

## FOLK USE OF THE DREAM IN RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES

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About one-third of our life is occupied with sleep, and a great deal of sleep is occupied with dreams, and man has always been occupied with the meaning of these dreams. The earliest records of civilization such as the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* and the Egyptian *Book of Dreams* already assume the existence of an elaborate system of dream interpretation. The Greco-Roman age scarcely questioned the premonitory and prophetic power of dreams—leading philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Democritus advancing various theories for this power. Our age, with its psychoanalytic schools and electronically wired dream laboratories, has added another link to this ancient chain of interest. But, whether this new link has expanded or limited our understanding of the power and use of dreams is a question that ought not to be answered lightly. Certainly, Freud, Adler, Jung and others have obviously added new systems of interpretations and new theories about the role dreams play in life. Obviously, also, the modern dream laboratory, with its electroencephalograph recording alpha, delta and theta waves, its measurements of rapid eye movements and other physical phenomena, has revealed new facts and opened doors for intriguing speculation. On the other hand, our scientific age may, through its theories and technologies, have closed certain doors of perception, doors which were opened in antiquity and are still at least partly open to so-called less sophisticated folk cultures of our day. Among the beliefs common to the latter groups is the assumption that dreams are capable of yielding information not accessible to ordinary sense perception. Cicero, logical and practical statesman, did not find it difficult to write a book about the use of dreams for divination. The anthropologist Kilton Stewart, with his research on the use of dreams among certain tribes in the South Pacific, has shown that so-called primitive peoples may have a thing or two to tell modern psychologists about the use and power of dreams. All of this I offer as an introduction to some facts and reflections on the role which dreams play in a culture which has its roots in antiquity but is still vital today—

particularly that aspect of the role which involves communication and insight not available through ordinary sense perception. The culture upon which my paper focuses is the Hebrew tradition both as it was expressed in the past and as it still exists in a number of faith-oriented folk cultures. These folk cultures differ immensely, one from the other. "What is it," asks a Yugoslavian Jew in Israel, "that connects me with Jews from Morocco or Yemen or Kurdistan? We don't look the same; we eat different foods, laugh at different jokes, don't understand each other's parental language, songs or customs." An answer to this question, even if available, is not within the purview of this paper. This much, though, is sure: Every variety of Jewish culture has its basic roots in the Bible. Hence, though I want to concentrate on times closer to our own, some general observations about dreams in the Bible are necessary. How large a part dreams play in the Bible can be suggested by drawing attention to only a few sentences in the first book of the Bible.

Gen. 20:3. "The Lord appeared to Abimelech in a night dream and said: Behold you are about to die because of this woman [Abraham's wife, Sarah] whom you took. . . ."

Gen. 25:11. "And he [Jacob] dreamed and there was a ladder set upon the earth and its top reached into the heavens and angels of the Lord ascended and descended. . . ."

Gen. 37:15. "And Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers and they hated him even more. . . ."

The Book of Genesis later relates the skill of Joseph as an interpreter of dreams—a skill which affects both his own career and the history of his people. All this and more comes just from the first book of the Bible. A full recital of dreams in the Bible, including the Prophets and the Book of Daniel,\* would show us that the Bible not only accepts the dream as an instrument of extraordinary communication and insight, but also recognizes something known to modern dream laboratories. That is, it knows that there are various levels of dream and trance states.

\* Dr. David Flusser, of Hebrew University in Jerusalem, has pointed out that the Book of Daniel goes beyond belief in dream interpretation to affirmation of clairvoyance as a definite power possessed by some. Thus, the King tests the Chaldeans by asking them not only to interpret his dream but also to relate its context. They protest that this is impossible, but Daniel does succeed in satisfying the King. This episode has its parallel in the test applied by Croesus, King of Lydia, to the Delphi oracle.

The "dream laboratory" has taught us that the dream cycle during sleep reveals several clearly distinguishable phases. There is an initial or "descending" state of sleep, intermediate stages and an "ascending" pattern. All of these are characterized by their own patterns of brain waves, REM movements, etc. The character of the dream is also different in each stage. The "descending" stage is usually accompanied by images which follow no easily recognized logical pattern and the symbols seem to have little direct connection with immediately preceding thoughts. Intermediate stages take on more logical patterns. The ascending stage coincides with the dreamer's deepest physical sleep. The dream recollection of this latter stage preceding normal awakening is usually the most vivid. Without attempting to correlate all this too closely, it is still interesting to observe that the Bible was also sharply aware of different levels of dream play during sleep. It distinguishes between a "dream of the night" and a trance such as that which characterized some of Balaam's prophecies. (Balaam, incidentally, is described as the one who sees his vision with "open eyes," i.e., set in a trance-like gaze.)

Prophetic visions usually are placed in an entirely different category, and the vision of Moses compared to those of other prophets is likened to the difference between "one who sees in a clear mirror and one who sees in an unclear mirror."

Since there were schools of prophets, it would not be too much to assume that some teachings of these schools had to do with techniques for entering into one or another dream level. Elijah, we know, places his head between his knees when preparing himself for a divine communication. There comes to mind, also, the voice heard by the child Samuel when sleeping in the Temple—a dreamlike auditory experience which may have been a standard way of confirming one's readiness for the prophetic experience.

I will return to the threads of these observations later. Right now, it is enough to reaffirm that the Bible harbors no doubts about the power of the dream to offer truth and information which is not bounded by the space, time and logic categories of our normal waking states. This unambivalent attitude is not shared by later Rabbinic levels of Hebrew culture.

After the Bible, the literature which most profoundly influenced and still influences Jewish folk culture in our day, is the Talmud. This is an immense collection of law, legend and custom, so vast that it has been described within its own text as an "ocean." Its vastness also includes completely contradictory opinions about dreams. There are rabbis who claim that the message of a dream neither "raises nor pulls down"—a phrase that has been interpreted to mean that one should not pay it serious attention. Yet the story to which this phrase is linked relates that a man's father died without revealing the hiding place of some money. The man asks his father in a

dream to tell him where the money is and he is told correctly. Another Rabbinic opinion in the Talmud has it that "nothing is shown to a man through a dream except what he has in his heart." Yet others flatly observe that a dream is "a sixtieth part of prophecy." Along the middle of the road would be the statement of Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Shimon bar Yochai, "As there can be no grain without straw, so can there be no dream without meaningless matter."

With all this difference of opinion, the great majority of sages from Talmudic days until recent times would agree that a dream is "like an unopened letter." And most were eager to open the letter. At one time, Jerusalem had twenty-four specially recognized dream interpreters, each with his own school of interpretation. The leading rabbis are reported as frequenting dream specialists, for which there was a professional charge. A long section of the Talmud relates how one of these specialists could make his interpretation more or less favorable according to the sum of money he received. This report is not as cynical as it appears. The point—a very important point—is that Jews believed and, if they are rooted in their tradition, still believe that "dreams go after the mouth". There is some room for interpreting this phrase in various ways, but the common understanding, important for our questions, is that the fulfillment of a dream depends in part at least on the interpretation. And I would like at this point to bring to your attention some material gathered in the course of my own research over the past months.

With the help and encouragement of the Parapsychology Foundation, I have been able to devote some time to probing possible correlations between parapsychological phenomena and the experiences of the Hebrew tradition as it is mirrored in the literature and life of communities which are still strongly tied to this tradition. The country of Israel is a natural laboratory for this kind of research and in Israel I have had the help of the Contemporary Institute for Folk Culture of the Hebrew University and its Co-Director, Dr. Ben-Ami. The dream and its use has been one of the subjects covered in this research. Now if there is one statement that characterizes the Jewish folk attitude toward the dream, it is the previously mentioned point about the importance of the interpreter. This is important, I repeat, not only in that dream interpretation requires skill, but also good feeling, even love, on the part of the interpreter. For the meaning of the dream and its power to affect the future depend in great part on the interpretation.

On one occasion I persuaded a young lady in Jerusalem whose husband compiled books of dreams to introduce me to her mother, who regularly brought her dreams to a sage. The mother had been born in Iraq to a family

which boasted several rabbis. Some of them acted as dream interpreters, but it was important, the mother stressed, "to consult only with people who love you." She had several episodes of precognitive dreams to relate. Her daughter confirmed one such tale. The mother had dreamt that her grandchild was run over by a car. Troubled, she had gone to a local sage who had used a traditional formula written in the prayer book for annulling troublesome dreams and she had given him a sum of money for "redemption of a soul." The next day the child had indeed very narrowly escaped being crushed under the wheels of a truck.

I made a date to visit the sage with the mother the next day and when morning came had my own dreams prepared. The dream interpreter was a man in his fifties, the son of a well-known rabbi who had died some years ago. He himself was not a rabbi, but people came to him with their dreams. "When a person sleeps," he explained simply, "his soul leaves him and rises to the upper worlds. There it can see what is about to happen. It is as if some events occur in the world and we who live in another part of the world don't hear of it till days later, but those who have radio or television can hear of it sooner. Now if a man is fortunate, an angel is sent to tell him through the dream what is decreed. If it is an evil decree, the man may then through prayer and good deeds change the decree."

I cannot say that I found the interpretations of my own dreams at the hands of this man particularly cogent, but I did buy his father's book. In this book, the father related his experiences not only in successfully interpreting precognitive dreams but also in driving out "Dybbuks" from the bodies of men and women. A Dybbuk is the psychic entity of a dead person who enters into a living being, resulting very often in what modern psychologists might call a schizophrenic or split personality. As to dreams, the rabbi offered several categories for distinguishing between those which are authentically precognitive and come "from a good angel," and those which are deceitful—from "an evil angel."

"For this is the characteristic of a true dream that comes from an angel: that his spirit is not disturbed during sleep as he sees the dream but only later when he awakes." Also, the true dream is orderly and not overly complicated with variegated material; and the person sees himself in it as he is in real life. We might note again that modern experimentation has been able to pinpoint stages of the dream cycle which conform to these criteria.

Generally speaking, today active dream interpretation is carried on mainly among the eastern Jewish communities, coming from North Africa, Iraq, Iran or Yemen. Communities stemming from eastern and western Europe are more inclined to follow the directions of the prayerbook which

are very explicit about what is to be said and done when there has been a disturbing dream, though the help of others to say "you have dreamt a good dream" is also recommended. The Eastern or Oriental communities also place greater stress on "dream books" which have compiled, either in alphabetical order or by subject matter, suggested interpretations. Much of the material in these books goes back to the Talmud. Among the most famous of these books is the *Interpretation of Dreams* by a fifteenth-century philosopher, grammarian, physician and Kabbalist, Shlomo Almoli.

Almoli begins with a quote from the *Zohar*, chief book of the Hebrew mystics: "Nothing happens in this world except that it is first announced in a dream or by a heavenly voice." Some of Almoli's interpretations of dream symbols vary with those offered in other Hebrew dream books. Allowance is also made for the individual circumstances and idiosyncracies of the dreamer. Nevertheless, a comparison between these symbolic systems and those found in other cultures would be most interesting. I myself, for example, am quite intrigued by some parallels between the Jewish approach to dreams and that which is found in a Malaysian tribe called the Senoi, as described by the anthropologist-psychologist Kilton Stewart. Thus, in the latter system, a dream of incestuous cohabitation with mother and/or sister is given a very positive interpretation. Strangely, despite the stringent moral code of Judaism, it is given a similar interpretation by Almoli. The appearance of a dead parent in a dream also solicits similar reactions. If the dead person appears accusing or silent, the meaning is negative. If, however, the dead person offers a gift or advice, the omen is fortuitous. Most important of all is the stress which both place on the positive role that can be played by the interpreter. The Senoi go further than the Hebrew sages in making suggestions about future dream programs. For them, the dream world is a kind of interior psychic factory which produces concrete changes in the external world. They believe that one can learn how to dream in a productive fashion. From childhood on, the Senoi is taught to relate his dreams in the family circle and occasionally to specialists. The specialist urges him to bring back concrete and socially usable material—like a song or dance or technique for making a trap—from his dream experience.

The Hebrew tradition does not go as far as the Senoi in programming dreams. It does, however, watch dreams for indications of a person's readiness for a certain task. An example is recorded in the literature of the Lubavitcher Hassidim, a mystically oriented orthodox group whose center today is in Brooklyn. The previous leader of the sect relates that as a child, his teachers asked him about his dreams. One day he told them that he had dreamed about a gathering of certain famous sages and participated with

them in the discussion of some religious legal questions. To his questioners, this indicated that his interior and exterior life were now approaching that harmony which made him fit for "crowning" as a leader of the sect.

As to receiving concrete and usable information from dreams, we have descriptions of specific techniques for putting a "dream question." A famous compilation of legal *responsa* in such dream questions is ascribed to Jacob of Marvège (13th century) and it was cited as support for later decisions by important Jewish scholars. One of the most distinguished Jewish authorities in the sixteenth century, Safed Jacob Karo, has recorded almost nightly visitations by a "spirit of the Mishna" (a compilation of Jewish law). Another remarkable record of dream activity in that period and city is offered by Rabbi Chaim Vital in his *Book of Visions*. Judging from this book, the Kabbalistically oriented sixteenth century community of Safed spent a great deal of its time discussing the meaning of their own and others' dreams. Some are night dreams, some are dreams "while awake." These dreams offer a person information ranging from his future marriage prospects to an elaborate genealogical tree tracing his soul to previous incarnations. Rabbi Chaim Vital again and again claims precognitive powers for his dreams and the dreams of others. Obviously, the community of Safed offered an environment which encouraged and stimulated such dreams and this brings me to my concluding observations.

In our day, the most "sensible" view of dreams sees them as performing not completely understood but important functions in maintaining a person's physical and psychic homeostasis. They are accepted by layman and psychoanalyst alike as offering a deep-level picture of an individual's true feeling and state of mind. Dr. Jan Ehrenwald is not alone in pointing out that this may oversimplify the real situation. It may not take into account the "tendency of the patient in psychotherapy to confirm with his dreams and other productions his analyst's unconscious wishes and expectations regarding the validity of his theories." "Between patient and therapist," he says, "there is a circular pattern of feedback of emotionally charged needs, wishes and expectations of those persons involved." This can certainly result in "self-fulfillment or consciously anticipated, hoped-for, or even dreaded events with or without telepathy being involved in its realization." Dr. Ehrenwald offers some interesting further speculations on the connection between psi phenomena and dreams, offering illustrations from classical Greco-Roman, Aztec and Biblical sources.

We might continue along this line of thought and wonder whether these ancient civilizations and some modern "primitive" cultures may have evoked dream powers and opened "doors of perception" closed to most modern approaches. Clearly these societies already knew a great deal about

different levels of sleep and accompanying dream stages. They may not have been able to measure the concomitant brain waves and Rem movements but they may know more than we do about techniques for entering into one or more of these specific dream states. Above all, they offered the dreamer certain elements which may have acted as catalysts to bring about dream states that cannot be easily duplicated by the laboratory. For example, they had dream interpreters who did not pretend to be objective while actually being self-enclosed by theories that automatically eliminated the possibility of psi phenomena in dreams. Instead they had men who believed completely in the power of the dream to provide insights and information not available to minds bound by the space, time and logic categories of our scientific standards.

Is it not possible that "dreams go after the mouth" in the sense that they may reveal powers to one type of interpreter or cultural environment which are not available in another context? The dream laboratory can discover much, but it cannot readily provide interpreters who love the dreamer, much less an environment of faith in the psychic powers of the dream. Lacking these elements, we may lack the very keys which can open up visionary perceptions on the part of the dreamer that transcend ordinary means of perception.

"The day will come," asserts the prophet Joel, "when your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions." We must not let our secular scientific mentality reduce such a prediction into a vague poetic hope. It is written in the Bible, which firmly ascribes to dreams, extrasensory powers—of the kind exhibited by other prophets and even by ordinary men. Its vision is of a time when the so-called normative consciousness will have powers of perception now ascribed only to a few—a new level of the human mind and psyche.

But that is in the future. Meanwhile, we can greatly enrich our knowledge of psi phenomena by probing the consciousness and records of those who did claim and offer evidence for such phenomena. This includes peoples and individuals who, like the communities to whom I have referred in this paper, may be labelled as "primitive" by some technological standards but may be anything but primitive in terms of psychic ability.

#### DISCUSSION

WALTER: This was a fascinating survey of the Hebrew/Judaic tradition which I can't comment on, but there is one personal anecdote that I would like to tell. I remember some of my dreams. When I was a kid in Kansas,



Missouri, my father had gone to England to join up with Intelligence and I was left alone quite a lot. This raises the problem: the word "fear" had been mentioned. I think there are other emotional affective factors which influence dreams. We had to go out quite often to dine in Kansas City, because my mother was working, and mostly I was with grownups. Well, I had a very vivid dream. I was standing at the top of the staircase and all the grownups downstairs were laughing at me and they said, "Who are you?" and I said, "My name is Grey." And they said, "What's going to happen?" and I said, "When I wake up, you'll disappear." That's superiority. Now, that's one dream, and that was a long time ago, when I was a kid during the first world war. Now since that time and until quite recently, and I'll tell you why they stopped, I used to dream about flying. Usually at a party. I didn't have to flap my wings. I'd hold my hands a certain way and I would float up around the ceiling and the people at the party would say, "How do you do that?" and I would say, "I stood like that." And they would ask if they could do it, and I'd say, "Sure, if you do the right sort of thing," and some certainly would learn to fly. And again, I was above them, so to speak, I had this feeling of superiority. I wished to become prominent at these parties and I became prominent by flying around the ceiling. Well, a little later I learned to fly myself. I flew real airplanes and I flew gliders, etc. I obtained all the qualifications. Since then I have had no flying dreams at all. I think this is a wish to fly as Daedalus did, so to speak.

Well now, a friend of mine, a colleague, Chris Evans who was also mentioned here, has this hypothesis: that dreams are essentially what you might call diffuse language, debugging brain programs; that is, surveying what you wish to do, surely in fantasy (but sometimes it would be in realistic terms and I've seen this myself; I've done it myself)—debugging the brain program, correcting it, trying it out, seeing if it will work. If it doesn't work, then you realize when you wake up, "I wouldn't do that; this is the wrong thing." In fact, I once dreamed a very long time ago of invention, of a computer which was finally made and has proved very successful commercially and has made my Institute about \$20,000. That's all in the dream—about the way the computer was finally made and it was a very vivid dream, the thing wobbling around in certain frequencies. It wasn't a sex dream at all; it was a wish fulfillment. I wanted to make something to help people to analyze brain records and it worked like that. Now it's been sold all over the world. So it was wish fulfillment, and not fear. It was a wish, and I think this is an important factor: the wish for superiority and the wish for achievement.

**BRIER:** Thank you. First, Professor Kreitler.

KREITLER: I want to direct my remarks to Dr. Weiner and then to Dr. Van de Castle about the different levels of dreams. When I was still practicing orthodox psychoanalysis, I had the unique privilege of treating a young woman patient belonging to the most orthodox sect existing in Judaism, so orthodox that the members of the sect do not recognize the State of Israel because it was not created by the Messiah. In regard to sex I did not encounter any difficulty. But once I had to contact the rabbis since we reached the conclusion that this young lady, who was brain damaged too, should not become pregnant for a year or two. Now this is the most difficult thing to attain in this sect of Judaism in which the use of contraceptives is held to be a horrible sin. Three of their leading rabbis, so religious that they don't even use Hebrew for secular conversation, came to me and asked how I could prove (a) that pregnancy would be dangerous, and (b) that the use of contraceptives would not prevent her in the future from becoming pregnant and giving birth to a son. In my despair, I told them a dream this lady had in which she gave birth to a child under horrible states of anxiety. In the dream she even was slightly epileptic, besides her hysteria. And I said, "Look, this horrible anxiety—how can we go on with it? She is too afraid of pregnancy in her present state." They looked at me and said, "She can use contraceptives. You see, she will have a boy after the treatment. This is a prophetic dream." After the treatment, she had a boy and I was invited to attend the circumcision. This rabbi came over and said to me, "You see, instead of using your craft, psychoanalysis, go and treat patients in accordance to the prophetic content of their dreams," and I must say the examples they quoted were impressive. I mention this only because in a highly modernized country, it's difficult to imagine that a group of about 30,000 people lives, in fact in daily life, with prophetic dream interpretations.

HALIFAX-GROF: I have some very brief comments. In regard to your last comment about the dream which was fulfilled, I would also like to mention Kekule's benzene ring as a most salient example in this category of phenomena. My second point is in regard to material about the Senoi. I think a very important aspect of their dream activity is the attempt at consummation of the dream content. Another interesting aspect which relates to what you have been saying is the generating effect of positive sanction in regard to prophetic dreams on other tribal groups. That is to say, apparently the Senoi are keenly interested in whether or not the prophetic dream is fulfilled in reality; if this should be the case, the dreamer is strongly supported and encouraged. So much positive sanctioning gives rise, according to Stewart, to a higher frequency of prophetic dreams.

KOESTLER: You can imagine the dreaming situation as a kind of movie theater with one spectator and the engineer who operates the projector. Now look at the relationship between that one spectator and the cameraman. The spectator is surprised, frightened, pleased with what the cameraman produces, but the cameraman ultimately only produces what the spectator wants to be projected, so the two are linked by a very unique intimacy which occurs in no other field of life. This intimacy could be on two levels of consciousness. It's more complicated by the fact that you can be dreaming, knowing that you are dreaming, knowing that you can walk out of the situation, but nevertheless because of curiosity, you let it go on for a little while. The hangman waits at the condemned man's cell. The condemned man can get out but he just wants to see what's happening, so this intimacy of unconscious/conscious and of conscious interperception, creates a situation unique to ESP phenomena, if we are to believe that most telepathic dreams and perhaps clairvoyant dreams are created at extra-conscious levels.

DEVEREUX: As regards the multiplicity of levels of dream interpretation, Bertram Lewin has discussed that very carefully, very logically. As regards the interpretation of the manifest content of dreams, I think I was the first to use the interpreting of the *manifest* content of dreams as a psychotherapeutic technique. My relevant book, entitled *Reality and Dream*, was published in 1951, and reprinted in 1969. It gives full details on this technique.