

Kislev: Close Your Eyes

Section 1: Rest Your Weary Head

Sefer Yetzirah (The Book of Formation) is a work of meditative proto-Kabbalah with strong magical elements. It is the earliest extant work of Jewish mysticism, and it is traditionally attributed to Abraham (18th Century BCE) and/or Rabbi Akiva (2nd Century CE). In it, each month is associated with a Hebrew letter, a constellation, a part of the human body and a human emotion, sense, or faculty. What does this passage suggest we should be paying attention to this month, and how does this relate to what is happening in nature, and your own inner experience of this time of year?

Sefer Yetzirah 5:9 (trans. adapted from R' Aryeh Kaplan)

He made the letter Samech king over sleep
And He bound a crown to it
And He combined one with another
And with them He formed
Sagittarius in the Universe
Kislev in the Year
And the stomach in the Soul
Male and female

ספר היצירה ה:ט

המליך אות ס' בשינה
וקשר לו כתר
וצרפן זה בזה
וצר בהם
קשת בעולם
וכסלו בשנה
וקבה בנפש
זכר ונקבה

R' Tzadok haKohen Rabinowitz of Lublin (1823 – 1900), usually referred to as Rav Tzadok, was a major figure in Polish Chasidut. He started life in a prominent Lithuanian rabbinic family who were opposed to Chasidut, but was won over to Chasidut by R' Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izhbitz, known as the Mei HaShiloach. His classes on Shabbat and festivals were transcribed by his students and compiled in Pri Tzadik (The Fruit of the Righteous) after his death. How does the below teaching connect us to our season and our ongoing work of Teshuvah (returning to our best selves)?

Pri Tzadik on Rosh Chodesh Kislev 3:1

Every month has its own work, and was created with a particular letter from the twelve simple ones, as is written in Sefer Yetzirah: “Samech over sleep...Kislev in the Year and the stomach in the Soul etc.” As the Talmud teaches, “the stomach brings sleep” (Brachot 61b).

The letter Samech refers to, “The Eternal supports all the fallen ones” (Psalm 145:14).

...
And the first Samech [in the Torah] is in the word, “surrounding” (Gen. 2:11), referring to G!d surrounding [everything] and the Transcendent Light, through which G!d “supports all the fallen.”

And the image of the letter Samech is a circle.

פרי צדיק לראש חודש כסלו ג:א

כל חודש יש לו עסק בפ"ע
ונברא באות מיוחד מי"ב פשוטות
כמ"ש בסי"צ המליך אות ס' בשינה
כסלו בשנה וקיבה בנפש וכולי
והוא עפמ"ש בגמרא
קיבה ישנה
ואות ס' מורה
סומך ה' לכל הנופלים

...
וכן אות ס' ראשונה הוא הסובב
והיינו
שהשי"ת סובב ואור מקיף
וע"י כן סומך לכל הנופלים

וכן תמונת אות ס' הוא היקף

<p>And this is the work of this month: To stubbornly trust that the blessed G!d will guard and help you even if you have acted destructively, G!d forbid. You can fix everything through Teshuvah.</p>	<p>וזה עסק חודש זה להיות מבטח עז בהשי"ת שישמרהו ויסייעהו אף אם קלקל ח"ו יוכל לתקן הכל ע"י תשובה</p>
<p><i>This month's faculty of sleep occupies a unique and quite problematic place in our lives. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2015 that 35% of US adults suffer from sleep deprivation, which causes a wide array of potentially serious physiological and psychological ailments. What does this ancient midrash have to say about our need for sleep?</i></p>	
<p>Genesis Rabbah 8:10</p> <p>When the blessed Holy One created the first human, the ministering angels erred because of him, and sought to say before him, "Holy!" (Isaiah 6:3). What did the blessed Holy One do? He caused a deep sleep to fall upon him, then everyone knew that he was human.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה ח:י</p> <p>בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון טעו בו מלאכי השרת ובקשו לומר לפניו קדוש מה עשה הקדוש ב"ה הפיל עליו תרדמה וידעו הכל שהוא אדם</p>
<p><i>Many of our traditional sources emphasize the merits of sleeping as little as possible, to (supposedly) maximize the positive activities we can engage in. What assumptions about sleep are evident here?</i></p>	
<p>Genesis Rabbah 9:6</p> <p>"And behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). This means: "Behold, sleep is good!" But is sleep actually very good?! After all, have we not been taught: "When the wicked drink wine and sleep, it is good for them and good for the world"? However, because a person sleeps a little, they are able to get up and toil greatly in Torah study.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה ט:ו</p> <p>הנה טוב מאד והנה טובה שינה וכי שינה טובה מאד אתמהא לא כן תנינן יין ושינה לרשעים נאה להם ונאה לעולם אלא מתוך שאדם ישן קימעא הוא עומד ויגע בתורה הרבה</p>
<p><i>Apart from as a prerequisite for learning Torah or doing other good deeds, how else might sleep be good, in the view of our early sages?</i></p>	
<p>Genesis Rabbah 17:5</p> <p>"And the Eternal G!d caused a deep sleep to fall [upon the human]..." (Gen. 2:21). R' Yehoshua of Sichnin said in the name of R' Levi: the beginning of a person's downfall is sleep. When asleep, they do not engage in Torah or work. Rav said: there are three types of deep sleep: the deep sleep of sleep; the deep sleep of prophecy; and the deep sleep of a trance.</p>	<p>בראשית רבה יז:ה</p> <p>ויפל יקוק אלקים תרדמה רבי יהושע דסכנין בשם רבי לוי אמר תחלת מפלה שינה דמך ליה ולא לעי באורייתא ולא עביד עבידתא רב אמר שלוש תרדמות הן תרדמת שינה ותרדמת נבואה ותרדמת מרמיטה</p>

<p>The Rabbis said: [there is a fourth type] even the deep sleep of foolishness.</p> <p>R' Chanina bar Yitzchak said: there are three withered reflections: A withered reflection of death is sleep; a withered reflection of prophecy is dreaming; a withered reflection of the world to come is Shabbat. R' Avin added two more: a withered reflection of the heavenly light is the sun; a withered reflection of heavenly wisdom is Torah.</p>	<p>רבנן אמרי אף תרדמה של שטות רבי חנינא בר יצחק אמר שלושה נובלות הן נובלת מיתה - שינה נובלת נבואה - חלום נובלת העולם הבא - שבת רבי אבין מוסיף עוד תרתין נובלת אורה של מעלה - גלגל חמה נובלת חכמה של מעלה - תורה</p>
<p><i>What attitudes towards sleep are revealed in this talmudic bedtime prayer?</i></p>	
<p>Babylonian Talmud, Brachot 60b</p> <p>One who enters to sleep on their bed recites the first paragraph of the Shema. Then they recite: Blessed [are You...] Who makes the bonds of sleep fall upon my eyes and slumber upon my eyelids, and illuminates the pupil of the eye. May it be Your will, O Eternal my G!d, that You make me lie down in peace and give me my portion in Your Torah, accustom me to mitzvot and do not accustom me to transgression, lead me not into error, nor into iniquity, nor into temptation nor into disgrace.</p> <p>May the good inclination have dominion over me and may the evil inclination not have dominion over me. Save me from an evil mishap and evil diseases. Let neither bad dreams nor troubling thoughts disturb me. May my bed be flawless before You. Enlighten my eyes in the morning lest I sleep [the sleep of] death. Blessed are You, O Eternal, Who gives light to the whole world in His glory.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי - ברכות ס"ב</p> <p>הנכנס לישן על מטתו אומר משמע ישראל עד והיה אם שמוע ואומר ברוך המפיל חבלי שינה על עיני ותנומה על עפעפי ומאיר לאישון בת עין</p> <p>יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלקי שתשכיבני לשלום ותן חלקי בתורתך ותרגילני לידי מצוה ואל תרגילני לידי עבירה ואל תביאני לידי חטא ולא לידי עון ולא לידי נסיון ולא לידי בזיון</p> <p>וישלוט בי יצר טוב ואל ישלוט בי יצר הרע ותצילני מפגע רע ומחללים רעים ואל יבהלוני חלומות רעים הרהורים רעים ותהא מטתי שלמה לפניך והאר עיני פן אישן המות</p> <p>ברוך אתה השם המאיר לעולם כולו בכבודו</p>

Section 2: Isn't Life a Dream?

In the traditional annual Torah-reading cycle, this powerful story is always recited in Kislev. What does this text have to say about sleep and dreams, and what questions does it raise?

Genesis 28:10-18

And Jacob left Be'er Sheva, and went toward Charan. And he encountered the place, and he slept there, because the sun set. He took some of the stones of the place, he put them under his head and lay down in that place. He dreamt a ladder was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of G'd were going up and down on it. And the Eternal was standing over him and He said, "I am the Eternal, the G'd of your father Abraham and the G'd of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will give to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Eternal is present in this place, and I did not know it!" And he was in awe. He said, "How awe-some is this place! This is none other than the abode of G'd, and that is the gateway to heaven." And Jacob awoke early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.

בראשית כח:י-יח

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שְׂבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חַרְנָה
וַיִּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם וַיֵּלֶן שָׁם
כִּי־בָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ
וַיִּקַּח מֵאֲבָנֵי הַמָּקוֹם וַיִּשֶׂם מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו
וַיִּשְׁכַּב בַּמָּקוֹם הַהוּא
וַיַּחְלֹם וְהִנֵּה סֹלֶם מֻצָּב אֶרֶצָה
וְרֹאשׁוֹ מְגִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִמָה
וְהִנֵּה מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹקִים עֹלִים וְיֹרְדִים בּוֹ
וְהִנֵּה יְקֹקֵץ נֹצֵב עָלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר
אֲנִי יְקֹקֵץ אֱלֹקֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם אָבִיךָ וְאֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲתָה שׁוֹכֵב עָלֶיהָ
לְךָ אֶתְנַנְנָה וְלֹרְעֶךָ
וְהָיָה זֶרְעֶךָ כַּעֲפֹר הָאָרֶץ
וַיַּרְצֵת יָמָה וְקִדְמָה
וַצַּפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה
וַנִּבְרְכוּ בְךָ
כָּל־מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה וּבְזֶרְעֶךָ
וְהִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי עֹמֵךְ וְשִׁמְרֹתֶיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר־תֵּלֵךְ
וְהִשְׁבַּתֶיךָ אֶל־הָאָדָמָה הַזֹּאת
כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ
עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם־עָשִׂיתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר־דִּבַּרְתִּי לְךָ
וַיִּקֶץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנָתוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְקֹקֵץ בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה
וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי
וַיִּירָא וַיֹּאמֶר מֵה־נִּוְרָא הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה אֵין זֶה כִּי
אִם־בֵּית אֱלֹקִים וְזֶה שַׁעַר הַשָּׁמַיִם
וַיִּשְׁכֹּם יַעֲקֹב בַּבֹּקֶר
וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָאֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר־שָׂם מִרְאֲשֹׁתָיו
וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָהּ מִצְבֵּה וַיִּצֹק שֶׁמֶן עַל־רֹאשָׁהּ

R' Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040 – 1105), known by the acronym Rashi, was a French scholar and author of the most authoritative commentaries on both the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and the Talmud. There seems to be a textual contradiction to Rashi's interpretation here – what is it?

Rashi on Genesis 28:16

“[Surely the Eternal is present in this place,] and I did not know it!” – For if I had known, I would not have slept in such a holy place as this.

רש"י על בראשית כח:טז

ואנכי לא ידעתי
שאלו ידעתי
לא ישנתי במקום קדוש כזה

Rashi cites the talmudic interpretation below from R' Yitzchak. What can we learn about Jacob's attitude towards sleep and dreams by combining the teachings above and below, as Rashi does?

Babylonian Talmud, Chullin 91b

It is written: “And Jacob left Be'er Sheva, and went toward Charan” (Genesis 28:10). And it is written thereafter: “And he encountered the place, [and he slept there, because the sun set]” (Gen. 28:11). When Jacob arrived at Charan, he said: Is it possible that I passed a place where my fathers prayed and I did not pray there? When he set his mind to return, the land contracted for him. Hence: “And he encountered the place.”

When he had finished praying and he wanted to return [on his way,] the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: “This righteous man came to my lodging place and he will depart without sleeping over!?” Immediately, “the sun set.”

תלמוד בבלי - חולין צאב:

כתיב
ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה
וכתיב ויפגע במקום

כי מטא לחרן אמר
אפשר עברתי על מקום שהתפללו אבותי
ואני לא התפללתי
כד יהיב דעתיה למיהדר קפצה ליה ארעא מיד
ויפגע במקום

כד צלי
בעי למיהדר
אמר הקב"ה צדיק זה בא לבית מלוני
ויפטר בלא לינה
מיד בא השמש

R' Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev (Poland and Ukraine, 1740 – 1809), is also known as the Kedushat Levi, after his most popular work, a widely beloved Chasidic commentary on the Torah and festivals. A key student of the Maggid of Mezritch, he became an important leader of his generation, and was known to be a devoted lover, helper and defender of our entire people. What is being stated explicitly in the interpretation below, and what may be being implied?

Kedushat Levi on Parshat Vayetzei

When [Jacob] slept, his soul and his thoughts ascended on high, and his soul was attached to the blessed Holy One, the root of all roots. And this is the meaning of, “He took some of the stones of the place” (Gen. 28:11), referring to those letters which his thought is composed of.
...
He put them “in the place” meaning in the blessed Holy One, who is called Place. And this is the meaning, that he placed them above his head. Because he was asleep, his thoughts ascended into the blessed Holy One, Who is above a person's head...

קדושת לוי על פרשת ויצא

כשהיה ישן עלה נשמתו ומחשבתו למעלה
ומדבק נשמתו להקדוש ברוך הוא
בשורש של כל השרשים
וזהו פירוש ויקח מאבני המקום
דהיינו אותן האותיות
שהיו במחשבתו
...
שם אותן במקום
דהיינו בהבורא ברוך הוא שנקרא מקום
וזה הפירוש וישם למעלה מראשותיו
רצה לומר מכח השינה
היה עליות מחשבתו בהבורא ברוך הוא
שהוא למעלה מראשו של אדם

R' Mordechai Joseph Leiner of Izhbitz (1801-1854), known as the Mei HaShiloach (The Waters of the Shiloach Pool), was a major figure in Polish Chasidut and founder of the Izhbitza-Radzyn dynasty. He was a leading student of Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa and his students included Rav Tzadok HaKohen and his grandson, R' Gershon Hanoch Leiner of Radzyn.

<i>What are the implications his interpretation of this verse for our relationship to our dreams?</i>	
<p>Genesis 41:15</p> <p>And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it, but I have heard it said of you [that] you understand a dream to interpret it.”</p>	<p>בראשית מא:טו</p> <p>וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה אֶל-יֹסֵף חֲלוֹם חֲלַמְתִּי וּפְתָר אֵין אֵתוֹ וְאֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי עֲלֶיךָ לֵאמֹר תִּשְׁמַע חֲלוֹם לִפְתֹּר אֹתוֹ</p>
<p>Mei HaShiloach on Parshat Miketz</p> <p>“You understand a dream to interpret it.” Every aspect of this world is like a dream that requires interpretation. As a person interprets it, so will it manifest for them. And a person who understands that in every matter, everything originates from G!d, that everything lives only from what emerges from His mouth, understands the meaning of all things and reaches true life.</p>	<p>מי השילוח על פרשת מקץ</p> <p>תשמע חלום לפתור אותו כי כל ענייני עולם הזה הם כחלום הצריך פתרון וכמו שיפתור לו האדם כן יקום אצלו והאדם המבין בכל כי הכל הוא רק מהשם יתברך רק ממוצא פיו יחיה הכל זה מבין טעם בכל דבר ומגיע לחיים אמתיים</p>