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Understanding Dreams

In *Parshas Mikeitz*, there is much about dreams. There are several dreams of Pharaoh, and in the previous *parshiyos*, the Torah describes the dreams of Yosef, the dreams of the *sar hamashkim* (the butler of Pharaoh) and the *sar ha'ofeh* (the baker of Pharaoh). What are dreams all about?

We have our intellect, which can see reality as it is, and we also have a power of imagination, which sees fantasies.

At night, when people go to sleep (as the Gemara says, that "The night was not created except for sleep"), the imagination becomes dominant, in their dreams. The Vilna Gaon says that during a dream, a person's intellect is weakened, and his imagination becomes dominant.

Imagination is not an absolute reality. It is merely an imagined reality. Therefore it has no substantial value on this world. However, the Sages state that "there is no dream which does not contain meaningless things." Where do such dreams come from?

We know that there are also dreams which do contain meaning, such as our own dreams, which can contain meaning to them. Dreams can reveal things to us, and on a deeper and spiritual level, dreams were the vehicle by which Hashem would communicate with the prophets.

There is intellect\thought, which is countered by imagination. Imagination has no substantial bearing on the reality on this world, but when a person goes to sleep, although his intellect is weakened and his imagination is dominant, some of his intellect still remains. This imprint of the intellect that is still left in him can fuse together with the imagination. The intellect then becomes subservient to the imagination.

Thus, there is no dream which does not contain meaningless things - but there are also truthful points contained in the dream. This is because the intellect fuses together with the imagination, and therefore in every dream there will be some truthful points that a person can see, via his intellect.

The more a person has purified his spiritual level, his intellect becomes even clearer when he sleeps, and the more truthful his dreams will be. The stronger a person's ability of thought is, although the imagination will overtake his intellect when he sleeps, he will still be able to see truthful things in his dreams, because his intellect will still play a very active role even as he sleeps, since it is strong from

during the day.

Purifying The Imagination – Through Strengthening The Intellect

On a subtler level, when a person has a strongly developed intellect, his dreams will show him revelations from Heaven, through the imagination. Where the intellect ends and cannot perceive, that is where the imagination can jump past all the limitations of the intellect, and perceive higher things that the intellect cannot.

This is only true when one has a strongly developed intellect, which purifies the imagination and turns it holy. But when one hasn't yet purified his intellect, his imagination will not either be holy, and it will fantasize about things which aren't connected to reality.

The more one purifies the imagination, although his dreams will still contain meaningless things due to the lower parts of the imagination which will always be unfixed, the higher parts of his imagination which are pure will be able to break past the limitations of the intellect and receive Heavenly revelation and understanding. This can only happen through a strongly developed intellect, which can see reality as it is. This is the depth of dreams.

Thus, in a dream, there is a combination of three factors: evil imagination, intellect, and purified imagination. When one hasn't yet merited it, he is only dominated by the lower parts of the imagination, which are unfixed, and he doesn't have a strongly developed intellect to aid him. His dreams will mainly be dominated by an unfixed kind of imagination. This is the level that most people experience, regarding the dreams that they consciously experience. These dreams have no substantial bearing on reality, because they are coming from unfixed imagination which is not connected with reality.

Imagination\Greek Exile vs. Intellect\Torah

The Sages compare the Greek exile to "darkness", because they "darkened" the eyes of the Jewish people. The simple understanding of this is that they "darkened" our power of intellect, our power of thought, by battling the holy power of intellect of the Jewish people.

Even more so, the Greek "darkness", which is simply understood as a war of secular wisdom versus the holy wisdom of the Torah, can also be understood as a war between the view of the imagination against the view of the holy Torah.

Let us explain what we mean.

Our Current Exile – A State of Imagination

Simply speaking, a person has a time where he is asleep and a time where he is awake. But going deeper, the initial state of man was sleep. Adam was put to sleep, so that Chavah could be created from his body, and a great slumber descended upon him. The Torah does not say that Hashem woke up Adam from this slumber. The state of slumber remained upon Adam. If he would have gone straight into Shabbos, he would have awoken from this state of slumber. But with the sin with the *Eitz HaDaas*, he remained with this state of slumber, which was the imagination.

The *Eitz HaDaas*, according to the *Sforno* and the *Vilna Gaon*, is identified as a tree that produced *medameh*\imagination. As soon as Adam and Chavah ate from the *Eitz HaDaas*, they remained with their imagination.

Within imagination itself, there is a state of being awake and a state of sleep. Compare this to the

difference between a person having a dream that he is having a dream, and a person having a dream that he is awake. They are both dreaming and within their imagination, but the person dreaming he is awake is “awake” within his imagination, while the person dreaming that he is sleeping is “sleeping” within his imagination. But they are both found within their imagination. That is the level we are found in, on this world.

Of the future, we will say, “Then, we were like dreamers.”^[1] In the imminent redemption, may it come speedily, we will see that our current era of 6,000 years is like one big dream. We will return to our root, through teshuvah, and then we will see that we were living in a dream all along.

Whether we dream of being “awake” or “asleep”, either way, we are in a dream. That is the depth of exile, and especially the Greek exile, which is compared to darkness. We are in exile within exile within an exile. Exile means that our entire experience and perception is through a state of being “asleep”, through a dreamlike state.

We can see that babies sleep a lot, and children also sleep more. As we get older, we need less sleep, and we are able to be more awake. The depth of this is because our beginning state is mainly sleep. A baby sleeps for most hours of the day, because our very perspective which we view the world with, when we come into the world, is through sleep\imagination. Even when we get older and we mature, it is like being “awake” in a dream – it is still a dream, and it is not as dreamy as being “asleep” in a dream.

Imagination Only Understands The Spiritual Realm Through “Moshol” (Parables)

Going further with this, if there is anything we cannot perceive, because it is on a higher level than our understanding, we are “asleep” towards it. We can “imagine” it – but we cannot actually grasp it and understand it. This is the imagination – when one cannot understand something, the imagination will get to work and imagine it through an example of something on this world.

This is the concept of *moshol* (parable) and *nimshal* (lesson). The *moshol* is within my understanding, while the *nimshal* is above my understanding. When one cannot understand the *nimshal*, he uses a *moshol* to understand it, which is a use of the imagination. His understanding of the *nimshal* will be through the imagination. That is the depth of exile.

Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all people, wrote *Mishlei*, which reveals the wisdom of the Torah, by means of *moshol*, parables. The Greek exile counters the wisdom of the Torah, and as is well-known, the Greek exile is called “wisdom of the body” (*chochmas haguf*). What is the depth of this?

Let us examine how people connect to the spiritual. How do people connect to the spiritual, when they have never seen it and they cannot sense it physically? By means of a *moshol* (parable), which speaks to the body. That is Greek wisdom. It is a wisdom which uses the means of *moshol*, parables, which is a use of the imagination.

The Torah also speaks to the language of people, and the Torah also uses *moshol*. If there would be no exile, a person would hear the *moshol* and immediately understand the *nimshal*. But in exile, we keep hearing the *moshol*, and we do not absorb the *nimshal*. Even worse, there are many people who love to hear a *moshol* but without understanding the *nimshal* – they would rather remain with the *moshol*. That is the Greek exile! The redemption will be that people will understand the *nimshal* of every *moshol*.

In the exile we are in, we have a perspective in which we see only the *moshol* in things. If we remain

only with the *moshol*, that is an even more total state exile. Many times people remember the *moshol* and they don't remember the *nimshal*. When people live only in the *moshol*, this is "exile".

An even subtler form of exile is when a person absorbs the *nimshal*, but he only perceives it on a level of *moshol*. That is the "exile of the imagination".

When we begin to understand something, we need a *moshol*, in order to understand. But when we try to live by the *moshol*, we need to understand reality not through *moshol*, but from seeing reality as it is. That is how we can leave behind the "exile of the imagination", and this is an *avodah* for all of one's life. One must first understand things through *moshol*, absorbing the *nimshal* through the *moshol*, and then he must purify himself further, so that he can see reality as it is and he doesn't need *moshol* to understand things. He can live by the *nimshal* even without using the *moshol*.

The Greek exile, which was the "wisdom of the body", is essentially a state of being exiled by the "body". It is when one can only understand inner and spiritual matters by way of *moshol*, which speaks to the body. When a person cannot identify directly with spirituality, and he needs parables from this world in order to identify with the spiritual, this is the meaning of Greek exile! If a person merely goes through this stage as part of his spiritual development, this is indeed the ideal way to go from immaturity to maturity; but if a person remains at that level, it is the depths of the exile.

The Ramban says that whatever the Greeks could not comprehend, they denied. This was said of Aristotle, the greatest Greek philosopher. This meant that their imagination could not comprehend spiritual or Heavenly matters. Whatever they understood, they understood, and whatever they didn't understand, they could not relate to, so they denied it.

This is the depth of all of the exiles, in general - and the Greek exile especially.

Relating To The Spiritual As A Tangible Reality

The way to come out of the perspective of Greek exile, then, is that we need to see the spiritual world as no less real and tangible than the physical world in front of us.

Even if a person learns Torah and does *mitzvos* and makes sure to do the will of Hashem, he may still be in one big state of "slumber", because he doesn't know what the "real" world is. Surely Hashem will reward every person for all of his actions in any case, but the person will still remain in a perspective of exile, until he changes his perception. The Redemption will essentially be a change of perspective. It will be a realization that there is a reality which we never knew existed.

Imagined Recognition of the Creator

With most people, recognition about the spiritual world, and recognition of the Creator (the root of everything) is only being experienced through the imagination.

How does a person recognize the Creator? With one person, it is because his father and grandfathers told him. Another person has recognition of the Creator because he is an intellectual, and knows that it's logical that there has to be a Creator, because the Creation itself testifies to a Creator. That is a true reflection to make. But one can recognize the Creator through simply sensing the reality. One can simply sense reality when he realizes that just as he can sense the physical reality, so can he sense the reality of the Creator.

Our own existence is entirely a power of imagination which can recognize the Creator. That is why man is called *adam*, from the word *medameh* (imagination). The existence of the Creator is the only absolute Reality that exists. There is no reality other than Him. Our own existence is only a form of

imagination, and our entire existence serves to recognize the reality of the Creator. But if we view ourselves as our own reality and we try to recognize the Creator within it, this is an imagined perception, and it will not be a true recognition of the Creator.

If only most people would even be on this level, to recognize the Creator from within their own existence. We are not speaking here of those who are in the category of "*tinok shenishbah*" (lit. "captive children"; i.e. Jews who are born and raised irreligious), and the like. Rather, even most believing Jews, who know about the Creator because that's how they were raised and educated to believe, do not have a kind of *emunah* (faith) that is alive and palpable. It is just knowledge to them, in the same way that a person knows (*l'havdil*) that there's a country called Australia and Africa.

And if a person believes in the Creator because he has arrived at this understanding intellectually, because he sees that the Creation testifies that there is a Creator, this can just be *emunah* on an intellectual level, and not necessarily a reality that a person is in touch with.

Only through palpable *emunah* does a person have true "recognition" of the Creator. What is the way to reach it? Even with those who are exerting themselves to attain recognition of the Creator, this is an issue. Again, we are not speaking here of those who simply live their lives superficially and who are simply taking life as it comes. We are speaking about the few people in the world, the "few in the hands of the majority", who have devoted their lives to recognizing the reality of the Creator. How can even these few reach it?

Recognition of the Creator can be reached through receiving our *mesorah* (tradition), and through *hisbonenus* (reflection), and from all other ways which our Sages revealed to us. Most people have reached it on an "intellectual" level alone. They see that if there is a functioning world, there must be a Creator behind it. But this is actually a perception of imagination – why? Because the person looks at this world, the lower dimension, and deduces that there must be a higher world. This is imagination, because imagination seeks to understand the higher world through the means of this lower world. If one uses this only as a stage in his spiritual growth, that is wonderful, but if he remains at this level, he is still in "exile".

In the redemption, it will be revealed that one's recognition of the Creator is not through intellectual perception or through imagination, but by recognizing the reality of the Creator because He exists, because He is the only reality! The Creator *is* reality! This is what the Chovos *HaLevovos* describes. True, complete recognition of the Creator *is* the redemption.

The True Meaning of Exile and Redemption

What is the exile, and what is the redemption?

The main aspect of exile is not that most Jews are found outside of Eretz Yisrael. The Greek exile took place even in Eretz Yisrael, so there is something deeper about exile that isn't dependent on being in Eretz Yisrael or not. The main aspect of exile is not either our subservience to the nations of the world, and the great suffering that our people have gone through. It is not even defined by the troubles which pursue us each day, or from the Anti-Semitism towards our people, from the nations of the world and from the "*Erev Rav*".

Rather, the main aspect of our exile is the absence of true, clear, and absolute recognition of the Creator. The exile obscures us from clearly sensing the reality of the Creator, and the redemption will reveal His Presence clearly to us.

In the redemption, when we will become clear of Hashem's Presence, that itself will bring all *shefa* (Heavenly sustenance and blessing) to the world completely, and all of the suffering and troubles will

then vanish. Awaiting the redemption is thus not about awaiting anything else that will come to the world other than the absolute recognition of the Creator which will be revealed to the world. That is the redemption we are waiting for.

As long as we are in exile, whether in the collective exile or whether we are in a personal exile (the Ramchal and others say that one can leave his own personal exile even during his lifetime), we have a perspective of imagination, which can only understand the spiritual in terms of *moshol*, parables. Even more so, it means that we are only having a sense of recognition of the Creator by way of *moshol* - the imagination.

Leaving the Greek Exile - Through Recognizing Reality As It Is

But the more a person elevates his spiritual level, the more his imagination becomes purified, and his sense of recognition becomes purified with this as well. At the time of the complete redemption which will come to the Jewish people, which can be experienced in one's soul when he has is "personal" redemption - one will begin to recognize the reality of the Creator in the sense that this is reality itself! It means to recognize the reality as it is!

We have no comprehension in the Creator, of course. All we can do is recognize His existence, which is to recognize the reality as it is: Hashem exists! To recognize that *He exists*, is the level of complete *emunah*. Thus, the main part of exile is the absence of the light of *emunah*, and redemption is mainly about the light of *emunah*.

When this becomes a person's main perception, his entire life changes, and this is the personal redemption of one's soul.

When one can only get a sense for the spiritual and for the Creator through hearing *mesalim*\parables, he is trying to understand a higher realm by the means of this lower realm, and this is the use of the imagination, which seeks to understand the higher realms through the lower realms. With this level of perception, one will sometimes forget about His reality, and sometimes remember it. But when one has recognition of the Creator because he is aware that is the reality as it is, he never forgets it. This is the meaning of "*I place Hashem opposite me, always.*"

It does not mean that one always "reminds" himself of the Creator. When you "remind" yourself of the Creator, you are using a feeble ability, which may not last. If one keeps reminding himself of the Creator and he persists with it, perhaps he will receive it as a permanent level as a gift from Heaven (which is the simple meaning of the words of the *Mesillas Yescharim*, that all holiness is first with work, and eventually a gift).

In Summary And In Conclusion

True recognition of the Creator does not come through "reminding" yourself of the Creator, or any other means, which may be helpful, or which may do the opposite. It is simply a recognition of reality as it is. Then all of the "darkness" of the Greek exile will not feel "dark" at all, and in this level, the Greeks cannot have any effect at all.

Redemption from the Greek exile is to recognize reality as it is, which is always revealed, all the time. When we leave the collective exile and merit the collective redemption, and when we merit specifically to leave our personal exile and merit personal redemption, to leave the "darkness" of the Greek exile during these days [of Chanukah], it is an actual recognition of the reality of the Creator, without the use of any imagination.

The more one penetrates into this place of the soul and he is seeing reality as it is, he receives this

level of recognition on a permanent level, as a gift from Hashem, where he can recognize the true recognition that there is a Creator who made this world, and even more so, to recognize His very reality, with nothing else besides Him.

[\[1\]](#) Tehillim 126:1

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