

LESSON



## DREAMS AND DIRECTION

*When should we follow our dreams, and when do we say it's "just a dream"? Let's explore where inspiration from a lifelike dream can take us. Plus: a time-honored Jewish routine for keeping nightmares at bay.*

**THE DAYDREAMER (DETAIL)**  
Nicolaes Maes, oil on canvas,  
Netherlands, c. 1650.  
(Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Welcome to an exploration of the Jewish perspective on a range of paranormal phenomena.

In this course we will explore topics such as dreams, astrology, the evil eye, ghosts, and angels. Our investigation into these mysteries will also serve as a window into Jewish teachings about fundamental issues—such as free choice, reward and punishment, and the human soul—shedding light on the role and destiny of the human being.

Today, in our first lesson, we will discuss the meaning of dreams.



FIGURE 1.1

### Belief in Various Paranormal Phenomena

#### BELIEF IN PARANORMAL PHENOMENA AMONG U.S. ADULTS

Based on Pew Research Center, “‘New Age’ Beliefs Common among Both Religious and Nonreligious Americans,” October 2018

Spiritual energy can be found in physical objects	<b>42%</b>
Psychics	<b>41%</b>
Reincarnation	<b>33%</b>
Astrology	<b>29%</b>
<b>Believe in at least one of the four entities above</b>	<b>62%</b>

### BELIEF IN PARANORMAL PHENOMENA AMONG BRITISH ADULTS

Based on BMG Research, "British Public Reveal Their Beliefs in New Survey," May 2017

Ghosts/spirits	<b>36%</b>
Fate/destiny	<b>47%</b>
Life on other planets	<b>49%</b>
Astrology	<b>16%</b>

### BELIEF IN PARANORMAL PHENOMENA AMONG CANADIAN ADULTS

Based on *Business in Vancouver*, "Poll: Young Canadians Continue to Be More Likely to Believe in Astrology, Other Supernatural Concepts," January 2022

Ghosts/spirits	<b>32%</b>
Clairvoyance	<b>28%</b>
Communication with the dead	<b>26%</b>
Astrology	<b>32%</b>

**Note:** These studies from different countries should not be compared and contrasted with each other. Each study has its own methodology and asks its questions differently.



## TEXT 1

## An Ominous Dream

Tad Fitch, et al., *On a Sea of Glass: The Life & Loss of the RMS Titanic* (Gloucestershire, England: Amberley Publishing, 2012), p. 94

Forty-three-year-old First Class passenger Isaac Frauenthal was a lawyer from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, with a practice in New York City. He was boarding the liner with his brother, 49-year-old Dr. Henry Frauenthal, and the doctor's 42-year-old wife Clara. Isaac Frauenthal was a little trepidatious as he boarded the Titanic that evening. He had a dream shortly before sailing which had disturbed him. In the dream, he seemed to be on a "big steamship which suddenly crashed into something and began to go down." He didn't pay much attention to the dream, as he was "not at all superstitious or given to belief in the supernatural." However, when the dream was repeated before he boarded the ship, it gave him pause for thought, and he became "a little worried." Frauenthal hadn't told his brother or sister-in-law about the dreams by the time the trio boarded the ship, perhaps thinking himself a little foolish for his nervousness. Still, he couldn't shake the unsettled feeling.

### TAD FITCH

Author. A resident of Ohio, Tad Fitch is an author who focuses on maritime history and the Titanic disaster, and he has written five books on these topics, including *On a Sea of Glass: The Life & Loss of the RMS Titanic*.



While most dreams are foolish, some contain truth. Learn how to tell the difference in *Rabbi Reveals How to Interpret Your Dreams*, with **Rabbi Pinchas Taylor**: [myjli.com/jewpernatural](http://myjli.com/jewpernatural)

**QUESTION**

If you had been in Isaac Frauenthal's position, would you have boarded the Titanic?

**EXERCISE 1.1**

1. Have you ever had a dream that seemed very real to you? If yes, how did you respond to it?

2. What criteria do you use to determine whether you take a dream seriously?

## II. BIBLICAL DREAMS

Our first port of call for developing a Jewish perspective on dreams would naturally be the Bible. Dreams play a significant role in many biblical stories and are treated very seriously by the narrative's protagonists.

### Dreams in the Book of Genesis

#### GENESIS 20:3-7 ABIMELECH

When Abraham moved from Hebron to Gerar, the locals immediately asked him about his wife, Sarah. Guessing their ill intentions, Abraham pretended she was his sister. The local king, Abimelech, sent for her, but an angel prevented him from touching Sarah.

That night, G-d came to Abimelech in a dream, telling him that Sarah was a married woman and that he deserved to die for his sin. Abimelech protested that he was innocent; he had been told she was

not Abraham's wife and had not touched her. G-d told Abimelech to return Sarah to her husband and ask Abraham to pray that he not die.

Abimelech returned Sarah to her husband, Abraham prayed for him, and he was spared.



#### GENESIS 31:24 LABAN

After twenty years of exile in Haran, G-d told Jacob it was time to return home. Worried that his father-in-law Laban would attempt to prevent them from leaving, Jacob and his family departed secretly for Canaan. When Laban noticed Jacob's absence a few days later, he set off in pursuit.

On the night he caught up with Jacob, G-d appeared to Laban in a dream and sternly warned him not to interfere with Jacob.

When Laban confronted Jacob the following day, he said, "I could harm you, but the G-d of your fathers came to me last night and warned me to beware." Laban and Jacob made a covenant of peace, and parted ways.



#### GENESIS 28:12-15 JACOB

When Jacob left his parents' home and set out for Haran, outside the Land of Israel, he stopped to pray on Mount Moriah. He arranged stones around himself and lay down to sleep.

In his dream, Jacob saw a ladder rising to Heaven, with one set of Heavenly angels ascending and another set descending. G-d stood over him and proclaimed, "I am G-d, the G-d of your father Abraham, and the G-d of Isaac." He promised to give the Land of Israel to Jacob and his descendants, and that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. G-d promised to protect Jacob and bring him back safely to the Land of Israel.

When he awoke, Jacob set up a stone altar to mark the spot at which G-d had appeared to him. He called it Bet-El, "House of G-d."



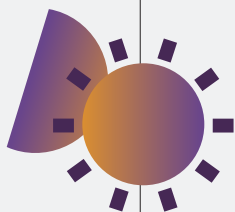
**GENESIS 37:5-7, 9****JOSEPH**

Joseph was the eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons and was favored by him, leading to jealousy on the part of his brothers. Joseph had two dreams of grandeur, which he shared with his brothers.

In the first dream, the brothers were binding sheaves together in the field, when Joseph's sheaf stood up straight and the brothers' sheaves circled around and prostrated themselves before it.

In the second dream, the sun, the moon, and the stars prostrated before Joseph.

At the time, the dreams increased Joseph's brothers' resentment of him, and even Jacob expressed skepticism. But years later, the dreams were fulfilled when Jacob and his family came down to Egypt and bowed before the viceroy: Joseph.

**GENESIS 41:1-7****PHARAOH**

Two years after the dreams of the cupbearer and the baker, Pharaoh himself had two dreams:

In his first dream, Pharaoh was standing at the bank of the Nile, and seven robust cows emerged from the river and grazed on the marsh. Seven scrawny cows then emerged from the river and devoured the healthy-looking cows.

In the second dream, Pharaoh saw seven ears of healthy grain growing on a single stalk. Seven gaunt ears of grain then sprouted up and swallowed the seven healthy ears.

Unsatisfied by the interpretations offered by his on-staff dream interpreters, Pharaoh summoned Joseph. Joseph explained that the dreams portended the arrival of seven years of great abundance, to be followed by seven years of famine. He advised Pharaoh to appoint a wise viceroy to oversee the stockpiling of food ahead of the famine, and Pharaoh selected Joseph for the position.

**GENESIS****GENESIS 40:9-17****THE CUPBEARER AND THE BAKER**

Soon after Joseph had been thrown into an Egyptian prison, Pharaoh discovered a fly in his cup and a stone in his bread. He had his chief cupbearer and chief baker thrown into prison together with Joseph. A year later, they each had cryptic dreams about their future and shared them with Joseph.

The cupbearer dreamed that he saw a vine with three clusters of grapes, which he squeezed into Pharaoh's cup and placed it in Pharaoh's hand.

Joseph interpreted the dream's meaning: "In three days, Pharaoh will restore you to your position, and you will place his cup in his hand as before."

The baker dreamed that there were three wicker baskets on his head. The top basket contained Pharaoh's preferred baked goods, and birds were eating from it.

Joseph explained that the three baskets symbolize three days: "In three days, Pharaoh will decapitate you and hang your corpse on a gallows, and birds will eat your flesh."

Three days later, at a birthday feast Pharaoh held for his servants, he restored the cupbearer to his position and ordered the baker to be hanged.





## TEXT 2

## Dreaming Details

Talmud, Berachot 55a–b

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן מִשׁוֹם רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחִי: כְּשֶׁם שְׂאִי אֶפְשָׁר  
לְבַר בְּלֹא תָבוּ, כִּן אֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְחֵלֹם בְּלֹא דְבָרִים בְּטָלִים.

אָמַר רַבִּי בְּרַכְיָה: חֵלֹם, אֵף עַל פִּי שְׁמַקְצָתוֹ  
מִתְקַיֵּם, כְּלוּ אֵינוֹ מִתְקַיֵּם.

מִנָּא לָן? מִיּוֹסֵף, דְּכָתִיב: "וְהָיָה הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וְהַיָּרֵחַ וְגו'"  
(בְּרֵאשִׁית לז, ט), וְהָיָה שְׁעֵתָא אַמְיָה לֹא הָיָת.

Rabbi Yochanan taught in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yocha'i: "Just as there can never be wheat without chaff mixed in, so too there can never be a dream without nonsense mixed in."

Rabbi Berachiyah taught, "Even though part of a dream may be fulfilled, the entirety of the dream is never fulfilled."

The source for these statements is found in the story of Joseph's dreams. Joseph dreamed that "the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me" [referring to his parents and eleven siblings] (GENESIS 37:9). Yet, at the time of the dream, Joseph's mother was already deceased.

### BABYLONIAN TALMUD

A literary work of monumental proportions that draws upon the legal, spiritual, intellectual, ethical, and historical traditions of Judaism. The 37 tractates of the Babylonian Talmud contain the teachings of the Jewish sages from the period after the destruction of the 2nd Temple through the 5th century CE. It has served as the primary vehicle for the transmission of the Oral Law and the education of Jews over the centuries; it is the entry point for all subsequent legal, ethical, and theological Jewish scholarship.





FIGURE 1.2

## Lessons Regarding Dreams in the Bible

1. **Some dreams are meaningful.**
2. **Dream interpretation is not simple.**
3. **Dreams are never entirely accurate.**

### JOSEPH'S FIRST DREAM

John Ashton, illustration in *Chap-Books of the Eighteenth Century* (London, U.K.: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, 1882), woodcut



Do Dreams Mean Anything These Days? *In Dreams in Law and Kabbalah*, Mrs. Fraidy Yanover provides the Halachic and mystical approach: [myjli.com/jewpernatural](http://myjli.com/jewpernatural)

### III. TALMUDIC DREAMS

For more concrete guidance regarding the meaning and reliability of dreams, we will now turn to the Talmud.



TEXT 3

#### Dreams and Prophecy

Talmud, Berachot 57b

חלום אֶחָד מִשְּׁשִׁים לְנִבְיָאָה.

A dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy.



PROPHET SPARKS  
Yoram Raanan, giclée, Israel

## Talmudic Dream Analysis

The Talmud (Berachot 56b–57b) lists many images one might see in a dream and explains their significance.

### Activities



#### Laying tefilin

##### MEANING

The dreamer should expect greatness.

##### REASON

The verse describes *tefilin* as inspiring awe in others: "All the nations shall see that the name of G-d is called upon you" (Deuteronomy 28:10).



#### Entering a city

##### MEANING

The dreamer's desires will be fulfilled.

##### REASON

The image of arriving to a city's harbor is used in Psalms 107:30 as a metaphor for achieving one's desires.



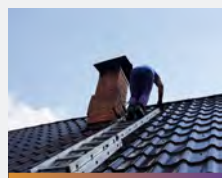
#### Haircut

##### MEANING

A good omen.

##### REASON

Joseph received a haircut before being promoted to viceroy of Egypt (Genesis 41:14).



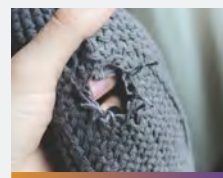
#### Ascending a roof

##### MEANING

The dreamer will ascend to greatness.

##### REASON

The roof symbolizes elevation.



#### Ripping one's clothing

##### MEANING

G-d has torn up a harsh decree against the dreamer.

##### REASON

The vision of tearing is a sign that G-d has torn up a decree that had been intended for the person.



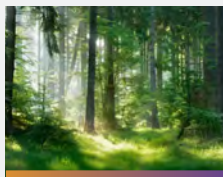
#### Entering a marsh

##### MEANING

The dreamer will become the head of an academy.

##### REASON

Entering between a swamp's reeds indicates that many people will attend one's lectures.



#### Entering a forest

##### MEANING

The dreamer will become head of the class of the most advanced students.

##### REASON

Entering between a forest's giant trees indicates that great people will attend one's lectures.



#### Bloodletting

##### MEANING

The dreamer's sins have been forgiven.

##### REASON

Redness serves as a metaphor for sin (Isaiah 1:18; Jeremiah 2:22).

## Animals



### Donkey

#### MEANING

Expect personal salvation.

#### REASON

The Messiah is described as “riding upon a donkey” (Zechariah 9:9).



### Elephant

#### MEANING

A domesticated elephant signifies that a wonder will be performed for the dreamer.

Multiple domesticated elephants signify that wonders upon wonders will be performed for the dreamer.

A wild elephant is a negative sign.

#### REASON

The Hebrew word for elephant, *pil*, is phonetically similar to the Hebrew word for wonder, *peleh*.



### Cat

#### MEANING

A. A beautiful song (*shirah naah*) has been composed for the dreamer.

B. A change for the worse (*shinu'ira*) is coming.

#### REASON

A applies if the local Aramaic dialect calls a cat *shunra*.



### Snake

#### MEANING

The dreamer will find their livelihood with ease.

If the snake bit the dreamer, it signifies a doubling of livelihood.

If the dreamer killed the snake, it signifies that their livelihood is ruined.

#### REASON

Snakes symbolize easy access to livelihood, for they “eat the dust of the earth” (Genesis 3:14).



### Camel

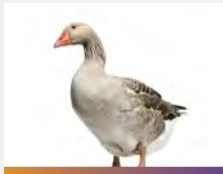
#### MEANING

The dreamer has been saved from a decree of death.

#### REASON

A: Rabbi Chama: The Hebrew word for camel, *gama*, is phonetically similar to the words used when G-d promised Jacob, “I will also bring you up [*gam alo*]” from Egypt (Genesis 46:4).

B: Rabbi Nachman bar Yitzchak: “*Gama*” is phonetically similar to the words used when the prophet Natan told King David “G-d has *also* [*gam*] overlooked your sins; you shall not [*lo*] die” (II Samuel 12:13).



### Goose

#### MEANING

The dreamer will be granted the gift of wisdom.

#### REASON

Proverbs 1:20 describes wisdom as “crying out in the street.” This behavior is most obviously associated with geese.



### Rooster

#### MEANING

The dreamer will be blessed with a male child.

#### REASON

Roosters are associated with fertility.



### Hen

#### MEANING

The dreamer will receive a beautiful garden and reason to rejoice.

#### REASON

The Hebrew word for hen, *tarnegolet*, forms an acronym for *tarbitzah na'eh* [beautiful garden] and *gilah* [rejoicing].



### Goat

#### MEANING

A blessed year for the dreamer.

#### REASON

Proverbs 27:27 associates goats with abundant food and wealth.

## Plants and Fruits



### Reed

#### MEANING

A single reed signifies that the dreamer will obtain wisdom.

Multiple reeds signify that the dreamer will obtain understanding.

#### REASON

The Hebrew word for reed, *kaneh*, also means “to acquire.” Acquisition is associated with wisdom in the verse, “Acquire wisdom, acquire understanding” (Proverbs 4:5).



### Wheat

#### MEANING

Peace.

#### REASON

The verse states that “the cream of wheat will sate you” during peacetime (Psalms 147:14).



### Barley

#### MEANING

The dreamer’s sins have been forgiven.

#### REASON

The Hebrew words used in the verse “your sins have left [vesar avonech]” by Isaiah (6:7) are phonetically similar to the Hebrew word for barley [*se’orim*].



### A laden vine

#### MEANING

The dreamer’s wife will not miscarry.

#### REASON

The imagery of a grapevine is invoked as a blessing of fertility in Psalms 128:3.



### Olive tree

#### MEANING

The dreamer will have many children.

#### REASON

The image of an olive tree’s many shoots is used to convey a blessing of fertility in Psalms 128:3.



### Olives

#### MEANING

The dreamer will be granted the gift of wisdom.

#### REASON

Business will flourish, increase, and endure like olives for the dreamer.



### Olive oil

#### MEANING

The dreamer should anticipate Torah knowledge.

#### REASON

Olive oil was the only substance fit to kindle the *menorah* in the Holy Temple, a symbol of spiritual illumination and Torah.



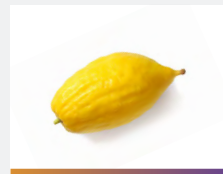
### Date palms

#### MEANING

The dreamer’s sins have been expiated.

#### REASON

The Hebrew word for a date, *tamar*, is closely related to the word used in the verse “your iniquity is expiated [tam]” (Lamentations 4:22).



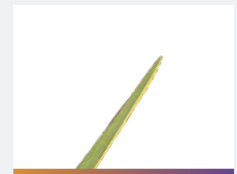
### Citron (*etrog*)

#### MEANING

The dreamer is beautiful before G-d.

#### REASON

The citron tree is described as the “beautiful tree” (Leviticus 23:40).



### Palm branch (*lulav*)

#### MEANING

The dreamer is of one heart [*lev echad*] before their Heavenly Father.

#### REASON

Date palm trees have a single “heart” of palm at their core.





TEXT 4

## Fasting to Counter a Dream

Talmud, Shabbat 11a

רַב יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּרִיּוֹת דְּרַב אִידִי אֶקְלַע לְבֵי רַב אֲשִׁי,  
עַבְדֵי לִיהַ עֲגָלָא תִּילְתָּא. אָמְרוּ לִיהַ: לְטַעֵם מַר מִיַּדִּי!

אָמַר לְהוּ: בְּתַעֲנִית יְתִיבְנָא.

אָמְרוּ לִיהַ: וְלָא סָבַר לִיהַ מַר לְהַא דְּרַב יְהוּדָה,  
דְּאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: לָנָה אָדָם תַּעֲנִיתוּ וּפּוֹרַע?

אָמַר לְהוּ: תַּעֲנִית חֲלוּם הוּא, וְאָמַר רַבָּא בַר מְחַסְיָא אָמַר רַב  
חָמָא בַר גּוּרְיָא אָמַר רַב: יָפָה תַּעֲנִית לְחֲלוּם כְּאֵשׁ לְנִעְרָת,  
וְאָמַר רַב חֲסָדָא: וּבּוּ בַּיּוֹם, וְאָמַר רַב יוֹסֵף: אֶפְלוּ בְּשַׁבָּת.

Rav Yehoshua the son of Rav Idi visited the home of Rav Ashi. His hosts prepared a thirdborn calf, and offered it to him to eat.

Rav Ashi responded, “I am observing a fast.”

They countered, “Do you not agree with the ruling of Rav Yehudah, that a person may break a self-imposed fast and repay his obligation by fasting on a different day?”

Rav Ashi replied, “This is a fast due to a bad dream. Rav bar Mechasya taught in the name of Rav Chama bar Gurya, who taught in the name of Rav, that a fast nullifies the portents of a bad dream like fire consumes flax. And Rav Chisda

stipulated that the fast is most effective when observed on the day of the dream. Rav Yosef added that such a fast may even be observed on Shabbat.”



## TEXT 5

## Dream Response

Rabbi Shlomo Elmoli, *Pitron Chalomot* 3:1:1

כְּשֶׁבָא לְאָדָם חֵלֹם רַע, לֹא יֹאמֵר: כְּבָר נִגְזְרָה גְזֵרָה,  
אֲבָדָה הַתְּקוּהָ. אֲלֵא עַל כָּל פְּנִיִּים יֵשׁ לוֹ תְּקִנָּה בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה  
וְתַחֲנוּנִים, וְאַפְלוּ בְּחֵלֹם הַיּוֹתֵר רַע שֶׁבְּעוֹלָם . . .  
רְאוּי לוֹ לְהַתְּעִנּוֹת וְלַחְזוֹר בְּתִשְׁבּוּבָה וּלְבַקֵּשׁ עֲלָיו רַחֲמִים.  
וְאִם יַעֲשֶׂה כֵן, הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יִקְבֹּל תְּעִנִּיתוֹ וְתִשְׁבּוּבָתוֹ  
וְתַפְּלוֹתוֹ, וַיְבַטֵּל מֵעָלָיו כָּל גְּזֵרוֹת קִשּׁוֹת וְרַעוֹת שֶׁנִּגְזְרוּ עָלָיו.  
וַיִּמְהַר, בְּמַהֲרֵי רַגְלֵי אֵשׁ לְנַעֲרָת, וּלְגַמְרֵי, שֶׁלֹּא  
יִשְׁאַר מִמֶּנּוּ, אֲלֵא כֹּל יִתְבַּטֵּל, כְּמוֹ שֶׁשׂוֹרֵף הָאֵשׁ  
הַנִּעֲרָת וְאֵינוֹ מִשְׁאִיר מִמֶּנּוּ כְּלוּם. לֹא כִּשְׂרוֹף הָאֵשׁ  
אֶת הָעֵצִים, שֶׁלְּעוֹלָם יִשְׁאַר מֵהֶם אוֹד מִצָּל מֵאֵשׁ.

A person who has a bad dream should not say, “The decree has already been sealed and all hope is lost.” The possibility of rectification through repentance and supplication is always available, even for the worst dream imaginable. . . .

**RABBI SHLOMO ELMOLI**  
C. 1490–1542

Rabbi and polymath. Rabbi Shlomo Elmoli was forced to flee the Iberian Peninsula as a child when the Jews were expelled. He lived in Constantinople and Salonika. A wide-ranging scholar, Rabbi Elmoli served as a physician and wrote books about Jewish thought, Hebrew grammar, and poetry. He is best known for *Pitron Chalomot*, a work about dreams in Jewish thought and law.

This person should fast, repent, and pray for mercy. If one does so, G-d\* will accept the fast, repentance, and prayer, and He will cancel all negative decrees that were issued.

The negative events portended by the dream will be revoked swiftly, like fire consumes flax. They will be revoked completely, just as fire consumes flax completely without leaving any remnant—unlike wood, which always leaves some remnant after being burned.

\* Throughout this book, “G-d” and “L-rd” are written with a hyphen instead of an “o” (both in our own translations and when quoting others). This is one way we accord reverence to the sacred Divine name. This also reminds us that, even as we seek G-d, He transcends any human effort to describe His reality.

**PORTRAIT OF A JEWISH  
WOMAN HOLDING A  
PRAYER BOOK**

Lazar Krestin (1868–1938),  
oil on canvas, Lithuania







## TEXT 6

## Manipulating Dreams

Talmud, Berachot 55b–56a

אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן:  
אֵין מֵרְאִין לוֹ לְאָדָם אֶלָּא מֵהַרְהוּרֵי לְבוֹ . . .

אָמַר לִיָּה קִיסָר לְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּרֶבִי חֲנַנְיָא: אֲמַרִיתוּ  
דְּחֻכְמֵיתוּ טוֹבָא, אֵימָא לִי מַאי חֲזִינָא בְּחֻלְמָאֵי? אָמַר  
לִיָּה: חֲזִית דְּמִשְׁחַרֵי לָהּ פְּרִסְאֵי וְגַרְבֵי בָּהּ, וְרַעֲיֵי בָּהּ שְׂקֻצֵי  
בְּחוּטְרָא דְדַהֲבָא. הֲרַהֵר פּוֹלִיָּה יוֹמָא, וְלֹאִוְרְתָא חֲזָא.

אָמַר לִיָּה שְׁבוּר מְלָכָא לְשְׁמוּאֵל: אֲמַרִיתוּ דְּחֻכְמֵיתוּ  
טוֹבָא, אֵימָא לִי מַאי חֲזִינָא בְּחֻלְמָאֵי? אָמַר לִיָּה: חֲזִית  
דְּאֵתוּ רּוֹמָאֵי וְשָׁבוּ לָהּ, וְטַחְנֵי בָּהּ קַשְׂיֵיתָא בְּרַחֲיֵיא  
דְדַהֲבָא. הֲרַהֵר פּוֹלִיָּה יוֹמָא, וְלֹאִוְרְתָא חֲזָא.

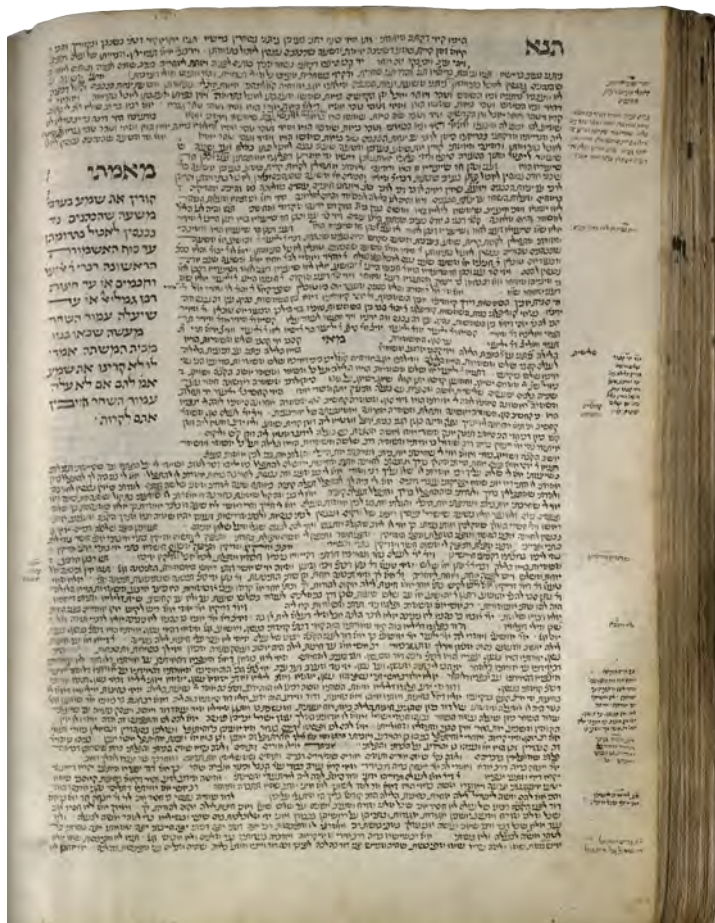
Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani taught in the name of Rabbi Yonatan, “People are only shown in their dreams the products of their own thoughts.” . . .

The Roman emperor once said to Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Rabbi Chananya, “You Jews claim to be very wise. Tell me, then: What will I see in my dream tonight?” Rabbi Yehoshua replied, “You will see the Persians capture and enslave you and force you to herd pigs with a golden staff.” The emperor thought about this vision all day, and at night he saw it in his dream.



Gain some practical tips for better dreaming in *What Your Dreams Mean*, with **Mrs. Shifra Sharfstein**: [myjli.com/jewpennatural](http://myjli.com/jewpennatural)

King Shapur once said to Shmuel, "You Jews claim to be very wise. Tell me, then: What will I see in my dream tonight?" Shmuel replied, "You will see the Romans take you captive and force you to grind date pits with a golden mill." The king thought about this vision all day, and at night he saw it in his dream.



The Munich Codex Hebraicus 95 is the only surviving manuscript that contains the complete text of the Babylonian Talmud, copied from two missing leaves, saved from France in 1342, the manuscript's history is known through the various entries of the owners' names. This page is the beginning of Tractate Berachot. (Bavarian State Library, Munich, Germany)



TEXT 7

## Treasure Map

Talmud, Sanhedrin 30a

הָרִי שֶׁהָיָה מְצַטְטֵר עַל מְעוֹת שֶׁהֵנִיחַ לוֹ אָבִיו,  
וּבֵּא בַעַל הַחֲלוּם וְאָמַר לוֹ: כָּךְ וְכָךְ הֵן, בְּמָקוֹם  
פְּלוּנֵי הֵן, שֶׁל מַעֲשֵׂר שְׁנֵי הֵן. זֶה הָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה.  
וְאָמְרוּ: דְּבָרֵי חֲלוּמוֹת לֹא מַעֲלִין וְלֹא מוֹרִידִין.

A person was troubled about the whereabouts of money that his deceased father left for him. He dreamed that his father told him exactly how much money it was and where it could be found, but that it was consecrated as *maaser sheni*. He went to the specified place and indeed found the specified sum of money.

The sages instructed this person that the contents of dreams are irrelevant, and he need not treat the money as *maaser sheni*.



**DREAMSCAPE**  
Tracey Rowan, acrylic on  
canvas, France, 2019

**EXERCISE 1.2**

How might Texts 3–4 and Texts 6–7 be reconciled?

**TEXT 8**

## Angels and Demons

Talmud, Berachot 55b

רָבָא רָמִי: כְּתִיב: "בְּחֵלוֹם אֲדַבֵּר בּוֹ" (בְּמִדְבָּר יב, ו),  
וְכִתְיב: "וַחֲלֵמוֹת הַשָּׁוְא יִדְבְּרוּ" (זְכַרְיָה י, ב).  
לֹא קִשְׁיָא: כָּאֵן עַל יְדֵי מַלְאָךְ, כָּאֵן עַל יְדֵי שָׂד.

Rava raised a contradiction between two verses: In one verse, G-d says, "I speak with the prophet in a dream" (NUMBERS 12:6). But a second verse states, "Dreams speak falsely" (ZECHARIAH 10:2).

[The Talmud resolves this:] There are two types of dreams. Some come by means of an angel, and some come by means of a demon.



## TEXT 9

## The Heavenly Palace

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn,  
*Sefer Hamaamarim Kuntresim 2*, p. 334

עַנְיָן הָעֲלִיָּה הוּא, דְּבָעֵת הַשָּׁנָה הַיְהִי בְּזִמְנוֹ יְדוּעַ זֹכָה לְעֵלוֹת  
בְּמַתִּיבְתָא דְרָקִיעָא בְּאוֹתוֹ הַהִיכָל שֶׁהוּא מְקֻשָּׁר בּוֹ . . .

דְּהַסְדֵּר הַפְּלָלִי הוּא, דְּאִישׁ אִישׁ לְפִי עֲנִינּוֹ  
בַּיּוֹם כֵּן הִיא שְׁנֵיתוֹ בְּלִילָה, וְלִפְּי אֲפֹן זֶה הוּא  
מְקוֹם מְנוּחַת נַשְׁמָתוֹ בְּהִיכָל הַפְּלָלִי.

וְהַסְדֵּר הַפְּרָטִי הוּא, אִם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עָשָׂה אִיזוֹ מִצְוָה  
בְּהַדּוּר, אוֹ עָסַק בְּתוֹרָה וּתְפִלָּה יִתֵּר עַל הַרְגִיל, וְכֵן הִישֵׁן  
מִתּוֹךְ דְּבוּר אוֹ מִחֻשְׁבָּה בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה, שְׂזוֹכִים מְקוֹם  
בְּאַכְסֵדְרָא. דִּישׁ פְּרוֹזְדוּר, אַכְסֵדְרָה וּטְרַקְלִין, וְהִיכָלוֹת  
וּמַתְבַּתּוֹת - דְּכָלֶם הֵם מְקוֹמוֹת מְנוּחָה לְהַנְשָׁמָה  
בְּעֵת הַשָּׁנָה, שְׁעוֹלָה לְמַעְלָה לְשֵׁאב לָהּ חַיִּים.

At a certain time during sleep, souls rise up  
to the Heavenly academy, each soul going  
to the hall it is associated with. . . .

In general terms, the location in the Heavenly  
palace where a person's soul rests at night is  
commensurate with the spiritual stature they  
have achieved with their daytime Divine service.

More specifically, if a person observed a mitzvah,  
studied Torah, or prayed in a more beautiful and  
complete manner that day—or went to sleep with  
words or thoughts of Torah on their mind—they

**RABBI YOSEF YITZCHAK  
SCHNEERSOHN  
(RAYATZ, FRIERDIKER  
REBBE, PREVIOUS REBBE)  
1880-1950**

Chasidic rebbe, prolific  
writer, and Jewish  
activist. Rabbi Yosef  
Yitzchak, the sixth leader  
of the Chabad movement,  
actively promoted  
Jewish religious practice  
in Soviet Russia and  
was arrested for these  
activities. After his  
release from prison  
and exile, he settled in  
Warsaw, Poland, from  
where he fled Nazi  
occupation and arrived  
in New York in 1940.  
Settling in Brooklyn,  
Rabbi Schneersohn  
worked to revitalize  
American Jewish life.  
His son-in-law Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson succeeded  
him as the leader of the  
Chabad movement.



YouTube's most popular  
rabbi talks about *Common  
Dream Meanings You  
Shouldn't Ignore*,  
with **Rabbi  
Manis Friedman**:  
[myjli.com/jewpernatural](http://myjli.com/jewpernatural)

merit a loftier location in Heaven. The Heavenly palace contains hallways, colonnades, lounges, and halls in which the soul can rest when it rises to Heaven to draw new life during sleep.



## TEXT 10

## Among the Angels

*Zohar* III, 25a

ההוא רוּחָא נְפִיק . . . בֵּין מַלְאַכֵי עֲלָאֵי קְדִישֵׁי,  
וְתַמּוֹן יָדַע מַה דְּיָדַע, וְאוֹלִיף מְלִין, וְאַתְהַדָּר  
לְאַתְרֵיהּ. כְּדִין הוּא קְשׁוּרָא דְבַר נֶשׁ בְּקְדוּשָׁה.

While a person sleeps, the soul . . . rises to the level of the holy angels and receives certain information, learns new things, and then returns to its place. This is an experience of connection to holiness.

### ZOHAR

The seminal work of kabbalah, Jewish mysticism. The *Zohar* is a mystical commentary on the Torah, written in Aramaic and Hebrew. According to the Arizal, the *Zohar* contains the teachings of Rabbi Shimon bar Yocha'i, who lived in the Land of Israel during the 2nd century. The *Zohar* has become one of the indispensable texts of traditional Judaism, alongside and nearly equal in stature to the Mishnah and Talmud.



Postcard depicting the Shema prayer before bed, Jacob Keller (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, c. 1910). (Folklore Research Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem)





## TEXT 11

## A Possessed Mind

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, *Tashbetz* 2:128

וְהַחֲלוּם הַבְּלָתִי צוֹדֵק, הוּא בְּהִיּוֹת  
הַכַּח הַמְדַמָּה בְּלָתִי בְּרִיא . . .  
וְזֶהוּ אֹמְרָם: "כָּאֵן עַל יְדֵי שֵׁד" - כִּי הַשֵּׁד הַשְּׂאִילוֹהוּ  
בְּמִקּוֹם הַזֶּה אֶל רוּחַ רָעָה מְזַקֵּת וְשׁוֹדְדֵת אֶת הָאָדָם.  
וְהֵם כָּלָם מֵאִין וּפְעֵלָם מֵאָפֶס, אִין יְדִים  
לָהֶם וְאִין לְחוּשׁ לָהֶם כָּלָל.

False dreams are the product of an  
 unhealthy, possessed imagination. . . .

The sages borrowed the term “demon” to describe  
 this negative destructive spirit that afflicts a person.

Dreams from this source are meaningless, and  
 one shouldn't be concerned about them at all.

**RABBI SHIMON BEN  
 TZEMACH DURAN  
 (RASHBATZ)  
 C. 1361-1444**

Physician, poet, rabbi,  
 and philosopher.  
 Duran was a student of  
 philosophy, astronomy,  
 mathematics, and  
 especially of medicine,  
 which he practiced for  
 a number of years in  
 Palma, Spain. He left  
 Spain in the aftermath  
 of the 1391 massacres  
 and moved to Algiers,  
 where, in addition to  
 practicing medicine,  
 he later became the  
 chief rabbi. Among his  
 many works is *Magen  
 Avot*, a philosophical  
 commentary on  
 Tractate Avot.

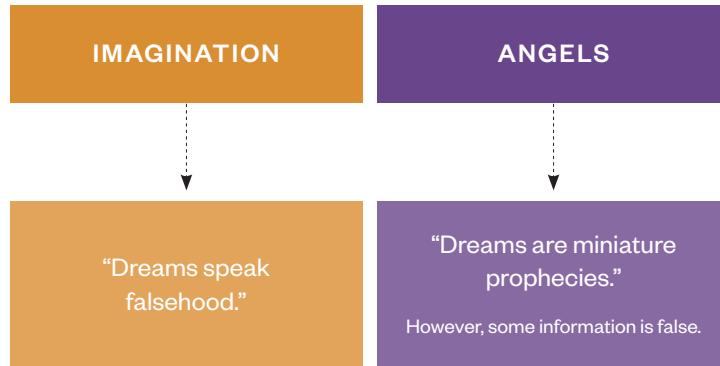
### HOW AN OLD MAN STANDS AND EXPLAINS THE DREAM TO THE KING OF PERSIA

Illustration in a Yiddish copy  
 of *Sefer Yosifun*, a history  
 of the Jews from Adam  
 until the times of Titus  
 (Amsterdam: Naftali Hertz  
 Levi Rofe and Kosman ben  
 Yosef, 1744), woodcut. (Gross  
 Family Collection, Tel Aviv)





FIGURE 1.3



**THE HARRISON MISCELLANY**  
Produced in Corfu, Greece, c. 1720; contains sixty full-page illustrations, in gouache, of scenes from Genesis, created by an unknown artist. The text, which is unrelated to the illustrations, consists of a collection of prayers and poems for a wedding, per the Jews' custom on the island of Corfu. Depicted here are the dreams of Pharaoh. (Braginsky Collection 67)



## IV. LIVING WITH DOUBT

According to the Talmud, some dreams are valid, while others are meaningless. But how can we identify the source of a dream and assess how seriously it should be taken?



TEXT 12

### Navigating Doubt

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran, *Tashbetz* 2:128

מעֲפָה, אַחַר שְׁנֵי יָשִׁיב לָנוּ מִדְּבַר חֲכָמֵינוּ ז"ל, וְהַשְׁכָּל  
מֵעִיד עָלָיו, פִּי יֵשׁ חֲלוֹמוֹת צוֹדְקִים רָאוּי לְחוּשׁ לָהֶם, וְיֵשׁ  
חֲלוֹמוֹת בְּלִתֵּי צוֹדְקִים אֵין לְחוּשׁ לָהֶם, אֲנַחְנוּ מְסַפְּקִים  
בְּזֶה הַחֲלוֹם אִם הוּא צוֹדֵק אוֹ הוּא בְּלִתֵּי צוֹדֵק . . .

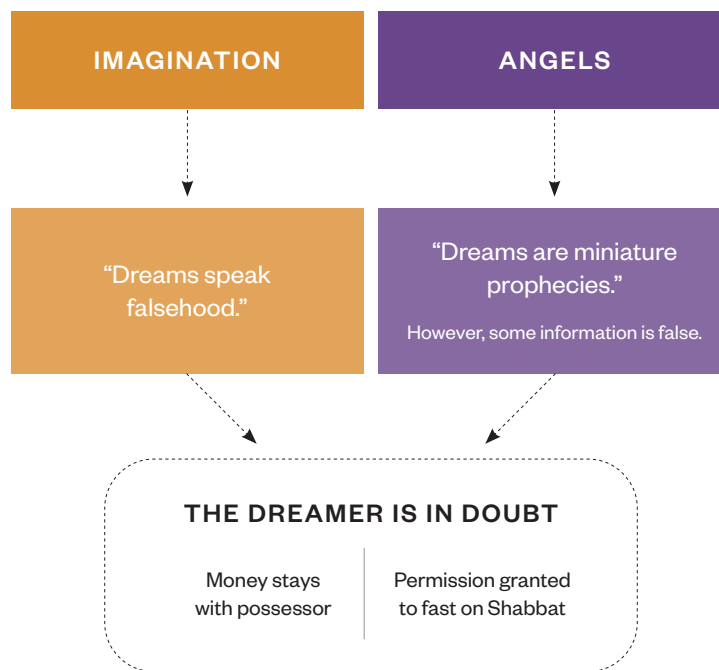
וְיָדוּעַ הוּא פִּי בְּכָל דָּבָר שֶׁבְּמִמּוֹן יֵשׁ לָנוּ לְהַעֲמִיד  
הַמִּמּוֹן שֶׁנִּפְלָב בּוֹ הַסֶּפֶק בְּחֻזְקוֹ. וְעַל זֶה אָמְרוּ בְּאוֹתוֹ  
שֶׁהָיָה מְצֻטָּעַר עַל מַעוֹת מַעֲשֵׂר שְׁנֵי שְׁהֵנִיחַ אָבִיו  
שֶׁאֵין לוֹ לְסַמֵּךְ עַל הַחֲלוֹם. וְיִנַּח הַמִּמּוֹן הַהוּא בְּחֻזְקוֹ  
כִּאֲשֶׁר הָיָה קִדְּם הַחֲלוֹם, דְּבָרֵי חֲלוֹמוֹת בְּכַעֲנָן זֶה  
לֹא מַעֲלִין וְלֹא מוֹרִידִין לְהוֹצִיא הַמִּמּוֹן מִחֻזְקוֹ.

We have reconciled the sages' teachings and reached the logical conclusion that some dreams are valid and should be taken seriously, while others are meaningless and should be ignored. We are now left with the question of how to relate to a specific dream: How are we to know if it is valid, or meaningless? . . .

The general rule in any situation of doubtful ownership is to leave the item in question in the hands of the person who currently possesses it. This is why the Talmud stated that the person who had a dream pointing to the location of a *maaser sheni* inheritance should disregard his dream, leaving the money under his full ownership as it had been prior to the dream. Dreams are irrelevant as far as taking money out of the possession of its owner.



FIGURE 1.4



Watch as **The Rebbe** interprets someone's dream:  
[myjli.com/jewpernatural](http://myjli.com/jewpernatural)

## V. A METHOD OF RESOLUTION

Text 12 didn't offer us a way to *resolve* the doubt raised by dreams. Rather, it gave us tools to *navigate* the doubt and decide on a course of action. We will now explore a second approach, which gives us a formula to resolve the doubt, at least partially.



### TEXT 13

## Who's Dreaming?

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch,  
*Tzemach Tzedek, Orach Chayim 111*

בְּפְרוּשׁ שְׂמִיעַ לִי מִנִּי דְמֶרֶן כְּבוֹד אֲדוֹנֵי אָבִי זְקֵנִי  
מוֹרֵי וְרַבֵּי נִשְׁמָתוֹ עֶדְוֹן, שְׁלֵא לִפְחֹד מִזֶּה.  
כִּי הַדְּבָרִים הַנֶּאֱמָרִים עַל זֶה בְּגִמְרָא, הֵינּוּ דְוָקָא לְאַנְשֵׁים  
גְּדוֹלִים מְאֹד שְׂמֻצְד הִרְהוּרֵי לְבוֹ רְחוּק מְאֹד מִזֶּה.  
וְאִין זֶה כִּי אִם מִן הַשְּׂמִימִים הַשְּׂבִיעוּהוּ, עַל כֵּן יִדְאָג וְכוּ'.  
אֲבָל מִי שְׂיֻכַּל לְהִיּוֹת שְׂמֻצְדוֹ בְּאֵה לּוֹ, אֵינּוּ בְּכָלֵל זֶה כְּלָל.  
כֶּן כְּפֹל וְשָׁנָה וְשִׁלְשׁ, וְשָׁחַק לְפַעֲמִים מְמִי  
שְׁהָיָה בְּמֶרֶה שְׁחֹרָה מִזֶּה . . . וְלִכֵּן יִסִּיחַ דַּעְתּוֹ  
מִזֶּה לְגִמְרֵי, וְיִהְיֶה שְׂמִיחַ וְטוֹב לֵב.

I heard explicitly from my grandfather and teacher, of blessed memory, that one should not be worried at all about such matters [like dreams].

The teachings in the Talmud that lend great significance to [dreams] only apply to people of great spiritual stature, whose thoughts are

**RABBI MENACHEM  
MENDEL OF LUBAVITCH  
(TZEMACH TZEDEK)  
1789-1866**

Chasidic rebbe and noted author. The *Tzemach Tzedek* was the third leader of the Chabad Chasidic movement and a noted authority on Jewish law. His numerous works include Halachic responsa, Chasidic discourses, and kabbalistic writings. Active in the communal affairs of Russian Jewry, he worked to alleviate the plight of the cantonists, Jewish children kidnapped to serve in the Czar's army. He passed away in Lubavitch, leaving seven sons and two daughters.

distant from these matters. If this person has an uncharacteristic experience, it must be Divinely orchestrated, and it is therefore cause for concern.

However, a person whose thoughts regularly wander to such matters has no reason for concern.

My grandfather repeated this many times and would dismiss people that were miserable as a result. . . . You should completely ignore this and be joyful.



**ALLEY OF THE DREAM**  
Leonid Afremov, oil on  
canvas, Florida, 2007



## TEXT 14

## Dream Transformation

Siddur, Musaf for Festivals, *Ribono shel Olam*

רבונו של עולם, אני שלך וחלומותי שלך, חלום  
 חלמתי ואני יודע מה הוא. יהי רצון מלפניך ה'  
 אלקי ואלקי אבותי שיהיו כל חלומותי עלי ועל כל  
 ישראל לטובה, בין חלומות שחלמתי על אחרים,  
 ובין שחלמתי על עצמי, ובין שחלמו אחרים עלי.  
 אם טובים הם, חזקם ואמצם, ויתקיימו בי  
 ובהם כחלומותי של יוסף הצדיק.  
 ואם צריכים רפואה, רפאם, כחזקתו מלך יהודה מחליו,  
 וכמרים הנביאה מצרעתה, וכנעמן מצרעתו, וכמי  
 מרה על ידי משה רבנו, וכמי ירחו על ידי אלישע.  
 וכשם שהפכת את קללת בלעם הרשע מקללה לברכה,  
 כן תהפך כל חלומותי עלי ועל כל ישראל לטובה.  
 ותשמרני ותחנני ותרצני.

“Master of the Universe, I am Yours and my  
 dreams are Yours. I have dreamed a dream  
 and I do not know what it is. May it be your  
 will, my G-d and the G-d of my fathers, that all  
 my dreams concerning myself or concerning  
 any other Jew shall be for the good; whether  
 dreams I dreamed about others or whether about  
 myself, or whether others dreamed about me.

### SIDDUR

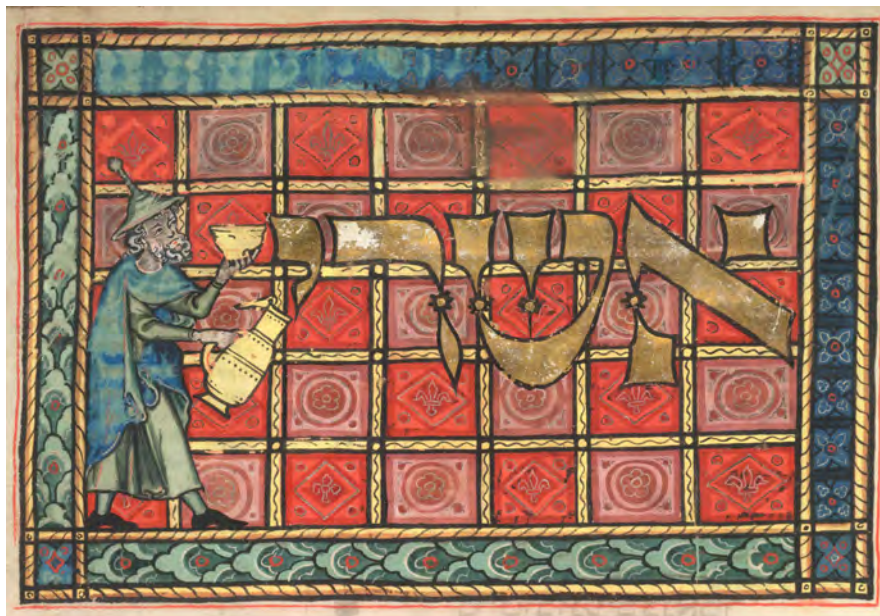
The siddur is the Jewish prayer book. It was originally developed by the sages of the Great Assembly in the 4th century BCE and later reconstructed by Rabban Gamliel after the destruction of the Second Temple. Various authorities continued to add prayers, from then until contemporary times. It includes praise of G-d, requests for personal and national needs, selections from the Bible, and much else. Various Jewish communities have slightly different versions of the siddur.

If they are good dreams, strengthen them and reinforce them, and may they be fulfilled in me and in them, like the dreams of Joseph.

But if they require a remedy, heal them like Hezekiah King of Judah from his illness, like Miriam the prophetess from her leprosy, like Naaman from his leprosy, like the waters of Marah by Moses, and like the waters of Jericho by Elisha.

As you changed the curse of the wicked Balaam from a curse into a blessing, so shall you change all my dreams concerning myself and concerning all of Israel to good.

Guard me, be gracious to me, and favor me.

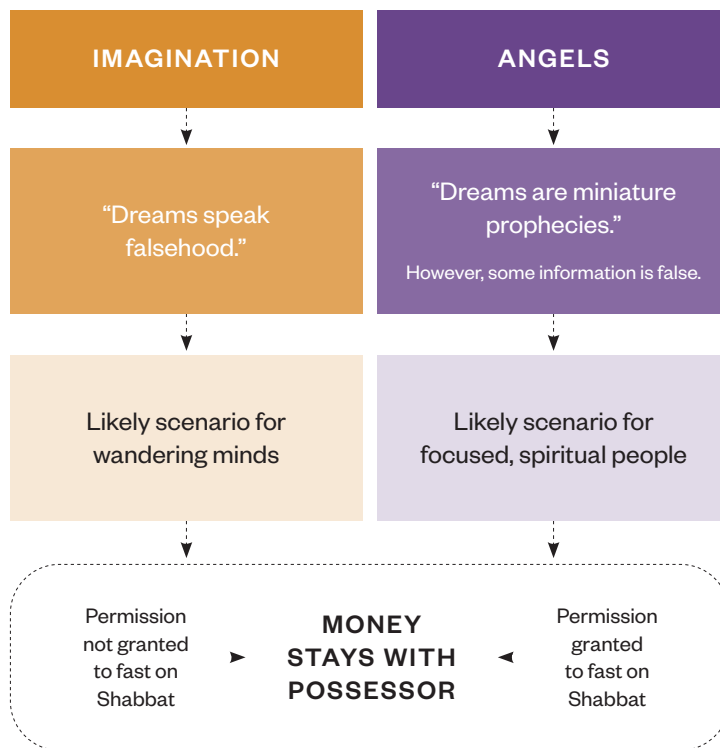


Elaborate initial word panel in a festival prayer book copied in Southern Germany in c. 1322. This parchment codex is the second part in a three-volume prayer book, with each codex housed in a separate library. (British Library, London)





FIGURE 1.5



**THE DREAM OF THE KABBALIST**  
Shoshannah Brombacher,  
oil on canvas, New York, 2020

## VI. SWEET DREAMS

While, generally speaking, people whose minds wander during the day shouldn't take their dreams at night seriously, we should pay attention to dreams that inspire us to become better people.



### TEXT 15

### Inspiring Interpretation

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,  
*Petachim Mishulchano Shel HaRebbe*, 1, p. 140

בְּכֹל לַאֲיִן צְרִיכִים כָּלֵל לְהוֹרְאוֹת עַל יְדֵי חֲלוֹמוֹת.  
שְׁלֵזָה נִתְּנָה מֵהַשֵּׁם לְכָל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד הַתּוֹרָה, שֶׁהִיא  
תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת וְתּוֹרַת חַיִּים הַמְּאִירָה דְרָךְ הַיְהוּדִי בְּחַיָּיו.  
כְּשֶׁאֵין מְקִימִים צְוֵיֵי הַשֵּׁם בְּתוֹרָתוֹ,  
לְפָעַמִּים מְרַמְזִים עַל זֶה בְּחֵלוֹם, וְכִיּוֹצֵא בָּזֶה.  
כְּשׁוֹט שֶׁאֵין מְרַמְזִים לוֹ בְּנוֹגַע לְעוֹלוֹת הָעוֹלָם  
כְּשׁוֹטוֹ, שֶׁהֵרִיזָה אֵינוֹ בְּכוּחוֹ לְתַקֵּן כָּלֵל.  
לְאִידָךְ, כְּשׁוֹט פְּרוֹשׁ הַחֵלוֹם כְּשׁוֹטוֹ מְרַאֲיִם לוֹ שֶׁצָּרִיךְ  
לְהִיּוֹת angry עַל שֶׁעוֹלָמוֹ (חַיָּיו הַפְּרָטִים שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ תְּלוּנָה  
הַנְּהַגְתּוֹ) הוּא injustice, שֶׁלֹּא כְּתּוֹרַת justice שֶׁל הַשֵּׁם.  
וְצָרִיךְ לְהִיּוֹת ascend לְהַתְּעַלּוֹת מִיְרִידָה זוֹ עַל יְדֵי חַיִּים  
יוֹמִיִּים כְּהוֹרְאָת הַשֵּׁם (כְּבִשְׁלַחַן עָרוֹף) בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְּפִעַל.

As a general rule, there is no need for instructions to be communicated through dreams. For instruction, G-d gave each and

**RABBI MENACHEM  
MENDEL SCHNEERSON  
1902-1994**

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.



every one of us the Torah, the Torah of truth and life, which illuminates a Jew's path in life.

When one isn't observing G-d's instructions given in the Torah, one may sometimes receive a hint regarding this in a dream, or the like.

It is certain that the message of your dream is not about injustices in the world in the literal sense. For such issues are completely beyond your ability to rectify.

Rather, the straightforward meaning of your dream is clear: you are being shown that you need to be “angry” about the fact that *your* world—your personal life that you exercise full control over—is being conducted “unjustly,” contrary to Divine justice.

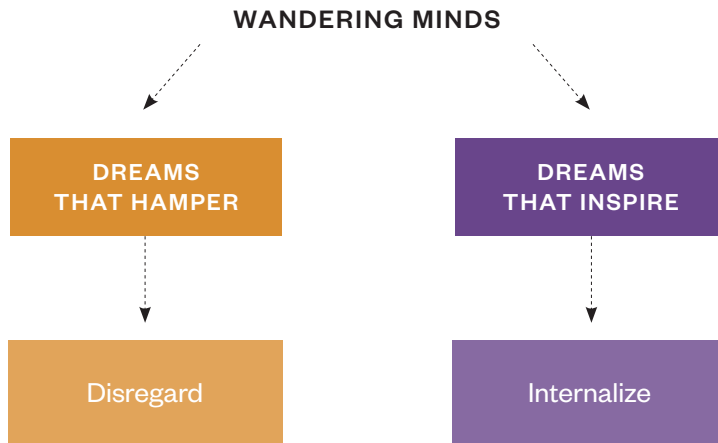
You must “ascend” from this mode of conduct through actual day-to-day behavior in accordance with G-d's instructions, as stated in the Code of Jewish Law.

*For additional guidance from the Rebbe about how to relate to dreams, see pp. 38–39.*





FIGURE 1.6



**DREAM INWARD**  
Shayna Denburg,  
acrylic on canvas

## VII. PEACEFUL DREAMS

We've studied traditional Jewish attitudes toward dreams and achieved some clarity on how we should react to the dreams we have.

We now turn for some advice for improving our sleep experiences and reducing the occurrence of nightmares.



### TEXT 16

## Nightmare Prevention

The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,  
*Igrot Kodesh*. 14, p. 326

ענין החלומות המבלבלים:

ידוע ומרמז גם במאמרי רבותינו ז"ל,

"אין אדם רואה אלא מהרהורי לבו,"

אשר החלומות הם תולדות המחשבה בטלה וכו' אשר במשך

היום. וכשממעטים הסבה, בדרך מיילא מתמעט המסבב . . .

יש להיות זהיר בקריאת שמע שעל המטה . . .

והמוזהא בפתח חדרו כשרה.

Regarding disturbing dreams:

It is well known, and the sages teach about this, that people only see in their dreams the products of their own thoughts. Dreams are the result of idle daytime thoughts, and when the cause is reduced, the result will automatically be minimized. . . .

You should be particular about reciting the bedtime Shema . . . and ensure that the *mezuzah* of your bedroom is kosher.



The bedtime Shema in a 1751 manuscript containing a collection of common prayers and blessings alongside illustrations. According to the title page, the manuscript was produced in Tzilem Adam, a name often used to hint to the Austrian town of Deutschkreutz. The manuscript is not signed but is thought to have been done by the well-known scribe Aaron Wolf Herlingen. (Braginsky Collection 217)



Why do Jews put a mezuzah on every doorway? Find out in this 2-minute video: [myjli.com/jewpernatural](http://myjli.com/jewpernatural)

## KEY POINTS

- 1 The degree of meaning our dreams have correlates with the degree of focus and meaning our daytime thoughts have. People who think with more intentionality have more meaningful dreams, and people whose minds roam without focus experience meaningless dreams.
- 2 Even if a dream has meaning, not all of its details are accurate or meaningful. Dream interpretation is far from an exact science and can never be considered certain.
- 3 As a rule, dreams that cause worry and anxiety should be disregarded as meaningless. When dreams do have meaning, their goal is to inspire us to act and improve ourselves.
- 4 There is no destiny that cannot be changed. Even if we are convinced that a particular dream forebodes negative events, we should know that prayer and *mitzvot* can change any destiny.
- 5 Nightmares can be reduced through improving the quality of our daytime thoughts. Firm faith in G-d and a Jewish bedtime ritual are particularly effective in setting the stage for a peaceful and refreshing sleep experience.

## The Rebbe's Advice on Dreams



Over the latter part of the twentieth century, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, corresponded with many thousands of individuals from all walks of life. His letters covered the full spectrum of Jewish scholarship and thought, and the human condition.

Presented here is a selection from the Rebbe's letters that address people's questions and concerns about dreams they had.

### *“Dreams Speak Nonsense”*

I am in receipt of your letter, . . . in which you write about the dream that you had.

You must abandon this path. Stop occupying yourself with dreams. It is explained in many sources that it is only for people who conduct every detail of their lives according to Torah and *mitzvot* that dreams, an area over which people have less control, contain meaningful messages. And even for such people, the sages teach that all dreams contain some meaningless details.

However, for ordinary people in our times, who speak idle chatter, and certainly have idle thoughts devoid of Torah-related meaning, dreams are nothing more than dreams.

Sometimes dreams are a ruse of the negative inclination to distract people from meaningful pursuits. I therefore reiterate: stop thinking about dreams.

It would be proper for you to arrange for the *mezuzah* of your bedroom to be checked, as well as your tefilin.

*Igrot Kodesh 7, pp. 290–291*

It is a clear ruling of our holy Torah that “dreams speak nonsense.” Even if a person has a dream that a sum of money can be found in a specific place and he should take the money and give half of it to charity—and he indeed found the money—all of the money belongs to the finder and not a penny to charity.

You should check your *tefilin* and *mezuzot* and ensure that your day-to-day conduct is in accordance with Jewish law.

*Me'otzar Hamelech 1, p. 92*

Regarding the dream that you considered fasting about, I believe your decision not to fast was correct, and you should use your energy for Torah pursuits.

*Igrot Kodesh 4, p. 158*



### *Fixing Dreams*

---

Regarding the request for blessing for the person whose deceased father came to him in a dream: This person should request forgiveness from his father, in the presence of a *minyan*, for not having conducted himself in accordance with the laws of mourning during the year following his father's passing. The Torah rules that a father has the right to forgive the honor he deserves.

It is also proper that the *tefilin* and *mezuzot* of the petitioner's residence be checked.

*Igrot Kodesh, 15, p. 277*

I received your letter in which you ask for advice concerning the dreams that are troubling your wife.

Firstly, you should check the *mezuzot* of your home. You should also ask your wife whether she ever offended someone in the past. If there indeed was such an incident, she should make a general request for forgiveness in the presence of three people. She should say, "If I offended the honor of any Jew, intentionally or by mistake, I hereby regret this wholeheartedly and ask for forgiveness."

I believe I already mentioned to you in the past that before your wife lights the candles on Friday afternoon and on the eve of a Jewish holiday, she should make a contribution to charity supporting the poor of the Land of Israel, in accordance with her means.

I am sure that after doing all of the above, the dreams will slowly cease.

*Igrot Kodesh, vol. 5, pp. 49-50*

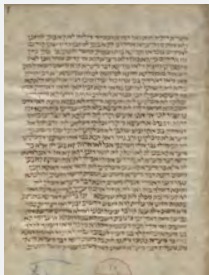
### *Transforming Dreams*

---

Regarding the dream that you had a few years ago: you have certainly said the prayer for transforming dreams, recited when the priests bless the congregation, many times since. The dream is therefore now a good one, and there is no reason to think about it anymore.

*Igrot Kodesh, 15, p. 191*

## Rabbinic Dreams in the Middle Ages



An important eleventh-century manuscript of the *Igeret Rav Sherira Ga'on*, held in the state library of Berlin.

### 10TH CENTURY, BAGHDAD, IRAQ RABBI SHERIRA GA'ON (C. 906–C. 1006)

In the late tenth century, Rabbi Sherira Ga'on, head of the central Babylonian academy, wrote a letter detailing the development and history of rabbinic literature. In his detailed chronological list of sages, he mentions that at one point the head of the Babylonian Academy, a position known as the *ga'on*, had been appointed based on a dream.

In 814, the academy had been in need of a new *ga'on*. Although the head of the *beit din*, Rabbi Aharon, was considered more qualified, Rabbi Yosef ben Rav Abba was selected due to an instruction received in a dream. Rabbi Yosef turned out to be a righteous and wise leader.

*Igeret Rav Sherira Ga'on, Ge'onei Pumbedita*



### 12TH CENTURY, REGENSBURG, BAVARIA RABBI EFRAIM OF REGENSBURG (C. 1110–1175)

For much of the Middle Ages, western European Jewry debated the kosher status of the turbot fish (*Scophthalmus maximus*). At one point, the twelfth-century German Tosafist Rabbi Efraim of Regensburg reached the Halachic conclusion that this fish was kosher.

The next night, Rabbi Efraim had a dream in which an old man with a long white beard brought him a platter of wriggling vermin. When he recoiled in anger, the man said, "Why are you angry? You yourself permitted it!" Rabbi Efraim was jolted awake and broke every plate in his house that the fish had been eaten upon.

*Or Zarua, Avodah Zarah 200*

950 1000 1050 1100 1150

### 12TH CENTURY, MAINZ, RHINELAND RABBI ELIEZER BEN NATAN (RAAVAN) (C. 1090–C. 1170)

Rabbi Eliezer ben Nathan, an early member of the Tosafist school of Talmudic analysis, records a question he was asked one Shabbat afternoon in 1152, regarding the kosher status of a vessel of wine. After an initial inquiry, he ruled the wine permissible and even drank from the wine himself.

Rabbi Eliezer then dozed off for a Shabbat afternoon rest and dreamed that he saw his teacher reading the verse in Amos (6:6), "They drink from basins of wine," but then adding the words, "and pork."

"I understood that this was a reference to those who drink nonkosher wine and eat pork," Rabbi Eliezer writes, "and I awoke and realized it had been a mistake to rule the wine kosher." He pronounced the wine forbidden for consumption and fasted for two days, together with everyone who had drank from the wine.

*Raavan, She'elot Uteshuvot 26*



Title page of the first edition of *Raavan*, published in Prague, 1610.





An illuminated manuscript of *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, held at the Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford.

**13TH CENTURY, COUCY, FRANCE**  
**RABBI MOSHE OF COUCY**  
**(C. 1200–1260)**

When French Tosafist and codifier Rabbi Moshe of Coucy began composing his list of the *mitzvot* in 1240, he had no intention of classifying the verse, “Beware lest you forget G-d by not keeping his commandments” (Deuteronomy 8:11) as an independent negative commandment. However, a vision in his dream told him that he had “missed the main point,” and pointed him to the verse. “I meditated on this in the morning and realized it is indeed a foundational idea in fearing G-d,” he writes. He saw the dream’s wisdom and included the warning in his count.

**Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, Negative Commandment 64**



A manuscript of *Shibolei Haleket*, transcribed in 1260, during the author’s lifetime.

**13TH CENTURY, ROME, ITALY**  
**RABBI TZIDKIYAH BEN AVRAHAM**  
**(C. 1220–1280)**

In his classic compilation of ritual law, *Shibolei Haleket*, Rabbi Tzidkiyah ben Avraham records the custom to fast on the Friday before Shabbat *Parshat Chukat* as a sign of mourning for the burning of the Talmud on that day in France in 1242.

“On that day they burned twenty-four wagons full of Talmudic, Halachic, and Agadic manuscripts,” he writes. “We heard that the rabbis who had witnessed it inquired via a dream as to whether the decree was associated with the date, and they received an affirmative answer. From then on, individuals have taken it upon themselves to fast each year on that Friday.”

**Shibolei Haleket, Laws of Fasting 263**



Title page of the first edition of *She'elot Uteshuvot Maharach Or Zarua*, published in Leipzig, 1860.

**LATE 13TH CENTURY, AUSTRIA**  
**RABBI CHAIM OR ZARUA**  
**(C. 1250–1310)**

One of the last Tosafists, Rabbi Chaim Or Zarua was grappling with a passage in the Talmud with several textual variants. The early Tosafists, as well as Rashi, had insisted that the phrase in question was a scribal error, and it had been erased from Rabbi Chaim’s manuscript. Struggling to understand the text, Rabbi Chaim saw the late Rabbi Me’ir (Maharam) of Rothenburg, whom he had never met in person, in a dream. Rabbi Me’ir told him to reinstate the old version of the text, and, since he had been unable to understand the new version, Rabbi Chaim did so.

**She'elot Uteshuvot Maharach Or Zarua 164**

1200 1250 1300 1350 1400

**13TH CENTURY, MEYRUEIS, FRANCE**  
**RABBI YAAKOV OF MARVÈGE (D. 1233)**

The early thirteenth-century Tosafist Rabbi Yaakov of Marvège had the unique custom of regularly seeking Halachic answers from Heaven. After secluding himself, uttering specific Divine names, and engaging in deliberate prayer, he received answers to his questions via dreams. He recorded the answers in his remarkable book, *She'elot Uteshuvot Min Hashamayim—Questions and Answers from Heaven*.

On one occasion, Rabbi Yaakov asked for a final verdict on the long-standing disagreement between Rashi (1040–1105) and Rabbeinu Tam (1100–1171), regarding the correct arrangement of the Scriptural passages contained in *tefilin*. “Both are the word of the Living G-d,” the answer said. “Just as there is disagreement below, there is disagreement above.”

**She'elot Uteshuvot Min Hashamayim 3**



Title page of the first edition of *She'elot Uteshuvot Tashbetz*, published in Amsterdam, 1738.

**15TH CENTURY, ALGIERS, ALGERIA**  
**RABBI SHIMON BEN TZEMACH DURAN (RASHBATZ) (1361–1444)**

The city of Algiers, where Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran was chief rabbi, had the custom to permit meat from animals with a certain potentially problematic health defect. Relying on the local custom and lenient authorities in rabbinic literature, Rabbi Shimon once ate meat from such an animal. That night he dreamed that he ate forbidden food, and he awoke in a cold sweat. From that day forward, he was personally stringent to never consume such meat again.

**She'elot Uteshuvot Tashbetz 159**