

Dreams – Daniel 2

- 1 In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream; his spirit was agitated, yet he was overcome by sleep.
- 2 The king ordered the magicians, exorcists, sorcerers, and Chaldeans to be summoned in order to tell the king what he had dreamed. They came and stood before the king,
- 3 and the king said to them, “I have had a dream and I am full of anxiety to know what I have dreamed.”
- 4 The Chaldeans spoke to the king in Aramaic, “O king, live forever! Relate the dream to your servants, and we will tell its meaning.”
- 5 The king said in reply to the Chaldeans, “I hereby decree: If you will not make the dream and its meaning known to me, you shall be torn limb from limb and your houses confiscated.
- 6 But if you tell the dream and its meaning, you shall receive from me gifts, presents, and great honor; therefore, tell me the dream and its meaning.”
- 7 Once again they answered, “Let the king relate the dream to his servants, and we will tell its meaning.”
- 8 The king said in reply, “It is clear to me that you are playing for time, since you see that I have decreed
- 9 that if you do not make the dream known to me, there is but one verdict for you. You have conspired to tell me something false and fraudulent until circumstances change; so relate the dream to me, and I will then know that you can tell its meaning.”
- 10 The Chaldeans said in reply to the king, “There is no one on earth who can satisfy the king’s demand, for great king or ruler—none has ever asked such a thing of any magician, exorcist, or Chaldean.
- 11 The thing asked by the king is difficult; there is no one who can tell it to the king except the gods whose abode is not among mortals.”
- 12 Whereupon the king flew into a violent rage, and gave an order to do away with all the wise men of Babylon.
- 13 The decree condemning the wise men to death was issued. Daniel and his companions were about to be put to death
- 14 when Daniel remonstrated with Arioch, the captain of the royal guard who had set out to put the wise men of Babylon to death.
- 15 He spoke up and said to Arioch, the royal officer, “Why is the decree of the king so urgent?” Thereupon Arioch informed Daniel of the matter.
- 16 So Daniel went to ask the king for time, that he might tell the meaning to the king.
- 17 Then Daniel went to his house and informed his companions, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, of the matter,
- 18 that they might implore the God of Heaven for help regarding this mystery, so that Daniel and his colleagues would not be put to death together with the other wise men of Babylon.
- 19 The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision; then Daniel blessed the God of Heaven.
- 20 Daniel spoke up and said: “Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power are His.
- 21 He changes times and seasons, Removes kings and installs kings; He gives the wise their wisdom And knowledge to those who know.
- 22 He reveals deep and hidden things, Knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him.
- 23 I acknowledge and praise You, O God of my fathers, You who have given me wisdom and power, For now You have let me know what we asked of You; You have let us know what concerns the king.”
- 24 Thereupon Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to do away with the wise men of Babylon; he came and said to him as follows, “Do not do away with the wise men of Babylon; bring me to the king and I will tell the king the meaning!”
- 25 So Arioch rushed Daniel into the king’s presence and said to him, “I have found among the exiles of Judah a man who can make the meaning known to the king!”
- 26 The king said in reply to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar), “Can you really make known to me the dream that I saw and its meaning?”

A discussion on Dreams based on Daniel 2

Some Textual Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What language is Daniel written in (hint: its not really Hebrew!)
- Who was Daniel? What's the story so far?
- The first pasuk reminds us of Pharaoh quite a lot. What other comparisons can you make between these two stories? What are the differences?
- How do you interpret the back and forth between the king and his sorcerers in the first 10 pasukim? (see malbim for explanation)
- What does the king's decree show about his character?
- What do you think the difference is between Daniel's "night vision" and a dream?
- Why is pasuk 21 so significant?
- What was the dream?! What did it mean? (open a Tanach)

Some General Questions to ask Chanichim:

- What lessons can we learn from the book of Daniel about being a Jew in exile?
- Should we relate to dreams the same way now as they did then? Why?
- How are dreams generally presented in Tanach? (Think outside of the Yosef story!)
- How do you interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream?
- How does modern psychological dream theory contribute to the Jewish discussion on dreams?
- Why do you think Kabbalah often refers to exile as "sleep"?

Some Personal Questions to ask Chanichim:

- Have you ever had an unreasonable request from someone in a position of authority?
- How do you relate to the characteristic of "power" that the King struggles with here? What are its negative and positive aspects? How does it relate to dreams?
- What are some strange/inspiring dreams you have had?
- How do you relate to Daniel as a character in Tanach?

Some Interactive Resources:

Dream Diaries – Many kabbalistic masters such as Rav Chaim Vital kept dream diaries. Try doing it with chanichim over Machane perhaps?

Youtube – Have a look at some videos on Kabbalah and dreams but do be careful – there's some weird stuff out there...

Film – Inception – Discuss this movie and the messages it leaves us with both about dreams and the choice of happiness over truth.

Art – Take a look at some Jewish dream art from Tzfat and the meaning behind it

Poem – Edgar Allan Poe: O God! Can I not grasp, Them with a tighter clasp?

O God! can I not save, One from the pitiless wave?

Is all that we see or seem, But a dream within a dream?

What statement is Poe making? How could this relate to the first line of Kohelet?

A Related Story:

Rabbi Bunam used to tell young men who came to him for the first time the story of Rabbi Eisik, son of Rabbi Yekel in Cracow. After many years of great poverty which had never shaken his faith in God, he dreamed someone bade him look for a treasure in Prague, under the bridge which leads to the king's palace. When the dream recurred a third time, Rabbi Eisik prepared for the journey and set out for Prague. But the bridge was guarded day and night and he did not dare to start digging. Nevertheless he went to the bridge every morning and kept walking around it until evening.

Finally the captain of the guards, who had been watching him, asked in a kindly way whether he was looking for something or waiting for somebody. Rabbi Eisik told him of the dream which had brought him here from a faraway country. The captain laughed: "And so to please the dream, you poor fellow wore out your shoes to come here! As for having faith in dreams, if I had had it, I should have had to get going when a dream once told me to go to Cracow and dig for treasure under the stove in the room of a Jew—Eisik, son of Yekel, that was the name! Eisik, son of Yekel! I can just imagine what it would be like, how I should have to try every house over there, where one half of the Jews are named Eisik, and the other Yekel!" And he laughed again. Rabbi Eisik bowed, traveled home, dug up the treasure from under the stove, and built the House of Prayer which is called "Reb Eisik's Shul."

Other sources and quotes to bring into discussion:

Rambam Guide for the Perplexed 2:36:

"As you are aware, our Rabbis state that a dream is 1/60th of prophecy; and you know, that it is inappropriate to make comparisons between two unrelated concepts or things...and yet they repeated this idea in Midrash Bereishit Rabbah (Genesis 17:7) and said, 'the buds of prophecy are dreams.' This is indeed a wonderful metaphor, for just as a bud is the actual fruit itself that has not yet developed fully, similarly, the power of the imagination at the time of sleep is exactly that which operates at the time of prophecy, in an incomplete and unperfected state."

Talmud Chagigah 5b:

The Talmud tells us that after the destruction of the first Temple prophecy came to a halt. We no longer have the kinds of revelations recorded in the Bible. But because the world could not survive without some measure of divine communication, God decreed that "Although I will hide my face from them, I will speak to them in a dream."

Talmud: "Sleep is 1/60th of death."

Carl Jung: "I have no theory about dreams. I do not know how dreams arise. On the other hand, I know that if we meditate on a dream sufficiently long and thoroughly – if we take the boat with us and turn it over and over – something almost always comes out of it."

Sigmund Freud: "The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind."

Iyov 33:15: "In a dream, a nocturnal vision of the night, when a deep sleep falls over people, during slumbers upon the bed, then He uncovers people's ears and seals their affliction."