

Waking to a Dream



Scientists have discovered that within five minutes of the conclusion of a dream, 50% of its content has been forgotten, and 90% of the details are lost a mere 10 minutes later. As a result, many people believe they don't dream at all. But it is quite unlikely that people never dream. It's far more likely that they have issues with REM sleep and memory recall due to sleep disturbances. Our external surroundings and circumstances play a significant role in crafting our dream recall and the dreams themselves.

This concept is echoed by Chazal,¹ who explicitly state that our thoughts and experiences during the day shape and mold our dreams at night. The Tanach is replete with stories anchored around dreams, but perhaps the best example of stimuli influencing our dreams is the storyline involving Yaakov Avinu in *Parshat Vayeitzei*, which describes two powerful dreams.

The first dream² occurs on Yaakov's

journey from Be'er Sheva to Charan, a majestic vision of a ladder ascending heavenward with floating angelic features. It is seen as a dream of unity of the Jewish nation and the fate and destiny of our nation scaffolded with holiness and purpose.

However, after 20 years of living in Lavan's home, even with his strong adherence to his faith and religious bearings, Yaakov gets caught in the mundane activities of his livelihood. So much so that commentators rush to defend him in his comment, *im Lavan garti* — saying that while I was living with the evil Lavan, I carefully guarded Tarya"g (613) mitzvot and didn't adopt his evil ways.

עם לבן הרשע גרתי ותרי"ג מצות שמרתי ולא
למדתי ממעשיו הרעים.

I lived with Lavan and kept the 613 mitzvot and didn't learn from his evil ways.

Rashi, Breishit 32:5

Yaakov is now dreaming about



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materialism³ — goats and sheep. And whereas in his first dream, God himself spoke to him and images of angels (plural) laced his dream, Yaakov now only speaks with one angel — with no other apparent divine communication.

The impact of Yaakov's surroundings, no matter how strong his observance, seemingly chipped away at his loftiness and his inspirational pursuits as is made evident in this dream. It is undeniable that our goals and aspirations are influenced by our environment, opportunities and resources. And we

1 Gemarot in *Brachot* 65b and *Avodah Zarah* 20b.

2 Breishit 28:10.

3 Breishit 31:11.

cannot deny that this phenomenon influences each one of us as individuals and collectively as a nation.

For millennia, we have had experiences of *im Lavan garti* and *Tarya”g mitzvot shamarti* — a difficult balancing act of survival and resilience, in order for us to continue in our *avodat Hashem*.

We were banished from our land and thrust into circumstances and surroundings that have tested our faith, morality and fortitude. Although we may have created institutions of worship and learning to strengthen our reach and widespread Torah study, we cannot deny that these surrounding influences of the adopted countries have impacted our national dreams.

When Hashem rescued and redeemed Bnei Yisroel from Mitzrayim — which has since become the archetypal example for our exile for generations to come — the Torah states:

לְכוּ אָמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנִי ה', וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבֻלַת מִצְרַיִם, וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדוֹתָם; וְנָאַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָהּ, וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים.

Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements.

Shemot 6:6

The Hebrew word “*lisbol*” means to suffer. In this *pasuk* Hashem declares that he will save the Jewish nation from the sufferings of Egypt. Some suggest⁴ that the word “*lisbol*” also means to tolerate. Bnei Yisroel had become accustomed to their surroundings. The power of inertia had stunted their dreams and aspirations to leave their enslaved state, which they had started to tolerate and even to accept. Acceptance,

to the point that they berated and protested against their leaders Moshe and Aaron for daring to go to Pharaoh to demand their release and to allow them to live in their divinely promised land.

The lesson we learn is strikingly clear: that one of our responsibilities in *galut* is in essence to **not** accept our situation; to recognize that we are not yet living in our intended, envisioned ideal state and that we are uneasy, uncomfortable, anxious and unsettled until we reconnect to our promise and our dream and are reunited with our Homeland.

We need to remember our collective dream. And if not self-generated, we are unfortunately doomed to be jolted from our tolerance of the present in order get back on course.

No doubt, this was why the angel tells Yaakov to recalibrate his spiritual compass immediately after having materialistic based dreams, and told him to return to his Land.

וַיֹּאמֶר, שָׂא-נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה כָּל-הָעֲתֻדִים הָעֲלִים עַל-הַצֹּאן, עֲקָדִים נִקְדָּיִם, וּבְרָדִים: כִּי רָאִיתִי, אֵת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר לָכֵן עָשָׂה לְךָ.

And he said, Raise your eyes, if you please, and see that all the he-goats mounting the flocks are ringed, speckled, and checkered, for I have seen all that Lavan is doing to you.

Breishit 31:12

אֲנֹכִי הָאֵל, בֵּית-אֵל, אֲשֶׁר מְשַׁחְתָּ שָׁם מִצְבָּה, אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִּי שָׁם נָדָר; עַתָּה, קוּם צֵא מִן-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, וְשׁוּב, אֶל-אֶרֶץ מוֹלְדְּתְךָ.

I am the God of Beth-EL where you anointed a pillar and where you have made Me a vow. Now — arise, leave this land and return to your native land.

Breishit 31:12

It is understandable to have strong

feelings and deep connections to our host country in *galut*, especially toward those who have given us the religious freedom and opportunity to grow, but our true dream needs to be ever-present.

The paradigmatic example of creating deep roots in our hosting country is that of Yosef Hatzadik.

Throughout the story of Yosef, we see a metamorphosis of Yosef going from dreamer regarding his personal lofty aspirations to interpreter of other people’s dreams. It is only upon seeing his brothers years later that he remembers the dreams of his youth.

וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת אָחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכְרָהוּ.
For though Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him.

Breishit 42:8

וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם.
Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them.

Breishit 42:9

Rav Nissan Alpert z”l points out that this is the very story of the Jew throughout our long *galut*. In every generation, the Jew becomes the leader of commerce, leadership and societal ranks and the leading voice for social action and change... but slowly forgets his own national dreams.

Rav Alpert points out that this is the meaning of “and we will be like dreamers.”

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת בְּשׁוּב ה' אֶת שִׁיבַת צִיּוֹן הֵינּוּ כְּחֹלְמִים.

A Song of Ascents. When Hashem brought back those that returned to Zion, we were like dreamers.

Tehillim 126:1

When we reconnect to our dream it will result in having our actions aligned

4 Rav Simcha Bunem Przysucha (1765-1827); Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (1787-1859).

with our destiny. That when we return to Zion at long last. Our eternal dreams will finally be realized.

Over the last two decades, I have held thousands of conversations with Jews living in the Diaspora and realized that while many know what our national aspiration should be and where the Jewish people ultimately belong, there is a disconnect between knowing and feeling. Hundreds of years of *galut* have seasoned and conditioned our Jewish nation to focus on their religious and physical survival by tending to their immediate communal needs. This experience has jeopardized the long-term spiritual ambitions of our community and impaired our long-distance national vision.

I have always found it ironic that in the most famous debate on the mitzvah of *yishuv haaretz* between the Rambam and Ramban, our cerebral dissection and mental gymnastics on the language of the Ramban makes us miss the point.

The Ramban (*Hasagot to Sefer Hamitzvot, Aseh* no. 4), in his commentary on the Rambam's *Mitzvot*, forcefully underscores the mitzvah of living in the Land of Israel.

מצוה רביעית שנצטוינו לרשת הארץ אשר נתן האל יתברך ויתעלה לאבותינו לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב, ולא נעזבה ביד זולתינו מן האומות או לשממה. והוא אמרו להם: "והורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה כי לכם נתתי את הארץ לרשת אותה והתנחלתם את הארץ..." היא מצוה עשה לדורות, מתחייב כל יחיד ממנו, ואפילו בזמן גלות כידוע בתלמוד במקומות

הרבה.

"... The mitzvah of possessing the land and settling it is a mitzvah that applies for all generations and to each individual."

The singular peculiarity of the wording *mitchayev kol yachid mimenu* (to each individual) has prompted generations of commentaries to extrapolate the meaning of the Ramban.

We can distill the approaches into three categories:

1. Some suggest that the Ramban opines that the mitzvah of *yishuv haaretz* does not apply to the masses before the arrival of the Mashiach, thus it is only falls upon the *yachid* and not the *tzibur*. This may be due to the nature of the edict of *galut*⁵ or the need of exile.⁶
2. Others suggest that the Ramban's intention is that this mitzvah only applies to specific individuals who will sanctify the land with their spiritual contributions, reading *yachid* as *yechidim*.⁷
3. While others suggest that the Ramban is emphasizing a duality of the mitzvah for both the *yachid* and the *tzibur*; either a) that the *tzibur* doesn't fulfill the mitzvah, the *yachid* needs to help the *tzibur* accomplish its mitzvah;⁸ or b) if the *tzibur* fulfills the mitzvah, the *yachid* still needs to do so;⁹ or c) or the *yachid* **needs** to help the **tzibur** accomplish its mitzvah.¹⁰

Again, these approaches are all cerebral. Trying to know, and trying to

understand, but avoiding an emphasis on what we are supposed to feel. *Galut* has so numbed our emotions and distorted our visceral feelings that we don't see the obvious *pshat* of the Ramban.

The simple and compelling reading of the Ramban is that the connection between the Jew and Israel is a mitzvah for all generations and for each and every one of us. There is no need for *pilpul* or *diyukim*. The Ramban is both emphatic and passionate. The mitzvah imposed on the individual is based on the fundamental connection and yearning that a Jew must have toward his or her Homeland.

This yearning is captured by one word: *chemda* (coveted).

It is infused in the very language of *birkat hamazon* where we refer to the land of Israel as *eretz chemda tova urechava*, **a coveted land that is good and spacious**; *chemda* means the subject of our yearning. Chazal took this phraseology from a *pasuk* in Yirmiyahu:¹¹

בְּיָמֵינוּ יִלְכְּנוּ בֵּית־יְהוּדָה עַל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָבֹאוּ יַחְדָּו מֵאֶרֶץ צָפוֹן עַל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הִנְחַלְתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם: וְאָנֹכִי אֲמַרְתִּי אֵיךְ אֲשִׁיתָךְ בְּבָנִים וְאֶתְּוֹלָךְ אֶרֶץ חֲמֻדָּה נְחֻלַת צְבִי צְבָאוֹת גּוֹיִם
In those days, the House of Judah shall go with the House of Israel; they shall come together from the land of the north to the land I gave your ancestors as a possession. I gave you a cherished land, the heritage **coveted** by the multitude of nations.
Yirmiyahu 3:18-19

Knowing something and actually feeling its truth are two different ways of

5 Ketuvot 111a, see also Shut HaRashbash no. 1.

6 Shelah, Parashat Devarim no. 15.

7 Tashbetz Katan no. 562, Kol Bo no. 127.

8 Yeshuot Malko, YD no. 66. Pe'at HaShulchan, Hilchot Eretz Yisrael 1:3.

9 Rivash no. 101 and 327.

10 Tzitz Eliezer 7:48.

11 Yirmiyahu (3:18-19).

perceiving or understanding things.

Knowing something is usually based on factual information, evidence or logical reasoning. It involves acquiring knowledge through observation, experience or study. It is often associated with having certainty or a high level of confidence in the accuracy of the information.

But to be inspired to action by that knowledge is the necessary next step.

Our experiences in *galut* have required us as individuals and even as a people to hunker down and gird ourselves with firming our knowledge, protecting our *mesorah* and focusing on the transmission of our laws to the next generations.

But something is missing.

The knowledge that we have accumulated should have inspired the spirit to action to reconnect to the

dream. But, unfortunately, our visceral relationship to Land and History has been narrowed through our life of remaining in survival mode all these years — causing our aspirations and dreams to be limited.

With the tremendous revival of Jewish life in Israel we indeed live in a blessed, miraculous time. History is beckoning us to stop dreaming of goats and sheep and start yearning for ladders ascending to the heavens.

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They didn't know what we are capable of, what we can accomplish when we come together, who we are at our core when all is on the line. Said the General, the secular are having a spiritual awakening and the Haredim are coordinating unprecedented networks of national service. The world and Hamas thought that the Jewish people were fractured and this would be the ultimate blow that would divide us. They, and to a certain extent we, never imagined how united, driven and unstoppable we could become.

The Torah describes that Yosef's brothers hated him to the point that *v'lo yachlu dabro l'shalom*." The Ibn Ezra explains, "*v'lo yachlu dabro l'shalom – afilu l'shalom*." It isn't that they just couldn't talk about the issues they disagreed about. It isn't just that they didn't want to be close, loving brothers. It isn't just that they couldn't debate respectfully. "*Afilu l'shalom*" — they couldn't even give each other a *shalom aleichem*. The hatred and intolerance had grown so deep that they couldn't

stand to even extend greetings to one another or to be in a room together.

Rav Yehonasan Eibshitz in his *Tiferes Yonasan* has an additional insight. When we disagree with people, we withdraw from them and stop speaking to them. We see them as "the other," different than us and apart from us. As our communication breaks down, the dividers go up, stronger and stronger until we can't find a way to break through them.

The antidote and answer are in our hands, and we remind ourselves of it three times a day when we pray. Our practice of taking three steps backward at the conclusion of the Amidah comes from a Gemara in Yoma (Daf 53) which states, "*Hamispaleil tzarich she'yafsiah shelosha pesios l'achorav v'achar kach yitein shalom*. The one who prays must take three steps back and only then pray for peace." R' Menachem BenZion Zaks (in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*) explains that we cannot pray for, nor achieve, peace if we are not willing to step back a little and make room for

others and their opinions, their tastes and personalities. After stepping back, we ask "*oseh shalom bimromav*, God, please bring peace," and we then turn to the right and to the left. Explains R' Zaks, achieving peace and harmony means bending towards those on the right of us and those on the left of us, acknowledging them, engaging them, and making space for them. That is a prerequisite to the *shalom*, the peace we crave.

The atrocity that took place on Oct. 7 was unimaginable, but so is the will and faith of our people. If we want *shalom*, peace, we must be capable of speaking *l'shalom*, not just tolerating a fellow Jew but learning to love them.

On billboards, bumper stickers, and the sides of busses all over Israel is the motto *Am ha'netzach y'natzeiach* — the people of eternity will prevail. If we want to prevail, we must ensure that the Oct. 8 Jew is practicing a Judaism of eternity, united with the people of eternity.