

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Dreams, False Prophets, and Red Flags



In Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), he speaks about the significance of dreams and develops a psychological technique for their analysis and interpretation.

I never gave dreams much thought until my grandmother told me her dream about an attic fire and how it came to pass. At the time, I was skeptical. However, I changed my mind when my father suffered a massive and unexpected heart attack one month after I dreamt about it.

As unusual as these occurrences may be, Judaism provides important insights concerning the phenomenon of dreams. Before Freud, Jewish sages discussed the role of dreams. Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) taught that meaningful dreams emanate from a very high spiritual level. Furthermore, the ancient kabbalistic work known as the *Zohar* (1:149b) says certain dreams are “six levels below the level of prophecy.”

The Torah records numerous spiritual dreams: some of the most familiar ones dominate this week's Torah portion, *Vayeshev* (Genesis 37:1-40:23). First, Joseph's dreams foretell that he would rule over his family. Later, the dreams of Pharaoh's wine butler and baker pave the way for Joseph's miraculous rise from imprisonment to leadership.

On the other hand, Rabbi Eliezer Papo (1785–1828) wrote that although dreams may be divinely inspired, most dreams are simply thoughts that are recycled from what occupies our minds during the day. Since some dreams are meaningful and others are fantasies, it is not surprising that the Torah cautions us about the inherent risk of dream interpretation. In this striking passage, the Torah warns against following false prophets and dreamers who provide signs or wonders:

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“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises and gives you a sign or wonder that comes true, concerning which he said to you, ‘Let us go after other gods whom you have not known and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for God is testing you to find out if you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death” (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

These verses not only warn us about the misuse of dreams, but they also warn us against relying on signs and wonders as proof that someone's message is true. Another explanation for the “miraculous sign” is that God allows it in order to test our faithfulness to the Torah.

This unequivocal warning concerning false prophets and the signs they may provide calls into question the veracity of a story in the New Testament.

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In Chapter 9 of the book of John, the author claims that certain Rabbis were told that Jesus had performed a “miracle.” Having previously witnessed Jesus sin, they say, “*This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath*” (John 9:16). When others wonder, “*How could a sinner perform such signs?*” the rabbis provide no alternative explanation.

The New Testament’s account of this story raises a serious and obvious question. Why didn’t the rabbis provide the most obvious response and say that according to Deuteronomy 13, Jesus could be a false prophet whose “signs” are a test?

The absence of this response raises several possible explanations. First, the story was edited by the church, and the Deuteronomy 13 response was deleted. Second, the story is a fabrication and never happened. Lastly, the story was intentionally recorded this way to serve as a red flag to warn Jews that the New Testament is not infallible and is not inspired by God.

To appreciate the red flag theory, it is essential to point out that historically, the church censored rabbinic writings that were unfavorable toward Jesus. In 1979, I met Rabbi Yehudah Blau, who was allowed access to the Vatican’s private archives to review some uncensored manuscripts. Among these documents, Rabbi Blau discovered a statement that Paul intentionally altered certain texts and doctrines to separate Christianity from Judaism to make it less appealing to Jews.

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Although controversial, this claim would explain Paul’s rejection of the most sacred ritual of circumcision and his introduction of the pagan belief that Jesus was God in a body. Although appealing to gentiles, these radical innovations would be abhorrent to Jews. To knowledgeable Jews, the abrogation of the commandments, mistranslation of bible passages, and the rabbis’ reaction to the miracle story would stand out as red flags.

Despite these red flags, missionaries insist that miracles prove that Jesus was the messiah. However, although dreams and miracles play an important role in Judaism; they are not definitive proof that something is true or that someone is the messiah. The Talmud recounts stories of many righteous rabbis who performed miracles. However, this did not make any of them the messiah.

The ultimate proof of an individual’s qualification for messianic leadership is his faithfulness to God and the Torah and his ultimate fulfillment of all the messianic requirements. These requirements are authoritatively and comprehensively recorded in Ezekiel 37:24-28. In summary, “*The messiah must be Jewish, from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of King David, bring peace to the world, gather the Jews to Israel, rebuild the Temple, and bring the entire world to a belief in one God.*”

Ezekiel Chapter 37 would have been a perfect place to include claims that the messiah must perform miracles, be born in Bethlehem to a virgin, rise from the dead, and die for our sins. The absence of these Christian claims reinforces that they are not biblical proofs or requirements.

May we soon merit to see the arrival of the true messianic redeemer when “*nations shall beat their sword into plowshares, and neither shall they make war anymore*” (Isaiah 2:4).

Shabbat Shalom,

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