

Lessons from the Chassidische Parsha

The teachings of the Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr and Likkutei Torah

The source of dreams

ד"ה שיר המעלות בשובנו היינו כחולמים

פרשת וישב

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Dreams are one of the most mysterious human experiences. They have perplexed us for thousands of years. In this week's Chassidische Parsha, the Alter Rebbe explains the mystical source of dreams.

When we dream our intellectual brain recedes and our power of imagination comes alive. Unrestrained by logic and rationality, our imagination can conjure up the most fantastical images, with no limit to what we can see, where we can go and how things can be.

In a dream we can see the impossible where two contradictory things can co-exist. Our rational mind does not allow us to conceive such ideas. We discern the incompatibility and shut it down, dismissing the impossible as just that. But in a dream the opposites are not opposites. They merge and blend into a single reality.

The Rambam illustrates this with the example of a flying boat. In our rational mind, a boat does not, cannot and will not fly in the sky. But in a dream boats can soar through the heavens.

Exile is like a dream. In Tehillim we read שיר המעלות בשובנו היינו כחולמים. When we return from exile with Moshiach's arrival we will look back at Golus and say "we were like dreamers." This is not just because exile is transient and soon we will wake-up to the true reality of redemption. Rather the very experience of exile is like a dream.

In the dream of exile, we live a life of contradiction, where two opposites coexist and we do not sense their incongruity. On one hand we have spiritual aspirations and emotions. We have moments of desire to unite with our creator and connect with our souls. All that we crave is G-dliness. This is the experience of Davening each day.

But when we leave Shule, the love that we experience fades as we spend the rest of our day pursuing worldly success and the materials allures of the physical world.

During exile, the intellectual component of the soul recedes and our ability to discern truth is blurred. Our confused imagination augments the contradictory tensions of our physical and spiritual selves into a life of duplicity and that's all okay. We accept the dichotomy as though nothing is wrong.

Were it to awaken, the intellectual mind of the soul would point out the obvious contradiction. We would be forced to conclude that both modalities cannot be true and one must be

a lie. Our strong desire for materiality may lead us to conclude that our spiritual yearnings and feelings during Davening were like a dream, a figment of our imagination.

This makes it sound like dreams are inferior to intellect and that the dream-like state is immature, irrational and we will soon wake-up to our senses.

But in truth, dreams come from a deep place, a subconscious reality which is deeper than our rational brain. Our dreams tell us things to which our rational mind is limited and unable to appreciate or grasp.

The Kabbalists describe the source of dreams as coming from a spiritual level which is so lofty that we cannot rationally grasp or understand it. In this G-dly reality, like Hashem Himself opposites can be united.

Kabbalah discusses two systems of G-dly revelation. One is referred to as Yosher (linear) and the other Igulim (circles).

Yosher refers to the limited levels of G-dliness within the worlds that conform to the logic and order of Creation. Igulim refers to the transcendent G-dly light that is beyond Creation. The light of Igulim is not bound by the logical order and structure of Seder Hishtalshelus.

The transcendent level of Igulim will only be openly revealed in the times of Moshiach. Nonetheless, we experience sparks of this reality in our dreams. This is why our dreams have within them the quality of Igulim, where opposites coexist

The same is true of our dichotomous dream of exile, where we are holy and worldly, craving G-dliness and materiality at the same time. This paradox only exists within the world of Yosher, but in the sub-conscious truth of Igulim, there does not need to be a contradiction. Both the physical and spiritual are equal parts of a singular, all-encompassing service of Hashem.

In the reality of redemption the concealment will be removed and the spiritual light which transcends intellect will make perfect sense. When we live in this higher reality, we will realise the subconscious truth of our dream; where what had formerly seemed impossible, will be absolutely logical.

Yosef the dreamer, surpassed even Moshe the scholar. For dreams represent our ability to transcend our rigid and finite confines of our rational brain and be able to touch the infinite. A dream is a spark of the Geulah.