

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

In the third month after Israel left Egypt, they arrived in the Sinai desert. They had traveled from Refidim, had come to the Sinai desert, and camped there, opposite the mountain. (Shemos 19:1-2)

Every year Torah Jews celebrate the holiday of Shavuos, a one-day holiday in Israel and two in the Diaspora. There are no halachos except to treat the day as a Yom Tov, with a few traditions such as to eat dairy in advance of the meat seudah, and to stay up the entire night learning Torah. Crashing for four hours of sleep the next morning is not a minhag, just a necessity for most who had remained awake all through the night.

And, the minhag IS that if the person will be forced to sleep most of the next day, either with his eyes closed or open, he is better off going to sleep for the night in order to wake up the next morning refreshed and able to learn most of the next day when it really counts.

Tradition has it that early in the morning on the sixth day of Sivan, when G-d was ready to tell us the Ten Commandments, the Jewish nation was asleep. After all, it had been Shabbos, and who doesn't sleep in a bit more Shabbos morning? It was also before the creation of alarm clocks, and I have not seen it written that they took roosters with them on their way out of Egypt.

Thus, when the sun began to rise in the Sinai Desert on the sixth day of Sivan in the year 2448 from Creation (1313 BCE), at about 5:45 am at this time of year, everyone was still sound asleep. Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon HaKohen, his four sons and all the elders, not to mention the rest of the 3,000,000 Jews, were all out like a light when the Creator of the Universe arrived, so-to-speak, to give them His Torah after keeping it to Himself for over 2,000 years. Not ONE person was awake to awaken the others.

Does that make sense to you? Or did we just never really give it that much thought?

After all, if the rabbis say that we should stay up all night learning Torah to avoid sleeping late as our ancestors did back at the time the Torah was actually given, what is there to think twice about?

Well, to begin with, it is probably quite safe to assume that if Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen

did not wake up that morning on time, it was because they had never gone to sleep the night before. We can assume that the greatest prophet that ever lived, and his remarkable brother whose entire life was given over to the service of G-d, (that is why he merited the priesthood in the first place), had devoted all of their time the night before to make sure that the nation was ready to receive Torah the next day.

Moshe Rabbeinu knew what they were like. He knew what had to be done to avoid any further mistakes.

After all, if YOU had been there, could you have slept that night? Even if you had dozed off, would you not have made sure to get up on time the next morning, somehow, somehow? And, if a family of five must catch an early morning flight, one person is bound to get up on time and wake up the other family members. Where were the zealous Jews from amidst the 3,000,000 to wake the others up on time?

This is why Rav Dessler explains that they had not been sleeping like any other night. Rather, regarding every prophet it says:

To the prophets among you when I appear I reveal Myself only in a vision, and speak in a dream. (Bamidbar 12:6)

Except for Moshe Rabbeinu about whom it is written:

Not so with My servant Moshe, who is the most trusted in all My house. With him I speak face-to-face, while he is conscious, and not in riddles; he has a true vision of G-d. (Bamidbar 12:6-8)

Thus, explains Rav Dessler, the Jewish people had specifically gone to sleep the night before in advance of the giving of the Torah, SPECIFICALLY to receive It the next morning. They had every reason to assume that was the way to do it, and Moshe Rabbeinu had every reason to assume that they were correct in their assumption.

Who would have thought that 3,000,000 Jews would experience G-d on the level of their leader, while conscious and in control over their senses?

SHABBOS DAY:

So the Children of Israel were stripped of their jewelry from Mt. Chorev. (Shemos 33:6)

The Talmud states:

When the snake approached Chava he imparted to her zuhama. When the Jewish people stood at Mt. Sinai, the zuhama ended for them. (Shabbos 146a)

Why is the gematria of nachash - snake - and Moshiach (358) the same? Because, the original Snake caused us to enter exile, and Moshiach will come to take us out of exile for good. Whereas the snake imparted zuhama to mankind, Moshiach will usher in the period that conquers it. This is why Moshe Rabbeinu (upon Mt. Sinai) was commanded to take the snake before him by the tail:

He said [to Moshe], "Throw it to the ground," and he threw it to the ground and it became a serpent. Moshe ran away from it. G-d told Moshe, "Reach out and grab it by its tail." He reached out and grabbed it, and it became a staff in his hand. (Shemos 4:3-4)

It was an allusion that his role was to bring the redemption and end the zuhama - the indelible spiritual impurity that makes death a necessity - either in that lifetime, or in a future one:

Now you can understand the meaning of, "Behold, you shall die with your fathers, and this people will rise up" (Devarim 31:16) . . . In the future, Moshe will reincarnate (i.e., rise up) and return in the last generation, as it says, "you will die with your fathers and rise up." (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 20)

Indeed, having the zuhama removed from them to become purified, also took away their need to die. Indeed, the Talmud writes:

Rebi Simai elucidated, "When Israel said, 'We will do' before saying 'we will understand' (Shemos 24:7), 600,000 ministering angels descended to each Jew and tied two crowns to each one, one corresponding to 'we will do' and one corresponding to 'we will understand'." (Shabbos 88a)

When the Jewish people said, "We will do" before saying, "We will understand," a Heavenly Voice said, "Who revealed to My children this mystery, which is used by the angels?" (Ibid.)

The Leshem explains:

Had it not been for the sin of the golden calf, the Torah would have remained revealed as it was given, on the level of the Ohr HaGanuz - the Hidden Light. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 441)

Indeed, the Talmud states:

When Israel sinned, 1,200,000 damaging angels descended and removed the crowns as it says, "So the Children of Israel were stripped of their jewelry from Mt. Chorev" (Shemos 33:6). (Shabbos 88a)

And again, the Leshem explains:

As it says, "So the Children of Israel were stripped of their jewelry from Mt. Chorev" (Shemos 33:6). It also says that 999 portions were taken from Moshe Rabbeinu from his level of greatness, leaving him with only one portion of a thousand of the great light that he had at the beginning. This is the small Aleph at the beginning of Vayikra, because that is when it was revealed to him. (But the large Aleph was the level of Adam HaRishon before the sin, which would have been rectified through Moshe Rabbeinu had they not sinned with the calf.) (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 449)

Thus, before the sin of the golden calf, which was a repetition of the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the Jewish people had been able to receive prophecy on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. They didn't need to sleep to hear G-d speak, though they did not know this at the time. And, thus we remain awake all night to remind ourselves of the greatness we had once achieved, that would have allowed us to hear G-d while still conscious.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

G-d said to Moses, "Go down. Warn the people in case they break through to see G-d, and many die." (Shemos 19:21)

What does this translate into? Pardes. Whereas we have to work from level to level, understanding Pshat before moving onto Remez, and understanding Remez before learning Drush, and all three before entering the realm of Sod:

There are four levels [of Torah understanding] and the pneumatic is PaRDeS: Pshat (simple understanding), Remez (hint), Drush (exegetical), and Sod (Secret). A person needs to toil in all of them to the extent that he can, and seek out a teacher to teach them to him. If a person lacks one of these four levels relative to what he could have achieved, then he will have to reincarnate. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 11)

A person must learn Torah on all four levels, alluded to by the word Pardes, which stands for Pshat, Remez, Drush, and Sod. He will have to reincarnate until he does. (Ibid. Ch. 16)

However, for the Jews at Sinai, it had been an automatic gift.

There is something more important to understand about Shavuot than the greatness of the Jews at that time. As the Talmud explains, and the Leshem elucidates, G-d taught Moshe Rabbeinu all of Torah while he was on Sinai. The Midrash (and the Talmud) says that this included every nuance of Torah that would emerge in the future generations, including the questions that school children would ask their teachers! (Shemos Rabbah 47)

If Moshe was taught everything, then what's the big deal about the divrei Torah that we come up with? The answer, explains the Leshem, is because not all of Torah was meant to be revealed all at once, but rather over the generations (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 438). Like everything in life, even divrei Torah has its time, and each person has his own portion in Torah from which no one can steal.

Nevertheless, Moshe Rabbeinu was and remains to be the conduit through which the light of Torah flows to the world, and through each person:

All the wisdom that Shlomo merited also came through the light of the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu. It emanated into Shlomo and gave off light. For, the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu is always the conduit for all wisdom and knowledge since the time that Torah was given through him . . . He is the father of wisdom and understanding. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 438)

This is a remarkable concept. It means that when someone speaks divrei Torah, he is actually hooking up with Moshe Rabbeinu himself. He's not just building something new onto something old, but rather he is reaching back to the source of Torah through a conduit whose name was Moshe Rabbeinu.

Thus, Shavuot is not merely a commemoration of a great event long gone, but a plugging into a central memory bank and drawing out light from an existing source. It is a special opportunity to hook into Moshe Rabbeinu, and through him, to the light of Torah, and who would want to sleep through THAT? Who wouldn't want to run up the mountain and take a look at the Divine Presence that comes among us on this holy night?

MELAVE MALKAH:

Ya'akov left Be'er Sheva in the direction of Charan. He arrived and slept there (Mt. Moriah) because the sun had set. He took some stones from there, put them around his head, and lay down over there. (Bereishis 28:10- 11)

Furthermore, if you recall, upon fleeing from his brother Eisav on his way to his uncle Lavan's home in Padan Aram, Ya'akov Avinu had by-passed Har HaMoriah. Upon realizing this when he arrived in Charan, he said, "I passed the place that my fathers prayed at, and I did not pray there?" When he set his mind to return there, a miracle happened and the ground shrunk . . . (Chullin 91b)

That is what Ya'akov said. He had no plans to stay there, just to catch Ma'ariv there. However, The Holy One, Blessed is He, said:

"This righteous person has come to My Inn and is about to leave without staying over?" And thus,

immediately, the sunset. (Ibid.)

And Ya'akov had no choice but to stay the night. And, because he stayed the night there, he slept there. And because he slept there, he dreamed there, and that was the famous dream of the angels ascending and descending the ladder, and the prophecy of the four exiles.

Indeed, the Arizal implores a person to take a nap on Shabbos, specifically because it is a way to reach higher levels of consciousness. In fact, Rav Chaim Vital reported about his rebi, the Arizal:

Every night my teacher used to look at the forehead of the students standing before him, on the side upon which his soul dwelled and illuminated, and determined which posuk shone more in that person. He would then explain a portion of the explanation of that posuk, according to that which was relevant to his soul. Before the person would go to sleep he would concentrate on that which was partially explained to him. He would also recite the posuk in order that when his soul ascended for the night they would teach him the completion of the explanation. This would purify the soul and allow it to keep ascending to even higher levels, where more would be revealed to him, though his body may not have sensed anything upon awakening. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 17)

And, if the Arizal could do that in Tzfas almost 3000 years after the Sinai experience, certainly Moshe Rabbeinu could do that at Mt. Sinai, with the Divine Presence hovering above.

Thus, as Rav Dessler has said, we can assume that when the Jewish people went to bed the night before the giving of the Torah, it was not the same way most of us do at the end of a long day just to escape. If anything at all, it was to approach G-d in ways they never thought were possible while they were conscious, except perhaps for Moshe Rabbeinu.

As the Midrash points out, when G-d spoke the first two of the Ten Commandments, their bodies could not handle the exposure of Divine light, and they all died. And, even though G-d revived them with the dew reserved for the resurrection of the dead in the future, they couldn't take anymore of that.

However, it had been precisely that process that had completely removed the zuhama from them, and made them immortal once again. If they ever had been ready to hear G-d while still conscious, it was after dying and coming back to life again.

In our time, for those of us for whom prophecy is still a little way off, our dreams do not always tell us what G-d wants us to know, and it might even include a long desired vacation in the upcoming summer vacation. Therefore, we remain awake on Shavuot night, like the night of the Seder when everything we do is not to draw the light down, but to make sure we're in the right place at the right

time when the light comes down on its own.

And, the truth is, Shavuot night is a metaphor for everyday of life. Divine light is coming at us ALL the time. But, if we're sleeping (even while conscious) and dreaming of non-spiritual realities, then we can sleep right through the Sinai experience even during the rest of the year.

Chag Samayach, and may we all merit to be fitting vessels for the light of G-d, and enjoy the path that winds through PaRDeS.

I will be in Toronto (June 3-7), New York (7-10), Baltimore (10-11), Potomac (11-13), Jacksonville FLA (14-15), b"H. Write to pwinston@thirtysix.org for places and times.

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