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I Do Speak... Scripture, Exegesis, and Dreams

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Ambivalence

It would be fair to say that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each display conflicted feelings about dreams. On the one hand, dreams are considered legitimate sources of ongoing revelation. Tertullian of Carthage (d. 240 C E), an early Church Father, claimed the majority of humanity learns of God through dreams -- not divinity in general but the One, True God.¹ Rava (d. 330 CE), a Babylonian Talmudic sage, cites the Torah as validating the continuing spiritual efficacy of dreams: *Although the Blessed Holy One proclaimed, "I will surely hide my face on that day" (Deut. 31:18) God also said, "I do speak (to visionaries other than Moses) in a dream (Numbers 12:6-8)"*² A *Hadith* reports that at the time of his death, the prophet Muhammad proclaimed that naught shall remain of Prophecy's good tidings after his passing except for true dreams³. Classical Muslim and Jewish sources both considered dreams to be fractional manifestations of Prophecy, with Islam setting the ratio at 1/46th⁴ and Judaism at 1/60th⁵

On the other hand, dreams' imagistic, nonlinear, and sporadic nature renders them institutionally unreliable as ongoing sources of Revelation. Dreams and dreamers can prove subversive to established religion, challenging both doctrine and authority based on personal visionary inspiration. Thus, it's not surprising that forces within each of the traditions sought to minimize, marginalize, and even demonize dreams. The 2nd-century Judean sage, Rabbi Meir, claimed that dreams are ineffectual, they "neither harm nor help,"⁶ while Maimonides (d. 1204 CE) suggests that dreams are primarily the product of the imagination⁷. St Jerome's (d. 419 CE) intentional

mistranslation of the Hebrew word *Anan* (soothsayer-- literal “one who divines or practices magic through clouds”) in the Vulgate’s rendering of Leviticus 19:26 and Deuteronomy 18:10 rewrote the biblical law forbidding witchcraft into a prohibition against observing dreams.⁸ Islam circumscribes what constitutes a “True Dream” (*Ruyah*), who are most likely to have them, and, who are best qualified to reliably interpret them.⁹ Efforts to restrict valid visions and dreams to only those which align with accepted religious doctrine and practice date as far back as the book of Deuteronomy (Deut.18: 15-22)

In the face of these pronouncements, spiritually oriented Dreamwork has continued among certain streams of these traditions. Through the practice of posing dream questions (*Istikhara*), Islam might arguably be the most significant dream culture in the contemporary world.¹⁰ Despite official Church condemnation, dream practices continued among the Christian folk and clergy in a variety of places and forms.¹¹ Jewish dream practice continued among the 12th-Century German Pietists, the Kabbalists of both 13th-century Spain and 16th-century Safed, Eastern European Hasidim, and North African Jewry. However, the relative paucity of dream practice among contemporary Westerners surely has more to do with our general acceptance of technomedical approaches to healing than it does with any religious strictures. The psychoanalytic legacy of Sigmund Freud, which basically transposed dreams from transcendent to intra-psychic phenomena, makes it far more likely that moderns will bring their dreams to therapists’ offices than to religious settings.

Peoples of the Book

According to leading anthropologists who study dreaming, “dream reports and dream interpretations are inseparable from the cultural context, language, social institutions and the psychological, philosophical and religious beliefs that shape these people's world.”¹² Given the

foundational role that the sacred texts play in classical Judaism, Christianity, and Islam it is little wonder that these provided the lenses through which those traditions historically viewed dreams. The Talmudic “Dream Book”, *BT Berakhot 55-7*, invokes a host of biblical verses to elucidate dream symbols, to counsel with whom one should share dreams (only those who wish one well, unlike Joseph’s brothers in Genesis), and how long it might take to see one’s dreams realized (up to 22 years, again drawn from Joseph’s experience). The dreams of early Christian martyrs like Perpetua of Carthage (d.203 CE) are replete with images that mirror those found in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, including a Cosmic Ladder (Genesis 28 & John 1:51), protection against a Dragon’s harm (Revelation 12) and a “Good Shepherd”, an allusion to Jesus, Moses or both.¹³ And since the *Qur’an* and good dreams both come from Allah, Muslims may use symbolism from the former to interpret images from the latter, providing the interpretation of *Qur’anic* symbols is drawn from authentic commentaries.¹⁴

We know that the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are replete with tales of Dreams and Visions. Jacob's Ladder Dream (Genesis 28:10-22), Joseph’s Dream of Jesus’ conception and birth (Matthew 1:20), and Muhammad's vision of entering Mecca to pray (*Qur’an* Sura 48: 27) were each foundational to their respective communities’ understanding of God's covenantal relationship with humanity and the faithful. Reams have been written about these and other scriptural dream narratives. Yet, there is a vital feature of the interplay between Dreams and Scripture that I believe deserves more attention: the continuing debt that the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim hermeneutic traditions owe to ancient dream interpretation practices. One could argue that these have played an even more continuing role in shaping the three Abrahamic traditions than the canonized visionary narratives themselves.

The Torah as Oracle

Unbeknown to me then, my first encounter with the interrelationship of scriptural and dream interpretation occurred during rabbinical school in 1973. One day, JTS's then Chancellor, Gerson Cohen, asked our Ancient Jewish History class, "What does the phrase *l'drosh et YHWH* mean?" Not suspecting a "setup," I raised my hand and offered a literal translation, "to seek God"; after all, the Hebrew root *d-r-sh* can denote seeking, inquiry, consultation, or exposition. Dr. Cohen retorted, "Well Mr. Addison what does that mean? I seek God every day of my life!" Suitably cowed, I remained silent; my wary classmates ventured no further replies, and a somewhat perturbed Dr. Cohen paused before contrasting two instances in the Hebrew Bible where variants of this phrase appear.

The first occurs in the story of Rebecca's pregnancy and the subsequent birth of her twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Having finally conceived after two decades of infertility, Rebecca felt torn apart by violent movements within her womb. Frightened and perplexed she proclaimed, "if this be so why do I exist?" The verse then goes on to state, "*va-teyleych l'drosh et YHWH* - she went to inquire of God."¹⁵

The second tale occurs nearly a millennium after the setting of the first. In 538 BCE Cyrus the Great granted his Jewish subjects leave to return from Persia to Judea; in 516 the Second Temple was completed. With the state of Judean society still tenuous in 458 BCE, King Artaxerxes empowered Ezra the Scribe to move to Judea and assume both religious and judicial authority. His qualifications? "For Ezra had prepared himself (lit. his heart) to inquire of God's Torah -- *l'drosh et Torat YHWH* -- to enact and teach statutes and judgments in Israel."¹⁶

Dr. Cohen explained that the phrase “*l’drosh et YHWH*” is a Biblical idiom that means “to consult an oracle.” The morphing of this phrase in Ezra into “*l’drosh et Torat YHWH*” heralded a major shift in Jewish religious history. From the Second Temple period on the Torah would become the Oracle; God's authoritative word to Israel and the World would come to be revealed not by prophets but by those skilled in delving into and expounding Scripture.

Two later rabbinic sources would illustrate just how profound this shift was. The first states that a Torah scholar, a *Talmid Hakham* (lit. “Student of the Wise”), is of a higher spiritual rank than a prophet.¹⁷ While the latter receives revelation but sporadically from an external Divine Source, the former, guided by the wise, in-dwelling Spirit, can always expound the Torah. The second indicates that the sages understood **Midrash**, their process of textual exposition, as the uncovering of new divine revelation.

Once, as ben Azzai sat and expounded (*v’doraish*), fire played around him. The students reported this to Rabbi Akiba, who went to investigate. “*I hear that as you were expounding, fire flashed around you,*” inquired Akiva. When ben Azzai replied affirmatively, Akiba asked: *Were you perhaps dealing with the secrets* (lit. inner chambers) *of the Divine Chariot?*¹⁸ No, he replied, *I was only linking the words of Torah with one another and then with the Prophets’ words and those with the Writings.*¹⁹ *The words rejoiced as sweetly as when they were first uttered at Sinai. Were they not originally delivered from Sinai in fire, as it says, “And the mountain burned with fire...”?* (Deuteronomy 4:11)²⁰

The transformation of Scripture itself into an oracular text had profound implications for its ongoing relationship with dreams. As previously mentioned, Judaism historically has been conflicted about dreams, alternately viewing them as graced channels for divine

communication²¹, as fleeting,²² and, at times, as sources of false prophecy.²³ From the time of Ezra on, however, Scripture itself could and would be read with increasing frequency as if its “...prophetic words were a mysterious inscription or a dream.”²⁴

As normative prophecy faded in Israel the application of oracular techniques to scriptural interpretation took on added urgency and importance. Not only did the Bible “become the repository of past revelation; as interpreted by its scholars, it now took the place of prophecy as the source of guidance for the present and near future.”²⁵ Moreover, the Torah itself can be read as indirectly endorsing such practices. Numbers 12:6-8, cited above, compare the level of Moses’ prophecy to that of other visionaries, in this case, his brother, Aaron, and sister, Miriam: *When there is a prophet among you, I, YHWH, reveal myself in visions, I speak in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of YHWH.*²⁶ While God asserts the primacy of Moses’ direct revelation (the Torah), dreams and visions are also described as God’s disclosures, albeit of lesser rank. In the absence of bona fide prophets, one could readily infer that methods used to uncover underlying messages in dreams and visions could also be employed to disclose hidden levels of revelation embedded in the words of Scripture.²⁷

Much Implication

Midrash ha-Gadol (lit. “The Great Midrash”) is a 13th-century work on the Torah comprised mainly of selections from the Talmud and other, earlier rabbinic texts.²⁸ In an opening section it states: *"A dream carries much implication" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Now... we reason: if the contents of dreams, which (empirically) neither help nor harm, may yield a multitude of interpretations, how*

*much more, then, should the important contents of the Torah imply many interpretations in every verse.*²⁹

Midrash ha-Gadol further lists 32 hermeneutic techniques (*middot*) through which Scripture's narratives might yield various dimensions of meanings. In his 1950 classic study, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, Dr. Saul Lieberman noted that at least five of these methods, originally ascribed to a 2nd-century CE sage, Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Yossi.³⁰, were derived from ancient dream interpretation practice.³¹ These include

Notarikon, reading single words as acronyms, anagrams, or as compounds:

Remez (Paronomasia), finding allusions based on word plays, often derived from homonymous roots.

ATBaSH, reading unknown terms as cryptograms to be decoded through letter substitution ciphers.³²

Mashal, symbolic or allegorical meanings,³³ and

Gematria, deriving meaning from the numerical equivalents of the Hebrew letters comprising words or phrases³⁴

Precedents already existed in the ancient Near East for using these dream interpretation techniques to explicate non-oracular sacred texts. The seventh tablet of the Mesopotamian Creation Myth, *Enuma Elish*, lists fifty names for Marduk, chief of the gods. Among these names is *dASARU*, there explained as a *Notarikon*, an acronym for “Makes the land fertile and assures boundaries”. The use of *Remez*, wordplay based on homonymous roots, can be found in

the Egyptian Demotic Chronicles. The statement, “You vanish (root *t-m-m*) before them like Re,” is said to apply to the dying mythological hero, Osiris, who was also known by the name *Atum* (*i'tmu*).³⁵

The Hebrew Bible at times applies such techniques to its own narratives. Among the best known is Daniel’s use of the *Remez* method to interpret the mysterious engraving on Babylonian King Belshazzar’s palace wall: *This is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN. Here is what these words mean: Mene -- God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end; Tekel -- You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting; Peres-- Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians*³⁶. The three inscribed words are Aramaic names for the coins *Mina*, *Shekel*, and *Peres*, which was half a *Mina*. Daniel decoded the message through a word play on their verbal roots: *m-n-h*, to count; *t-k-l*, to weigh, and *p-r-s*, to split, which also alludes to the Aramaic name for Persia, *Paras*.

Pesher

As reflected in the Dead Sea Scrolls, one such interpretive approach, *Pesher*, was particularly important in the Qumran community. The Aramaic word *Pesher* is a multivalent term whose primary meaning is “to remove;” its secondary implication is “to solve.” Its Hebrew equivalent, *Patar*, connotes both translation and the magical transfer of harmful energy from a dream to an external object. When applied to dreams these terms “...refer to the 'translation' of the 'symbols' of the dream into an unequivocally worded message or announcement and alludes to the fact that the evil implications of the mystery contained in such a 'symbolic' dream have been dissolved.”³⁷ If we permit ourselves a contemporary wordplay, *Pesher* and *Patar* can mean to **Solve**, **Dissolve**, **Resolve** and/or **Absolve**³⁸. Thus, we can better understand the Talmudic dictum that an

uninterpreted dream is like an unopened letter.³⁹ In both cases, the recipient doesn't know the inner message and neither responds nor acts to mitigate any harmful portents the letter or dream might contain.

Parallels have been drawn between ancient structures of dream interpretation and the composition of Scriptural *Pesher*. As delineated in 1963 by Asher Finkel⁴⁰ each displays three lines of interpretation. The dream interpreter would consider:

- Do any occurrences or circumstances unfolding in the dreamer's waking life mirror the overall arc of the dream?
- Do any of the dream images or characters represent traditional symbols, particularly those found in sacred texts?
- How might wordplays, including puns, double meanings, variant usages and interpreting single words as compounds or acronyms, aid in the dream's interpretation?

The *Pesher* commentator would similarly ponder:

- Does a given Scriptural prophecy mirror a current situation, or can its words serve as keys to understanding the flow of history until end times?
- Do significant terms in that text lend themselves to allegorical interpretation based on identification with traditional symbols or scriptural references?
- Might variant readings, dual meanings, and/or word-splitting provide interpretive clues?

A short look at the second chapter of the prophet Habakkuk can exemplify how this tripartite Dream*Pesher* interpretive process unfolded in the Qumran texts. Having been called to prophesy, most likely in Jerusalem during the late 7th century BCE, Habakkuk declared: *And*

as for that which God said, "he who reads may read it quickly; For the vision is yet for the **appointed time** and it tells of the **End** and does not **lie**. See, the enemy (Babylonia) is puffed up; his desires are not upright— but the righteous will live by faith⁴¹

Modern scholars date *Pesher Habakkuk* to the second half of the first century BCE, nearly six hundred years after the original prophecy.⁴² In it, the “Teacher of Righteousness,” (*Moreh Tzedek*) Qumran’s early charismatic and defining spiritual leader, is identified as Habakkuk’s “he who reads may read it quickly...”: *Interpreted (Pashar): this concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of God’s servants, the prophets’ words...the ktz (Final Age literally “End”) shall be prolonged, exceeding all the prophets have said; for the mysteries of God are astounding.*⁴³ Initiated by God into all the mysteries of the prophets, the Teacher can more rapidly discern than they the intricacies and secrets of Scripture and thus see more clearly history’s duration and trials. The *Pesher* also identified the self-inflation and unrighteous desires of its contemporary Jerusalem elite with Habakkuk’s, “puffed up enemy” whose “desires aren’t upright.” The “End”, *ktz*, which the Teacher perceives with greater accuracy than the Prophets, has eschatological resonance derived from Isaiah’s 8th-century prophecy: *For a child will be born to us... And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end...*⁴⁴. *Pesher Habakkuk*, employing a method mirroring the three elements of ancient dream interpretation, transformed a 7th-century prophecy into a contemporary source of revelation for the 1st-century adept to mine, as would later Rabbinic Midrash and its analogous processes in Christianity and Islam.

Tapping the Wells of Revelation Anew

One need look no further than the first chapter of *The Gospel According to Matthew* to find examples of dream interpretation styled *Pesher*, which distilled new revelation from centuries-old prophecies and Scriptural pronouncements:

*the Lord's angel spoke to Joseph in a dream: Joseph, son of David, don't fear taking Mary, your wife, into your home. This child was conceived within her through the Holy Spirit. You will name the son she bears Jesus (Joshua) -- because he will save his people (Sirach 46:1), from their sins fulfilling the Lord's word through the prophet: Behold, the virgin (alma – literally maiden) shall be with child and bear a son, that will be named Emmanuel, God is with us. (Isaiah 7:14)*⁴⁵

Here the Gospel writer finds in ben Sirach's early 2nd century BCE ode to Moses' successor Joshua, (literally "He will save") a foreshadowing of Jesus⁴⁶, who shares the name and the salvific mission it denotes. Isaiah's 8th-century prophecy is interpreted to reveal that Mary is the predicted maiden and Jesus the presaged child, who will embody Emmanuel, the Incarnate God Who is with and among us.

Following the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE Judaism needed to reorient much of its theology and practice, given the eclipse of its central shrine, sacrificial cult, and priestly leadership. Inculcating Judaism's lunar calendar so that it didn't diverge too radically from the flow of the agricultural year and the solar seasons on which the Torah's Holy Days are based, was among ancient Judaism's more important judicial functions.⁴⁷ After all, the date of Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, determined when all other Holy Days occurred. A rabbinic homily in Leviticus Rabbah 29:4 states:

Rabbi Joshua opened his discourse on the text, "Fortunate is the people who know the Shofar blast; they walk, YHWH, in the light of Your countenance" (Psalms 89:16) Rabbi Abbahu thus interpreted the verse [*patar k'raya* – lit. offered a *pesher* on this scripture]: this refers to the five elders who enter to proclaim a leap year (lit. prolong the year) What

does the Blessed Holy One do? God descends from the heavenly senate ... confining the Presence to a narrow space among those below... Why all this? So that if they [the elders and the earthly tribunal] err in a matter of law the Blessed Holy One enlightens them...

Through this *Pesher* on Psalm 89, Rabbi Abbahu revealed divine sanction for this new rabbinic practice. The people mentioned in the psalm as those “who know the Shofar’s blast,” originally referring to all among Israel who heed God’s call, are here identified with the five elders who ascertain that an extra month should be added to extend the current year. It is they who know when the Shofar should be sounded having, by extension, fixed the date of the next New Year, Rosh Hashanah. And if they make a mistake in Jewish Law? (*Halakhah*, lit. “the Walked Path”) God will be among them to illumine and guarantee the path they walk (*yihaleychun*)!

A prophecy revealed to Muhammad following the *Hegira*, the Muslim community’s flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 CE, exhibits certain aspects of the *Pesher* style. Sura 4 of the Qur’an, *An-Nisa* (lit. *On Women*), derides those Jewish tribes that didn’t accept the validity of Muhammad’s prophecy.⁴⁸ There, the Angel Gabriel (*Jibril*) traces Jewish disbelief back to Israel’s challenging of Moses, the Sin of the Golden Calf, and Israel’s subsequent ill-use of other prophets. The censure then extends to the Jewish maltreatment of Jesus (*Isa*) whose crucifixion is claimed to have been apparent but not real:

And because of their (the Jews) saying, "We killed Messiah Isa, son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allah," - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of Isa was put over another man (whom they killed), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely, they killed him (Isa) not! Rather, God raised him up. God is Mighty and Wise... Due to wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, we forbade them good things that used to be lawful for them; and for deterring many from God’s path. (Holy Qur’an 4:157-60)

A 3rd century CE Gnostic Gospel, *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*,⁴⁹ depicts Jesus as stating:

*Yes, they (the Jews) saw me; they punished me. It was another, their father, who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. I was another upon Whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height over all the wealth of the archons and the offspring of their error, of their empty glory. And I was laughing at their ignorance.”*⁵⁰

It can be argued that Sura 4's Qur'anic revelation is framed as a *Pesher*, relating a 3rd Century Coptic Christian theme to the unfolding Islamic reality beginning in 7th century CE Arabia. Thus, we see an ongoing stream of new spiritual insights and practices, spanning at least nine centuries and all the Abrahamic traditions, revealed through Scripture by exegetical techniques which mirrored those of ancient dream interpretation.⁵¹

Much Implication, Revisited...

The following anecdote, attributed to a 3rd-century CE Galilean sage, Rabbi Bana'ah, reflects the Talmud's recognition that dreams convey many levels of meaning allowing for multiple valid interpretations: *There were twenty-four dream interpreters in Jerusalem. Once I dreamt a dream and I went around to all of them and they all gave different interpretations, and all were fulfilled*⁵² Just like dreams, Rabbinic Midrash allows, if not mandates, multiple interpretations of the same verse. The following well-known Rabbinic pronouncement (BT Sanhedrin 34a) validates such homiletic multiplicity: It was taught in the School of Rabbi Ishmael: "*Behold, My word is like fire-declares the Lord-and like a hammer that shatters rock*" (Jer. 23:29). *Just as this hammer produces many sparks [when striking the rock], so a single verse has several meanings.*⁵³ While interpretive *Pesher* elicited new, ongoing revelation from centuries-old texts, it most often limited itself to one authoritative interpretation; *Midrash* also elicited new revelation through exegesis but, more like dream interpretation, allowed for many levels of meaning, with 2, 3 and even 4 differing interpretations of the same verse offered serially.⁵⁴

Perhaps not as voluminous or always as fanciful as some rabbinic *Midrashim*, multiple

interpretations of the same scriptural passage can also be found in Christianity and Islam. St Augustine considered "... God's blessing to mankind 'to be fruitful and multiply' (Gen.1:22, 28) as an injunction to multiply interpretations of Scripture, 'to express in manifold ways what we understand in but one, and to understand in manifold ways what we read as obscurely uttered in but one way'."⁵⁵ He offered five different interpretations of Genesis 1:1. The Qur'an also allows some of its passages to be multivalent: He (Allah) revealed the Book to you. *Some of its verses are definitive; they are the foundation of the Book, and others are unspecific.* (Qur'an 3:7) These unspecific verses, however, are to be "*recollected by those who have understanding*" and not by those seeking deviation and discord.

Mirroring Augustine's assertion that Scripture can be interpreted on four levels, both the English Christian exegete, the Venerable Bede, and Ja'far al-Sadiq, the last Imam before Islam's Ismaili- Imani schism, formulated four-dimensional frameworks for interpreting scriptural texts in the 8th century CE, later referred to in Judaism as the PaRDeS method.⁵⁶ This multiplicity of interpretation, like that which we find in dreamwork, became a major aspect of traditional Biblical exegesis. Historically, it has allowed text-centered religions to avoid ossification, stimulating the growth of rich bodies of legal and homiletic exegesis in response to ever-changing conditions⁵⁷

...and Renewing

The 1900 publication of Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* sparked a renewed interest in Dreamwork, an interest that has accelerated in both religious communities and general society in recent decades.⁵⁸ Significantly, scriptural hermeneutics and dream interpretation practices are being combined anew to yield powerful insights and spiritual experiences.

While studying in the late 1990s at the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation⁵⁹ I was introduced to the practice of *Lectio Divina* (Sacred Reading), formalized as a monastic practice by St. Benedict of Nursia (d.547 CE)⁶⁰. After entering a contemplative, dreamlike state, one is to read the Biblical text four times, encountering it at four successive levels:

- *Lectio* (Read) -- listening carefully for simple words or phrases that "call out" to the reader

- *Meditatio* (Reflect) -- Careful reflection following the second reading on what God might be saying and where God might be nudging you
- *Oratio* (Respond) -- Following the third reading, one can respond in prayer and/or enter a conversation with God.
- *Contemplatio* (Rest) -- Sitting quietly after the fourth reading and allowing the Mystery to unfold

I and other colleagues have introduced this practice to Jewish groups through its Hebrew name, *Kriat HaKodesh*.⁶¹ I find that this practice mirrors the four-dimensional PaRDeS structure discussed above: *Peshat*, listening for a simple word or phrase that “calls out,” *Remez*, reflecting on aspects of the tale that allude to my own life, *D’rash*, what is God asking of me or me of God in response to this text, and *Sod*, what unbidden insights might arise while resting in the silence following the fourth reading. It has proven especially moving on *Shabbat Shira* and Shavuot, as some participants imaginably experienced the birth pangs of leaving Egypt through the blood-painted portals of their homes then emerging from the birth canal of the Reed Sea or standing at Sinai and listening for God’s revelation to them.

In 1979 Montague Ullman and Nan Zimmerman published *Working with Dreams*, a text that details an emotionally safe method for engaging in group dream work.⁶² This projective process also unfolds in four stages: First, the dreamer shares the dream and the members of the group can ask questions of clarification; Second, the group symbolically accepts the dream and always prefaces their comments about feelings and associations the dream has triggered with the words, “if this were my dream...” to amplify that these are their own projections and are not necessarily valid for the dreamer; Third, the dream is “returned” to the dreamer, who may comment or not as s/he wishes, and; Four, the dreamer is asked to contemplate reactions and realms of meaning that might unfold between sessions. Just as in the *Lectio* process of entering a dreamlike state to encounter scripture more deeply, the projective group Dreamwork process also mirrors the PaRDeS structure. Framed within the same schema employed by centuries of religious exegetes can affirm, in a very real sense, that one’s dreams help compose the innermost Scripture of one’s life.⁶³

The examples described above are but two of many practices emerging and reemerging among religious communities. It’s not unusual for some contemporary Muslims to pose

dream questions through the above-cited practice of *Istikhara*, whose formulae cite the Qur'an, to better understand the teachings of the Qur'an.⁶⁴ Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that the cross-fertilization of scriptural exegesis and dream interpretation continues across the millennia to this very day. To quote Joyce Rockwood Hudson, author of *Natural Spirituality: ...since dreams and Scripture with its [tales and] parables come from the same place of metaphor, they call us to the same place of understanding...bringing us into conversation with Wisdom... to teach us how to live with God.*⁶⁵

¹ Tertullian, *De anima* 47.2 cited in Strousma, G.G. "Dreams and Visions in Early Christian Discourse" in Shulman, D and Strosma, G.G. editors, *Dream Cultures* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 191

² Bt Berakhaot 55b

³ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 9, book 87:119 cited in Hermansen, M. "Dreams and Dreaming in Islam" in Bulkely, K, editor *Dreams* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) p. 75.

A *Hadith* is a report of the words, actions or habits of the Prophet Muhammad. While the *Qur'an* is a unitary work, the collections of *Ahadith* (pl.) derive from many sources and have canonical status second to the *Qur'an*. Sunni Islam accords the highest status among *Ahadith* collections to *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim*

⁴ Ibid. p 74. Ibn Khaldun's (d. 1406) explanation is that for 6 months (1\2 of 1 year) Muhammad had anticipatory dreams prior to the 23 years between the beginning of his prophetic revelations and his death.

Thus 1\2 (6 months of anticipatory dreams) x 1(among)\23(years of prophecy) =1\46 (Muhammad's period of dreams in relation to his years of prophecy)

⁵ Bt Berakhot 57b. In Jewish law 1\60th is the smallest identifiable portion of an entirety, whose figurative role in dream amelioration is viewed analogously to the proportions used to determine whether questionable admixtures of foods (i.e. soups) remain kosher. See Addison, H.A. "I have Dreamed a Dream" in Birnbaum, D & Cohen, M.S. *Birkat Kohanim: The Priestly Benediction* (New York: New Paradigm Matrix, 2016) p 352

⁶ Bt. Horayot. 13b

⁷ *Guide to the Perplexed* 2:36-7.

⁸ "Jerome" in "Dreams and Visions Throughout Church History" retrieved from cwgministries.org/dreams-and-visions-throughout-church-history

⁹ Yamani, A. "Healing and Dreams in Islam" in Bulkeley, K, Adams, K & Davis, P.M. editors, *Dreaming In Christianity and Islam* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009) pp.115-20

¹⁰ Edgar, I.R. *The Dream in Islam* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011) p.1

¹¹ See Strousma, G.G. "Dreams and Visions in Early Christian Discourse" and Schmitt, J-C. "The Liminality and Centrality of Dreams in the Medieval West" in Schulman and Strousma, *Dream Cultures, op cit.* Also, Winiarski, D.L. "Souls Filled with Ravishing Transport: Heavenly Visions and the Radical Awakening in New England"

The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series, Vol. 6:1 (Jan,2004), pp. 3-46. Retrieved from jstor.org/stable/3491674

¹² Bulkely, K. *The Wilderness of Dreams* op. cit. pp. 68-9. Also see Tedlock, B. "Dreaming and dream research" in Tedlock, B. editor, *Dreaming* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1992) pp. 28-30

¹³ Miller, P.C. "'A Dubious Twilight': Reflections on Dreams in Patristic Literature" in *Church History*, Vol. 55:2 (June,1986), pp. 156-159. Retrieved from jstor.org/stable/3167417

¹⁴ Philips, A.A.B. *Dream Interpretation According to the Qur'an and Sunnah* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: A S Noordeen, 2001) p.49

¹⁵ Genesis 25: 19 – 26

¹⁶ Ezra 7:10

¹⁷ Bt Baba Batra 12a

¹⁸ *Secrets of the Chariot* (*Chadrei Merkavah* – lit. the Inner Chambers of the Chariot) refers to the earliest movement in Jewish mysticism centered around the mysteries of the *Merkavah*, the Divine Chariot described in Ezekiel 1

¹⁹ The classic form of an ancient rabbinic homily (*Midrash*) hermeneutically linked a passage from the Torah to verses from the Prophets (*Nevi'im*) and the Wisdom Writings (*Ketuvim*). Most often these expositions began with a verse from the Writings that was linked to Prophetic verses. These homilies then concluded with the Torah verses they intended to elucidate.

²⁰ Song of Songs Rabbah 1:10. This tale seems to be a sequel to the story of “Four Who Entered *Pardes*” recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud, Hagigah 2:1, and the Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 14b. Both sources agree that of the four sages who undertook this mystical “trip,” its leader, Rabbi Akiba, remained spiritually and physically whole while the fourth, Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya, became an apostate. The sources disagree about the fate of the other two, ben Azzai and ben Zoma, both named Simeon and neither yet formally ordained. The Jerusalem Talmud states that ben Azzai became deranged while ben Zoma died; the Babylonian Talmud claims the reverse.

²¹ Joel 3:1, Job 33:14-16

²² Psalms 76:20, 126:1

²³ Deuteronomy 13:2-6, Jeremiah 23:25-32

²⁴ Finkel, A. (1963). The Peshet of Dreams and Scripture. *Revue de Qumran*, 4(3). P. 370
Retrieved from jstor.org/stable/24600881.

²⁵ Tigay, J “An Early Technique of Aggadic Exegesis” in Tadmor, H & Weinfeld, M editors, *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literature* (Jerusalem, Magnes Press, 1984) pp 169-70. Also see Spiegel, S. "On Medieval Hebrew Poetry," in L. Finkelstein (ed.) *The Jews: Their History. Culture. and Religion*. 1961 pp. 854-856.

²⁶ See Chapter 1, p

²⁷ Tigay, op. cit. p 172

²⁸ Modern scholars attribute it to a 13th CE century Yemenite author, Rabbi David ben Amran Adani of Aden See “MIDRASH HAGADOL” Retrieved from jewishvirtuallibrary.org/midrash-ha-gadol

²⁹ Midrash Hagadol Bereshit, ed. Shechter, p. XXV retrieved from Lieberman, S. *op. cit*, p 70

³⁰ Strack, HL. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (New York; Atheneum, 1969) pp. 95-8

³¹ Lieberman, S. *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1950) pp. 68-77

³² The key to the **ATBaSh** cypher is created by writing the Hebrew *Aleph Bet* in its correct order on one line and its reverse on the line below. Thus *Aleph*, the first letter, corresponds to *Tav*, the last (**AT**), *Bet*, the second, for *Shin*, the penultimate (**BaSh**) and so on, forming mutually substituting pairs for Hebrew’s 22 letters.

A Biblical example of ATBaSH revolves around the king of an unidentifiable realm, *Sheshakh*, mentioned in Jeremiah 25:26. The kingdom’s name appears again in Jeremiah 51:41 in a synonymous parallelism with Babel. **Sheshakh**, composed of a double *Shin*, Hebrew’s penultimate letter, and its eleventh, *Khaf*, is interpreted as a cryptogram for **Babel**, which doubles Hebrew’s second letter, *Bet*, and ends in its twelfth letter, *Lamed*.

³³ such as the Seven Cows and Seven Ears of Corn representing Seven Years in Pharaoh’s Dreams Genesis 41:1-32

³⁴ An example of Gematria claims the 318 warriors who accompanied Abram to free his nephew Lot (Genesis 14:14) were not a whole company but Abram’s lone servant, whose name Eliezer bears the numerical value of 318!

Eliezer -- E (1 א) + L (30 ל) + I (10 י) + Eh (70 ם) + Z (7 ז) + R (200 ר) = 318 Bt. Nedarim 32a; Genesis.Rabbah. 43:2

For a brief overview of Gematria and the numerical value of Hebrew Letters see Ratzabi, H “What Is Gematria” Retrieved from myjewishlearning.com/article/gematria/

³⁵ Fishbane, M. (1973). *The Qumran Peshet and Traits of Ancient Hermeneutics*, 1(A). p. 101-5
Retrieved from jstor.org/stable/23515557

³⁶ Daniel 5:26-8

³⁷ Kalmin, R. L. (2009). *Sages, stories, authors, and editors in rabbinic Babylonia*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, p 71
See Oppenheim, A.L. "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East" *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, 46, Part 3 (1956), p. 218.

³⁸ Stern, D. “Midrash and Indeterminacy” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15: 1 (Autumn, 1988), p. 141

³⁹ Bt Berakhot 55a

⁴⁰ Finkel, *op. cit.* p 360

⁴¹ Habakkuk 2:2-4

⁴² <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/habakkuk>

⁴³ Peshar Habakkuk 7:5-8

⁴⁴ Isaiah 9:6-7

⁴⁵ Matthew 1:18-23

⁴⁶ The Hebrew of which is *Yehoshua*, Joshua

⁴⁷ See Adler, C & Jacobs, J, (1906). "The History of the Calendar: Empirical Determination of Leap Year," *Jewish Encyclopedia* Retrieved from jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3920-calendar-history-of#anchor3

⁴⁸ For the dating of the Medinan Surahs see McAuliffe, J. (2006) *The Cambridge Companion to the Quran*. Cambridge. p. 111

On the relations between Muhammad and Medina's Jewish tribes see Donner, FM (1999). "Muhammad and the Caliphate" *The Oxford History of Islam* Retrieved from holyland.oucreate.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Donner-Muhammad-and-the-Caliphate-Oxford-History-of-Islam.pdf

⁴⁹ See "The Nag Hammadi Codices and Gnostic Christianity" (2017)

Retrieved from biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/post-biblical-period/the-nag-hammadi-codices/

and Robinson, S "Second Treatise of the Great Seth" *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*

Retrieved from ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/1726

⁵⁰ The Nag Hammadi Library Codex VII,

Retrieved from pesherofchrist.com/Quran_Seth.html, 2013 by Dylan Stephens

⁵¹ Finkel, *op. cit.* p 360

⁵² Bt Berachot 55a

⁵³ Bt Sanhedrin 34a. Retrieved from Stern, D. "Midrash and Indeterminacy" *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15: 1 (Autumn, 1988), p. 135.

⁵⁴ Stern, *ibid.* p143 Unlike Stern who asserts that Ancient dream practice sought but one interpreted meaning per dream (p. 142) the Talmudic tale of Rabbi Ba-anah seems to confirm at least the Rabbinic validation of dreams' multiple interpretations

⁵⁵ Stern, *ibid.* p145

⁵⁶ Based on St Augustine's notion that Scripture has four levels of meaning, the 8th century schema of the **Venerable Bede** includes: the **Literal** or plain sense of the text; the **Tropological** or figurative connotations, the **Allegorical** or philosophical allusions and; the **Anagogical**, from which one could infer the secrets of life everlasting. Stein, RH. *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1981) p 47

Later in the 8th century, **Caliph Jafar al-Sadik's** methodology includes '*ibāra*, the literal expression, *ishāra*, allusion, *laqā'if*, the subtleties and *haqā'iq*, the deepest realities. *Spiritual Gems: The Mystical Qur'an Commentary ascribed to Ja'far al-Sadiq as contained in Sulami's Haqa'iq al-Tafsir* (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011), trans. Farhana Mayer, p. 1

This fourfold approach only appears among Jewish circles in Spain in a late thirteenth century Torah commentary and is known by its acronym, **PaRDeS: Peshat** (Literal), **D'rash** ("Inquiry" Homoletic), **Remez** (Allusions), **Sod** (Secret).

See www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3263-bible-exegesis

⁵⁷ Tigay, *op.cit.* p 171

⁵⁸ See "You Heal Me Through Dreams," in H A Addison, ed. *Seeking Redemption in an Unredeemed World* (GTF Press, 2019)

⁵⁹ www.Shalem.org

⁶⁰ See <https://hallow.com/blog/how-to-pray-lectio-divina/> and <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide>

⁶¹ Leila Gal Berner. *Listening To The Heart of Genesis* (Cascade Books, 2021) A description of my introduction of the practice to our second Lev Shomea Spiritual Direction Training cohort can be found on p. 37-8

⁶² Ulman, M & Zimmerman, N. *Working With Dreams* (J.P. Tarcher, 1979)). Also, Taylor, Jeremy. *Dream Work:*

Techniques for Discovering the Creative Power in Dreams (Paulist Press, 1983)

For a biblically based approach to this work see Robert L. Haden, Jr.. *Unopened Letters from God* (Haden Institute, 2010)

⁶³ For fuller presentations of this practice see, Addison, HA "In the Presence of Three" (*Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction*) vol. 22:2 pp 46-41 and Hammer, Jill. *Undertorah: An Earth-Based Kabbalah of Dreams* (Ayin Press, 2022)

⁶⁴ See Aydar, H "Istikhara and Dreams: an Attempt to Predict the Future through Dreams" in K. Bulkeley, K. Adams and P.

Davis (eds.), *Dreaming in Christianity and Islam: Culture, Conflict, and Creativity*. New York: Rutgers, p 123 and "Istakhara – Seeking the Best from Allah." Retrieved from <https://quranacademy.io/blog/istikhara/>

⁶⁵ Joyce Rockwood Hudson. *Natural Spirituality: A Handbook for Jungian Inner Work in Spiritual Community*, 2nd edition (Chiron Publications, 2017) Joyce shared the above quote in a 2018 conversation with me