



A lesson from
Aleph Learning Institute

Priestly Blessing: When you Dream a Dream

Lesson 6//Series 4

The Power of Imagination and Thought

Possible impact of Anti-Semitism beginning with the self

Since the publication of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1899, people have come to realize that to every dream there is a deeper meaning. Even if they are not prophecy, dreams are our mind and subconscious at work. They offer an unobstructed glimpse into a person's soul.

Prayer Book: Liturgy for the **Priestly Blessing**: Master of the World, I am yours and my dreams are yours. I have dreamed a dream, and I do not know what it was. May it be Your will, O Lord my G-d, and the G-d of my ancestors, that all of my dreams concerning myself and concerning the Jewish people be for good... But if they require healing: heal them...and in the manner that you altered the wicked Balaam's curse, from a curse to a blessing.

The Talmud Tractate Berachot, 95a; A dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy. So if according to Jewish tradition, dreams are G-d's ways of delivering a message to us, why are dreams the ideal forum for heavenly communication?

The answer to that lies precisely in the unconscious nature of dreams. It is evident that the less engaged our physical senses are, the more "switched on" are the emotional and intellectual ones. It is for this reason that the patriarchs and leaders and sages throughout our history blessed their children and students just before they passed away to impart their final words of wisdom. Sleep is considered one-sixtieth of death, and as such, it is a time when the material forces are weakened and most appropriate for prophetic dreams.

While it is clear that dreams were taken very seriously in early times, the same is not true today. Times have changed and we have changed. Back in the day, humankind was more spiritually sensitive and graceful enough to use dreamtime as an interface with the spiritual world. Today, we are too morally cumbersome and steeped in the mundane to receive meaningful dreams. Along the way, coarseness has set in and dreams lost their meaning. There are however neurological theories to dreams that they are simply what we think about consciously or subconsciously as opposed to prophetically. Talmud states: A Person is only shown the thoughts of his heart.

In the Torah Portion of Balak, king of Moab, hires Bilaam to curse the Jewish people. The danger was not so much in what Bilaam said, but in what he was thinking. Indeed, he only expressed words of blessing-

as recorded in Torah-but in his heart, he remained a twisted and bitter man. In his heart, he continued to hate the Jews. There in his mind and heart his thought ran thick with curses for the Jewish people. And these thoughts had the potential to kill, had G-d not remained merciful. Even without actually verbalizing Bilaam's thoughts, there was enough toxic power to potentially wreak havoc on the Jewish people. This is an idea of enormous impact. Our thoughts are not merely the flotsam of our brain's waves which are useless, but they are powerful and impactful tools.

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Thank you!

True, they are likely not prophecy. But because they are the product of our thoughts, no matter how unconscious, they hold terrifying power. By mere virtue that they existed in our minds, they are able to become reality. **Therefore we offer up a special prayer during the Priestly Blessing asking Almighty G-d that we not fall victim to the effects of our harmful thoughts and the realization of bad dreams.**

In the Bible when Jacob journeyed to Haran, he was forced to spend the night in the untamed wild. He placed stones around his head. What about the rest of his body? The Rebbe explains that this teaches us the danger of “negative thinking”. As recognized by psychiatrists, we must no longer pretend that our thoughts exist in isolation and do not effect a concrete change within us. We must be vigilant over our thoughts; directed at ourselves or others, as they have a real effect. A thought is like a physical action in that it marks a progression from the unrealized to the realized.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, Likutei Diburim, vol 1, p. 1: Thought matters. Not only is it the first and closest vehicle of the soul; it has real bearing in actual life and impacts action. Thinking about someone else with positive engaged thought is already an “action.” It must then progress into speech and real action. His successor, Rabbi M.M. Schneerson, explains in Hayom Yom daily diary 14 Shevat: In addition to arousing Divine compassion upon those who had a deep soul-connection with them, our forebears, the holy Rebbeim, observed another sublime practice. From time to time, while alone, they would bring to mind those individuals and meditate upon the love and connection [they felt for The Rebbe] and as “water reflects a face”, The Rebbe would shine these feelings back. When we look powerfully at someone, he/she must respond by looking back, because a penetrating glance arouses the essence of the soul. The same is true of the power of thought. The Tzemach Tzedek once declared, “Think good and it will be good!” In this vein, very positive thinking will itself bring positive results.

Maimonides had a similar understanding of the critical nature of every one of our thoughts. He famously declared that each of us must view the moral state of the world as hanging in precarious balance; knowing the score we must realize that our smallest thoughts, words and actions could have a cataclysmic effect. Even one thought has the capacity to tip the scales.

There are generally two perspectives one can have. The first is the path of Bilaam who had the trait of finding fault in every circumstance and person. Anticipating negativity, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. And then there is the G-dly one. “He sees no iniquity in Jacob,” for he focuses on the positive. This perspective also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, allowing negativity to be channeled and transformed to goodness and beauty. **What kind of prophet will you choose to be?**

This class is based on JLI Torah Studies taught at Aleph Learning Institute of Baltimore