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# The Rabbinic Conception of Dreams and Dream Interpretation

Kenneth H. Kudisch

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts  
in Hebrew Letters and Ordination.

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Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Eugene Mihaly  
Thesis Referee, Dr. Lewis Barth

In Memory of

Clarence P. Kudisch

## DIGEST

The Rabbis were very much interested in dreams: biblical dreams as well as the dreams of their contemporaries. This thesis attempts to probe that interest in order to determine how the Rabbis viewed the phenomenon of dreams.

Dreams were seen by the Rabbis as a form of incomplete communication and this is reflected in their view of both the causes and effects of dreams. God was considered the primary agent of causation and, thus, through dreams, man sometimes received prophecy. However, probably because they saw dreams as incomplete communication, the Rabbis considered this type of prophecy to be inferior. Angels, demons, and man's soul also played a role in causing dreams, but of significance, in addition to God, is the role man himself played. The Rabbis felt that man's thoughts, interests, and activities during the day all influenced the dreams he had at night.

Not all dreams, of course, were the same and the Rabbis attributed this, not only to the different agents causing dreams, but also to the nature of the dreamer as well. Thus, the righteous could expect good dreams while the evil generally received only bad dreams. With regard to these bad dreams, the Rabbis suggest a plethora of ways to effectuate their annulment.

The most important consideration in determining the outcome of a dream, whether seemingly good or bad, the Rabbis placed with the interpretation. Because they viewed dreams as incomplete forms of communication, the Rabbis felt it necessary to probe the communication to determine its meaning, or, if you will, its interpretation. However, the effect of interpretation was seen as being greater than mere explanation. Indeed, the Rabbis felt that it was the interpretation of the dream, as opposed to the dream itself, which determined the dream's effect. Thus, it is even suggested that two or more interpretations of the same dream could all come true. With regard to dream interpretation, the thesis also considers the various methods the Rabbis employed to interpret both biblical dreams and the dreams of their contemporaries.

Finally, a different type of dream interpretation is discussed: the universal dream interpretation. This interpretation was to be valid no matter who the dreamer or what the circumstances under which his dream took place. There are a limited number of these interpretations and all of them were found to deal with what were probably the most common and recurrent dreams of the people.

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## INTRODUCTION

This study began as an investigation into the rabbinic attitude toward biblical dreams, with emphasis upon those dreams contained in the Joseph narrative. However, as the midrashic and talmudic sources were probed, it became increasingly clear that the Rabbis' views with regard to biblical dreams were closely intertwined with their views about the dreams of their contemporaries in addition to such related subjects as dream interpretation. Thus, the scope of this thesis has been widened.

In another way, the scope of this thesis has been delimited. To speak of the rabbinic view or attitude toward any subject is to span many centuries. The Rabbis, in particular, and rabbis, in general, have played a role in Jewish history since the time of the Sanhedrin in Palestine. As a result, their views can, in no way, be considered monolithic. Therefore, we have taken "the Rabbis" to mean the Tannaim and the Amoraim whose statements are recorded in the Talmud and classic midrashic texts. Even within this group, an attempt has been made to show, where possible, a development in thought.



Using various concordances, collections, and especially the invaluable notes found in Ginzberg's The Legends of the Jews, all relevant rabbinic material was collected. This, along with selected secondary sources, served as the basis for this work.

English translations of the talmudic and midrashic sources, where they exist, have been utilized in this thesis. The author has felt free, however, in consultation with the Hebrew text, to make whatever changes were deemed necessary. It should be noted in this regard that all citations, unless otherwise noted, are to the Hebrew texts.

Thanks are due to two faculty members of the Hebrew Union College, both of whom served as advisers in this undertaking. First, to Dr. Eugene Mihaly whose love for the Midrash is infectious and whose interest and concern led me to this study and provided guideposts along the way. To his pupil and my teacher, Dr. Lewis Barth, special thanks must be given. During a period when his schedule allowed no more time, he found the time to offer of his knowledge and ability. His cogent and well reasoned thoughts and criticisms were much appreciated.

## Chapter One

### Dreams and their Causes

The Rabbis dreamed.<sup>1</sup> The men whose lives they studied and emulated, their biblical forebears, dreamed.<sup>2</sup> "And do not all people dream" they rhetorically asked?<sup>3</sup> This view as to the ubiquitous and pervasive nature of dreams gave rise to the Rabbis' rather thorough investigation of the phenomenon of dreams. In so doing they grappled with many different facets of the phenomenon: its causes, results, and effects upon man, the dreamer.

The types of dreams people experience, good or bad for example, the Rabbis in large measure attributed to external influences which caused the dream. They saw many catalysts as playing a role in the causation of dreams, but considered God the fundamental cause. In this view, man was the passive recipient of a dream which God caused and for which God determined the effect. Most biblical dreams are of this type including Joseph's dream which the Rabbis viewed as a part of God's historical plan for Israel and as a result of which a whole series of events was initiated. God caused Joseph to have a dream which presaged events that would eventually occur in Egypt but which also was itself

the cause of those events. Commenting on the verse from Genesis 39:1, "And Joseph was brought down to Egypt," the Rabbis make this point.

Scripture says: "I drew them with cords of a man etc." (Hosea 11:4) This refers to Joseph, as it is written, "But there were certain men who were unclean by the dead body of a man." (Numbers 9:6) Had Israel not gone down [to Egypt] because of the incident of Joseph [i.e. the dream which caused his brothers to sell him to the Midianites], he was destined to be taken down to Egypt bound with chains about his neck, just as they were taken to Babylonia. Why? For thus He made a covenant with Abraham, "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger [in a land that is not theirs] and they shall serve them; and shall afflict them [four hundred years.]" (Genesis 15:13) But because He cherished them, He caused him to be placed in the pit, and He brought about the act that Joseph would be sold in order that they themselves would go down.<sup>4</sup>

God's role in this sequence of events initiated by Joseph's dreams is expanded in the Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer. There R. Pinhas is quoted as saying that God served as a shepard to Joseph, guiding him not only in his dreams but in the interpretation of his dreams as well.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the Rabbis suggest that dreams caused by God are intended to bring about very specific results. It should be noted here, that the Rabbis, in this instance, are not speaking about the results of a dream according to its interpretation. Rather, the dreams caused by God, as historical

events, have very definite and discernable results regardless of their interpretation or even if they are not interpreted at all. The following passage from Agadat Bereshit, speaks in terms of the dreams God causes as either punishing or healing man, and clearly illustrates this point.

Another interpretation of [the verse] "And it came to pass at the end of two full years." (Genesis 41:1) This is what Scripture says: "For I will restore health unto thee, etc." (Jeremiah 30:17) The manner of the Holy One, blessed be He is not like the manner of man. Man wounds with a sword and heals with a plaster. But he is unable to wound with a sword and heal with a sword. But it is not so with the Holy One, blessed be He. He heals with a sword as He wounds with a sword. You find that that with which he punishes Israel, with the same thing He heals them...

They are punished with dreams: "As a dream when one awaketh, [so, O Lord, when Thou arousest Thyself, Thou wilt despise their semblance.]" (Psalms 73:20) And they are healed with dreams: "Your young men shall dream dreams..." (Joel 3:1) Thus Joseph was sold only because of dreams, as it is written, ["Behold the dreamer cometh] Come now therefore, and let us slay him." (Genesis 37:19-20) And he was healed through a dream: "And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed." (Genesis 41:1) Thus it is written: "For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds." (Jeremiah 30:17)<sup>6</sup>

The petitionary prayers which the Rabbis wrote serve as an excellent indication of the powers and abilities they ascribed to God. The liturgy for the festivals of Sukkoth

and Pesach, for example, is replete with prayers asking for geshem and tal respectively. Certainly the Rabbis attributed to God the power to provide these various types of precipitation. Similarly, the Rabbis wrote a prayer which petitions God to deal with the dreams of man. Found in the tractate Berakoth, a veritable repository of dream material, the following prayer clearly indicates the Rabbis' view of God's role in dreams.

Sovereign of the universe, I am Thine and my dreams are Thine. I have dreamt a dream and I do not know what it is. Whether I have dreamt about myself or my companions have dreamt about me, or I have dreamt about others; if they are good dreams, confirm them 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 Thou didst turn the curse of the wicked Balaam into a blessing, so turn all my dreams into something good for me.<sup>7</sup>

With God as the cause and man the recipient of dreams, the Rabbis developed the notion of dreams as a means of divine communication with man. As such, they viewed dreams as a vehicle for prophecy. In a much later period, Maimonides describes dreams as the fifth level, and an incomplete form, of prophecy, but this same view is clearly propounded by R. Hanina b. Isaac, a forth generation Palestinian Amora,

who, in discussing various types of incomplete phenomena, states that "an incomplete form of prophecy is the dream."<sup>8</sup> R. Hanina's conception of the dream as incapable of conveying pure prophecy may very well stem from an even earlier belief, to be discussed below in greater detail, that the dream itself is not a complete form of communication and as a result cannot convey complete prophecy. Commenting on Jeremiah 23:28, this conception of the dream as incomplete communication is presented in the following passage:

"A prophet that hath a dream let him tell a dream; and he that hath My word let him speak My word faithfully. What hath the straw to do with wheat, saith the Lord?" What is the connection of straw and wheat with a dream? The truth is, said R. Johanan in the name of R. Simeon b. Yoḥai, that just as wheat cannot be without straw, so there cannot be a dream without some nonsense.

If, as this passage indicates, dreams were not considered complete forms of communication, so too must prophecy received via a dream be considered an incomplete form of communication.

Viewing the dream as an inferior form of prophecy, the Rabbis use biblical incidents in an attempt to show that it was the gentile prophets who received prophecy by means of dreams as opposed to the more superior and complete forms of prophecy received by the Hebrew prophets. With regard to Abimelech, for example, this distinction between gentile and

Hebrew prophet is set forth.

"But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night." (Genesis 20:3) What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and those of the other nations? R. Hama b. R. Hanina said: The Holy One, blessed be He reveals Himself to heathen prophets with half-speech only, as you read, "And God met וַיִּקְרַ Balaam." (Numbers 23:4) R. Issachar of Kefar Mandi observed: The term "וַיִּקְרַ" signifies uncleanness, as in the verse, "If there be among you any man that is not clean by reason of that which chanceth upon him בַּלַּיְלָה by night." (Deuteronomy 23:11) But to the prophets of Israel He speaks with complete speech, in terms of love and sanctity, with language in which the ministering angels praise Him, as it says, "And one [seraph] called unto another, and said: 'Holy holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts.'" (Isaiah 6:3)

R. Jose said: "The Lord is far from the wicked." (Proverbs 15:29) refers to the prophets of other nations; "But He heareth the prayer of the righteous." (Ibid.) refers to the prophets of Israel.

R. Jose b. Bibah said: The Holy One, blessed be He, appears to the heathens only in the hour when people generally take leave of each other [i.e. at night] as it says, "Now a word was secretly brought to me... at the time of leave-taking, from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men." (Job 4:12-13) R. Leasar b. Menahem said: "The Lord is far from the wicked" refers to the prophets of other nations; "But He heareth the prayer of the righteous" to the prophets of Israel. And God appears to the nations only like one who comes from afar, as you read, "They are come from a far country unto me." (Isaiah 39:3) But in connection with the prophets of Israel we read, "And [the Lord] appeared." (Genesis 18:1) "And the Lord called." (Leviticus 1:1) implying, from the immediate vicinity.

What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of other nations? R.

Hanina said: It may be compared to a king who was with his friend in a chamber but separated by a curtain; whenever he desired to speak to his friend, he folded up the curtain and spoke to him. But He speaks to the prophets of other nations without folding the curtain back but from behind it. The Rabbis compared it to a king who has a wife and concubine; to his wife he goes openly, but to his concubine he repairs with stealth. Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be He appears to the heathens only at night, as it says, "And God came to Balaam at night." (Numbers 22:20) "And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night." (Genesis 31:24) "And God came to Abimelech in a dream at night." (Genesis 20:3)<sup>10</sup>

This same distinction is also made with regard to the dreams of Pharoah and Joseph; the dreams of the former being described as "not of heaven and earth" while the dreams of the latter "are of heaven and earth."<sup>11</sup>

There are also Hebrew prophets who receive prophecy at night. In contradistinction to the gentile prophets, the Rabbis do not consider their prophecy in any way diminished. Thus, Rab, an early Babylonian Amora, categorizes as "the torpor of prophecy" the deep sleep (tardema) which fell upon Abram and in which God spoke to him. (Genesis 15:12)<sup>12</sup> Likewise, no aspersion is cast upon the prophecy Jacob receives, although it too takes place in a dream of the night.<sup>13</sup>

Just as the Rabbis considered dreams to be a vehicle for prophecy, so they considered prophecy to be a vehicle for dream interpretations. Thus, as quoted above from the



Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer, R. Pinhas is attributed with saying that Joseph interpreted "Pharoah's dream while the Holy Spirit rested upon him, as it is written: 'And Pharoah said to his servants: 'can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the spirit of God is?' (Genesis 41:38)<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Bereshit Rabbah, the Rabbis expand upon the biblical narrative of the Joseph story so that Joseph says to Pharoah "'It [the interpretation] is not in me; God will give Pharoah an answer of peace.' He ascribed the greatness to Him to whom it belongs."<sup>15</sup>

Recorded in the Tanhuma is further testimony to the role of prophecy in dream interpretation. In addition, the following passage provides the reader with an interesting glimpse at other, previously employed, methods of interpreting dreams. The passage deals with the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and his attempts to have them interpreted; first by his magicians and then by Daniel. After experiencing difficulty with the interpretation, it is suggested that

Prophecy would be needed, for the language of prophecy is more precious, as it is written, "And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no frequent vision." (I Samuel 3:1) "And there is none other [that can declare it before the king.]" (Daniel 2:11) When the Temple as in existence one would go to the sons of Aaron and inquire of the urim and tumim and they would declare to him the matter. But now, the Temple no longer exists and one does

not ask the urim and tumim. He said to them: "So it was when the Temple existed. But you advised me to destroy it!" Immediately he became angry "and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree went forth, and the wise men were to be slain; and they sought Daniel and his companions to be slain." (Daniel 2:12-13) Daniel began to speak with Arioch [captain of the king's guard,] "Wherefore is the decree so peremptory from the king?" Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. Then Daniel went in (Daniel 2:15-15) before the king and [Arioch] said thus unto him: 'I have found a man of the children of the captivity of Judah, that will make known unto the king the interpretation.'" (Daniel 2:25) He said to him, "You or Daniel?" for he did not know him. Then he said to him [The king to Daniel] , "Do you have the power to tell me the dream and its interpretation?" He said to him "yes." And he said to him "when?" And he said to him "I do not request of you time; not after thirty days or after twenty days. But wait for me over night and in the morning I will tell you." Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions." (Daniel 2:17) Why? In order that they should pray with him, as it is written, "That they might pray to the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his companions should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." (Daniel 2:18-19)

The Holy One, blessed be He said, in this world prophecy will come to individuals but in the time to come it will come to every man, as it is written: "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions." (Joel 3:1)<sup>16</sup>

It was not through prophecy alone, however, that the Rabbis viewed God as a cause of dreams. Other agents were

employed as well. Although I found only one reference to the involvement of angels and demons in this regard, it is interesting and worthy of note. The qualitative differences among dreams will be dealt with below, but it is in regard to this qualitative distinction between dreams that the Rabbis speak of good dreams coming "through an angel" as opposed to bad dreams "through a demon."<sup>17</sup> This notion is occasioned by a supposed scriptural contradiction pointed out by Raba: "It is written, 'I do speak with him in a dream,' (Numbers 12:6) and it is written 'The dreams speak falsely.' (Zechariah 10:2) There is no contradiction; in the one case it is through an angel, in the other through a demon."<sup>18</sup>

Angels, demons, and especially God were the external agents which the Rabbis considered to be the causes of dreams. However, they also thought that other factors were involved in the causation of dreams; factors which saw man not as a passive recipient but himself actively influencing his own dreams. Indeed, man himself, or aspects of his being, was capable of actually causing dreams, albeit of a different nature from the dreams brought about by God. When man slept the Rabbis thought that his soul was released from his body to return upon awakening. Some dreams were thus attributed to this nighttime activity of

the soul. How was it that a man could dream of events that were elsewhere taking place while he slept? It was his soul, the Rabbis contended, which "wanders over all the earth and tells him in a dream what happens."<sup>19</sup>

There is the urge, when presenting the rabbinic view of dreams to relate these findings to the present day investigation of the same phenomenon and especially to the work of Freud. This is most tempting in a discussion of the influence which the Rabbis considered man's own thoughts to have had upon his dreams. But such an undertaking is not germane to this investigation. Suffice it to say that many such parallels do indeed exist.<sup>20</sup> The Rabbis considered many of man's dreams to be the direct result of his activities and thoughts during the days preceeding a dream. Drawing first on biblical situations, they found there evidence to support this view. The following, from Midrash HaGadol, draws upon several different stories to illustrate the power of one's thoughts.

Another interpretation of [the verse] "And behold he stood by the river." (Genesis 41:1) It teaches you that what a man thinks about during the day is shown to him in his dreams. You may infer that the butler and the baker were only shown [in their dreams] the nature of their occupations, as it is written, "And Pharoah's cup was in my hand." (Genesis 40:11)

And so it was with Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked, be-

cause all his days he thought only about an image. Therefore, it appeared to him from his thoughts, as it is written, "[Thou, O king, sawest] and, behold, a great image." (Daniel 2:31) And so you find with Jacob, our father. Because all his days he thought only of the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written, "If God will be with me." (Genesis 28:13) What did he see? "And behold the Lord stood beside him." (Ibid.) And so it was with Pharoah, the wicked. Because all his days he thought only of the Nile, as it is written, "[Thus saith the Lord God: Behold I am against thee, Pharoah king of Egypt, the great lion that lieth in the midst of his rivers] that hath said: my river is my own." (Ezekiel 29:3) Therefore, it says, "And behold he stood by the river." 21

Substantiation from the Bible was not the only means employed by the Rabbis to show the effect of previous thoughts on one's dreams. In addition, they asked why it is a man never dreams of such things as a "date palm of gold or an elephant passing through the eye of a needle?" The question is answered by R. Samuel b. Nahmani: "A man is shown in a dream only what is suggested by his own thoughts."<sup>22</sup> Since, according to the Rabbis, no man can conceive of an elephant passing through the eye of a needle, it likewise cannot be dreamed.

An interesting comment, found in Berakoth, deals with the effect of daytime activities on dreams. There, it is suggested that by acting modestly in a privy one is spared, among other things, from disturbing dreams.<sup>23</sup>

With these factors, man's own thoughts, his soul, angels, demons, and most importantly, God by means of prophecy, the Rabbis accounted for the phenomenon of dreams. They also knew that these same factors, along with others to be discussed in the proceeding chapter, played a role in determining the qualitative differences which exist between dreams.

## Chapter Two

The Qualitative Differences Between Dreamers  
and their Dreams

Factors other than being an Israelite or a gentile prophet were seen by the Rabbis as playing a decisive role in determining the nature and quality of one's dreams. Thus, for example, there exists a "difference between the dreams of the righteous and the dreams of the wicked."<sup>1</sup> This latter distinction often correlates with the former, so that the prophets of Israel are viewed as righteous and, as a result, have good dreams while the prophets of the other nations are considered wicked and therefore have bad dreams.

Our rabbis teach us the difference between the dreams of the righteous and the dreams of the wicked. The dreams of the wicked are not of heaven or earth, as it is written, "And Pharoah dreamed: and behold, he stood by the river." (Genesis 41:1) And similarly, concerning Nebuchadnezzar it is written, "I saw a dream which made me afraid." (Daniel 4:1) For it was of neither the heaven or the earth.

But the dreams of the righteous are of heaven and earth. Thus you find that Joseph said to his brothers "Behold, we were binding sheaves." (Genesis 37:7) Behold, [this takes place] on earth. And from where do we know [that the dreams of the righteous also deal] with heaven? As it is written, "Behold the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to me." (Genesis 37:9) And so with Jacob, our father, "And he dreamed and behold a ladder set up on earth and the top of it reached to heaven." (Genesis 28:12) Thus, in the heaven and on the earth.<sup>2</sup>

This same conception is further illustrated in the following passage which deals specifically with dreams in which God appears to the wicked.

"And it came to pass at the end of two full years." (Genesis 41:1) This is what Scripture says, "As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when Thou arousest Thyself, Thou wilt despise their semblance." (Psalms 73:20) The Holy One, blessed be He does not reveal Himself to the wicked during the day. Why? In order to mock them, "as a dream when one awaketh." And why at night? In order that He may make them dark and gloomy, as it is written: "And their works are in the dark." (Isaiah 29:15) Therefore, He reveals Himself to them in darkness "as a dream when one awaketh." And not even at night do they see [God] for the Holy One, blessed be He only reveals Himself to them when He makes Himself a messenger to the wicked in order to do the will of the righteous. Therefore, one finds with the first Pharaoh, when Sarah was taken [to be married] the Holy One, blessed be He did not send an angel or a seraph against him, but He, as it were, went "And the Lord plagued Pharaoh." (Genesis 12:17) He was able to do this because of her merit. Scripture says, "Because of Sarai, Abram's wife." (Ibid.) And so it was when Abimelech took her. He [God], as it were, went and appeared to him at night, as it is written: "But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night." (Genesis 20:3) And so with Laban: "And God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night." (Genesis 31:24) So with Pharaoh, there appeared to him in a dream what would happen in the future: "And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed." (Genesis 41:1) And so it was that Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams. And why was it that He was revealed to him in dreams? In order to mock them "as a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when Thou arousest Thyself, Thou wilt despise their semblance."<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the dreams of the Hebrews, however, God seems to have a special relationship to dreams of a posit-



ive quality. Although Joseph's dreams, when considered independently from the entire Joseph narrative, may be seen as resulting in his brothers' anger and their subsequent sale of him to the Midianites, the more representative rabbinic attitude, as mentioned above, sees these dreams in a positive vein.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Rab Judah suggests that a good dream, inasmuch as it is dependant upon God, is one of the three things for which a man should supplicate.<sup>5</sup>

Because good dreams were closely associated with God and, in a sense, their own reward, the Rabbis were especially disturbed by the nature of evil dreams and the effects they had upon man. As a result, they suggested a plethora of ways to combat their effects. Judah ha-Nasi made use of the following statement by R. Eliezer, a second generation Tannah, to suggest that "if you have seen ill-omened dreams and confusing visions of which you are afraid, take hold of three things and you will be delivered of them:

For R. Judan said in the name of R. Eliezer: Three things annul evil decrees, viz. prayer, charity, and repentance. And three of them are mentioned in one verse, as it is written: "If My people, upon whom My name is called, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their evil ways; then I will hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II Chronicles 7:14)<sup>6</sup>

The rabbis of the Amoraic period presented other meth -

ods of annulling evil dreams; the most widespread of which seems to have been fasting. Thus, "Raba b. Mehasia said in the name of R. Hama b. Goria in Rab's name: Fasting is as potent against an [evil] dream as fire against tow. Said R. Hisda: Providing it is on that very day. R. Joseph added: And even on the Sabbath."<sup>7</sup>

The passage of time is also suggested as a means of annulling evil dreams.

R. Johanan said: A bad dream, an evil prophecy and unreasonable mourning are nullified by the lapse of time. How do we know it of a bad dream and an evil prophecy? [From the verse] "The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth." (Ezekiel 12: 22)<sup>8</sup>

In Berakoth, of the Jerusalem Talmud, R. Yona offers the following prayer, similar to that found in Berakoth of the Babylonian Talmud<sup>9</sup> to counteract evil dreams:

R. Yona said in the name of R. Tanhum b. Hiya: He who sees a painful dream should say "May it be Thy will, O Lord my God and God of my Fathers, to take care of all the dreams I dreamt, whether tonight or any other night, whether I dreamt them or others dreamt them about me. If they are good, may they be fulfilled with joy, happiness, blessing, and life. But if they are of a different nature, change them just as Thou changed the salt water to sweet (Exodus 15:25) and the waters of Jericho sweet by means of Elisha, and the curse of Peor's son a blessing; so change all my disagreeable dreams. And may that which others have dreamt about me, be changed to good, blessing, healing, life, happiness, joy and peace."<sup>10</sup>

The final suggestion for counteracting bad dreams reveals the Rabbis' understanding of the nature of dream interpretation. Even though a dream may not appear to augur well for an individual, a good interpretation of that dream will vitiate its potential for evil. Thus,

If one has a dream which makes him sad he should go and have it interpreted in the presence of three. He should have it interpreted? Has not R. Hisda said: A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read? Say rather then, he should have a good turn given to it in the presence of three.<sup>11</sup>

The interpretation of a dream, as indicated in the above passage, has the power to alter the effects of a bad dream. Indeed, it is not only with regard to bad dreams that the Rabbis placed such importance upon the interpretation of a dream. The outcome of all dreams is determined by the interpretation of the dream as opposed to the dream itself. This idea will be discussed at length in Chapter Three, which deals with dream interpretation. For the present, the following passage is offered as representative of the Rabbis' thinking.

A woman came to R. Eleazer and said, "I dreamt that the beam of the house was split." He told her, "You will bear a son." She departed and it happened so. On another occasion she came to inquire of him and said, "I dreamt that the beam of the house was split." He told her, "You will

bear a son." She departed and it was so. A third time she came to him and found the disciples assembled in the school, but their teacher was not present. She asked them, "Where is your teacher?" They said, "What do you want of him?" She said to them, "Perhaps you are as wise as your teacher to interpret a dream which I saw." They said to her, "Tell us what you require and we will interpret it to you." She told them, "I dreamt that the beam of the house was split." They replied, "You will bury your husband."

When she left them she began to cry. R Eleazer heard this and asked them, "Why is this woman crying?" They answered, "She came to inquire of you but did not find you." He said to his disciples, "What did she come to ask?" "To interpret a dream," they said. "And what did you tell her?" They informed him; and he thereupon said to them, "You have killed a man; for is it not written, 'And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was?' (Genesis 41:13) And did not R. Johanan say, 'A dream follows its interpretation except when it is of wine; some dreams they are drinking it and it is a good omen, while others dream they are drinking it and it is a bad omen.?' R. Abbahu said: dreams are of no consequence either for good or for ill."<sup>12</sup>

R. Abbahu's statement, also found in Sanhedrin 30a and Bereshit Rabba 68:12, must be understood, not so much as discrediting the effect of dreams, but as supporting the belief that "A dream follows its interpretation."<sup>13</sup> However, the Rabbis seem to agree that "while a part of a dream may be fulfilled, the whole of it is never fulfilled."<sup>14</sup> R. Berekiah derives this notion from Joseph's dream that the sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down before him. As these celestial bodies represent the members of his family, the

dream could not be completely fulfilled inasmuch as Joseph's mother, Rachael, had already died.

This same view was alluded to above in the passage which comments on Jeremiah 23:28. There, R. Johanan, in the name of R. Simeon b. Yoḥai concludes that "there cannot be a dream without some nonsense."<sup>15</sup>

Although R. Hiṣda holds a similar view, that "neither a good dream nor a bad dream is ever wholly fulfilled,"<sup>16</sup> it is not derived, as those above, from scriptural example. Rather, basing his statement upon the nature of good and bad dreams respectively, he says, "The sadness caused by a bad dream is sufficient for it and the joy which a good dream gives is sufficient for it."<sup>17</sup>

Whether perceived by the dreamer as good or bad, however, it was not the dream itself which the Rabbis saw as the determining factor in its outcome. Perhaps it is because the Rabbis viewed dreams as incomplete forms of communication that they felt it necessary, with regard to all dreams, to probe the communication and determine its meaning, or, if you will, its interpretation. As incomplete communication the Rabbis could derive no meaning directly from a dream and thus held that "All dreams are dependent on the interpretation given to them."<sup>19</sup> R. Hiṣda characterized this notion best when he said that "a dream which is not

interpreted is like a letter which is not read."<sup>20</sup>

## Chapter Three

## The Interpretation of Dreams

The practice of dream interpretation in the ancient Near East appears to have been widespread. The existence, for example, of the Assyrian Dream Book and references to dreams and dream interpretation in the Epic of Gilgamesh testify to this. Likewise do they suggest the thought, introduced above, that interpretations of dreams not only predicted but somehow determined the dream's outcome. Thus, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, "After the mother of Gilgamesh has provided him with what we term today an interpretation of his dream, she concludes her speech with the statement: '[and thus, or: and now] your dream is [so]lved.'<sup>1</sup>

The Rabbis were also concerned with the significance of a dream's interpretation. As in the Epic of Gilgamesh they considered the interpretation of a dream to be the determining factor in the dream's outcome and found the foundation for this concept in the Bible. This notion is manifest throughout the Rabbinic period as is attested to in the following statement attributed to R. Bizna b. Zabda, a fourth generation Palestinian Amora:<sup>2</sup>

R. Bizna b. Zabda said in the name of R. Akiba who had it from R. Panda who had it from R. Nahum

who had it from R. Biryam reporting a certain elder-- and who was this? R. Bana'ah: There were twenty-four interpreters of dreams in Jerusalem. Once I dreamt a dream and I went round to all of them and they all gave me different interpretations, and all were fulfilled, thus confirming that which is said: All dreams follow the mouth.

Is the statement that all dreams follow the mouth scriptural? Yes, as stated by R. Eleazar. For R. Eleazar said: Whence do we know that all dreams follow the mouth? Because it says "And it came to pass, as he interpreted it to us, so it was." (Genesis 41:13)<sup>3</sup>

R. Bana'ah, the elder credited with the original version of this story, is described by Aaron Hyman as coming very early "when Israel was still in Jerusalem,"<sup>4</sup> and thus is the earliest reference found which relates this view of dream interpretation to the Rabbis. Others, however, also based this concept of dream interpretation on the biblical account of Joseph's interpretations. In the above quote, R. Eleazar employs the statement "And it came to pass, as he interpreted to us, so it was," from Genesis 41:3. Similarly, in the Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer this same text is used to show that "For each man, according to his dream, he interpreted just as things were."<sup>5</sup> Joseph also correctly interprets the dream of the chief butler and the chief baker; and this incident, too, is used as biblical justification for the rabbinic understanding of dream interpretation.<sup>6</sup>



This concept is further developed during the Tanaitic period and is perhaps best expressed in the passage quoted above, in which R. Eliezer reprimands his disciples for having interpreted a woman's dream in such a way as to bring about her husband's death.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, R. Jose b. Halaftha, a third generation Tamah, when presented with the following dream, was able to interpret it so that benefit would result for the dreamer:

A man came to R. Jose b. Halaftha and said, "I dreamt that people told me to go to Cappadocia and receive my father's property." He asked him, "Had your father ever been to Cappadocia?" "No," was the reply. "Go then, and count from the top to the bottom and from bottom to top and where the number twenty ends, there you will find [your father's money]." He proceeded to do so, and found the property and became rich. Whence did R. Jose know this? In Greek Kappa means twenty and dokoi means beams.<sup>8</sup>

The above account of R. Jose b. Halaftha's interpretation is taken from Lamentations Rabbah. A parallel version, found in Bereshit Rabbah, is introduced by the following statement: "R. Abbahu said: Dreams have no influence whatsoever."<sup>9</sup> In view of the preponderance of rabbinic material supporting the validity of dreams, it is difficult to take R. Abbahu's statement literally, as a disclaimer with regard to the influence of dreams. Indeed, in only one other instance was any rabbinic statement found which dep-

recates the validity of dreams or dream interpretation; and even in that case, merely the hope of reversing an interpretation is offered.

R. Hanan said: Even if the master of dreams says to a man that on the morrow he will die, he should not desist from prayer, for so it says: "For in the multitude of dreams are vanities and also many words, but fear thou God." (Ecclesiastes 5:6)<sup>10</sup>

It seems likely that R. Abbahu's statement that "Dreams have no influence whatsoever," is meant not to discredit dreams but rather to credit the interpretation of dreams as the crucial factor. Such an understanding of Abbahu's statement would place him in agreement with his contemporaries, as for example, R. Huna b. Ammi, also a third generation Palestinian Amora, who said

in the name of R. Pedath who had it from R. Johanan: If one has a dream which makes him sad he should go and have it interpreted in the presence of three. He should have it interpreted? Has not R. Hisda said: A dream which is not interpreted is like a letter which is not read? Say rather, then, he should have a good turn given to it in the presence of three. Let him bring three 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 All-Merciful turn it to good and may it be good. They should say three verses with the word "turn," and three with the word "redeem," and three with the word "peace."<sup>11</sup>

R. Hisda's statement that "a dream which is not inter-

preted is like a letter which is not read,"<sup>12</sup> is one of many such general statements with regard to the efficacy of dream interpretation. Thus, for example, R. Johanan is found to say that "all dreams are dependent on the interpretation given to them," and Bar Kappara, a late Tannah, "No dream is without its interpretation."<sup>14</sup>

Inasmuch as the interpretation of a dream was seen as directly producing results, it was important to have a dream properly interpreted. Two passages follow which deal with this problem and describe some of the possible situations which arose. The first, from Lamentations Rabbah, is concerned with a Samaritan interpreting dreams.

A Samaritan set himself up as an interpreter of dreams. R. Ishmael b. R. Jose heard of this and said, "Shall I not go and see this fool of a Samaritan who tricks his fellows?" He went and sat by him. A person came and said, "In my dream I saw an olive tree feeding oil." The Samaritan told him, "the olive tree denotes light and the oil denotes light; you will see much light." R. Ishmael said to the interpreter, "A curse upon you! The dream signifies that he had committed incest with his mother."

Another person came and said, "I dreamt that one of my eyes swallowed the other." He told him, "You will see much light." R. Ishmael b. R. Jose said to the interpreter, "A curse upon you! That man has two children and one of them committed incest with the other."

The passage continues according to the pattern established

in the first two paragraphs: the Samaritan interprets a dream, is cursed by R. Ishmael who then reinterprets the dream. A new element, the payment of a fee, is introduced in the concluding paragraph:

Another came and said, "I dreamt that everybody pointed the finger at me." He told him, "You will achieve greatness and all will point at you." R. Ishmael said to the man, "Give me a fee and I will interpret it for you;" but he replied, "It is already interpreted." The same man came again and said to the interpreter, "I dreamt all the people were puffing at me with their cheeks and praising me with their fingers." He told him, "you will achieve greatness and everybody will praise you with his cheeks." R. Ishmael said to the interpreter, "A curse upon you! He has a store of wheat; and when he dreamt that people pointed the finger at him, it denotes that the drippings of the rain had fallen upon it; and when he dreamt that the people were puffing at him with their cheeks, it denotes that the wheat had become swollen; and when he dreamt that the people praised him with their fingers, it denotes that the wheat had sprouted so that he would derive no profit therefrom."<sup>15</sup>

The above statement by R. Ishmael, "Give me a fee and I will interpret it for you" indicates another problem with regard to dream interpretation. If the interpreter of dreams had the power to determine the outcome of dreams there was little to stop him from being capricious in his work. Perhaps as a check against an interpretation which presages evil, one first paid the interpreter a fee. Thus, the following is related about a fourth generation Babylonian Amora:

Bar Hedya was an interpreter of dreams. To one who paid him he used to give a favorable interpretation and to one who did not pay him he gave an unfavorable 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.' (Deuteronomy 28:31) 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.' (Deuteronomy 28:41) To Raba he interpreted it in its unfavorable 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.' (Deuteronomy 28:32) 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, 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 you.' (Ecclesiastes 11:7) 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.]" (Deuteronomy 28:38) 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].'" (Deuteronomy 28:40) 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.'" (Deuteronomy 28:10) 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 treasury will be broken into, and you will be arrested as a thief, and everyone will draw an interference from you. 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." 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." 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'ah [a prophalactic] has fallen into a well and cannot be found." 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, and an Amora will stand by you." To Raba he said: "The words 'The first-born of an ass' (Exodus 13:13) 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."

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 teeth fell out." He said to him: "Your sons and your daughters will die." He said to him: "I saw two pigeons flying." He replied: "You will divorce two wives." He said to him: "I saw two turnip tops." 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 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 [of Passover]." 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?" 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 my wife] the daughter of R. Hisda. 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 up and fled to the Romans. He went and sat at the door of the keeper of the wardrobe of the king. 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 worm 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 garments have been ruined." They tied two cedars together with a rope, tied one cedar to one leg and the other to the other, and released the rope, so that his head was split. Each tree rebounded to its place and he was decapitated and his body fell in two.<sup>16</sup>

It is also possible, as suggested by Jacob Neusner in his study A History of the Jews in Babylonia, that this passage was written to caution people against paying money in order to have their dreams interpreted. "If Bar Hedyā had not been a Jew," Neusner suggests "then the people would thus have been told to be careful about having others than qualified Jews, presumably rabbis, interpret their dreams."<sup>17</sup>

The critical aspect of these passages, however, is the



concern shown by the Rabbis that dreams be properly interpreted and this, no doubt, in response to a belief in the efficacy of interpretation. Because it was thought, for example, that a person could live or die depending on how a dream was interpreted, it was essential that only a qualified interpreter be consulted; one who knew the proper means and methods of interpreting dreams.

## Chapter Four

## Methods of Dream Interpretation

For the purpose of understanding the methods employed by the Rabbis in the interpretation of dreams, it is important to distinguish between their interpretations of biblical dreams and the interpretations they gave to the dreams of their contemporaries. The former, being part of the Divine Word as revealed in Scripture, was subject to and governed by the hermeneutic rules of interpretation. On the other hand, the latter was in no way restricted, albeit that many of the same hermeneutic rules were employed in this case as well.

Various types of word play appear to have been most commonly used by the Rabbis in the interpretation of biblical dreams. Among others, this technique allowed the Rabbis, on the basis of one word or phrase in a dream, to bring other biblical passages, because they contained the same word or a similar phrase, to bear on the interpretation. Thus, for example, Jacob's dream of a ladder ascending into heaven is understood by Bar Kappara as representing Temple sacrifice. The verse from Genesis 28:12, "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on earth. And the top of it reached to heaven," was broken down so that "Behold a lad-

der set up on earth" comes to represent the altar as found in Exodus 20:21: "An altar of earth thou shalt make unto Me." Similarly, the second part of the Genesis verse "And the top of it reached to heaven" is compared to the odor of the sacrifices as found in any number of biblical verses.<sup>1</sup>

This same passage, slightly expanded upon yet interpreted in a similar manner, is also found in Buber's Tanpuma:

"And he dreamed and behold a ladder [למנו] ." R. Jose HaGalili said: "Manasseh making a statue [למנו] appeared to him." (II Chronicles 33:7) Another interpretation of the verse "And he dreamed and behold a ladder." R. Elezar in the name of R. Shimon b. Jose (Yohai) said: an altar appeared to him, as it is written: "An altar of earth..." (Exodus 20:21) "And it reached to heaven." This refers to incense. "And behold the angels of God," These are the priests who stand at the altar ramp and officiate.

R. Shimeon b. Halafiah said: Korah appeared to him, as it is written: "And the earth opened her mouth [and swallowed them up, and their household and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods]" (Numbers 16:32) "And the top of it reached to heaven." Moses appeared to him, as it is written: "And unto Moses He said: 'Come up unto the Lord.'" (Exodus 24:1)

Another interpretation of "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on earth." R. Elezar b. Azariah said: Jonah appeared to him, as it is written: "I went down to the bottom of the mountains." (Jonah 2:7) "And the top of it reached to heaven." Elijah appeared to him, as it is written: "And Elijah went up by a whirlwind unto heaven." (II Kings 2:11)<sup>2</sup>

The use of biblical verses as a means of interpreting dreams was sometimes employed in conjunction with another technique: that of viewing objects which appear in a dream as symbolic representations of other entities, biblical and otherwise. Thus, in the Joseph cycle, the vine about which the Chief Butler dreams comes to represent Israel because of the verse "Thou didst pluck up a vine out of Egypt." (Psalms 80:9) and the three branches on the vine are said to represent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.<sup>3</sup> Other interpretations, however, saw the three branches as representing different people. In the tractate Hulin, for example, many possibilities are offered.

"And in the vine were three branches." (Genesis 40:10) R. Hiyya b. Abba said in the name of Rab, Those are the three men of excellence that come forth in Israel in every generation; sometimes two, one here [in Babylonia] and one is in the land of Israel, and sometimes two are in the land of Israel and one is here. And the Rabbis set their eyes upon Rabbana 'Osha and Rabban Nehemiah, the sons of Rab's daughter. Raba said, these are the three princes of the nations who plead in Israel's favor in every generation.

It was taught: R Eliezer says, the vine is the world, the three branches are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: "and as it was budding its blossoms shot forth," these are the matriarchs, "and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes," these are the tribes. Thereupon R. Joshua said to him, Is a man shown [in a dream] what has happened? Surely he is only shown what is to happen. Therefore, I say that the vine is the Torah, and the three branches are Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "and as it was budding its blossoms shot forth," these are [the members of] the Sanhedrin,

"and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes," are the righteous people of every generation.

R. Gamaliel said, We still stand in need of the Modiite, for he explains the verse as referring to one place. For R. Eleazar the Modiite says, the vine is Jerusalem, the three branches are the Temple, the king, and the High Priest, "and as it was budding its blossoms shot forth," these are the young priests. "And the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes," these are the drink-offerings. R. Joshua b. Levi interprets it in regard to the gifts, for R. Joshua b. Levi said, the vine is Torah, the three branches are the well, the pillar of smoke, and the manna. "And as it was budding its blossoms shot forth," these are the first fruits. "And the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes," these are the drink-offerings.

R. Jeremiah b. Abba said, the vine is Israel, for so it is written, "Thou didst pluck up a vine out of Egypt." The three branches are the three Festivals on which Israel goes up to the Temple every year. "And as it was budding," the time is come for Israel to be fruitful and to multiply, for so it is written, "And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly." (Exodus 1:7) "Its blossoms shot forth," the time is come for Israel to be redeemed, for so it is written, "And their lifeblood is dashed against My garments, and I have stained all My raiment." (Isaiah 63:3) "And the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes," the time is come for Egypt to drink the cup of stammering.<sup>4</sup>

No less important than symbolic representation in the interpretation of dreams was the consideration given to the structure and form of individual words in a dream. Particular letters added to or omitted from the normal configuration of a word were significant and provided a clue as to the meaning of a dream or an opportunity to devise a pun which also

could shed some light on the dream. This technique was employed in an attempt to understand the general consequences of a dream. Thus, for example, after Pharoah's dream, the Bible states, "And it came to pass in the morning that his [Pharoah's] spirit was troubled [טָרַח] ." (Genesis 41:8) while after Nebuchadnezzar's dream it is written

"Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams and his spirit was troubled

[טָרַח] ." (Daniel 2:1) This discrepancy in the form of the verb used to describe the troubled nature of both Pharoah and Nebuchadnezzar led to the observation that "Pharoah, because he knew the dream but he did not know its interpretation, was seized by one confusion. Nebuchadnezzar, because he forgot both the dream and its interpretation, was seized by two confusions."<sup>5</sup> Here, the use of an additional syllable in the form of the word "troubled" when describing Nebuchadnezzar, permits an elucidation of the situation.

Puns were similarly employed, as seen in the following midrash, the source of which has been lost, found in Midrash HaGadol:

"And he slept and dreamed a second time." (Genesis 41:5) By logical conclusion from the text which says "And he slept" would I not know that he dreamed a second time? Then why does Scripture say "a second time [שְׁנִיתָ]?" Only to teach you that it was different [מְשֻׁנָּה] than the first. In what manner? In the first he saw kine, one eating the other as is the way of all flesh that anything which has a mouth consumes. The fish swallows its kind and reptiles swallow their kind. But corn, a thing which

has no mouth, does not consume. Thus it says, "A second time [שנית] ." For he saw something different [שונה] from the natural order of the world.<sup>6</sup>

A second example of the pun as used in the interpretation of dreams is also found in the elucidation of Pharoah's dream about the seven kine feeding in the reedgrass. The Hebrew word for reedgrass is ahū. Because of this it is suggested that this dream means that "when the good years come all men will become brothers [אחים] "7 or "love and brotherliness [אהבה] will reign in the world."<sup>8</sup>

The use of secondary biblical verses, as mentioned above, is also found in conjunction with, and as a support to, the use of puns. As is the case in the following passage, an interpretation based upon a pun is offered, followed by a biblical verse which then serves as a type of proof-text.

"For, lo, we were binding sheaves [באליהם] [אליהם]." (Genesis 37:7) You were gathering produce, yet yours rotted while mine stood sound; thus, "And, lo, my sheaf arose and stood upright." R. Levi said: Joseph told them: You will set up dumb idols [אליהם] before the calves of Jeroboam are set up and say to them, "This is thy god, O Israel." (Exodus 32:4) R. Aha interpreted it: you will hide [העלים] the truth about me from our father and assert, "An evil beast has devoured him." (Genesis 37:33)

Numerology of various types was also employed by the Rabbis as a means of dream interpretation. In its simplest

form, multiple objects seen in a dream could be interpreted as symbolically representing an equal number of biblical personages. Thus, as quoted above, the three branches of the vine in the butler's dream were understood as, among others, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This method of interpretation becomes more complicated when a dream is repeated in one's sleep or when it is simply recalled. In this case numbers or multiple objects may be interpreted once, as they appeared in the dream itself, or an additional time for each occasion the dream is seen again or related to another. Pharoah's dream of the seven kine is subject to this type of interpretation:

"The seven good kine are seven years." (Genesis 41:26) R. Judah said: The dreams betoken fourteen years of famine and plenty respectively, since Pharoah saw it thus. R. Nehemiah said: Twenty-eight years of each, since Pharoah dreamt thus and narrated thus to Joseph. The Rabbis said: Forty-two years were intended, since Pharoah dreamed, recounted his dream to Joseph, and Joseph repeated them to Pharoah. R. Jose b. R. Hanina said: The famine lasted two years, for as soon as Jacob went down there it came to an end. And when did it return: In the days of Ezekiel, as it says, "And I will make the land of Egypt desolate." (Ezekiel 29:12)<sup>10</sup>

The most involved use of numerology was gematria. Here the numerical equivalents of the Hebrew letters in a word found in a dream were compared to other words with an equal numerical sum. The results are often ingenious and facinat-



ing.

R. Shimeon b. Yohai said: Sinai [סני] appeared to him [Jacob]. This is a mnemonic sign: ס equals sixty, י equals ten, נ equals fifty, י equals ten, and together they total one hundred and thirty. So too, "Ladder" [סל] equals one hundred and thirty. It says here "set up on earth, and the top of it reached to heaven." And it says in reference to Sinai, "And the mountain burned with fire unto the heart of heaven." (Deuteronomy 4:11)<sup>11</sup>

When interpreting the dreams of their contemporaries, the Rabbis used many of the same techniques as mentioned above. Biblical verses often provided the symbolism which gave meaning to a dream. Such is the case with Raba who dreamt of two doves flying away. The biblical verse from Song of Songs 5:2 "Hark my beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one" provides the analogy of lover (or wife) to dove and this permits the interpretation, since in the dream the doves were flying away, that Raba would divorce two wives.<sup>12</sup> This same technique was also employed to make interpretations of a universal nature:

If one sees [in his dream] olive trees, he will have many children, for it is said, "Thy children like olive plants." (Psalms 128:3) But some say, this dream means that he will have a good name, for it is said, "The Lord called thy name, a leafy olive tree, fair with goodly fruit." (Jeremiah 11:16)<sup>13</sup>

Puns, too, were used in this way. Thus in Berakoth it is suggested that "if one sees an elephant [פיל] in a dream,

wonders [ מִנְחָה ] will be wrought for him."<sup>14</sup>

Other hermeneutic rules were applied by the Rabbis to their contemporaries' dreams. For example, a word that appeared in a dream could be divided into two words from which the significance of the dream was then derived. This method, called notriḳon, was employed by R. Jose b. Ḥalafta. He interpreted a dream, quoted above, in which a man has been told he would find his father's money in the town of Cappadocia. By dividing the name of the town into two Greek words meaning "twenty boards" he was able to determine the exact location of the money.<sup>15</sup>

The Rabbis used other methods, as well, in the interpretation of dreams. David Bakan, in his study Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition, suggests that sexual symbolism played a role in the interpretation of dreams, especially as found in Berakoth. "Although Berakoth, in its discussion of dreams, contains many of the primitive notions criticized by Freud in the first chapter of The Interpretation of Dreams, we find within it a number of features which are very closely akin to psychoanalytic theory... On the use of sexual symbolism in the dream we read:

I saw myself [in a dream] pouring oil on olives. He [the interpreter] replied: [this man] has outraged his mother... He said to him: I dreamt my eyes were kissing one another. He replied: [this] man has outraged his sister. He said to him: I

dreamt that I kissed the moon. He replied: He has outraged the wife of an Israelite. He said to him: I dreamt that I was walking in the shade of a myrtle. He replied: He has outraged a betrothed damsel. He said to him: I dreamt that there was a shade above me, and yet it was beneath me. He replied: It means unnatural intercourse. (Berakoth 56b)16

The notion that one's own thoughts were capable of causing dreams, discussed in Chapter One, sometimes seems to have influenced dream interpretations given by the Rabbis. Thus, as in the following case, dreams could be related to the daily activities of the dreamer; especially his occupation.

I dreamt I had four ears, and all the people were listening to my words... R. Ishmael said: ...He is a gatherer of thorns, and when he carries them everybody flees before him...

I dreamt that I was carrying a pole to which was tied a bundle of lettuce... R. Ishmael said: ...He has a large store of wine which will turn sour, and everybody will come and take some of it in their bottles, formed of gourds, to pickle lettuce in.<sup>17</sup>

With regard to many interpretations, no apparent reason can be found for the way they were rendered. One is left merely to hazard a guess. Such is the case with the woman who came to R. Eleazer with the dream that the beam of her house had split.<sup>18</sup> The reason for his interpretation, that she would bear a son, is in no way apparent. Perhaps the splitting of the beam is analagous to the process of giving

birth. So, too, there is no apparent reason when R. Eleazer's disciples interpret the same dream to mean that the woman's husband would die. Again, it may be that the splitting of the beam, the main structural support of the house, is analogous to the death of the family's central figure.

Finally, there are the interpretations, especially of a universal nature, for which it is difficult to even hazard a guess. "All kinds of vegetables are a good sign in a dream, except unripe turnip-tops"<sup>19</sup> is such, and one is left to ponder its significance.

## Chapter Five

## Universal Dream Interpretations

The interpretation of a specific dream, a dream one had the previous evening and related to a rabbi the following morning, was, as we have seen, dealt with by the Rabbis in a variety of ways. Because, in these instances, the Rabbis were responding to a specific set of circumstances their interpretations are usually explicable. Thus, by analysing the dreamer, his dream, and the method of dream interpretation employed, one is almost always able to understand the stated interpretation. This is not always the case, however, when the Rabbis offered dream interpretations that were to be valid, no matter what the circumstances or who the dreamer. Rather, these universal dream interpretations are often contradictory and generally defy explication.<sup>1</sup> One need only collect all such interpretations relating to one dream-object or type of dream-object to be seen in a dream and this becomes quite clear.

In Berakoth 56b, for example, the following interpretation with regard to fruit is found:

All kinds of fruit are a good sign in a dream,  
except unripe dates.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, I did not encounter any further interpretations about unripe dates and, thus, the second half of this interpretation stands alone. However, several interpretations about other kinds of fruit were found and, while the majority suggest that their being viewed in a dream is a good sign, in a few instances it is taken as a bad sign. Thus, it is a good sign when a man sees small olives in a dream for

his business will flourish and grow like an olive tree. This is true only if he sees the fruit of the olive. If he sees olive trees, he will have many children, for it is said: "Thy children like olive plants." (Psalms 128:3) But some say this dream means that he will have a good name, for it is said: "The Lord called thy name, a leafy olive-tree, fair with goodly fruit." (Jeremiah 11:16)<sup>3</sup>

However, when one sees grapes in a dream it is not always a good sign.

If one sees grapes in a dream, if they are white, whether ripe or unripe, they are a good sign; if black and ripe they are a good sign, but unripe they are a bad sign.<sup>4</sup>

The Rabbis were themselves aware of this problem and attempted to rectify contradictory interpretations by suggesting that the dreams to which these differing interpretations refer were not exactly the same. Thus, the general statement "All kinds of beasts are a good sign in a dream except

the elephant, the monkey, and the long-tailed ape,"<sup>5</sup> is not contradicted by another passage which says that "if one sees an elephant in a dream, wonders will be wrought for him. There is," the Rabbis suggest, "no contradiction. The elephants are a good omen if saddled, and a bad omen if not saddled."<sup>6</sup>

In order to maintain rabbinic consistency in the above quote dealing with olives, one might suggest that unripe fruit cannot be classified as fruit and thus does not contradict the statement that "all kinds of fruit are a good sign in a dream." However, just as we have seen that various interpretations can be given to a specific dream,<sup>7</sup> so, too, is this the case with universal interpretations. Different rabbis, from different periods of time, gave different interpretations for the same dream. Far more difficult than the question of consistency in universal dream interpretation is an understanding of how these interpretations were derived.

Many of the techniques the Rabbis employed in the interpretation of specific dreams also found use in the interpretation of universal dreams. Biblical passages which contained the dream-object served as a means of interpretation. In this way, R. Hiyya b. Abba was able to say that wheat seen in a dream is a sign of peace because of the biblical verse "He maketh thy borders peace; And giveth thee in plenty the fat

of wheat." (Psalms 147:14)<sup>8</sup> So, too, were puns used to make universal interpretations:

If one sees a cat in a dream, if in a place where they call it שונרה, a beautiful song דירה will be composed for him; if in a place where they call it שונרה, he will undergo a change for the worse. [ שונרי רע ]<sup>9</sup>

The Rabbis also combined the use of biblical quotes and puns, as in the following passage, and these served as a basis for universal dream interpretation.

Our rabbis taught: If one sees a reed [קנה] in a dream, he may hope for wisdom, for it says: "Get [קנה] wisdom." (Proverbs 4:5)<sup>10</sup>

In certain instances, the Rabbis based their interpretations upon obvious relationships between the dream-object and the role it would or had actually played in life. Thus, if one dreamed of a biblical personage, the Rabbis held that whatever this personage was best known for would happen to the dreamer. For example, God had responded to the wailing of the outcast child, Ishmael, and so the Rabbis held that "If one sees Ishmael in a dream, his prayer will be answered."<sup>11</sup> The same held true for important rabbis who appeared in one's dream, so that

There are three disciples [significant for dreams.] If one sees Ben 'Assai, he may hope for piety; if Ben Zoma, he may hope for wisdom; if Aher, let him



fear for punishment.<sup>12</sup>

Of particular interest in the above interpretations is the wording of the predictions. In all specific dream interpretations, and also in some universal interpretations, predictions are made with complete certainty: such and such "will" happen. The Rabbis express this certainty by using the future tense of the verb which describes the expected action or event. Thus, in the oft quoted dream of the woman who saw that the beam of her house had split, the interpretation given by R. Eleazer is "you will bear a son."

[ בְּרַחֲמֵי יְלִדְתָּ בֵּן ] and by his disciples, "You will bury your husband." [ אֶתְחָרָא קְבֵרָא בְּעֵלְתָּ ] <sup>13</sup> However, in many universal dream interpretations the same technique employed by the writers of today's fortune cookies and astrological tables is used so that a definite and assured prediction is avoided. Rather, as in the above passage about the three disciples significant for a dream, one may merely "hope for" a certain result. In this case the Hebrew verb is יִצְפֶּה, the piel form of the verb, which means to look forward to, wait, or hope.<sup>14</sup> The use of this particular verb allows for equivocation by the Rabbis so that, for many universal dream interpretations, they did not state that the effect of the dream would, of a certainty, occur. They obtained the same result by using another expression as well.

In this case the Hebrew word is רָאוּי and is rendered in English "to be worthy." Thus,

If one dreams that he is reciting the Shema, he is worthy that the Divine presence should rest upon him.<sup>15</sup>

"To be worthy" of something in no way specifies or predicts that one will receive that thing.

With many universal dream interpretations, however, it is, at best, difficult to understand the connection between the dream-object and the prediction. Seemingly inexplicable, for example, is the statement "all kinds of birds are a good sign in a dream, except the owl, the horned owl, and the bat."<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, attempts have been made, more often than not it seems to me unsuccessfully, to impose an explanation upon such passages. The editors of the Soncino Talmud, for example, do just this in a footnote to the following universal dream interpretation from Berakoth 57b:

All kinds of colors are a good sign in a dream, except blue. [Footnote:] The color of sickness.<sup>17</sup>

Although the color blue may, on the one hand, have the negative connotation of sickness, it does, on the other, have a positive connotation as used by the Rabbis at the beginning of Berakoth in determining when the Shema may be recited in

the morning.<sup>18</sup> Of equal consequence in understanding the above interpretation is the omission, as a bad sign, of the color crimson which, in an earlier Soncino footnote, is said to connote sin.<sup>19</sup>

The same type of questionable rabbinic mind reading is found in attempted explanations of those universal dream interpretations which deal with sex. In Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition, David Bakan states that "of crucial importance is the fact that Berakoth already uses sexual imagery to symbolize knowing."<sup>20</sup> He then presents as proof the following consensed quote from Berakoth 57a:

If one dreams that he has intercourse with his mother, he may expect to obtain understanding.<sup>21</sup>  
 ...[sic] If one dreams he has intercourse with a betrothed maiden, he may expect to obtain knowledge of Torah... [sic] If one dreams that he has had intercourse with his sister, he may expect to obtain wisdom...[sic] If one dreams he has intercourse with a married woman, he can be confident that he is destined for the future world, provided, that is, he does not know her and does not think of her in the evening.<sup>22</sup>

By omitting in all but one instance, and then mentioning it only in a footnote, the biblical prooftexts employed by the Rabbis to make a connection between sex and knowledge, Bakan would have us believe that the association is a direct one. Rather, in each instance the association between sexual imagery and knowledge is derived through the use of a biblical

quote as, for example, in the following passage:

If one dreams he has had intercourse with his sister, he may expect to obtain wisdom, since it say: "Say to wisdom, thou art my sister." (Proverbs 7:4)<sup>23</sup>

This being so, it seems somewhat strained to attribute to the Rabbis a similar understanding of the symbolic connection between sexual imagery and knowledge as had Freud.

This is not to say, however, that all universal dream interpretations which the Rabbis offered are totally inexplicable. Rather, those that employ a discernable method of interpretation, such as reference to a biblical verse, can be explained in terms of that method just as was done with specific dream interpretations. However, those universal dream interpretations which are derived without apparent rhyme or reason are open merely to speculation.

A clearer understanding as to the purpose of these interpretations can be gained by observing the subjects with which they dealt. The seventy-four universal dream interpretations collected can be broken down into nine main categories: dreams about fruit, vegetables, animals, colors, sex, biblical personages, rabbinic personages, prayers, and common daily activities. Without exception, every universal dream interpretation deals with an object or activity which, if not cen-

tral to the life-style of the people, could certainly be expected to enter into it at some point during their lives. The same is true of the interpretations themselves. The result of dreaming about any object or activity within these nine categories, although often extremely vague, is also something that would have been within the common experience of the people. Even those interpretations which merely suggest that a good or bad omen will be the result of a certain dream, although too general to deal with in the above context, do not contradict this contention.

The three universal dream interpretations which follow are representative examples from within one category. Each contains a prediction based on the subject of the dream.

If one sees in a dream a vine laden with fruit, his wife will not have a miscarriage, since it says: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine."  
(Psalms 128:3)<sup>24</sup>

In this case both the dream and the subject of the prediction are clearly within the experiential realm of the people. The interpretation is based upon a biblical verse; although, in this case, it could just as easily be understood without the verse. The second interpretation is not quite so clear.

If one sees a myrtle in his dreams, he will have good luck with his property; and if he has no property he will inherit some from elsewhere.

'Ulla said: according to others, it was taught in a Baraitha: This is only if he sees a myrtle on its stem.<sup>25</sup>

The difficulty with this passage is the method, or lack of any method, of interpretation. There is no apparent answer to the question of why a dream about myrtle relates to property. The final interpretation predicts the coming of the Messiah.

When in a dream a man sees a choice vine, he may expect the coming of the Messiah, for it says: "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his asses colt unto the choice vine." (Genesis 49:11)<sup>26</sup>

As is true with many interpretations, the prediction in this passage relates to a religious idea or conviction. In that sense it is common to all the people.

Universal dream interpretations dealt with subjects and predicted events that were in no way extraordinary or beyond the understanding of the people. Indeed, they are concerned with the most elemental and common activities of life: eating, drinking, defecating, working, copulating, and praying. As such, they were very likely to have been the subjects and activities about which the people most often dreamed. Consequently, it would have been these dreams most commonly presented to the Rabbis for interpretation and perhaps, because of this, they came to be stated in universal terms.

Universal or specific, contemporaneous or biblical, the

Rabbis were very much concerned with dreams and dream interpretation. Dreams had a message to convey, but were a form of communication that required more than mere apprehension to be understood. Interpretation, the Rabbis felt, was the key; but in using it one did more than simply unlock the dream's hidden meaning, for in large measure interpretation determined that message. With dreams and their interpretation "the medium is the message" and this the Rabbis understood to be the relationship between dreams and their interpretation.

## FOOTNOTES

All Talmudic references, unless otherwise noted, are to: Talmud Bavli [Vilna edition] (New York: Otsar HaSefarim, 1957).

## Chapter One

1. See, for example, Berakoth, 55a.
2. For biblical dreams, see:  
Genesis 28:12; 37:5; 37:9; 40:5; 41:1; 41:5.  
Judges 7:13.  
Daniel 2:1.
3. Hanokh Albeck and Judah Theodor, eds., Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (1927; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 89:4.
4. Solomon Buber, ed., Agadat Bereshit (Cracow: Josef Fisher, 1902), 60:3.
5. Pirkê Rabbi Eliezer (New York: Om Publishing Co., 1946), p. 92b.
6. Buber, Agadat Bereshit, p. 66:3.
7. Berakoth, 55b.
8. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 17:5. Cf. Ibid. 44:17.
9. Berakoth, 55a.
10. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 51:5. Cf. Ibid., 20:12; and Buber, Agadat Bereshit, 66:1.
11. Solomon Buber, ed., Tanhuma HaOadam VeHaYashan (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1885), Vayetze, par. 6.
12. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 44:17.
13. Ibid., 48:12-14.
14. Rabbi Eliezer, p. 92b.



15. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 89:9. Cf. Ibid. 88:4.
16. Tanhuma (n.d., Warsaw; reprint ed., Jerusalem: n.p., 1964), 49a-49b.
17. Berakoth, 55b.
18. Ibid..
19. Rabbi Eliezer, 79a-79b. Cf. Solomon Buber, ed., Midrash Tehilim (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1891), 11:6.
20. See, Sigmund Freud, On Dreams, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1952), pp. 15-28.
21. Mordecai Margulies, ed., Midrash HaGadol (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1956), 693:1. The selections therein are taken from Berakoth and Sekel Tob.
22. Berakoth, 55a.
23. Ibid., 62a.

## Chapter Two

1. Solomon Buber, ed., Tanhuma HaQadum VellaYashan (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1895), Vayetze, par. 6.
2. Ibid.
3. Solomon Buber, ed., Agadat Bereshit (Cracow: Josef Fisher, 1902), 66:1. Cf. Hanokh Albeck and Judah Theodor, eds., Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (1927; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 20:12.
4. See Berakoth, 55b.
5. Ibid. 55a.
6. Kohleleth Rabbah: Midrash Rabbah Vilna Edition (Jerusalem: Orstel Ltd., 1961), 6:1.
7. Shabbat, 11a. Cf. Kohleleth Rabbah, 6:1; and Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 44:12.
8. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 64:5.
9. Berakoth, 55b.
10. P. Td., Berakoth [Zhitomir edition] (Zhitomir: Haninah Lipa Shapiro and Bros., 1866), 53b- 54a.
11. Berakoth, 55b.
12. Solomon Buber, ed., Ekhah Rabbah (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1889), 18:1. Cf. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 89:8.
13. Berakoth, 55b. Cf. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 89:8.
14. Berakoth, 55a.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.

18. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 89:8.

19. Berakoth, 55b.

## Chapter Three

1. A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, new series, vol. 46, part 3 (1956) p. 218.
2. D. J. Bornstein, "Amoraer," Encyclopaedia Judaica, ed., Jakob Katzkin, vol. II (Berlin: Verlag Eschkol A.-G., 1928), p. 651.
3. Berakoth, 55b.
4. Aaron Hyman, Toldot Tannaim VeAmoraim (London: Express, 1910), p. 280.
5. Pirkê Rabbi Eliezer (New York: Om Publishing Co., 1946), 92b.
6. Hanokh Albeck and Judah Theodor, eds., Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (1927; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1965), 88:6.
7. Ibid., 89:8. Cf. Solomon Buber, Ekhah Rabbah (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1899), 1:15.
8. Buber, Ekhah Rabbah, 1:17. Cf. Berakoth, 56b; and Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 68:12.
9. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 68:12.
10. Berakoth, 10b.
11. Ibid., 55b.
12. Cf. Ibid., 55a.
13. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 89:8.
14. Ibid., 68:12.
15. Buber, Ekhah Rabbah, 1:14.
16. Berakoth, 55a-56b.
17. Jacob Neusner, A History of the Jews in Babylonia, vol. 4 (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969), p. 346.

## Chapter Four

1. Hanokh Albeck and Judah Theodor, eds., Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (1927; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965), 68:12. Cf. Solomon Buber, ed., Tanhuma HaQadum VeHaYashan (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1885), Vayetze, par. 7.
2. Buber, Tanhuma, Vayetze, par. 7.
3. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 88:5.
4. Hulin, 92a.
5. Tanhuma, (n.d., Warsaw; reprint ed., Jerusalem: n.p., 1964), Miketz, par. 8.
6. Mordecai Margulies, ed., Midrash HaGadol (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1956), 700:5. "מקורו נעלם"
7. Buber, Tanhuma, Miketz, par. 3.
8. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 89:4.
9. Ibid., 84:10.
10. Ibid., 89:9.
11. Buber, Tanhuma, Vayetze, par. 3.
12. Berakoth, 56a.
13. Solomon Buber, ed., Midrash Tehilim (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1891), 128:4.
14. Berakoth, 56b.
15. Albeck and Theodor, Bereshit Rabbah, 68:12.
16. David Bakan, Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 259.
17. Solomon Buber, ed., Ekhah Rabbah (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1899), 1:14.
18. Ibid., 1:18.
19. Berakoth, 57b.

## Chapter Five

1. Such universal interpretations were not often undertaken by the Rabbis. Indeed, aside from a few examples in Midrash Tehilim, the only sizable compilation is found in Berakoth.
2. Berakoth, 56b.
3. Solomon Buber, ed., Midrash Tehilim (Vilna: Wittwe and Gebrüder Romm, 1891), 128:4.
4. Berakoth, 56b. In Midrash Tehilim, 128:4, the text reads: "Black grapes...that are unripe, he is in need of mercy."
5. Berakoth, 57a.
6. Ibid., 56b-57a.
7. See Berakoth, 55b.
8. Ibid., 57a.
9. Ibid., 56a.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 57b.
13. Hanokh Albeck and Judah Theodor, eds., Midrash Bereshit Rabbah (1927; reprint ed., Jerusalem: Wahrmann Books, 1965), 89:8.
14. Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targum, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (New York: Pardes Publishing House, Inc., 1950), p. 1296.
15. Berakoth, 57a.
16. Ibid., 57b.
17. Isidore Epstein, trans. and ed., The Babylonian Talmud, Seder Zera'im, Berakoth (London: The Soncino Press, 1943), p. 356.

18. Ibid., p. 48. "From what time may one recite the Shema' in the morning: From the time one can distinguish between blue and white. R. Eliezer says: between blue and green."

19. Ibid., p. 354.

20. David Bakan, Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 260.

21. At this point, Bakan includes the following footnote: "This is based on an ambiguity in the text (Proverbs 2:3). The original text does not include pure vowel sounds. Thus the distinction between the word im, which means 'if,' and aym, which means 'mother,' is usually made on the basis of the context. In this instance the context does not help because a sensible sentence is possible both ways. The sentence can mean either 'If thou wilt call for understanding Binah' or 'Thou wilt call understanding mother.'" (p. 260).

22. Bakan, Freud and Mystical Tradition, p. 260.

23. Berakoth, 57a.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Buber, Midrash Tehilim, 128:4.

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