:10). This would be, of course, impossible, because Rochel was no longer alive when Yosef had his dream. Rashi (ibid s.v. *havoh*) says that Yaakov's intent with this criticism of the dream was to convince Yosef's brothers to forget about the whole matter, telling them that just as it was obviously impossible for the part of the dream about Rochel bowing to Yosef to come true, so too the rest of the dream is likewise worthless. In truth, however, it is quite possible for part or even most of a dream to come true, even if some of it does not. In fact, the Gemara in Berachos (55a – 55b) derives from this very incident that no dream ever comes true completely; even if part of a dream comes true, there is always some part of it which is meaningless and will not come true.

The implication of this Gemara, though, is that there is significance to what one sees in one's dreams, and at least part of the dream may actually come true. On the other hand, of course, some dreams do not come true at all. Interestingly, the Riva, in his commentary on this Parsha (Bereishis, ibid posuk 5), quotes a view that Yosef actually had a third dream which was not recorded in the Torah; he even suggests what this dream was about, as does the Bartenura, in his commentary on the Torah (ibid), who adds that it was not recorded because the brothers were not concerned about it. The Chizkuni, however, in his commentary on the Parsha (ibid), says that this dream was not recorded in the Torah because it did not come true. The question then is, what exactly is the significance, if any, of a dream, according to Chazal, and how seriously should one be concerned about what he sees in his dreams?

There are clearly authorities among Chazal who hold that dreams have no particular significance or validity, that is, they are not indicative of any sign or message being communicated by Hashem which may contain descriptions of

future events. The Gemara there in Berachos (ibid 55b, see Rashi s.v. *hirhurei*) says, for example, that one's dreams at night simply reflect what one has thought about during the day; such a dream obviously does not represent any kind of revelation from Hashem. The Gemara (ibid) likewise states that the importance of a dream depends upon how it is interpreted; this too would indicate that the dream alone has no significance. The Tosefta in Ma'aser Sheini (perek 5 halacha 6) states clearly and succinctly that dreams have no effect at all, either positive or negative. In commenting on the Gemara in Sanhedrin (30a) where this statement is quoted, the Ran (chidushei HaRan, ibid s.v. *bo*) writes that even where there are indications that some parts of the dream are true, there is still no Halachic validity to it. The Meiri (Beis HaB'chira, ibid s.v. *me*) agrees to this point, adding that it is true because even if there are some parts of a dream which represent the truth, there is much nonsense mixed in, and therefore we need not be concerned with it at all.

In the She'iltos of Rav Achai Gaon (parshas miketz, she'ilta 29), this conclusion that dreams are Halachically irrelevant is reached as well; the Netziv (Ha'amek She'eilah, ibid os 15) writes that this seems to mean that in all areas of Halacha, one need not be concerned with dreams, although he quotes some who say that only regarding monetary matters are dreams considered irrelevant, while in issues of whether something is permitted or forbidden (*issur v'heter*), we do pay attention to the contents of dreams. The Sdei Chemed (k'lallim, *ma'areches hd'l's* siman 45) discusses this matter at length. The Rambam (hilchos ma'aser sheini 6:6 and hilchos zechia u'matana 10:7) and the Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat siman 255 seif 9 and Ramo on Yoreh De'ah siman 259 seif 6) rule without making distinctions that the contents of dreams have no particular effect or validity.

On the other hand, there certainly are sources which seem to indicate clearly that dreams do have a certain validity, and one should consequently be concerned with what one sees in one's dream. The Abarbanel, in a lengthy discussion about dreams found in his commentary on the Torah (beginning of parshas Mikeitz), notes that elsewhere in the Torah (Bamidbar 12:6), dreaming is compared to receiving a prophecy; the Gemara later in Berachos (57b) indeed states that a dream in a small way is a form of prophecy, while the Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah (parsha 17 siman 7) refers to a dream as undeveloped prophecy. The Rambam discusses this relationship between dreams and prophecy at length in his Moreh Nevuchim (vol. 2,

perakim 36-38, 41-45). The Gemara there in Berachos (ibid) as well as on the previous pages (56b – 57a) discusses the symbolism of different things that one may see in a dream, and what such a dream indicates for the future of the person who has the dream; an earlier passage in the Gemara there (55b) lists different categories of dreams which come true. The Beis Yosef, in his commentary on the Tur (Orach Chaim siman 651 s.v. *kasav*), quotes a dream by one of the Poskim which confirmed a Halachic requirement; the Taz (Orach Chaim siman 585 end of seif katan 7) likewise cites a dream to explain a certain Halachic issue, as do other Poskim (see Encyclopedia Talmudis, vol. 7 – *erech divrei chalomos*, notes 48 and 49). The Shittah Mekubetzes in Bava Metzia (107b s.v. *aval*) cites a view that there were Amoraim who relied on dreams for Halachic decisions. Although the Rashba (shu”t haRashba vol. 1 siman 408) writes that the purpose of dreams has not been revealed to us, and although the Shach (Choshen Mishpat siman 333 seif katan 25) as well as the Noda BeYehudah (shu”t Noda BeYehuda, *mahadura tanina*, Yoreh De’ah siman 30) disregard Halachic decisions rendered in a dream, it appears from the above sources that dreams do have some validity and significance in Halacha, at least according to some.

To resolve the apparent contradiction between the views among Chazal about dreams, the Abarbanel in Parshas Mikeitz (ibid) suggests that there are different types of dreams, one of which is indeed irrelevant and is the product of something physical or psychological in the person who has the dream. This type of dream indeed has no significance according to Halacha. Another type of dream, however, is one which contains a message from Hashem, to inform a person of something, protect him, or let him know about the future; this type is similar to prophecy, although this too may have some extraneous or nonsensical content. The way to tell the difference between the categories, he suggests, is to examine the orderliness and straightforwardness of the dream, as well as the impact it has on the person having the dream. The Sdei Chemed (ibid) quotes a view which suggests that a dream is to be considered significant and valid if it relates to the future, but if it relates to the past, it is meaningless; he says, though, that this does not seem to be a widely accepted opinion.

The Sdei Chemed (ibid) adds, however, that although many consider dreams to be meaningless, if a dream signals some kind of trouble or danger, it is of Halachic concern to us. The Gemara in Berachos (55b, see Tosfos s.v. *sheva*) writes that if one has a dream which makes him sad or perturbed, he should follow a prescribed ritual in the presence of three people, which is called *hatavas chalom*, and is printed in many Siddurim. The details of this are outlined in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim siman 220 seif 1); the Magen Avraham (ibid seif katan 2) writes that it is preferable to do this the morning after one has had the dream.

The Gemara in Shabbos (11a) indicates that one who has had a bad dream should fast what is called a *ta’anis chalom* in order to nullify any bad decree against him; he must fast on the

day on which had the dream, even if it is Shabbos. The Rivash (shu”t haRivash siman 513) writes that one does not *have* to fast at all for a bad dream if it does not bother him, because it is not a Mitzvah to fast; the Rashba too (shu”t haRashba, ibid siman 132) writes that one has permission to fast (even on Shabbos) for a bad dream, but it is not obligatory. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid seif 2) however, records the importance of this fast; the Ramo (ibid) adds that it must be done on that day, even if it’s Shabbos. Elsewhere, the Shulchan Aruch (ibid siman 288 seif 4) rules that one who does fast a *ta’anis chalom* on Shabbos must then fast another day as well to compensate for the fact that he fasted on Shabbos. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid seif 5) then adds that some hold that one shouldn’t fast at all on Shabbos nowadays, unless one sees certain specific visions in one’s dream; the Mishnah Berurah (ibid siman 220 seif katan 6) notes that the fasting is of value only if it is accompanied by sincere Teshuvah.

The aforementioned Gemara in Berachos (ibid) also refers to specific Tefillos (*Adir Bamarom and Ribono shel Olam*) which one should recite when the Kohanim recite *Birchas Kohanim* that will nullify the effects of any bad dream which one may not remember. The Shulchan Aruch (ibid siman 130 seif 1) rules accordingly. The Magen Avraham (ibid seif katan 1) writes that in Eretz Yisrael, where Kohanim recite *Birchas Kohanim* daily, one should not recite these Tefillos daily, but rather only if one actually had a dream the previous night. The Mishnah Berurah (ibid seif katan 1) notes, though, that in our communities, where Kohanim go to Duchan only on Yom Tov, the entire Tzibbur recites these Tefillos, even those who had no dreams the previous night, because it is not possible that one had no dreams since the previous Yom Tov. He adds, though, (ibid seif katan 4) that on Shabbos, one should not recite these Tefillos during *Birchas Kohanim* unless he indeed had a bad dream that night.

SMILE, YOU’RE ON CAMERA

Yenatan Chudnoff (19)

In this week’s *parashah* we read one of the most famous stories in all of TaNaKh. We learn about Yaakov favoring his favorite wife’s, Rachel’s, son (Yosef) out of all of his other sons. So much so that he gives Yosef a special multicolored coat. Yosef then tells his brothers of the amazing dreams he’s been having, consisting of all his brothers bowing down to him. This causes his brothers to have strong enmity against Yosef. A couple of *pesukim* later, Yaakov sends Yosef to go and see how his fellow brothers are doing shepherding the animals. When Yosef arrives, the brothers conspire to kill Yosef and throw him in a pit. But Reuvein, the oldest out of all the brothers, has the idea not to kill Yosef, but to throw him into the pit and let him die there. Some time goes by and a caravan of Ishmaelites passes by the gang of brothers. The *parashah* explicitly describes how the wagon the Ishmaelites had was filled with spices. Yehuda, the

fourth oldest son, proposes to just sell Yosef as a slave to these Ishmaelites and not let him die; the brothers agree with the plan.

The question is, why does the Torah have to say explicitly that the Ishmaelites had spices in their wagon? Rashi even comes to say that the spices that are mentioned in the *passuk* are beautiful spices, some of which were used in the Beit Hamikdash. But again: why would the Torah have the need to explicitly say the Ishmaelites have all these beautiful spices?

The Midrash Rabbah quotes the MiShulchan Gavoah (p.186), who says that the spices were coming as a message for Yosef from Hashem. Usually the Ishmaelites would carry very foul smelling items in their wagons, but this day it happened to be that they had very pleasant smelling spices. Hashem wanted to tell Yosef that although everything seems terrible right now and he is now going to get sold into slavery, there are still sweet spices. Hashem is still watching him, and Hashem is still with him. Rav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi adds on to this idea, saying that a skilled surgeon only cuts things that are necessary, and leaves things that are unnecessary – so too here. Hashem is saying I haven't completely abandoned you (Yosef) and am not making you suffer completely; I am only doing what is carefully measured to be done. The foul smelling items in the Ishmaelites wagons were unneeded, so I put spices in their wagons.

Both of these ideas share a beautiful message. Although it may seem sometimes like the entire world is collapsing on you and everything is terrible, one must remember Hashem is always watching – even if it may seem like He's not, He always is.

I would like to conclude with a personal event which occurred that further strengthens this point. This Sunday I attended my great grandfather's 90th birthday party. He lived in Hungary and survived the Holocaust. He told me at the party that it is incredible how he was able to survive through the entire war. He says that the only way he could have survived through all of the tragedy, was with the help of Hashem. Hashem controlled everything and allowed him to survive. My great grandfather said, "I am just a single person of many thousands of millions of people – how can Hashem watch over me?" This exactly proves the point. Even though we may seem like nothing and considering ourselves a speck of dust is already over-praising ourselves, we have to remember that Hashem is always watching us no matter what.

THE RITE OF SPEECH

Ari Englander ('17)

Today, Egypt is advertised as a land of endless sunsets, pristine beaches, coral reefs and smiling tourists riding camels past magnificent pyramids. This country was not always the destination for a peaceful vacation. Three and a half thousand years ago, immorality was the norm, idol worship the obsession, and the country's largest natural resource was a thriving slave trade. The *midrash* describes such atrocities as Pharaoh bathing in the blood of Jewish babies, tiny infants being bricked into

walls and slaves being ravished by wild beasts as examples of the apocalyptic scene that typified the culture. It was into this very nightmare that Yosef was flung.

At the age of seventeen, Yosef, the beloved, pampered and protected favorite son of Yaakov, became Yosef, the despised, enslaved, and confronted castaway. Sold by his own flesh-and-blood into an endless hopeless nightmare, challenged and threatened both physically and spiritually, he not only survived, but climbed the rungs of society to become the second-in-command of the most powerful nation at the time! What could have possibly been his secret to success?

The Torah relates that Yaakov sent Yosef to check on his brothers and expected to find them in Shekhem. By the time he arrived there, they had already moved on, prompting him to wonder what had happened. Regarding this, the *passuk* says; *vayyimtza'eihu ish, vehinneih so'eh bassadeh; vayyishaleihu ha'ish leimor, 'mah tevakkeish?'*, a man discovered him, and behold he was blundering in the field; and the man asked him saying, 'What do you seek?' (Genesis: 37:15). With the instruction of this "man", Yosef was directed to Dothan to where he had the fateful meeting that led to his being sold into slavery.

Although the discussion with the helpful onlooker seems rather unremarkable, there are a couple of fascinating insights that show this event is not to be taken at face value. First, since the Midrash enlightens us that the man he met was in fact the angel Gavriel, there was surely a deeper purpose for his appearance than simply to be a celestial road map. Secondly, what could the Torah possibly mean with the superfluous word "saying" within the *passuk* of "and the man asked him **saying**, 'What do you seek?'"

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that this was indeed far more than a casual rendezvous. Before Yosef was catapulted into a life of slavery devoid of spiritual support, Hashem sent him the key to survival through his emissary Gavriel—a code that would unlock the most difficult binds and create a timeless message for us all. Yosef was advised that while navigating the challenges in life, decide your course of action by articulating what you seek. Decisions should not be based on convenience, comfort, or momentary pleasure, but on the true desire instilled into every human being to do the right thing. At every crossroad of moral challenge, one should say to him/herself, 'what is really the correct move that will give me long-lasting pleasure?'

Yosef was not the only one that took this message to heart and used these otherwise crushing challenges as a catalyst to greatness. The great Chanukkah heroes—the Chashmonaim—used this same thought-process hundreds of years later to crush the mighty Greeks. With the future of Torah values being challenged, they entered a hopeless war with the 'what must be morally done' weapon and defeated the entire Greek army. As we physically kindle the *neiros* on Chanukkah, we must rekindle our spiritual flame of burning dedication to the legacy of our heroically devout ancestors.

CHUT HAMESHULASH COLUMN: VOLUME I

Yair Kaplan ('17)

(Through the Makor Chaim Exchange Program, MTA students were exposed to a fascinating seifer on the parasha, titled "Chut Hameshulash Bashe'arim." This work is a Polish "pilpul" seifer on Chumash, written by three generations of Rabbinic figures from Glogów, Rabbi Asher Halevi Lemel, his son Rabbi Yechiel-Michel Halevi Lemel, and grandson Rabbi Moshe Halevi Lemel. This devar Torah is a paraphrased English synopsis of the Sha'ar Hakatan, Rabbi Moshe Halevi's piece from "Chut Hameshulash" on parashas Vayeishev)

Bereishis 37:21 states "vayyishma re'uvein vayatzileihu miyyadam, and Reuvein heard, and saved him, (Yosef), from there, (the brothers'), hands. The *medrash* explains that what Reuvein heard was the brothers saying "ve'attah lekhu venahargeihu, and now, let us go and kill him (Yosef)," prompting him to respond by saying "lo nakennu nafesh, let us not kill him." This is perplexing, as it seems fairly obvious that this is what Reuvein heard, as this is the immediately preceding *passuk*, 37:20! What is the *medrash* teaching us? Furthermore, the *passuk* itself seems superfluous, as it is obvious Reuvein heard them plotting, because he is clearly responding to their scheme when he says "al tishpekhu dam, do not spill blood" in 37:22.

To answer these difficulties, the Sha'ar Hakatan first deals with a seemingly unrelated issue: Rashi on 37:22 comments, based on the words "lema'an hatzil oso, in order to save him (Yosef)," that *ruach haKodesh* was testifying that Reuvein's motive was pure, and he only said to throw Yosef into the pit "in order to save him." The question is: why is this testimony necessary? Surely a righteous individual such as Reuvein would have only the best intentions, (especially because he had a vested interest in saving Yosef, as Rashi himself continues to explain; as the eldest son, any negative feeling toward Yosef's death would be directed toward Reuvein).

Rav Moshe Helevi quotes the Sefer Ir Dovid, who offers a resolution based on a *mishnah* in Sanhedrin, *perek* 4. The *mishnah* has a ruling, a *din*, that if in a capital case, the court unanimously votes in favor of a guilty verdict, the accused is acquitted. Therefore, one might think that Reuvein ought to have argued that Yosef was deserving of death, and, combined with the fact that the other brothers voted for guilt as well, Yosef would be acquitted based on the *mishnah* in Sanhedrin. Because of this false conclusion one might come to, the *ruach haKodesh* must tell us that Reuvein indeed had righteous intentions.

The Sha'ar Hakatan is still bothered: if it really could have worked to vote in favor of Yosef's death, thereby exempting him, why *wouldn't* Reuvein had taken that path? Attempting to argue for keeping Yosef alive is much riskier, because he might convince his brothers – but then again, he may be outvoted!

To answer this question, one must first understand the reason behind the *din* in Sanhedrin. In the *gemara* there, Rav Kahana posits a rationale for the strange rule. He argues that

one of the critical aspects of a proper capital judgment is hearing both sides of the story, especially the exonerating arguments (as there is a concept of *vehatzilo ha'eidah*, doing everything possible to 'find room' for vindication in capital cases), and the way to accomplish this is *halanas din*, thinking through the case details overnight. But if the court is unanimous in favor of conviction, then there is no room for the court to sincerely hear the other side, and there will be no *halanas din*. Therefore, in such a case, the court has not fulfilled the critical duty of hearing both sides, and thus the accused is absolved. However, in the case of the brothers, they had no intention of waiting at all, or hearing the other side, as they said "And **now**, let us go and kill him!" So the entire reason for the *din* from Sanhedrin does not even apply, as they intended to agree then and there, without *halanas din*, to kill Yosef. Therefore, Reuvein realized his vote for guilty would be in vain, as it would not save Yosef, being that the *din* from Sanhedrin was mute under the circumstances.

And thus, we have an answer to our first two questions – namely: why is *passuk* 21 necessary, and what is the *medrash* adding? Put simply, the *passuk* is pointing out that, just as the *ruach haKodesh* testified, Reuvein truly wanted to save Yosef. In fact, if it would have made sense in the situation, he would have voted to **convict** Yosef, ultimately saving him with a unanimously guilty vote. However, Reuvein heard something that made him reconsider. As the *passuk* says, and the *medrash* spells out more clearly, what Reuvein heard was his brothers' intent to kill Yosef **immediately**. Reading back into the *medrash*, he heard his brothers say "ve'attah lekhu venahargeihu," and only because of that, he responded with "lo nakennu nafesh" realizing that voting to convict would not save Yosef, and resorting to his best shot – arguing against killing Yosef, in the hope of convincing his brothers he was correct. (This also adds to the Ir Dovid's answer: not only is the *ruach haKodesh* testifying that Reuvein *didn't* have negative intentions, it is ensuring that he was forced into his decision because it was, in fact, the *only* option to effectively save Yosef. Evidently, his intentions were wholly good.)

שבת שלום!

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