

Dreams

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translated from the Hebrew by
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A dream (*chalom*) is a night vision, an apparition, a revelation¹ or a vision that a person occasionally sees in his sleep.²

Sometimes, the term "dream" is also used to describe a phenomenon without permanence, something fleeting which rapidly evaporates.³ "Dream" also refers to a strong desire which is unfulfilled⁴ or to something which is farfetched and unlikely.⁵

¹. Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* 2:41 states that these names denote similar things with variations in degree. See also *Guide* 2:45 and *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei Hatorah* 7:2-3. Other scholars state that there is a fundamental difference between a dream and prophecy and these names are not all the same.

². Some rabbis write that the word dream (*chalom*) means health as found in Isaiah 38:16, "And you healed me (*vatachleemeini*) and made me live;" see Rabbenu Bachya on Genesis 40:9.

³. "Like a dream which evaporates," - Job 20:8.

⁴. "When a hungry man dreams, and behold, he is eating," - Isaiah 29:8.

⁵. Like a dream in Asfamia, - *Niddah* 30b.

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A. Scientific Background

The study of dreams is an ancient one. People since antiquity have been agitated and fascinated by dreams and have made many attempts to explain the nature of dreams, their purpose and their interpretation.⁶

In spite of thousands of years of effort and study of the nature and interpretation of dreams, science has advanced very little in this area. The modern era of the study of dreams begins with the publication of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900.⁷ Freud claimed that all details of a dream (even the most ridiculous) have significance. In his view, various feelings and sensations which one experiences in a dream are those pushed out of consciousness because of various social prohibitions. Further, contents of dreams satisfy hidden desires. There are struggles in man's nature between intellect and impulse. During waking hours, logical tendencies predominate. During a dream, instinctive desires and experiences occur which are important to satisfy a person's needs. The approach of Freud is based more on theories and hypotheses than on scientific facts. His views were strongly opposed by many people even during his lifetime and more so nowadays in view of new scientific knowledge about the structure of dreams - knowledge which was not known to Freud.⁸

In the first half of the present century, the numerous studies of dreams were based on psychological and/or psychiatric considerations. Dreams form the basis of

⁶. Concerning the historical view of ancient people toward dreams and their interpretation, see S.M. Oberhelman, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, vol. 61, pp. 47ff, 1987; R.G.A. Lieshout, *Greeks on Dreams*, Utrecht, Hes Publishers, 1980; G.E. Von Grunebaum and R. Callois (Editors), *The Dream and Human Societies*, Berkeley, 1966; *Encyclopedia Ivrit*, Vol. 17, s.v. *chalom*, pp. 456-457.

⁷. S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 1900.

⁸. See the section entitled "Sleep."

psychoanalytical theory. Even nowadays, some psychiatrists and psychologists believe that dreams have important significance to the dreamer. Various psychiatric theories are based on the diagnosis and treatment of the contents of dreams.

In 1953, the various stages of sleep which form the physiological basis of sleep were first identified.⁹ In that year, the stage of sleep of rapid eye movements (REM) was described as the most important stage of dreams.¹⁰ The connection between a large number of dreams and the REM stage of sleep was established in 1957.¹¹ On the other hand, some people lack this stage of sleep, lack any known dreams during sleep, yet have no functional problems.¹² During the past 50 years, dreams have been intensively studied by physiologists and others specializing in sleep disorders. There are still no clear scientific facts which prove that dreams are psychological, physiological, or a combination of both. Therefore, we still do not have a clear understanding of the nature and function of dreams nor of their genesis.

The importance and function of dreams has not yet been scientifically clarified. According to the theory put forth by Freud, the function of dreams is to release the contents of our subconscious and to transfer these contents to our consciousness. Primarily these contents are sexual in nature. Other psychoanalysts, such as Adler and Jung, theorize that dreams are important to express other contents such as aggressive tendencies or various personal desires. Other psychiatrists state that the main purpose of dreams is to forget some learned material, thereby producing "cleanliness of the head" and to

9. Ibid.

10. E. Aserinski and N. Kleitman, *Science*, Vol. 118, pp. 273-274, 1953.

11. W.C. Dement and N. Kleitman, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, Vol. 53, pp. 339-346, 1957.

12. P. Lavie et al, *Neurology*, Vol. 34, pp. 227ff, 1984.

liberate brain energy to gather other and varied material.¹³ Yet other psychiatrists believe that the purpose of dreams is to transfer memory, temporarily stored in subcortical areas, to cortical areas in the brain where memory is stored for prolonged periods of time.¹⁴ Finally, some psychiatrists suggest a combination of the two theories, namely the transfer of memory from subcortical to cortical areas, and the simultaneous erasure of memory which was temporarily stored in those subcortical areas, for an intermediate period of time, thereby allowing a fresh collection of memories and experiences to be collected and stored.¹⁵

Some psychiatrists believe that the storage of memory in our brain is effectuated through parables. When awake, we immediately try to interpret them. During sleep, the dream is an expression of the amorphous from the memory. This matter resembles vision and learning which enter the brain and are stored as electrical impulses. Only when our brain is awake does it translate the impulses into pictures and sounds.

B. Dreams in the Bible and the Talmud

The phenomenon of dreaming seems to be a universal human experience. A number of dreams are portrayed in the Bible: the dream of Abimelech,¹⁶ the dreams of Jacob,¹⁷ of Laban the Aramean,¹⁸ the dreams of Joseph,¹⁹ and of the butler and

13. F. Crick and G. Mitchison, *Nature*, Vol. 304, pp. 111, ff, 1983; J.J. Hopfield et al, *Nature*, Vol. 304, pp. 158, ff, 1983.

14. The hippocampus (in the brain) is here referred to since it is thought to be the source of dreams.

15. C.P. Maurizi, *Medical Hypotheses*, Vol. 23, pp. 433 ff., 1987.

16. "And G-d came to Abimelech in a dream by night," Genesis 20:3.

17. "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth," Genesis 28:12; "I lifted up mine eyes and saw in a dream," Genesis 31:10.

18. Genesis 31:24.

the baker,²⁰ the dreams of Pharaoh,²¹ of the two Midianites about Gideon,²² of Solomon,²³ of Nebuchadnezzar,²⁴ and the dream of Daniel.²⁵

The interpretations of all these dreams are described in the Bible except for the first dream of Jacob, about the ladder whose top reached up to heaven.²⁶

Dreams and dreaming are often discussed in the Talmud, but their ultimate significance is debatable. "Dreams are hidden and concealed things, and their purpose is concealed from human beings."²⁷ "In the matter of dream interpretation there are nostrums or concealed things. Their purpose has not been revealed to us."²⁸ Thus, in the Torah and the Talmud we find statements and opinions which indicate that dreams have no significance, are not true, are not fulfilled, and only represent deceptions of one's imagination for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, we also find statements which indicate that dreams are significant in telling us about the future and in

19. "And Joseph dreamed a dream," Genesis 37:5; "And he dreamed another dream," Genesis 37:9. See *Chizkuni's* commentary there which says that Joseph had another dream which was not fulfilled and is therefore not recorded.

20. "And they dreamed a dream, both of them," Genesis 40:5.

21. "And Pharaoh awoke and, behold, it was a dream," Genesis 41:7.

22. "Behold, a man told a dream unto his fellow," Judges 7:13.

23. "The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night," I Kings 3:5.

24. "And Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams," Daniel 2:1.

25. "Daniel had a dream," - Daniel 7:1.

26. See *Torah Sheleimah*, Genesis, Chapter 28:70 in the name of *Lekach Tov*.

27. Responsa *Shivat Tzion* #52.

28. Responsa *Rashba* attributed to *Ramban* #287; Responsa *Rashba*, Part 1 #800.

establishing Jewish law or ethical conduct. Some dreams are completely true and correct, while others are at least partially correct. There are also numerous conflicting opinions in Jewish writings about the origins and purposes of dreams, as discussed below.

Confirmed dreams which have significance and which can be used to determine a halacha or a custom are called "true dreams."²⁹ By contrast, dreams which are insignificant or meaningless are called false dreams³⁰ or vain dreams.³¹

Our rabbis apparently considered that true dreams can be significant and meaningful. Examples include the dreams cited in Scriptures,³² which have true prophetic meaning, and the dreams cited in the Talmud whose forecasts become established according to the contents of the dreams.³³ The laws about voiding a bad dream, fasting for bad dreams, and excommunication³⁴ testify to the various meanings our rabbis attributed to dreams. Other mentions of dreams as authentic harbingers of some kind of divine message include "If there be a prophet among you ...I will speak to him in a dream,"³⁵ "And when Saul inquired the Lord... neither by dreams..."³⁶ "a dream is one sixtieth part of prophecy;"³⁷ "the Lord said: Although I hide My face from them, I shall speak to them in

29. For example *Kuzari*, Treatise 3:53; Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #128.

30. Zachariah 10:2.

31. Ecclesiastes 5:6.

32. See above in section B.

33. See above in section C.

34. See below in the section on Specific Laws.

35. Numbers 12:6.

36. I Samuel 28:6.

37. *Berachot* 57b; *Zohar*, part 1, pp. 149a and 238a, Part 3, pp. 222b and 234b. See *Maharsha*, *Berachot* 57b and *Maharatz Chayot*, *Sotah* 5a for an explanation of "one sixtieth" in this context.

a dream;³⁸ "unripe prophecy is a dream."³⁹ "Three types of dreams are fulfilled: an early morning dream, a dream which a friend has about one, and a dream which is interpreted in the midst of a dream. Some also add, a dream which is repeated."⁴⁰ "Every dream just before morning is fulfilled immediately."⁴¹ "Nowadays, there is no prophecy nor voice from heaven, but people still have dreams."⁴²

Some rabbinic dicta suggest that a dream should not be understood as totally meaningful and true. However, it may be partially meaningful, as stated in the Talmud: "Just as wheat cannot be without straw, so there cannot be a dream without some nonsense."⁴³ Kabbalists hold that although part of a dream is fulfilled, the whole of it is not fulfilled.⁴⁴ And

38. *Chagigah* 5b.

39. *Genesis Rabbah* 44:19. See the differing explanations of this phrase in Maimonides' *Guide* 2:36 and Abarbanel there at the end of the chapter in the third introduction.

40. *Berachot* 55b. Ramban, Genesis 41:7 states that a dream during sleep following an earlier dream with a different content is not sustained. See M. Spero's *Judaism and Psychology*, New York, Ktav, 1980, pp. 107-108 for a scientific psychological explanation of this verse.

41. *Genesis Rabbah* 89:6.

42. *Zohar*, Genesis, p. 238b. Some sources provide additional signs validating dreams over and above those cited in the Talmud. For example *Chafetz Chayim* #88 and *Responsa Yad Eliyahu* #32 write that Sabbath dreams are true because of the extra Sabbath spirit one experiences; *Responsa Meshivat Nefesh*, Part 1 #30, states that if one hears G-d's name in any language the dream is true; *Minchat Yehuda*, *Miketz* states that if one hears one's name called to accept a Torah honor the dream is true; Abarbanel and Malbim *Miketz* say that excitement from a dream means it is a true dream.

43. *Berachot* 55a. Rashi, Genesis 37:10 and *Zohar*, Genesis, p. 183a state that there is no dream without some falsity mixed in.

44. *Berachot* 55a. See *Torah Sheleimah*, Genesis, Chap. 37:80 for the various textual readings of this adage.

while not all of a good dream is fulfilled, neither is all of a bad dream fulfilled.⁴⁵ Some dreams are totally true and some contain both truth and falseness.⁴⁶

These elusive, sometimes contradictory, opinions regarding the validity of a dream sequence and its possible relevance reflect the wide range of rabbinic positions regarding the importance one ought to ascribe to a dream.

Clearly, there is a difference between the dreams of true prophets, which are meaningful and represent an expression of prophecy, and the usual dreams of ordinary people. The latter dreams are the ones whose content, function, and significance are discussed in the Talmud and by the rabbis, to probe to what extent they may be meaningful.

Rabbinic decisors employ a variety of approaches to reconcile the apparent contradictions in talmudic teachings about dream interpretation and to explain the origins of dreams and their significance. Some rabbis write that there is an essential identity between a dream and prophecy - the difference between them is only quantitative.

A dream originates in the imaginative faculty of the soul. What a person perceives in a dream are concepts which he already had and whose impressions remain engraved in his imagination together with all his powers of imagination. When any idea becomes nullified, only those impressions remain. According to this view, there are various levels of prophetic experience; a prophet's dreams represent certain stages of prophecy. The prophetic dream levels are a dream in which the prophet sees an allegory, a dream in which the prophet hears things, a dream in which the prophet is addressed by an angel, a dream in which it appears to the

45. *Berachot* 55a.

46. Maimonides' *Guide* 2:36-38. See also *Zohar*, *Vayechi* p. 238a, *Pikudei* p258a and *Pinchas*, p. 222b, who seems to agree with Maimonides.

prophet as if G-d spoke to him.⁴⁷ Consequently, some rabbis describe true dreams as a "minor prophecy."⁴⁸

By contrast, other rabbis believe that there is a substantive difference between a dream and prophecy and that the similarity between them is only external. For a dream is derived from the individual human imaginative faculty according to his own expressed characteristics and the constitution of his body, whereas prophecy comes from divine revelation from above.⁴⁹

Whether the difference between prophecy and a dream is qualitative or quantitative, apparently most rabbinic decisors and commentators believe that the majority of dreams originate from an imaginative faculty which is not healthy, or from a physical reason such as the digestion of food which produces gases in the brain, or from weakness of the body constitution which allows alterations in the body humors, or from provincial expressions and thoughts during the course of the day. A dream is the revelation of disorganized thoughts that are suppressed during waking hours and released during sleep. Such dreams are vain, have no meaning, and have no effect one way or the other. One should pay no attention to them.⁵⁰ Even if something in the dream is true, it is a very small part of the dream. Prophecy, however, is completely true, without any falseness at all.⁵¹

47. Maimonides' *Guide* 2:45. See also Ralbag's *Milchamot Hashem*, Treatise 2; Rabbi H. Creskas' *Or Hashem*, Treatise 2, rule 4, Chap. 3.

48. Rabbenu Bachya, Genesis 41:1.

49. Abarbanel's commentary on Maimonides' *Guide*, end of Chap. 36, third introduction; see there for the difference of opinion between Abarbanel and Maimonides concerning the explanations of scriptural and talmudic statements about the essence of dreams.

50. Abarbanel, Genesis 40:24 and beginning of *Miketz*; Rabbenu Bachya, Genesis 41:1; Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #128; *Radak*, Jeremiah 23:28; Responsa *Shivat Zion* #52.

51. *Radak*, Jeremiah 23:28.

The rabbis also maintain that although the imaginative faculty is in part correct, much worthless material is contained therein,⁵² and consequently most dreams are useless things. Even "true dreams," which derive from prophecy and intellect, also contain useless things.⁵³ Some rabbis write that a dream can only contain a true or prophetic matter if it pertains to the future; if it relates to the past, however, it is considered meaningless.⁵⁴ Similarly, some rabbis write that whether a person dreams about himself or another person dreams about him, the contents of dreams have no effect one way or another. This is a general rule for all dreams.⁵⁵

There is, however, a very small minority of dreams which are true and correct and which have no relationship to physical causes but occur due to strength of the soul. If the imaginative faculty in a person is very strong and healthy, dreams can be a teaching from heaven, - "a small prophecy," one sixtieth part" of prophecy.⁵⁶

Despite the ephemeral nature of the dream experience, Jewish thinking is not quite ready to discount these experiences altogether. Thus, halacha (law) and *hashkafa* (philosophy) do address the issue.

Certain general principles apply to the validity of dreams from a halachic viewpoint. Most dreams are considered of questionable validity and therefore, in monetary matters, the doubt is resolved leniently - money is not taken from one person and given to another merely on the basis of a dream, but only upon clear and convincing evidence. However, in matters of what is permitted or forbidden, the doubt as to the dream's importance is resolved stringently, and one must be concerned

52. Meiri, *Sanhedrin* 30a.

53. *Levush Orah* in *Levushim*, *Vayeshev*.

54. Responsa *Shivat Zion* #52; Responsa *Beer Moshe*, Part 3 #170.

55. Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #128.

56. Abarbanel, beginning of *Miketz*; Rabbenu Bachya, Genesis 41:1; Responsa *Shivat Zion* #52.

about the contents of the dream.⁵⁷ Some rabbis, however, rule that even in such matters one need not be concerned with a dream because dreams have no effect one way or another.⁵⁸

In general, Jewish law follows the rule of the majority and considers most dreams as meaningless. However, in matters of danger to life, the law does not follow the rule of the majority. There is concern even for a minority circumstance. Therefore, a dream whose contents deal with danger to life is of concern.⁵⁹

In matters which are not contrary to Jewish law, one should be concerned about the contents of a dream. For example, if one dreams that raging troubles will occur to the general populace, one should pay attention thereto, fast, and do penitence. However, if the dream indicates that one should nullify biblical or even rabbinic commandments, one is not allowed to heed the dream.

In halachic literature, there is a difference of opinion among rabbinic decisors whether or not a scholar is allowed to inquire in a dream about a halachic decision, and whether, if he saw the answer to a halachic question in a dream, he should pay attention to it. In biblical times dreams were frequently consulted, and some rabbis note that talmudic sages at times inquired of dreams.⁶⁰ A number of early rabbinic

57. Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #128; *Haamek She'ela*, *Sheilta* 29:15 according to *Tashbatz*; *Yad Malachi*, general laws, section *dalet* #167 in the name of *Maavar Yabok* in his introduction; *Sedei Chemed*, section *dalet*, rule 45. See also Responsa *Rav Pealim*, Part 2, *Yoreh Deah* #32 and Responsa *Chayim Beyad* #92.

58. Novellae *Ran Sanhedrin* 30a; *Haamek She'ela*, loc. cit. See also Responsa *Shivat Zion* #52.

59. *Nechmad Lemareh*, Part 1, p. 171; Responsa *Chikrei Lev*, *Choshen Mishpat*, *Prat* 1 #118; Responsa *Shivat Zion* #52. See also *Sedei Chemed*, section *dalet*, rule 45.

60. *Baba Metzia* 107b states that Rav went to the cemetery and did what he did. *Rach* and *Shitah Mekubetzet* there and *Aruch*, s.v.

decisors affirm that in dreams they saw answers to and interpretations of halachic questions.⁶¹ Rabbi Yaakov from Marvish, one of the Tosafists,⁶² inquired in dreams about

avad (2) explain that Rav did so by consulting a dream. *Baba Metzia* 147a and *Menachot* 67a state, "Rava said: may it be Thy will that I see it in a dream." *Berachot* 18b cites the story of a pious man which Maharsha there explains refers to the fact that he consulted a dream. *Yerushalmi Kilayim* 9:3 cites an incident involving Rabbi Jose who fasted for 80 days in order to see Rabbi Chiyah the Great in his dream. See also the introduction to the Talmud of *Maharatz Chayot*, Chap. 28 in the name of *Kaftor Vaferach*.

61. Responsa *Maimoniyot* to *Kinyan* #31 in the name of Maharam of Rottenberg concerning an ill teacher; *Ravan* #26 and Mordechai, *Avodah Zarah* Chap. 5 #858 concerning a vessel of wine of libation; *Semag*, negative precept #64 (cited in *Migdal Oz*, *Hilchot Deot* 2:3); Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #159 concerning an abdominal wound; *Hagah*, *Avodah Zarah* #41 in the name of Rabbi Ephraim concerning a fish; Mordechai, *Baba Kamma*, beginning of Chap. 5 concerning the payment of workers; *Bet Joseph*, *Orach Chayim* 651 in the name of Rakenati concerning the apposition of the *etrog* to the *lulav*; Responsa *Radvaz*, Part 6 #2286 concerning phylacteries of *Rashi* and Rabbenu Tam; *Taz*, *Even Haezer* 129:35 in the name of *Or Zarua* concerning the name Akiba; Rabbi Chayim ben Itar's *Peri To'ar* #85 concerning locusts. Responsa *Chayim Beyad* #92 cites *Avodat Mikdash* authored by Rabbi Menachem di Lonzano who wrote his book on the basis of a dream in 1572. Concerning additional dreams of early rabbinic decisors (*Rishonim*) which clarified and established halacha, see the introduction of Rabbi R. Margoliyot to Responsa *Min Hashamayim*. Concerning dreams of later rabbinic decisors (*Acharonim*), see *Taz*, *Orach Chayim*, end of 585 and 551:14; *Taz*, *Choshen Mishpat*, end of 88; *Chidah* in *Midbar Kademot*, section 20:8; Rabbi A.Z. Margoliyot's *Yad Ephraim*, *Orach Chayim* 692; Rabbi J.S. Nathanson's *Divrei Shaul*, Genesis, p. 31. Responsa *Maharsham*, Part 1 #29. Margoliyot, loc. cit. also cites dreams of medieval poets which inspired them to write liturgical prayers and poetry.

62. Some writers identify him as Rabbi Jacob of Corbeil whereas others dispute this identification. See Margoliyot, loc. cit. and A.A. Auerbach, *Baale Hatosafot*, p. 129.

legal questions and disseminated the questions and divine answers in his book.⁶³

By contrast, some rabbis write that a person should refrain from asking in a dream which woman to marry and in which business undertaking he might succeed.⁶⁴ Although some later rabbinic decisors accept as authoritative the content of dreams which revealed Jewish law to them,⁶⁵ most rabbis reject his view. Dreams should have no effect one way or another, for the Torah is "not in the heavens," and a dream is "fleeting and without substance."⁶⁶

63. See about him in Responsa *Radvaz*, Part 1 #10 and Part 2, end of #340; Chidah's *Shem Hagedolim*, section *gedolim* 10:224; Margoliot, *loc. cit.* However, see *Shibolei Haleket* #157 who dismisses the use of dreams for practical purposes since the Torah is not in heaven and dreams are of no effect one way or another. This author is responded to by Responsa *Yabia Omer*, Part 1, *Orach Chayim* #41:25.

64. *Sefer Chasidim* #205, 469 and 1173. He bases his opinion on Deuteronomy 18:13, "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord, thy G-d." See Y. Pacha, *Techumin*, Vol. 5, 5744 (1984) pp. 402ff who explains *Sefer Chasidim* as giving good advice but not enunciating a prohibition.

65. Chidah in *Yair Ozen*, Part 1 #15 and *Shem Hagedolim* *loc. cit.*, states that, according to Maimonides, if a prophet asserts that it was revealed to him in a dream that the opinion of such and such a rabbi is the correct one, he is strangled as a false prophet. This rule applies if the Sages of that generation can decide the matter. However, if the Sages disagree among themselves, it is allowed to ask that heaven reveal the correct rule and to abide by the answer received in a dream.

66. *Shach*, *Choshen Mishpat* 333:25 speaks of the dream of Maharam of Rottenberg about the law of the sick teacher. Responsa *Noda Biyehuda*, 2nd edition, *Yoreh Deah* #30 describes the dream of Rabbenu Ephraim about the *barbuta* fish; *Yafeh Lalev*, Part 2, last *kuntres* #269; Responsa *Maharshag*, Part 2 #40; Responsa *Torah Jekutiel*, *Orach Chayim* #31; *Artzot Hachayim* #9:21. Responsa *Chayim Beyad* #31 writes that nowadays it is forbidden to inquire about a dream in order to predict the future concerning normal matters. See *Sedei Chemed*, Section *dalet*, rule 45. Concerning the method of inquiring about a dream,

However, books and treatises have been written attempting to interpret various dreams, according to the view that dreams do have significance and one should pay attention to their contents.

C. Specific Laws

Since by their very nature it is very difficult to determine whether a person's dreams are nonsense or should be taken seriously, Jewish law and literature reflect a cautious approach, based on the possibility that the dream might indeed carry a portent.⁶⁷

see *Sefer Razi'el*, cited in Ibn Ezra, Exodus 14:19. See also Margoliot's introduction to Responsa *Min Hashamayim* who cites many sources concerning inquiring of a dream and what to do with answers received. See also the introduction to Responsa *Min Hashamayim* by the author of *Keset Sofer* who writes that since the time of Baal Shem Tov there is no inquiring of dreams because he nullified this practice.

In a similar way, some rabbis discuss whether or not a legal ruling which comes from "holy spirit" should be given credence. See for example Ravad's commentary on Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah*, *Lulav* 8:5, *Bet Habechirah* 6:14 and *Mishkav Umoshav* 7:7. In his book *Baale Nefesh*, end of *Shaar Hamayim*, Ravad says "thus was shown to me from heaven." Ramban disagrees with Ravad; See Chidah's *Devash Lepi*, section *nun* #12. See also Rabbi Joseph Karo's *Magid Mesharim* and Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzato's *Megilat Setarim*, *Razin Genizin* and *Tikonim Chadashim*. In the introduction to his *Safra Detzianuta*, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin writes that many orators came to the Vilna Gaon from heaven and tried to give him legal rulings effortlessly but he refused because he wanted to "work" at the study of Torah. See further about "holy spirit," "voice from heaven," and "Elijah's Clarification" in Margoliot's introduction to Responsa *Min Hashamayim*.

67. *Mifashar Chalmin* authored by Shlomo Almoli (1490-1542), published in 1516. In the introduction, Almoli writes that Rav Hai Gaon composed essays on dream interpretation. Some writers state that Rashi and Rav Saadya Gaon also wrote treatises on dream interpretation; the latter's is entitled *Magid Atidot*. Recently a book entitled *Pitron Chalomot Hashalem* ("Complete Book of Dream

"Neutralizing" a Bad Dream

On going to bed one recites the prayer "Who causes the bands of sleep to fall upon my eyes" (*hamapil*), part of which includes "and let not evil dreams and evil thoughts disturb me."⁶⁸

The way to "neutralize" a bad dream is as follows: if one has a dream which makes one sad, even if it contains nothing bad but only makes him sad,⁶⁹ he should have a "good turn" given to it in the presence of three people. Let him go to three of his friends and say to them, "I have seen a good dream". And they should say to him, "Good it is and good may it be. May the Holy One, blessed be He, turn it to good. Seven times may it be decreed from heaven that it should be good and may it be good." They should then say three verses in which G-d promises to turn bad to good, three verses with the word redemption and three verses with the word place.⁷⁰ Some sources interpret the "seven times may it be decreed"...

Interpretation") was published in 1965 by Meyer Bakal.

The Greeks and Romans also wrote many books on this topic; these are called *oneirocritica*. Some are attributed to physicians, others to philosophers. See S.M. Oberhelman, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 61, pp. 47ff, 1987.

68. *Berachot* 60b; Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, *Tefilah* 7:1. See also *Berachot* 55b and *Sanhedrin* 103a which interprets "There shall no evil befall thee" (Psalms 91:10) to mean that thou wilt not be frightened by nightmares and dread thoughts.

69. *Derisha*, *Orach Chayim*, beginning of #220; *Peri Megadim*, *Orach Chayim* 202, in *Aishel Avraham* 1; *Mishnah Berurah* 202:1.

70. *Berachot* 55b; *Rosh*, *Berachot*, Chap. 9 #5; *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim* 220:1. Alfasi and Maimonides omit this law from their codes. *Yad Hamelech*, *Hilchot Tefilah* and *Maharatz Chayot*, *Berachot* 55b explain that Maimonides omits from his *Mishneh Torah* all laws pertaining to the neutralization of bad dreams and the "Sovereign of the Universe" prayer recited in the priestly blessing. He also omits all the portrayals of dreams and their interpretations cited in the Talmud.

to be part of the text of the incantation.⁷¹ In this view, the entire incantation is recited three times.⁷² Other rabbis state that this sentence is not part of the text of the incantation. Rather, the incantation should be recited seven times and one should respond "Amen" after it seven times.⁷³

During the "neutralization" one should remember the dream in one's mind.⁷⁴ One rabbi states that the dreamer should describe his dream to the three people, who should then "interpret" it for good.⁷⁵ The time to perform the neutralization ritual, according to some rabbis, is at the end of the day after one leaves the synagogue;⁷⁶ other rabbis suggest that morning is the proper time.⁷⁷

In general, the rabbis advise people not to pay attention to dreams because most are meaningless. However, if he is sad and anxious about a dream, he should perform the neutralization ritual.⁷⁸

The Talmud advises that if a person had a dream but does not remember what he saw, (whether he cannot remember whether it was good or bad or whether he entirely forgot the dream), let him stand before the *Kohanim* when they raise their hands to offer the priestly benediction and offer a prayer that the dream have a good outcome.⁷⁹

71. *Tosafot*, *Berachot* 55b, s.v. *sheva*, 1st explanation; *Meiri*, *Berachot* 55b.

72. *Ri* in *Tosafot*, loc. cit; *Magen Avraham*, *Orach Chayim* 220:2.

73. *Tosafot*, loc. cit, 2nd explanation; *Tur*, *Orach Chayim* 220 state that this is the custom. See other explanations in the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 8, s.v. *hatavat chalom*, p. 754.

74. *Magen Abraham*, *Orach Chayim* 220:1.

75. *Meiri*, *Berachot* 55b.

76. *Derisha*, *Orach Chayim* 220.

77. *Magen Avraham* 220:2 in the name of *Shalah*.

78. *Aruch Hashulchan*, *Orach Chayim* 220:4.

79. "Sovereign of the Universe, I am Thine and my dreams are

In Israel, where the *Kohanim* bless the people daily, one does not recite this prayer every day but only if he had a dream the night before.⁸⁰ In countries where the priests offer the priestly benediction only on Jewish Holidays, it is customary for the entire congregation to recite this prayer during the priestly benediction - even the people who did not dream.⁸¹

Fasting On Account of a Bad Dream

Halachic literature indicates that a person who experiences a bad dream should fast the next day, because fasting is as potent against a dream as fire against tow.⁸²

It is permissible to fast on account of a bad dream, even on the Sabbath,⁸³ but he must afterward observe the next day of

Thine. I have dreamt a dream and I do not know what it is. Whether I dreamt about myself or my companions dreamt about me or I dreamt about others, if they are good dreams, confirm them and reinforce them like the dreams of Joseph. If they require a remedy, heal them, as the waters of Marah were healed by Moses our teacher, and as Miriam was healed of her leprosy, and Hezekiah of his sickness, and the waters of Jericho by Elisha. As Thou didst turn the curse of the wicked Balaam into a blessing, so turn all my dreams into something good for me." The Jerusalem Talmud, *Berachot* 5:1, has a different textual reading: "...may all the dreams that I dreamt this night or on other nights, whether I dreamt them or others dreamt about me - if they are good dreams, confirm them for me for happiness, rejoicing, blessing and life. ..."

80. *Taz* and *Magen Avraham* 130:1.

81. *Mishnah Berurah* 130:1. The reason is that it is nearly impossible that a person does not dream at least once between one holiday and the next.

82. *Shabbat* 11a; *Taanit* 12b; *Genesis Rabbah* 44:15. See also *Responsa Or Zarua* #407 and *Birkei Joseph, Orach Chayim* 288 who write that the reason is possible danger to life. By contrast, Maimonides, in his *Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot* 1:12 writes that the reason is that he should examine his deeds and do penitence.

83. See *Otzar Hageonim* on *Berachot* 30a in the name of Rav Hai

fasting in penance for having failed to make the Sabbath a delight.⁸⁴ If one is weak and unable to fast on two consecutive days, he should fast on another day.⁸⁵ Some rabbis, however, rule that one should not fast on the Sabbath on account of a bad dream unless he saw that dream three times.⁸⁶ Others rule that nowadays one should not fast on the Sabbath at all on account of a bad dream because we are not experts on dream interpretation to know which dream is good and which is bad.

It is commonly stated in ancient books that for three types of dreams one should fast on the Sabbath: If one sees a Scroll of the law (*Sefer Torah*) burning,⁸⁷ or if one sees Yom Kippur at the time of the late afternoon service, or if one sees the walls of one's house or one's teeth falling out. Other types of dreams are sometimes included in this list.⁸⁸ Some rabbis rule that one should not fast on the Sabbath for any of the aforementioned occurrences but should fast two weekdays, one on account of the bad dream and the other to compensate for the Sabbath.⁸⁹ In any event, one should not fast on the Sabbath

Gaon that a person has no greater pleasure than fasting on account of a bad dream in order to have the evil decree annulled.

84. *Tosafot, Nazir* 2b, s.v. *ve'amei* states that it is meritorious to neutralize the dream on the Sabbath but it is sinful to fast on the Sabbath. Therefore, one should make up the fast on another day. See also *Sheillot* #1; *Meshech Chochmah*, Numbers 6:14.

85. *Berachot* 31b; Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot* 1:12; *Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 288:4.

86. *Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 288:5. See Rabbi H. Plagi's *Chafetz Chaim* #88 which states that if a dream is repeated, it is fulfilled.

87. According to *Mishnah Berurah* 288:16, this rule only applies if one sees a Scroll of the Law or phylacteries burning but not if they are seen falling on the ground.

88. *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 228:5.

89. *Shelah, Shabbat*, Part 2, p.i 85. See also *Shaar Hatziun* 288:15.

unless fasting gives him pleasure; for example, if he is very sad, fasting may give him peace of mind.⁹⁰

While some rabbis minimize the need to fast for a bad dream, others seem to feel that it is important to do so - both for the individual personally or even for the benefit of the community.

Vows in a Dream

What if a person in his dream swore to do something, or vowed not to perform a certain act?

Some rabbis rule that the oath does not require cancellation (*hatarah*, literally: regret)⁹¹ whereas others rule that it does.⁹² Some rabbis even maintain that a vow made in a dream is more stringent than one made while awake and therefore requires ten persons to cancel it.⁹³ Some rabbis rule that a husband cannot nullify his wife's vow⁹⁴ made in her dream, but that she needs ten people to cancel it.⁹⁵ Other rabbis however, rule that the law in regard to a woman's vow is the same whether it occurs in a dream or while awake.⁹⁶

90. *Mishnah Berurah* 288:15.

91. Ran, *Nedarim* 8b; Responsa *Rosh* 8:11; *Tur*, *Yoreh Deah* 210 in the name of Rosh; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:2, the first opinion; Maharal, cited in *Taz*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:4.

92. Responsa *Rashba*, Part 1 #668, and in the name of *Teshuvat Geonim*; Responsa *Rashba* attributed to Ramban #265; *Nimukei Joseph*, *Nedarim* 8b in the name of Ritva; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:2 in the name of "some say." See also Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #128; Responsa *Shemesh Tzedakah*, *Yoreh Deah* #5; Responsa *Shivat Tzion* #52; *Torah Shelema*, Genesis, Chap. 37:80.

93. This is the opinion of the *Geonim* as cited in Responsa *Rashba*, *loc. cit.*; see also *Taz*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:4.

94. As he can in ordinary circumstances.

95. *Bach*, *Yoreh Deah* 210; *Shach*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:4; Responsa *Bet Yehuda*, *Yoreh Deah* #8.

96. *Taz*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:4.

Some rabbis write that one need be concerned only with obligatory vows made in a dream but not with vows which are only made as a sign of piety and asceticism.⁹⁷ Interestingly, some rabbis rule that if a person swears or vows in a dream to fulfill a commandment, he is obligated to do so, such as if he vows in a dream to write a Scroll of the Law,⁹⁸.

Monetary Matters in a Dream

The Gemara talks about a person who was distressed over some money which his father had left him but whose location was not disclosed. In a dream the specific amount and its location were disclosed to him - and also the fact that it was money for the redemption of second tithe. On that occasion, the rabbis ruled that dreams do not matter one way or the other and the money was not considered tithe money and could be used by him for any purpose.⁹⁹ The same rule applies if a person was told in his dream that the money belongs to so-and-so; even if it was given for safekeeping to his father, he can keep it.¹⁰⁰ So, too, if he was told in the dream that so much is earmarked for charity, he can keep it.¹⁰¹ The rabbis explain that one cannot rely on a dream to remove money from

97. Responsa *Chatam Sofer*, *Yoreh Deah* #222. See also Responsa *Beer Moshe*, Part 3 #170.

98. Responsa *Radvaz*, Part 4 #1170. See also *Pitchei Teshuva*, *Yoreh Deah* 210:2-3; Responsa *Beer Moshe*, Part 3 #169.

99. *Sanhedrin* 30a; Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, *Maaser Sheni* 6:6 and *Zechiya Umatana* 10:7; *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 255:9. The reason given is that although what he sees in his dream is true, he is being made to suffer through the dream for his sins; alternatively only part of the dream may be true - *Sheiltot*, *Sheilta* #29; Meiri, *Sanhedrin* 30a; *Magid Mishneh*, *Zechiya Umatana* 10:7. See also Responsa *Shivat Tzion* #52.

100. *Sheiltot*, *loc. cit.*; Rif, *Sanhedrin* 30a; Maimonides, *loc. cit.*; *Tur*, *loc. cit.*

101. *Sheiltot*, *loc. cit.*; Ramo, *Yoreh Deah* 259:6.

the person who is in possession of it.¹⁰² It matters not whether or not he is distressed; in every instance, these dreams are of no significance.¹⁰³

Some rabbis write that the principle that dreams are of no effect applies only in regard to commandments. But if one dreams about a deceased person and his indignity, one should pay attention to the dream.¹⁰⁴ The aforementioned applies, however, only within thirty days of the death of a relative. Later than that, one pays no attention to the dream.¹⁰⁵

If a physician is prepared to prescribe a medication for a patient but is warned in a dream not to do so because the patient might die - if he is in doubt about that medication, he should not prescribe it. If he is sure it will not harm the patient, he should pay no attention to the dream. If he is in doubt but another physician is not in doubt, the second one should pay no attention to his friend's dream.¹⁰⁶

The various rabbinic teachings cited herein hardly offer a concrete or coherent approach toward the question of the relative importance one should ascribe to a dream. Dreams are evanescent, and the laws pertaining to them seem similarly obscure. If a person is troubled by a dream experience, it would appear to be prudent to consult a Torah scholar wise in the depths of this deep issue, in order to receive direction and guidance on the proper reaction.

102..Responsa *Tashbatz*, Part 2 #128. See also Mordechai, *Baba Batra* #658.

103..See *Yerushalmi Maaser Sheni* 4:6; *Haamek Sheelah*, *Sheilta* #29; *Torah Shelemah*, Genesis, Chap. 37:80; *Encyclopedia Talmudit*, Vol. 7, p. 86.

104..*Sefer Chasidim* #727. See also *Ikrei Hadat*, *Yoreh Deah* #38:5; *Yad Malachi*, *Kelalei Hadinim* #166.

105.. Responsa *Shevut Yaakov*, Part 2 #103; *Sedei Chemed*, section *dalet* #45.

106..*Sedei Chemed*, loc. cit. in the name of *Yad Neeman*. See also Responsa *Beer Moshe*, Part 3 #173.