



Ohr Yerushalayim News

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News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Naftali Scherer and his parents, Ari and Elisheva, on the occasion of his Bar Mitzva this Shabbos. The Kehilla is invited to a Kiddush after davening in their home, 13 Hilton Crescent.

Chaim Aruchim

We wish Chaim Aruchim to the following who have Yahrzeit this week:

- Shabbos, 9th Kislev - David Newman for his mother
- Mon, 11th Kislev - Petra Rodrigues-Pereira for her mother
- Mon, 11th Kislev - Debbie Davis for her mother
- Weds, 13th Kislev - Rebbetzin Cohen for her father

Hakomas Matzeivo

The Hakomas Matzeivo of Maurice Bursk, late father of Charles, takes place this Sunday at Failsworth Beis Olam at 2pm.

Weekday Mincha

There is a daily Minyan for Mincha, Sunday-Thursday, at 1.15. We were considering cancelling it however on Thursday there was a sudden surge in popularity after a message was sent around. Please can those who are able, help support this Minyan.

To Dream The Impossible Dream

Dani Epstein

Few of us, if any, might be familiar with the Seocho-gu district of Seoul, South Korea. It has no great claim to international fame other than one infamous event: the collapse of the Sampoong Department Store, which killed 502 people and injured 937. Closer to home, we are sadly more familiar with the Versailles wedding hall disaster in Talpiot, Jerusalem, which claimed 23 lives and injured 380 guests.

What do they have in common? Both buildings were constructed with perfectly sound foundations, but the upper stories were overloaded beyond spec, and unauthorised alterations were made during construction that undermined the structural integrity of the developments that resulted in the overload destroying the buildings. These incidents highlight the absolute necessity of rigid supervision at all stages of construction, but also provide some thought-provoking concepts beyond what they immediately suggest: to ensure any project reaps the success of the efforts expended, care has to be taken at all times that every single component passes muster, not just the foundations.

This became a salutary lesson for the Australian airline Qantas, whose perfect flight record in the jet age (they had some rather horrible incidents with their propeller aircraft in their early years) was almost perfect until 4 November 2010, when Flight 32 running an Airbus A380 suffered an "uncontained failure" (in other words, something went bang) in one of its Rolls Royce Trent 900 engines. A turbine disc had disintegrated, firing shrapnel into the aircraft which damaged the nacelle, wing, fuel system, flight and engine controls.

All it took was one small component to fail. Fortunately, the plane eventually landed safely without any injuries being incurred.

This simply serves to ram home the concept that the failure of even something small can result in far greater consequences than one

could possibly imagine. As this is true for buildings and aircraft, so this is true for יהדות, Judaism.

Our Torah provides us with a very finely tuned engine that has very specific parameters. They are stipulated in two main sources: תנך and the תורה שבעל פה, the remnants thereof which we have in the משניות and תלמוד; these are the only canonical texts. Within both these sources are often rather abstruse messages and alliterations which have to be handled with a great deal of care. They are not something one can fiddle around with at one's leisure.

This ought to encourage us to apply almost excessive caution when delving in areas not directly addressed either by תנך or חז"ל. Yet in my experience this is clearly not the case.

Take for example the many stories we all love to retell and listen to, about various miraculous events. Someone has a dream in which they receive a message "from the other side" as to what a baby in the family should be called, along with a raft of other interesting factoids. It is then scrutinised and the investigator is absolutely convinced that this message is true. The obvious conclusion is that this is the greatest proof of the existence of עולם הבא, and anyone who refuses to believe this story is not a מאמין; ergo they must be an apikorus and deny the reality of Hashem. Surely, you will agree that this is correct. The conclusion - given the evidence - is inescapable.

Yet if someone then poses a simple question, something along the lines of (Zacharia 10:2) וְחִלְמוֹת הַשְּׂוֹא יִדְבְּרוּ - dreams speak falsehood - they are shouted down. If they then point out that practitioners of other religions tell exactly the same kind of stories with the same degree of proof, the discussion rapidly turns ugly.

Let us then sit back comfortably in our armchairs, wrapped in our warm flannel dressing gowns with a snifter of fine single malt close at hand and carpet slippers fully deployed, and examine this entire concept more closely, with level heads and a lot less opprobrium.

First of all, let's have a look at the "evidence". Rare is the individual who is equipped with the skills to ferret out the stories and examine them objectively. I dabble in the investigative arts on the odd

Davening Times

פרשת ויצא

Candle Lighting	No later than 4.01pm
Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	4.06pm
Hashkomo	7.30am
Shacharis	9.30am
סוף זמן ק"ש	9.35am
Mincha	1.30pm / 3.48pm
Motzei Shabbos	5.08pm
Ovos uBonim	6.08pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am
Mon / Thurs / Fri	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha	1.15pm
Mincha & Maariv	4.00pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

occasion, and consequently have a passing familiarity with the methodology involved. None of the stories I have spent any serious time on pass muster. Generally speaking, under a microscope these anecdotes fall apart rather rapidly because they lack any way of verifying many of the purported details. One would have to ensure, for example, that the name that came in the dream has never been mentioned in the presence of the dreamer. Given the paucity of names we employ, this is improbable, in which case a crucial factor in the story loses absolute credibility. Were the name in question something along the lines of "Yehoyokim Avinoam Chever" the story would stand a better chance of being plausible, statistically speaking.

Within logic and debate there is a principle known as "cum hoc ergo propter hoc", or perhaps more familiarly "correlation does not imply causation". Just because someone snapped their fingers, it does not mean that this caused the thunder and rain to appear, even if a deluge ensued immediately after the action. Regression to mean, or sheer coincidence, is a similar property related to causation that has to be applied to any story during the verification process. There is of course a lot more to the methodology, much of which is beyond me due to the paucity of my education and intelligence.

Leaving investigative methodology aside, should such stories play any role in Yahadus? Do we find any canonical sources for this?

At first glance, we can simply point to Yaakov and his epic dream, which is recounted in technicolor detail in the Torah. Surely this, if nothing else, should be the greatest vindication for dream-related stories of miracles? After all, look at what he says when he wakes up.

"אַכֵּן יֵשׁ ה' בְּמִקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי - Surely Hashem is in this place and I did not know it." Yaakov clearly believed his dream was true, and therefore reacted with this remark, which prompted him to react further: "מִה־נֹרָא הַמִּקוֹם הַזֶּה - how awesome is this place!"

"There you have it," I hear my interlocutor say smugly. "What more can you want?" All of this is well and true until we examine how Yaakov reacts later, under the microscope of the Abravanel.

Yaakov says the following after he woke up in the morning: "אִם־יְהִיָּה ה' עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרֵנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבִגְד לְלַבֵּשׁ - If Hashem is with me and guards me on the way, provides me with food and clothing and I return in peace to my father, then Hashem will be my god."

The Ramban argues in contrast to Rashi that this is not a condition with regards to his acceptance of Hashem as his god, but is a promise to serve Hashem in this spot. This does make Rashi's position a little difficult to understand; after all how could Yaakov test Hashem in order to designate Him as his god?

Don Yitzchak comes to our rescue with his scintillating brilliance, which I will expand on a little. The verses mention two waking incidents: once immediately after his dream, after which he went back to sleep since it was still nighttime, and the second one in the morning.

His immediate reaction after the first awakening was one of awe and shock; yet he still went back to sleep after a while. In the morning, once he had contemplated the events of the night, he had quite a different response, which was this: until proven otherwise, a dream is just that: a dream. Who knows if this was a genuine nevuah, or just my mind trying to grapple with the events that unfolded recently? So, let me see what happens next. If everything works out as promised, i.e. I don't go hungry and run out of clothing and I get home happy and safely, then clearly this dream was true. Otherwise, it was just a dream.

Even Yaakov, as great as he was, had a degree of uncertainty that he had experienced a genuine message from Hashem.

Is this a little odd? Hardly. We see this repeated in many other ways.

When Hana prayed for a son, she asked Hashem for "זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים". Asks

the גמרא, what exactly does "זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים" mean? Several answers are offered, one of which is: "רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר: זָרַע שֶׁשְׂקוּל כְּשֵׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים, וּמֵאֵן אֵינֵן — מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: 'מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן בְּכַהֲנֵי וּשְׂמוּאֵל בְּקוֹרְאֵי' - Rabi Yochanan said: a child the equivalent of two people. And who are they? Moshe and Aharon, as the verse says: 'Moshe, and Aharon in his priestliness, and Shmuel who would call out in His Name'". (See the מהרש"א ad loc regarding the punctuation of this verse). Shmuel was so great that in some form or another he was equatable to Moshe and Aharon simultaneously.

Yet when Shmuel first dreamed of Hashem calling to him, he woke up thinking Eli the Kohen Godol was calling him. Eli, who was also a נביא, thought it was merely a dream and told him to go back to bed. It took a few incidents before Eli realised that Shmuel was probably being called by Hashem, so he provided him with a test phrase.

וַיֹּאמֶר עָלֵי לְשִׁמוּאֵל לֵךְ שָׁכַב וְהָיָה אִם יִקְרָא אֵלֶיךָ וְאַמַּרְתָּ דְבַר יְהוָה כִּי שָׁמַע - And Eli said to Shmuel, "Go lie down. If you are called again, say, 'Speak, Hashem, for Your servant is listening.'" That is to say, when you wake up next, say this phrase. If you receive a vision after this, then you can know that Hashem was calling you in your sleep.

Here again we see how a נביא - Eli - was not ready to leap to the conclusion that Shmuel was having prophetic dreams. The premise had to be tested first.

Similarly, when Rabon Gamliel was deposed over his treatment of Rabi Yehoshua (Brochos 27b), the first action taken was to remove the bouncer from the door of the Beis Hamedrash, which promptly filled up to the rafters with new talmidim. Rabon Gamliel was horrified that perhaps he had prevented all these people from studying Torah.

Recounts the גמרא:

"אֲחִזּוּ לֵיהּ בְּחִלְמֵיהּ חֲצָבֵי חִינְרֵי דְמַלְיִין קֻטְמָא - they showed him in a dream white jugs filled with ashes." The implication being that the new additions to the Beis Hamedrash were worthless. Nu, this must have been a true dream?

However the גמרא continues:

"וְלֹא הָיָא, הֵהִיא לִיתּוּבֵי דַעְתֵּיהּ הוּא דְאַחֲזוּ לֵיהּ." - but this was not the case. This was shown to him to ease his mind". That is to say, this was not a prophetic vision confirming his stance on entry criterion, but something shown to him (perhaps that his subconscious produced) in response to his distress to soothe him.

In a similar vein we have the story recounted in Bovo Metzioh (59b) with regards to the battle of Rav Eliezer and the Chachomim, during which various miraculous events transpired including a carob tree uprooting itself, the walls of the Beis Hamedrash collapsing halfway and a stream running backwards. The Shita Mekubetzes ad loc quotes Rabeinu Chananel in response to this story, explaining that the incident did not actually take place, but was a dream that one of the Talmidei Chachomim had, which he recounted thereafter to the chaburah in the Beis Hamedrash.

ומפני מה לא פירש כי דברי חלומות הם מפני שהיו בידם החלומות קרובים לנבואה אבל יסמכו בזה הענין והחלומות שוא ידברו וקיימו אחרי רבים להטות - why did they not explain (in the gemoroh) that this was a dream and not an actual event? Because they accepted such dreams as neo-prophetic visions, but applied the phrase "dreams falsehood speak" to it and upheld the principle of majority rule.

Here we have four sources from canonical texts: one from the Torah, one from "תנ"ך, two from "חז"ל, in which we observe dreams and the response to them.

All of this leads us to conclude that if we base our trust and belief in Hashem on dreams, the very foundation of Yahadus is being undermined; we are tinkering with the machinery in an unauthorised and foolish manner, which will bring the entire edifice to collapse around us. All the proof we might require lies in the Torah, if we but put our minds to investigate it appropriately.