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Interpreting the Rabbis Interpreting the Dreams

A discussion on the Dream Section
Berakhot 9:55a-57b, Babylonian Talmud.

by Pearl Barlev
Advisor: Dr. Dvora Weisberg
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Submitted in partial fulfilment of Text Immersion Project for Rabbinic Ordination

NOTE TO THE READER:

I have chosen a Text Immersion project for my Rabbinical Ordination Thesis requirement to learn more about the culture and power of the Rabbis and the sanctity of their opinions in traditional Judaism. For this project I have been required to read original Talmudic texts, to be examined orally on certain selections and to write on a topic or topics that has or have emerged from this study.

I chose three selections to study:

- Berakhot 4 and 5: which deal with Jewish liturgy and the efficacy of prayer.
- Berakhot 9: which deals with the supernatural and dreams.
- Sanhedrin 11: which deals with the afterlife.

This paper is the product of studying Berakhot 9 and is an exploration into the world of the Rabbis and their views and rituals concerning dream interpretation.

Interpreting the Rabbis Interpreting Dreams

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Interpreting the Rabbis Interpreting Dreams

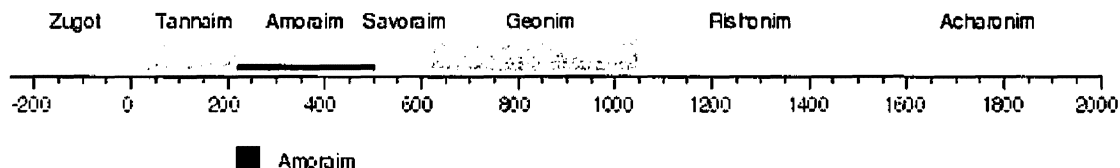
A discussion on the Dream Section
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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In Talmudic tradition, the Dream Section comprises Rabbinic statements covering an array of ideas and opinions that span generations and cultures.¹ These particular views revolve around the nature of dreams and their fulfilment. This section is an indicator of the importance of dreams, and in particular dream interpretation and good dreams, to the Rabbis, who speculate on dreams and how they are to be dealt with upon waking and afterwards.

This paper will explore a variety of these. In particular it will look at the Rabbis' views of dream interpretation, their relationship to non-rabbinic dream interpreters, and their techniques for encouraging good dreams. It is my hope that this will give insight to their views and also to why this was important to them.

¹ This timeline (from Wikipedia.org) shows the Rabbis of the Talmud (Tannaim and Amoraim) in relation to other periods.



The Talmud has a place among others dream writings of the same era, which look to explain and understand dreams, their efficacy and their general nature. An example of this is "Oneirocritica" by Artemidorus, a work about the interpretation of dreams in the 2nd C. Dreams were so important to the Rabbis that there are three sections of Talmud on dreams: one in the Babylonian Talmud and two in the Palestinian Talmud. The Dream Section in the Babylonian Talmud is the longest, most complex and most influential.² It appears in Tractate Berakhot, which deals primarily with blessings and prayers. It is located in Chapter 9 which offers blessings for various things, including a blessing to be said before going to sleep which includes a petition not to have a bad dream, and which will be discussed in more detail later. In general, Chapter 9 deals with the supernatural, discussing demons, angels, the evil eye and the like. The Dream Section, 55a-57b, discusses the supernatural in that it reflects on dreams that are at the liminal intersection of the dream world and waking world.

The Rabbis encouraged people to seek the protection of God against evil forces and bad dreams. They created a nighttime prayer for this purpose, which will be discussed in more detail later. In addition to this, God's influence

² Hasan-Rokem, Galit. p. 93

on dreams is emphasised by a statement of R. Judah in the name of Rav³ that also appears in Ch. 9:

"Three things require God's mercy: a good king, a good year and a good dream." (55a)

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב, שלשה צריכים רחמים: מלך טוב, שנה טובה, וחלום טוב.

As the guardians of Judaism and interpreters of God's Torah, the Rabbis were invested in emphasizing the importance of God in all things. They were also interested in promoting their own role as leaders and wise men. With regard to dreams, it was in their interest to minimize the role of other interpreters and increase the influence of their own interpretations of dreams. This hints at a power struggle between the Rabbis and non-rabbinic dream interpreters. This can be seen in the Rabbis' discussions regarding the interpretation of dreams and their techniques for encouraging good dreams, by directly or indirectly employing God's intervention. This will be discussed in the following section.

³ AB1

SECTION 2:

INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS AND RABBIS' TECHNIQUES FOR GOOD DREAMS.

An examination of the Dream Section⁴ reveals three overarching topics. The first deals with a series of aphorisms, which express a range of rabbinic opinions concerning the nature of dreams. The second is a story that focuses on interpretation and clearly indicates the Rabbis' distaste for other dream interpreters. The third section refers to ways in which the Rabbis work with "bad" dreams to transform them to "good" dreams. The structure is:

Topic One:

- a. R. Hisda: on the nature and significance of dreams.
- b. Aphorisms: on the nature and significance of dreams.

Topic Two:

- c. Bar Hedyā Story: at center of structure about interpretation.

Topic Three:

- d. Rabbis Working with Dreams: techniques for the reversal of bad dreams to good dreams, and symbols.⁵

⁴ Alexander p. 232

⁵ Symbols are not discussed in this paper.

The contents of this structure are analyzed below. In general the Rabbis view the fulfilment of some dreams as induced by the response of the dreamer to the interpreter, and the fulfilment of other dreams as inevitable regardless of the interpretation. Throughout the discussion these arguments have varying degrees of clarity and in some cases Rabbis contradict other's opinions; as a result one is left with the question "are dreams the dreams of Rabbis and their contemporaries, or are they messages from God?"⁶ In other words, are dreams and their fulfilment manipulated by the Rabbis and interpreters or are they communications from God? In the following analysis, it seems that the Rabbis are fixed on showing that the non-rabbinic dream interpreters have no place in bone fide interpretation, and that it is the directive of the Rabbis that will bring a dreamer to positive fulfilment of his dreams.

a. R. Hisda⁷:

R. Hisda's list of comments regarding dreams opens the Dream Section and begins with:

"R. Hisda said: any dream rather than one of a fast." (55a)

⁶ Alexander p.234

⁷ AB3

אמר רב חסדא: כל חלום ולא טוות.

It seems that R. Hisda is saying that except for dreams influenced by hunger, any dream can be interpreted. He is referring to the notion that when one is fasting the content of one's dream may be affected by the fast. This would render the dream impossible or difficult to interpret. It may also refer to the idea that a fast might induce a "bad dream". R. Hisda seems to be warning that a "bad" dream need not imply bad things, but may merely be a response to hunger. With this statement R. Hisda affirms that dreams that are not influenced by hunger contain material for interpretation. He goes on to support this idea with the next statement in his list:

"R. Hisda also said: A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read." (55a)

אמר רב חסדא: חלמא דלא מפשר - כאגרתא דלא מקריא.

This implies that dreams are filled with information in the same way that letters are filled with information. In the same way that a letter can be left unopened, so too can a dream be unopened, that is uninterpreted. In this

way there will be no autosuggestion to the dreamer about the meaning or implications of a dream, good or bad.

There is another way to understand this statement by R. Hisda. In an era in which traditions were in the transition from an oral to a written record, this analogy has relevance. It suggests that a dream is a text. This notion has import in that the study and interpretation of texts had high value in the ideal Torah scholar culture of the Rabbis. This implies that to interpret dreams is like interpreting the text of Torah and thus firmly places dream interpretation in the domain of the Rabbis.

This statement of importance of interpreting dreams seems to contradict the previous one, which seemed to suggest that interpretation of dreams is not necessary or desirable. However, I see no contradiction, because in the first case R. Hisda is discrediting the interpretation of a non-Rabbi dream interpreter and in the second case he is giving support to Torah scholars interpreting the "text" of the dream. This interpretation empowers the Rabbis, who are the Torah scholars, and disempowers the non-rabbinic dream interpreters and thus it lends power to the political stance of the Rabbis.

"R. Hisda also said: Neither a good dream nor a bad dream is ever wholly fulfilled." (55a)

ואמר רב חסדא: לא חלמא טבא מקיים כוליה, ולא חלמא בישא מקיים כוליה.

With this statement, R. Hisda appears to be offering reassurance to the dreamer that no matter whom the interpreter, the interpretation will not all come true. Although R. Hisda points out that a dream is never entirely fulfilled, he does not say how much is or is not fulfilled. Later in the Dream Section dreams are described as: "one sixtieth of prophecy" (57b). If prophecy is understood to mean dreams that foretell the future and are fulfilled in the future, then one sixtieth of all dreams are fulfilled. In this way, a dream is a minor form of prophecy. This explanation shifts power from the non-rabbinic dream interpreters to the Rabbis who are the guardians of the Torah and the prophecies.

"R. Hisda also said: A bad dream is better than a good dream. (55a)"

ואמר רב חסדא: חלמא בישא עדיף מחלמא טבא.

Perhaps R. Hisda means that a bad dream can bring someone out of complacency and heightens one's appreciation of what exists in the waking world. The Talmud is not clear on

what exactly is a "good" or "bad" dream. It is not clear if this is a dream about something "good" or "bad" in the dreamer's mind, or if it is in the interpreter's assessment of the dream. At any rate, it is possible that what R. Hisda means here is indicated later on in the Dream Section, where one learns that one may have a "bad" dream reversed to a good dream, so it seems as if a bad dream coming true in the awake world can be averted. It seems that the reason R. Hisda says that a bad dream is better than a good one, makes the point that because one cannot be certain about what kind of dream it is and what part of it will be fulfilled, then at least one has the option of a reversal ritual or technique that is later suggested by the Rabbis.

"R. Hisda also said: The sadness caused by a bad dream is sufficient for it and the joy which a good dream gives is sufficient for it." (55a)

רב חסדא: חלמא בישא - עציבותיה מסתייה, חלמא טבא - חדוייה
מסתייה.

It is the sadness of the dream that makes the dreamer sad not the actual outcome. Perhaps R. Hisda is saying that no interpretation is necessary for this dream. A sad or joyful dream has its own interpretation or reaction. This statement diminishes the role of dream interpreters in

general and the significance of interpretation, since the dream is already "fulfilled" or realized through one's immediate emotional response.

"R. Yosef⁸ said: Even for me the joy caused by a good dream nullifies it." (55a)

אמר רב יוסף: חלמא טבא - אפילו לדידי בדיחותיה מפכחא ליה.

This comment by R. Yosef is of note because he is blind and therefore what he sees in his dreams is joyful because he cannot see it in reality. It becomes nullified because he will not see it in reality. This statement by R. Yosef adds to the diminishing of the role of the interpreters, in that for him all dreams in which he has an experience of "seeing" is good for him whether it is interpreted by the interpreter as a "good" or a "bad" dream. This seems to discredit the opinion of the interpreter, who may not be attuned to the particular sensibilities of the dreamer.

"R. Hisda also said: A bad dream is worse than scourging, since it says, 'God hath so made it that men should fear before Him'⁹ and Rabbah b. Bar Hanah¹⁰ said in the name of R. Yohanan¹¹: This refers to a bad dream." (55a)

⁸ AB3

⁹ Eccl. III, 14

¹⁰ AB1

אמר רב חסדא: חלמא בישא קשה מנגדא, שנאמר והאלהים עשה
שיראו מלפניו ואמר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן: זה חלום רע.

This refers with great negativity to a bad dream, which contradicts the previous statements made by R. Hisda that spoke positively of bad dreams. Nonetheless, in this statement, R. Hisda points out that dreams are of a Godly nature and that bad dreams instil fear of God in the dreamer. By associating dreams with the fear of God, which is the territory of the Rabbis, and not of non-rabbinic dream interpreters, this statement can be seen as one that elevates the Rabbis.

In summary, the above statements by R. Hisda support the idea that the Rabbis wish to show that non-rabbinic dream interpreters are not reliable in their interpretation and that Rabbis may be considered a more reliable source to understand dreams and deal with dreams in reality.

b. Other Aphorisms regarding dreams:

The dream section continues with other statements by the Rabbis regarding the nature and quality of dreams. These statements also can be read as statements that refer to the Rabbis' views for or against the validity of

¹¹ AI2

interpretations by dream interpreters. In general they cover the topic of the origin of dreams and dream prophecy. These comments include:

Regarding the origin of dreams, Rabbi Yonatan¹² claims that dreams originate from within a person.

"R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: A man is shown in a dream only what is suggested by his own thoughts..." (55b).

אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: אין מראין לו לאדם אלא
מהרהורי לבו...

In this case, the dreamer's dreams are a product of the dreamer's thoughts, including his fears and inclinations. All this, says R. Yonatan, indicates that a dream is related directly to the dreamer and thus suggests that the dreamer himself is the key to interpretation. On the other hand, one could understand this to mean that once a dream has been interpreted, the interpretation influences the existing thoughts of the dreamer, and the dream is fulfilled in this way.

¹² T5

With regard to dream prophecy, Rava¹³ brings up a similar point about the contents of dreams being initiated by the dreamer.

"Rava said: a man is not shown in a dream a date palm of gold or an elephant through the eye of a needle." (55b)

אמר רבא: תדע, דלא מחוו ליה לאינש לא דקלא דדהבא, ולא פילא דעייל בקופא דמחטא.

Rava is saying that a dreamer only dreams about things that are within the realm of his reality. Dreams come from within the dreamer and not from prophecy and will ring true to the dreamer's own experience. In such a case the fulfilment of a dream is self-induced and discloses what is already on one's mind.¹⁴

This leads to the question about the role of prophecy in dreams. In the culture of the Rabbis, "prophecy" was a comprehensive term to describe Torah or something induced by God¹⁵. Because dreams are interpreted in Torah texts, prophecy connected the Rabbis more closely to dreams than the non-rabbinic dream interpreters. The Rabbis strengthened this connection when they displaced the

¹³ AB4

¹⁴ Alexander p.233.

¹⁵ Alexander p.237

prophets as interpreters of prophecy and made the statement: "the sage was to be preferred to the prophet." (Bava Batra 12a). In this way the Rabbis became the interpreters of prophecy through Torah study and by extension the interpreters of dreams¹⁶.

The Talmud connects dreams and prophecy further by stating that a dream is one-sixtieth part of prophecy.

"Five things are a sixtieth part of something else: namely, fire, honey, Sabbath, sleep and a dream. Fire is one-sixtieth part of Gehinnom. Honey is one-sixtieth part of manna. Sabbath is one-sixtieth part of the world to come. Sleep is one-sixtieth part of death. A dream is one-sixtieth part of prophecy." (57b)

חמשה אחד מששים, אלו הן: אש, דבש, ושבֹת, ושינה, וחלום. אש - אחד מששים לגיהנם, דבש - אחד מששים למן, שבת - אחד מששים לעולם הבא, שינה - אחד מששים למיתה, חלום - אחד מששים לנבואה.

The Rabbis did not explicitly state what the other 59 sixtieths consist of. It seems likely that some of these 59 comprise interpretations and life experiences. Conversely, some of these 59 comprise prophecy. This seems to uphold a previous statement by the rabbis that dreams are never fulfilled in their entirety and leaves at question the total make up of dreams. Nonetheless it

¹⁶ Jewish Theological Seminary, Ismar Schorsch, *Parashat Vayeishev* 1998.

appears that even one sixtieth of prophecy is important to the Rabbis, perhaps because prophecy affirms a Godly portion in dreams.

In summary, this section of additional aphorisms on the nature of dreams supports the bias of the Rabbis to claim the power from non-rabbinic dream interpreters.

c. Bar Hedya Story:

At the center of the structure of the Dream section is the long story of Bar Hedya (56a).¹⁷ Its placement alludes to its importance and centrality to the discussion on dreams and dream interpretation. The story is a detailed account of a shady dream interpreter, who interprets the dreams of Abaye¹⁸ and Rava,¹⁹ who both dream the same dreams. They both go to Bar Hedya²⁰ many times for interpretation of the identical dreams. Abaye pays and gets positive

¹⁷ Please see Addendum for entire story.

¹⁸ AB4

¹⁹ AB4

²⁰ Bar Hedya is named by Judith Abrams (p. 162) as an Amora who commuted between Palestine and Babylon in 3rd and 4th generations. Steinsaltz does not have him listed with the Rabbis. Given the message of the story, it is most likely that he is not an Amora and he is probably a fictional character and a construct that the Talmud utilizes to make a point about his shady character. In the story he is presented as someone who is swayed in his dream interpretation by money. Judith Abrams (p.162) points out that there is word play on his name. The spelling of his name is hey, daled, yud, alef. This spelling with different vowelings has two different meanings. "Hedya" indicates directness and openness; "Hadaya" indicates swooping and capriciousness. (Jastrow p.333.) This man appeared one way i.e. "Hedya" but acted another i.e. "Hadaya". Further comment on the duality of this dream interpreter follows in the text above.

interpretations. Rava does not pay and gets negative interpretations. Later, Rava pays Bar Hedyā and has positive interpretations. In the end Bar Hedyā drops the book he writes in where it is written "all dreams follow the mouth". At the very end of the story Bar Hedyā is literally split in two by the secular authorities.

This incident is clearly a comment on the possible efficacy of dream interpretation, because some of the dreams that Bar Hedyā interpret come true, for both good and bad. Bar Hedyā interpreted for his own gain and was punished. It is meaningful that his punishment is for him to be split in two. This may be the Talmud's comment on the duality of the two interpretations of the same dreams for two different people. This story implies that it is the interpreter that brings the dream to reality by unlocking it through interpretation and the resulting suggestion to the dreamer. In other words, according to this story, dreams may be fulfilled through the autosuggestion of the interpreter. This story seems to serve as a warning against shady dream interpreters. The phrase that "outs" Bar Hedyā is the one written in his book:

"All dreams follow the mouth" (55b)

כל החלומות הולכים אחר הפה.

which suggests he knows that dreams that are interpreted may be fulfilled because of that interpretation and not for another reason. This highlights the role and power of the dream interpreter and is a statement against the corruptness that the Rabbis depict as possible in non-rabbinic dream interpretation. It is a statement that supports the Rabbis, by discrediting the non-rabbinic dream interpreter. The phrase implies that that which comes from the mouth - that which is said about the dream - shapes how the dream is fulfilled. In addition, "mouth" may also literally refer to the food intake through the mouth, which physically can have effect on dreams²¹.

The presence of twenty-four dream interpreters in Jerusalem indicates that dream interpretation had a following during the time of the Rabbis. An example is given in the story about Rabbi Banaah²² who has a dream. He goes to twenty-four different interpreters. Each interprets the dream differently and yet each interpretation is fulfilled. According to the Gemara then,

²¹ Alexander p.235 fn11

²² Rabbi Banaah appears primarily in aggadah (Eretz Yisrael Amora)

how a dream is fulfilled depends on the way it is interpreted.²³

A further close look at the phrase "all dreams follow the mouth" indicates that it can be read with a double meaning. Talmud and Mishna are called Torah "shel bal peh", that is Torah "of the mouth". One meaning is that "all dreams follow the mouth" and therefore dreams that are interpreted "come true" by virtue of autosuggestion. The other meaning is that "all dreams follow the mouth" and therefore dreams that are interpreted "come true" because they are product of "shel bal peh", (Torah/divine prophecy/ or rabbinic say so - as written by the rabbis themselves). This interpretation sets the Rabbis as the interpreters of dreams that follow the mouth, and displaces the other dream interpreters.

Several questions arise from this story and their answers seem to add further support to the Rabbis' attempt to reclaim power from the non-rabbinic dream interpreters. The first is: What is the relationship between money and dream interpretation? It is suggested that there is a link between payment and the outcome of dreams.²⁴ It seems

²³ Alexander p.235 notes that this indicates that dreams themselves are multivalent and can be actualized in different ways. Schottenstein p.55b fn.52 similarly points out that each of the twenty-four interpreters understood only one aspect of the multivalent dream.

²⁴ Shulman and Stroumsa, p.10.

that this link can be bought, according to the Bar Hedya story. Given the negativity towards Bar Hedya and the outcome of the story, it seems that the Rabbis believe that interpretation should not be bought as in the case of Bar Hedya. Again this is in support of the Rabbis' desire to diminish the power and popularity of the non-rabbinic dream interpreters. The second question is: Is there a parallel between Bar Hedya's interpretations of Rava's dreams that comes true, and when Rava curses Bar Hedya and the curse is fulfilled when Bar Hedya gets split in two. What is the difference between the "curse" that Rava puts on Bar Hedya (to get into trouble with the authorities) and the "curse" that Bar Hedya puts on Rava (that Rava's wife will die).? Both come true. It seems that these two curses play out that both the non-rabbinic interpreters and the Rabbis have power that seems to be able to influence the outcome of their words. If this is so, then all the more reason for the Rabbis to find other ways to diminish the influence of the non-rabbinic dream interpreters. A third question is: What does it mean that Rava was able to intervene in the dream that became reality? In an incident when he is hit with clubs two times, he declares, "there were only two in my dream" and he averts a third hit. Rava is able to call upon his dream to stop a third hit in reality, because he

asserted that there were only two hits in his dream. This too is a point that refers to how dreams may be fulfilled by the autosuggestion of dream interpreters, but only to the extent that it matches the dreamer's reality, and therefore it may undermine the authority of dream interpretation.

In summary, the above section seems to show the Rabbis' attempts to discredit non-rabbinic dream interpreters and to strengthen their own position as dream interpreters.

d. Rabbis' Techniques for Good Dreams:

The Dream Section continues to encourage the dreamer away from dream interpreters by offering ways to reverse the portent of what the dreamer perceives is a "bad" dream. Rav indicates that good dreams are through the providence of God.

"Three things require God's mercy: a good king, a good year and a good dream." (55a)

ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב, שלשה צריכים רחמים: מלך טוב, שנה טובה, וחלום טוב.

With this as a backdrop, the Talmud recommends certain techniques to prevent bad dreams. The first is a prayer composed by the Rabbis to be said upon going to bed:

"The one who goes to sleep on his bed says from 'Hear Israel...' until 'And it will come to pass that if you hearken...'²⁵.

Blessed ...Who casts bonds of sleep upon my eyes and slumber upon my eyelids, and Who illuminates the pupil of the eye. May it be Your will, Adonai, my God, that You lay me down to sleep toward peace, and grant me my share in your Torah and accustom me to the rule of Your mitzvot, but do not accustom me to the rule of transgression. Do not bring me into the grasp of an error, nor into the grasp of a sin, nor into the grasp of a challenge, nor into the grasp of scorn. Let the good inclination dominate me, but not let the evil inclination dominate me. Rescue me from an evil mishap and from terrible diseases. May I not be confused by bad dreams or bad thoughts; may my offspring be perfect before You; and may You illuminate my eyes lest I die in sleep. Blessed are You, Adonai, my God, Who illuminates the entire world with His glory." (60b)

הנכנס לישן על מטתו אומר משמע ישראל עד והיה אם שמוע. ואומר
ברוך המפיל חבלי שינה על עיני ותנומה על עפעפי ומאיר לאישון בת
עין. יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהי שתשכיבני לשלום, ותן חלקי בתורתך,
ותרגילני לידי מצוה, ואל תרגילני לידי עבירה, ואל תביאני לידי חטא,
ולא לידי עון, ולא לידי נסיון, ולא לידי בזיון, וישלוט בי יצר טוב ואל
ישלוט בי יצר הרע ותצילני מפגע רע ומחללים רעים ואל יבהלוני
חלומות רעים והרהורים רעים, ותהא מטתי שלמה לפניך, והאר עיני
פן אישן המות, ברוך אתה ה' המאיר לעולם כולו בכבודו.

²⁵ This is the first of the three sections of the Shema. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

This prayer is strengthened through its association with the Shema, which precedes it in the pre-sleep liturgy. This nighttime prayer ritual affirms the rabbinic overview that God is involved in all things, including protection from bad dreams. The Rabbis' work with dreams is born of a culture of superstition as evidenced by other parts of chapter 9 which talk about techniques for avoiding the evil eye, or the bad angels, and other such supernatural menaces. This cultural bent fits the agenda of the Rabbis, to claim more power by offering dreamers protection from potentially bad dreams.

Another practice offered by the Rabbis is intended to reverse what the dreamer perceives is a bad dream. This is achieved at the time of waking. It is for the dreamer who awakes with what he perceives to be a negative Torah verse on his lips. The dreamer is instructed by the Rabbis on waking to immediately replace the negative verse with a positive verse. In this way, the Rabbis taught, negative dreams could be reversed.

An additional process that the Rabbis describe to reverse a bad dream is the recitation of the following prayer during the Priestly Blessing²⁶:

²⁶ The Priestly Blessing - Birkat Hakohanim is an ancient Jewish custom. It is said by Kohanim, (priests) for the pray-ers of the congregation. It is a particularly potent moment for prayer. The blessing itself is

"If they are good dreams, confirm and reinforce them like the dreams of Joseph, and 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 You turned the curse of the wicked Balaam into a blessing, so turn all my dreams into something good for me" (55b).

אם טובים הם - חזקם ואמצם כחלומותיו של יוסף, ואם צריכים
רפואה - רפאם כמי מרה על ידי משה רבינו, וכמרים מצרעתה,
וכחזקיה מחליו, וכמי יריחו על ידי אלישע, וכשם שהפכת קללת בלעם
הרשע לברכה - כן הפוך כל חלומותי עלי לטובה

The above words are to be inserted between the congregation's "amens" during the Priestly Blessing. The words are a prayer to God to heal the bad dream the dreamer has dreamed. The possibility for God's intercession is made more potent by timing the dreamer's prayer to be affirmed by the "amens" of the pray-ers. By involving God in the interpretation of dreams and also in the reassignment of good and bad dreams, the Rabbis are proactively offering solutions to the dreamer that will steer the dreamer away from seeking the counsel of the dream interpreters.

taken directly from Numbers 6: 24-26: "Adonai bless and keep you. Adonai let Adonai's face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. Adonai look upon you kindly and give you peace."

This idea is also played out in the process that the Rabbis describe concerning three people who get together with the dreamer to ensure that his has been a good dream. They say:

"Do not interpretations belong to God?" (55b).

This is followed by the recitation of various verses, some of which are repeated three times.

In summary, with the above methods, the Rabbis have elected to give dreamers an alternative way to respond to their superstitions about bad dreams, thus strengthening the Rabbis' position as interpreters of dreams.

SECTION 3: CONCLUSION

In its assessment of the Rabbis' views regarding dreams, this paper has argued that the Rabbis use this Dream Section to detract from the popularity of non-rabbinic dream interpreters. The Rabbis make the case that these interpreters are unreliable and may be motivated by financial gain. The Rabbis do not deny that some dreams may be fulfilled as a result of the suggestion of the dream interpreter's interpretation. They do however repeatedly make the point that there is an alternative to the dream interpreter. That alternative is realized in the methods that the Rabbis put forth to change a dream perceived to be "bad" by the dreamer, to a "good" dream.

It becomes clear that the Rabbis see dreams as similar to texts that are open to interpretation, but that they prefer that the interpretation manifests via Rabbinic influence rather than via a non-rabbinic dream interpreter's influence. This is evidenced by an analogy between unlocking the meaning of dreams and unlocking the meaning of Tanach: "Just as the text of the Scripture remains in potentia till its meaning is unlocked and actualized by the rabbinic interpreter, all of whose actualizations, however contradictory, are equally valid, so the multivalent potential of the dream text is unlocked

and actualized by the dream interpreter."²⁷ This makes the case that interpretation is important. However, analysis of the Dream Section seems to indicate that it is not interpretation that is the concern of the Rabbis, but rather who is doing it.

This is a subtext in the Dream Section that places the Rabbis in their previously claimed position, which is in the lineage of Jewish tradition as affirmed by the Rabbis of the Mishna:

"Moses received the Torah at Sinai and handed it down to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the prophets; and the prophets handed it down to the Men of the Great Assembly."²⁸

משה קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת הגדולה.

This states the chain of which the Rabbis are a part and confers on their opinions the authority of the Torah,²⁹ and sets them as the valid interpreters of the texts of Torah and the language of dreams.

²⁷ Alexander p.237

²⁸ Avot 1:1.

²⁹ This is The Written Torah - *torah she-bikhtav* (which includes *neviim* and *ketuvim* of the Tanach) which is the Torah of Moses and the Oral Torah (*torah she-b'al peh*) which is the Mishnah and Gemara of the Talmud.

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SECTION 5: ADDENDUM

STORY OF BAR HEDYA: DREAM INTERPRETER

(Soncino Translation)

56a

Bar Hedya was an interpreter of dreams. To one who paid him he used to give a favourable interpretation and to one who did not pay him he gave an unfavourable interpretation. Abaye and Raba each had a dream. Abaye gave him a zuz, and Rab did not give him anything, They said to him: In our dream we had to read the verse, Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes,⁴ etc. To Raba he said: Your business will be a failure, and you will be so grieved that you will have no appetite to eat. To Abaye he said: Your business will prosper, and you will not be able to eat from sheer joy. They then said to him: We had to read in our dream the verse, Thou shalt beget sons and daughters but they shall not be thine,⁵ etc. To Raba he interpreted it in its [literal] unfavourable sense. To Abaye he said: You have numerous sons and daughters, and your daughters will be married and go away, and it will seem to you as if they have gone into captivity. [They said to him:] We were made to read the verse: Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given unto another people.⁶ To Abaye he said: You have numerous sons and daughters; you will want your daughters to marry your relatives, and your wife will want them to marry her relatives, and she will force you to marry them to her relatives, which will be like giving them to another people. To Raba he said: Your wife will die, and her sons and daughters will come under the sway of another wife. (For Raba said in the name of R. Jeremiah b. Abba, reporting Rab: What is the meaning of the verse: 'Thy sons and thy daughters shall be given to another people'? This refers to a step-mother.) [They further said]: We were made to read in our dream the verse, Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, etc.⁷ To Abaye he said: Your business will prosper, and you will eat and drink, and recite this verse out of the joy of your heart. To Raba he said: Your business will fail, you will slaughter [cattle] and not eat or drink and you will read Scripture to allay your anxiety. [They said to him]: We were made to read the verse, Thou shalt carry much seed out into the field, [and shalt gather little in, for the locusts will consume it].⁸ To Abaye he interpreted from the first half of the verse; to Raba from the second half. [They said to him:] We were made to read

the verse, Thou shalt have olive trees throughout all thy borders, [but thou shalt not anoint thyself, etc.]⁹ To Abaye he interpreted from the first half of the verse; to Raba from the second half. [They said to him:] We were made to read the verse: And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon thee, etc.¹⁰ To Abaye he said: Your name will become famous as head of the college, and you will be generally feared. To Raba he said: The King's treasury¹¹ will be broken into, and you will be arrested as a thief, and everyone will draw an inference from you.¹² The next day the King's treasury was broken into and they came and arrested Raba: They said to him: We saw a lettuce on the mouth of a jar. To Abaye he said: Your business will be doubled like a lettuce. To Raba he said: Your business will be bitter like a lettuce. They said to him: We saw some meat on the mouth of a jar. To Abaye he said: Your wine will be sweet, and everyone will come to buy meat and wine from you. To Raba, he said: Your wine will turn sour, and everyone will come to buy meat to eat with it.¹³ They said: We saw a cask hanging on a palm tree. To Abaye he said: Your business will spring up like a palm tree. To Raba he said: Your goods will be sweet like dates.¹⁴ They said to him: We saw a pomegranate sprouting on the mouth of a jar. To Abaye he said: Your goods will be high-priced like a pomegranate. To Raba he said: Your goods will be stale like a [dry] pomegranate. They said to him: We saw a cask fall into a pit. To Abaye he said: Your goods will be in demand according to the saying: The pu'ah¹⁵ has fallen into a well and cannot be found.¹⁶ To Raba he said: Your goods will be spoilt and they will be thrown into a pit. They said to him: We saw a young ass standing by our pillow and braying. To Abaye he said: You will become a king,¹⁷ and an Amora¹⁸ will stand by you. To Raba he said: The words 'The first-born of an ass'¹⁹ have been erased from your tefillin. Raba said to him: I have looked at them and they are there. He replied to him: Certainly the waw of the word hamor [ass] has been erased from your tefillin.²⁰

Subsequently Raba went to him by himself and said to him: I dreamt that the outer door fell. He said to him: Your wife will die. He said to him: I dreamt that my front and back teeth fell out. He said to him: Your sons and your daughters will die. He said: I saw two pigeons flying. He replied: You will divorce two wives.²¹ He said to him: I saw two turnip-tops.²² He replied: You will receive two blows with a cudgel. On that day Raba went and sat all day in the Beth ha-Midrash. He found two blind men quarrelling

with one another. Raba went to separate them and they gave him two blows. They wanted to give him another blow but he said, Enough! I saw in my dream only two.

Finally Raba went and gave him a fee. He said to him: I saw a wall fall down. He replied: You will acquire wealth without end. He said: I dreamt that Abaye's villa fell in and the dust of it covered me. He replied to him: Abaye will die and [the presidency of] his College will be offered to you. He said to him: I saw my own villa fall in, and everyone came and took a brick. He said to him: Your teachings will be disseminated throughout the world. He said to him: I dreamt that my head was split open and my brains fell out. He replied: The stuffing will fall out of your pillow. He said to him: In my dream I was made to read the Hallel of Egypt.²³ He replied: Miracles will happen to you.

Bar Hedyā was once travelling with Raba in a boat. He said to himself: Why should I accompany a man to whom a miracle will happen?²⁴ As he was disembarking, he let fall a book. Raba found it, and saw written in it: All dreams follow the mouth. He exclaimed: Wretch! It all depended on you and you gave me all this pain! I forgive you everything except [what you said about] the daughter of R. Hisda.²⁵ May it be God's will that this fellow be delivered up to the Government, and that they have no mercy on him! Bar Hedyā said to himself: What am I to do? We have been taught that a curse uttered by a sage, even when undeserved, comes to pass; how much more this of Raba, which was deserved! He said: I will rise up and go into exile. For a Master has said: Exile makes atonement for iniquity. He rose and fled to the Romans. He went and sat at the door of the keeper of the King's wardrobe. The keeper of the wardrobe had a dream, and said to him: I dreamt that a needle pierced my finger. He said to him: Give me a zuz! He refused to give him one, and he would not say a word to him. He again said to him: I dreamt that a worm²⁶ fell between two of my fingers. He said to him: Give me a zuz. He refused to give him one, and he would not say a word to him. I dreamt that a worm filled the whole of my hand. He said to him: Worms have been spoiling all the silk garments. This became known in the palace, and they brought the keeper of the wardrobe in order to put him to death. He said to them: Why execute me? Bring the man who knew and would not tell. So they brought Bar Hedyā, and they said to him: Because of your zuz, the king's silken garments have been ruined.

56b

They tied two cedars together with a rope, tied one leg to one cedar and the other to the other, and released the rope, so that even his head was split.¹ Each tree rebounded to its place and he was decapitated and his body fell in two.