

SEFER DANIEL
By Rav Yaakov Medan

Shiur #03:
Chapter 3 – The First Dream and Its Interpretation

1. Forgetting of the Dream

In the second year of the reign of Nevukhadnetzar, Nevukhadnetzar dreamed dreams, such that his spirit was caused to be troubled and his sleep was withheld from him. And the king commanded to call for the magicians, the conjurers and the sorcerers, and for the Chaldeans, to explain to the king his dreams; so they came and stood before the king. And the king said to them, "I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know (*la-da'at*) the dream." (2:1-3)

In his commentary on verse 1, Rashi explains (on the basis of *Bereishit Rabba* 89:5) the difference between what the Torah says of Pharaoh – "his spirit was troubled" (*va-tipa'em rucho*) (*Bereishit* 41:8) – and the narrative here: "his spirit was caused to be troubled" (*va-titpa'em rucho*). The *midrash* teaches that Pharaoh was troubled by having forgotten the interpretation to his dream, while Nevukhadnetzar was doubly troubled, for having forgotten the dream itself as well as its interpretation. This understanding is based on the verses that follow, in which Nevukhadnetzar demands that his magicians tell him the content of his dream.^[1]

Let us attempt to understand this linguistic distinction. The difference between one "*tav*" and two (*va-tipa'em* vs. *va-titpa'em*) seems a slight one, perhaps unable to support such a far-reaching insight into the difference between the dreams of the two leaders. Perhaps, then, there is another difference between Pharaoh's "*va-tipa'em*" and Nevukhadnetzar's "*va-titpa'em*." In the verse in *Bereishit*, the word appears in the "*nif'al*" (simple, passive) case. In our chapter, the verb is in the "*hitpa'el*" ("heavy," reflexive) case, indicating a strong action.^[2] Nevukhadnetzar's experience of having his spirit "caused to be troubled" is stronger, as the catastrophe he foresees in his dream is greater than that envisioned by Pharaoh. His dream means complete destruction, and the shock that passes through him is therefore more profound. It comes as no surprise that modern research on dreams indicates that in such a case, there is a tendency to forget the dream and to suppress it in the subconscious.

2. Dream vs. Prophecy

What is the nature of a prophetic dream, so central to our *Sefer* – both in the dreams of Nevukhadnetzar, which are interpreted by Daniel, and in the dreams of Daniel himself? Was Daniel a prophet?

The strongest proponent of the view that Daniel was indeed a prophet is Abarbanel, in his *Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'a*.^[3] Abarbanel argues that Daniel's accuracy in foretelling the details of events to come is greater and more impressive than that of any other prophet, and there therefore can be no doubt that he is a prophet. (We will address this argument at length in the future.) According to Abarbanel, *Sefer Daniel* is included among the "*Ketuvim*," rather than the Books of the Prophets, because it was written on the level of "Divine inspiration" (*ruach ha-kodesh*), not prophecy, even though Daniel was a prophet – just like *Megillat Eikha*, which was written by the prophet Yirmiyahu. (The Book of *Iyov* may fall into the same category, if we accept the view that it was written by Moshe Rabbeinu.)^[4]

However, from the Talmud it appears that Daniel was not a prophet, and it is for this reason that his words are recorded in the *Ketuvim*, rather than in the Books of the Prophets:

"And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves" – Who were these men? R. Yirmiyahu said, or some say R. Chiya bar Abbas said: They were Chaggai, Zekharia, and Malakhi. They have a higher rank than he does, and he has a higher rank than they do. They have a higher rank than he – for they are prophets, while he is not a prophet... (*Megilla* 3a)

Rashi and Rashba reach the same conclusion.^[5] In their view – which we will adopt here – Daniel was not a prophet, and his visions should not be regarded as prophecies. Had he been a prophet, *Sefer Daniel* would have been included among the Books of the Prophets, rather than among the *Ketuvim*, which were written with Divine inspiration, not with prophecy. What, then, is this intermediate level, which is somewhere between prophecy and this-worldly thought?

The nature of dreams is a subject which has always fascinated people. Is the source of the dream internal, within the human psyche, as Freud taught? In the words of *Chazal*, "What a person is shown [in a dream] is nothing but the thoughts of his own heart" (*Berakhot* 55b). Or is the source external, such that the dream is a covert channel of communication between God and the angels and the human psyche? As a different teaching of *Chazal* puts it, "A dream is one sixtieth of prophecy" (*Ibid.* 57b)?

The first approach is better known in the modern world; we will therefore elaborate further on the second approach, which maintains that a dream originates somewhere outside of a person.

R. Kook discusses various aspects of dreams in his *Orot Ha-Kodesh* (part I, "The Higher Imagination"), and explains that God is revealed to a person through the higher layers of his psyche. Those layers are not manifest in a person's usual waking state, when he is engaged in the world;^[6] therefore, a person cannot hear God's word while he is awake.^[7] According to the *gemara* cited above, sleep is one sixtieth of death^[8] – it has a dimension that severs the soul from the body and from the world. When the spirit is

liberated from the chains of the body, it is freer to receive God's word. A prophet who is capable of it therefore receives prophecy in his sleep. An ordinary person has dreams originating in different sources, but he, too, is able to receive a "sixtieth" of God's word. It will always be mixed up with other things, and therefore cannot be regarded as real prophecy, but a dream also contains an element of true perception.

A vivid description of a dream as a phenomenon containing prophetic perception is presented by Elifaz, the eldest and most senior among the companions of Iyov:

"A word came stealthily to me, and my ear received a whisper of it. In thoughts from night visions, when deep sleep falls upon men, fear came upon me, and trembling, causing my bones to shake. And a spirit passed over my face and caused the hair of my flesh to stand on end. It stood still but I could not discern its appearance; its image was before my eyes; there was silence and I heard a voice." (*Iyov* 4:12-15)

Although Elifaz is listed in a *beraita* as one of the seven prophets who arose among the nations of the world,^[9] it is possible that this is a reference to a lesser level of prophecy. Indeed, the prophecy of Elifaz and his companions listed in the *beraita* is recorded in *Sefer Iyov*, in the *Ketuvim*, and not in the Books of the Prophets, suggesting that Elifaz's dream was not fully prophecy. The content of what he says also suggests that he heard "from behind the veil:" he heard only a whisper that came stealthily to his ear, like someone who overhears something from his hiding place behind a door. Hearing and understanding the message were difficult for him, not only because of the partition between him and the speaker, but also because of his psychological state at the time of hearing, overcome as he was by fear and trembling. Elifaz appears to acknowledge that he may possibly have misunderstood the vision and the voice which he heard, owing to this psychological barrier, and he tries to interpret the meaning of the voice based on his own logic. This is the source of much of the disagreement between him and *Iyov*.

What we have, then, is a combination of reception of a message from the upper worlds and the inner workings of human psychology, and the person is left to interpret what he has received. This level contains something of Divine inspiration, but it is not prophecy. In the case of prophecy, the message is clear, with no possibility of mistake or misunderstanding. The Rambam expands on this in *Guide of the Perplexed* (III: 24) in speaking about the prophecy in which God commands Avraham to offer up his son as a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. He argues that had Avraham not been absolutely certain that this was what God was commanding him, he would not have gone off to slaughter his son. The Rambam goes on to present the *akeida* as a prototype for all prophecies in terms of the prophet's certainty of God's word. The obscure and opaque vision that Elifaz saw (or heard) does not seem to fit this picture. It belongs to the level of *Ketuvim*, not the Prophets.

Yirmiyahu describes a situation of undesirable intermingling of these levels:

I have heard what the prophets have said – those who prophesize falsely in My Name – saying, “I have dreamed, I have dreamed.” How long shall this continue? Is it in the heart of the prophets that prophesize lies, and the prophets of the deceit of their own hearts, who presume to cause My people to forget My Name by their dreams which they tell each to his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My Name for Ba'al? The prophet who has a dream – let him tell his dream, but one who has My word – let him speak My word faithfully. What has straw to do with wheat, says the Lord. Is My word not like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that shatters the rock? (*Yirmiyahu* 23:25-32)

In short, dreams and prophecy are two different levels. A dream includes "straw" or "chaff" – inner thoughts, subjective interpretations of the dream, and so on – even if God's word is mingled in it. It is like a sixtieth of prophecy. Prophecy, on the other hand, is solely God's word (although delivered in a style unique to the individual prophet involved), with no mixture of human thoughts. It calls out mightily from within the prophet, even against his will:

Then it is in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I weary myself to contain it, but I cannot. (*Yirmiyahu* 20:9)

This explains the strange prophecy of Zekharia, who was active during the Second Temple Period, when the power of prophecy was already weakening and on its way to disappearing from Israel:

Then the angel who spoke with me returned, and woke me, like a man woken from his sleep. And he said to me, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see, and behold, a menorah all of gold, with a bowl on top of it, and its seven lights upon it, and seven pipes to the seven lamps which are upon it. And there are two olive trees by it, one to the right side of the bowl and the other to the left.” (*Zekharia* 4:1-3)

The historical background to this prophecy are the doubts plaguing those who engaged in building the Second Temple, from the second year of Darius onwards. They had started their construction without official permission, and the local authorities appointed by the Persian ruler noted the names of the heads of the builders as a threat, to stop them from continuing.^[10] The construction had already been aborted once in the past, in the days of Cyrus or Achashverosh. The prophet Zekharia, called upon to address this situation, sees a prophetic vision of the menorah, like the menorah in the Temple. Clearly, the vision is meant to convey that the construction will succeed and the Temple will be inaugurated. But Zekharia does not understand this:

And I answered and said to the angel who spoke with me, saying, “What are these, my lord?” And the angel who spoke with me answered and said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” and I said, “No, my lord.” (*Ibid.* 4:4-5)

It is surely impossible to suggest that Zekharia was unable to understand a message that to us seems self-evident. We must therefore conclude that he understood it just as we do – intellectually, but without prophetic understanding. Therefore, he needed the angel to interpret the vision for him, to interpret it prophetically. Had he involved his "political" thinking, based on his own logic, in the prophetic vision of the menorah, and still spoken as a prophet, then he would have been no better than the false prophets against whom Yirmiyahu spoke out so strongly.

So much for prophecy. In a dream, in contrast, even if it comes with Divine inspiration, God's word is mingled with the interpretation of the human subject, who exerts genuine efforts to understand God's word.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1] This follows the opinion of R. Yehuda in *Bereishit Rabba* 89. Abarbanel (*ma'ayan* 6, *tamar* 1) adopts the approach of R. Nechemia in the *midrash*, maintaining that Nevukhadnetzar had not forgotten his dream, but merely wanted to test his ministers. I see no need to understand the verse in this way, contrary to its simple meaning.

[2] The group of "heavy" cases is so called because of the *dagesh* (emphasis) on the middle letter of the verb root, effectively doubling it. All the cases included in this group indicate strong action.

[3] *Ma'ayan* 3, *tamar* 1, and the rest of the *ma'ayan*.

[4] Abarbanel himself brings no support for his view. A comment of R. Sa'adia Gaon in his introduction to *Emunot Ve-De'ot* seems to support Abarbanel, although it is mentioned only incidentally: "I am no cleverer than all my contemporaries, but in accordance with my ability and the extent of my intelligence, as **the prophet** said: 'As for me – it is not for wisdom in me more than any living being that this secret is revealed...' (*Daniel* 2:30)." He writes further, in his 8th *ma'amar*: "God showed His prophet, Daniel, three angels." However, it is difficult to draw the same definite conclusion from Rav Sa'adia Gaon that we find in Abarbanel's unequivocal words; it may be that he does not necessarily have in mind the same level of prophecy that we associate with the prophets.

This possibility is strengthened by an apparent contradiction in the words of the Rambam. He writes in the *Mishneh Torah*: "The prophets are on many different levels... but all of them, when prophesizing, have tremors in their limbs and their bodies are weakened... as we find in the case of Avraham: 'And behold, a great dark terror fell upon him,' and as we find in the case of Daniel: 'My comely appearance changed horribly, and I had no strength left' (10:9)" (*Laws of the Foundations of the Torah* 7:2). But in his *Guide of the Perplexed*, the Rambam writes: "And this is what is called 'a prophetic vision,' also known as 'the hand of God,' also called 'a vision' – something terrible and fearful which the prophet feels while awake, as is distinctly stated by Daniel: 'And I saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me, for my comely appearance changed horribly, and I had no strength left' (10:9), and he continues, 'I was in deep sleep on my face, with my face towards the ground,' such that the angel speaking to him and setting him [upon his knees], etc. – all of that takes place in the prophetic vision" (*Guide of the Perplexed* II:41). From these sources, it seems that Daniel was a prophet according to the Rambam as well. The same impression arises from his language in his *Laws of Kings* 11: 4 (in the non-censored version; see, for example, the S. Frankel edition, Jerusalem-Bnei Brak, 5759).

However, from what the Rambam says later in his *Guide* (II: 45), we see that in his view Daniel's level was not like that of the prophets, but rather the lower level of "Divine inspiration" (*ruach ha-kodesh*): "... Such a person is said to speak with Divine inspiration, and it was with this sort of Divine inspiration that David composed *Tehillim*, and Shelomo composed *Mishlei* and *Kohelet* and *Shir Ha-Shirim*, and likewise *Daniel*, and *Iyov*, and *Divrei Ha-Yamim*... And it is necessary to point out that David, Shelomo, and Daniel belonged to this class, and not to the class of Yishayahu, Yirmiyahu, Natan the prophet, Achiya the Shiloni, and others like them. For David, Shelomo, and Daniel spoke, and they recorded what

they recorded, through Divine inspiration..." From here it would seem that when the Rambam previously referred to Daniel as a prophet, he did not necessarily intend the level of prophecy. The same inference could be made about R. Sa'adia Gaon, as well, in which case Abarbanel is left almost alone in his view.

However, Ibn Ezra (10:5,7) seems to say something somewhat similar (as well as in his commentary on *Kohelet* 5:1), although we cannot draw unequivocal proof from his words there that he believes that Daniel was a prophet.

[5] Rashi *Megilla* 14a; *Teshuvot ha-Rashba*, part 1, *siman* 548. The Chatam Sofer also concurs in *Even ha-Ezer*, part 2, *siman* 40, and especially in *Kovetz Teshuvot*, *siman* 64. The same impression arises from the language of *Sefer Ha-Ikarim*, *ma'amar* 3, *chapter* 22.

The Christians always regarded Daniel as a prophet (hence, unfortunately, the road named after Daniel in the Morasha neighborhood of Jerusalem). They attached great value to his words, since among the intimations concerning the Redemption they "found" a sign of the appearance of Yeshu, their messiah. The fact that the Muslim tradition also refers to Daniel as a prophet is likewise no proof, since all the biblical personalities are referred to them as "nabi."

Abarbanel, cited above, reconciles the *gemara* here with his own view that Daniel received his visions on the level of prophecy by positing that Daniel was not a prophet in the sense of being sent by God to declare his prophecies to the people and to guide them in God's path because he lived after the Destruction, in exile. However, he was a prophet in terms of the level of his visions. For further attention to the *gemara*, see note 12 in chapter 13 of this series.

[6] This also explains why these layers cannot be measured or perceived using scientific tools. Science has therefore generally ignored or denied their existence.

[7] With the exception of Moshe, concerning whom the Rambam states (*Introduction to Perek Chelek*) that God "would speak to him by day, as he stood between the two *keruvim*."

[8] According to this view, the *Keri'at Shema* recited before retiring is in essence the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven just before one's soul separates from his body – like the *Keri'at Shema* recited by R. Akiva a moment before his death. This is also the reason for the inclusion of the verses, "Bring light to my eyes, lest I sleep [the sleep of] death" (*Tehillim* 13:4) and "I entrust my spirit into Your hand; You have redeemed me, Lord, God of truth" (*Ibid.* 31:6), as part of *Keri'at Shema* at night.

[9] *Bava Batra* 15b. Bila'am is also listed there, although according to Ramban he was a sorcerer who prophesized only for his time.

[10] See *Ezra* 5.