

INTERPRETING DREAMS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Talmud teaches us that the meanings of dreams are all contingent upon the interpreter and interpretation of the dream. Yosef had told the butler and baker of Pharaoh's court that "Dream interpretations are up to the Lord." Yet he went ahead and interpreted those two dreams accurately and presciently.

Apparently what he meant by "up to the Lord" was that the one who interprets dreams has to possess some sort of holy intuition, an inner sense of the person whose dream he is interpreting in order to be able to interpret the dream. This inner voice is a gift from the Lord.

This is true in medical matters where some physicians are master diagnosticians and their inner voice leads them to the correct conclusion regarding the nature of a person's illness. It is also true for psychologists and mental health therapists. An inner voice must guide them as to how to help the troubled person that they see before them.

It is even true for the great decisors of halacha, who many times arrive at their decision after rigorous scholarship but also with unerring intuition as to what the correct solution is to the matter laid before them. Yosef has this intuition within him and therefore he is confident that his interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh will be accurate and correct.

It is this apparent self-confidence and certainty of spirit that so impresses Pharaoh and thus is the catalyst for Yosef's meteoric rise to power in Egypt. Pharaoh recognizes this by stating that Yosef possesses God's spirit within him. Without that spirit, Pharaoh is well aware that his dreams will never be interpreted in a proper light.

We read in Psalms that when the Lord returns the captivity of Zion "we will be as dreamers." The dream will require interpretation and that interpretation can only come from the returnees to Zion themselves. And in order for that dream to be interpreted correctly, the spirit of Godly holiness and purpose must reside within the interpreters - in this case the dreamers themselves.

God provides the dream but the interpretation is up to us and our ability to fathom God's wishes is the matter. Every dream - even the dream of Zion restored and rebuilt - is subject to varying interpretations. We who live in current day Israel are well aware that there are not only varying but

even conflicting interpretations of what the dream of Zion and Jerusalem truly means.

Holy spirit is required to make sense of the dream and to implement its promise. The Lord presents us with opportunities. What we do with those opportunities is the ultimate measure of our interpretation of the dream. Yosef not only interprets Pharaoh's dream but he lays out a course of action in order to actualize its promise and opportunity. The healthy intuition born of Jewish experience and tradition can help us arrive at the correct and most meaningful realization of our age old dream of Zion and Jerusalem, peace and holiness.

Shabat shalom.

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com