Freud was understandably ambivalent toward Talmudic and Midrashic traditions of dream interpretation, for these sources both affirm and dispute the interpreter’s power. They provoke reevaluation of the task of the dream interpreter by suggesting that interpretations, rather than dreams themselves, can prophesy or alter future events. Rabbinic sources do not in general conceive the meaning of a dream as a divine message or plan; the meaning of a dream lies beyond it, and may be modified by an interpretation. Dream texts receive their meaning retrospectively, from the dreamer and from every interpreter called upon for assistance.

The discussion of dreams in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Berakhot, raises central questions of interpretive method and validity. This extensive compilation of rabbinic views combines theories and narratives, legal assertions (halakhot) and legendary stories (aggadot). Twentieth-century psychologists, philosophers, and intellectual historians have only scratched the surface of the chapter on dreams. Sigmund (Solomon) Freud, when he learned of the last chapter of Berakhot and the parallel passage in Lamentations Rabbah, had reason to suppress the narratives they contain. Freud could not have dismissed the rabbinic discussions of dream interpretation as readily as he did their biblical precedents; the Talmud and Midrash cast two dream interpreters in the role of villain, when dream analyses expose a dreamer, his family, and the interpreter to mortal danger. In response to the challenge of the Talmud, Freudian theory would have to reconsider the quasi-prophetic effects achieved by suggestion.

Rabbinic voices in the Talmud and Midrash anticipate several aspects of Freud's work on dreams. First, in their underlying assumptions: rabbinic traditions emphasize the importance and complexity of interpretation. Second, in their skepticism: rabbis occasionally express disbelief and antagonism toward dream interpreters who claim to make prophetic pronouncements. Third, in their techniques: rabbinic commentators frequently arrive at their results by resorting to puns and verbal associations. Finally, in their content: some rabbis insinuate the sexual significance of dreams. Such resonances do not, however, imply a direct influence on Freud, who labored incessantly to avoid coming to terms with his precursors.

Berakhot contains theoretical statements on dreams, legends about notable interpretations, and explanations of common symbols. The relevant passage raises controversial problems of dream interpretation; to the extent that textual interpretation resembles dream interpretation, the Talmud uncovers risks inherent in all commentary. In this problematic situation, Midrashic texts attempt to differentiate sharply between rabbinic interpreters and their rivals.

"A Dream That Is Not Interpreted . . ."

The discussion of dreams in Berakhot opens by attributing several sayings to R. Chisda. One simile compares dreams to texts: "A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that is not read." This figurative equation poses problems that set the tone of the passage. R. Chisda suggests that a dream awaits interpretation, as a letter demands reading. A Freudian might comment that dreams contain censored messages from the unconscious, which require special techniques in order to be read. R. Chisda perhaps indicates that dreams can be interpreted because they are like letters. He also points out that if we do not interpret our dreams, this is like ignoring a message we have received. Yet R. Chisda's words resist translation into a proposition, and his saying does not specify the ethical implications of the analogy; this statement may hint that it is better not to open some dream letters. Following the Midrashic commentary on Genesis 41:13, Rashi translates the elusive simile into more concrete and evaluative terms: "Such a dream is neither good nor bad, because all dreams follow their interpretation." Rashi alludes to the belief that only interpretation bestows positive or negative meaning on a dream. Sometimes the emotional response to a dream already acts as a kind of interpretation, however, so that we may not be as free in dealing with dreams as we are in deciding whether to read a letter.

The source of the dream, if it is analogous to the sender of a letter, remains obscure. Berakhot 55b subsequently cites the conflicting views that dreams may be granted by angels (malakhim) or aroused by evil spirits.


4. R. Chisda's statement is not, however, necessarily equivalent to a positive assertion. "A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that is not read" need not imply that an interpreted dream is like a read letter.
According to another opinion, in contrast, a dream is shown to a man only from "the thoughts of his heart" (Ber. 55b). Transcendent and immanent explanations of dream origins appear to compete. The transcendent theory conceives dreams as minor prophecies, like letters sent from God; the immanent conception suggests that dreams derive from subjective thought processes. Yet the sharp distinction between these two poles ultimately breaks down, since both views recognize language—at once a subjective and an impersonal phenomenon—as the origin of dreams and the locus of their meaning. The opposition between transcendence and immanence reappears as two modes of language, centered around scriptural allusions and personal associations.

R. Chisda neither advises nor discourages the opening of dream letters, for the consequences are unpredictable. This leads to a skeptical view of dream prophecy, when R. Chisda adds that "the sadness of a bad dream is sufficient to it, and the joy of a good dream is sufficient to it" (Ber. 55a). No further consequences need be anticipated; awakening from a bad dream brings relief, whereas awakening from a good dream may bring disappointment. Paradoxically, he also states that "a bad dream is preferable to a good dream" (ibid.).

R. Chisda's chain of assertions might then imply that bad news in a letter is better than good news, or that a dream from an evil spirit is better than a dream from an angel. The difficulties are too easily reconciled by Rashi's gloss: "For it [the bad dream] brings a man to

5. Compare Chagigah 5b: "Although I [God] have hidden my face from him [the prophet], yet I will speak with him in a dream." The biblical source is Numbers 12:6, in which God tells Moses, Aaron, and Miriam that "if there is a prophet among you, I make myself known to him in a vision, and speak to him in a dream." Berakhot never resolves the dualistic tensions that may result from attributing some dreams to demons.

6. In its reference to thoughts of the heart, the Talmud alludes to Daniel 2:30. There are several other points of contact between Berakhot and the early chapters of Daniel. When King Nebuchadnezzar requests a dream interpretation, he asks to be told both the dream and its meaning (Dan. 2:26). Later, King Belshazzar asks that Daniel "read this writing, and make known its meaning" (Dan. 5:16). These passages perhaps influence the Talmudic notions that a dream is like a letter, and that interpretation revises the dream text.

7. Earlier in the Gemara (Ber. 55a), we learn of three things that require divine mercy: a good king, a good year, and a good dream. The commentator proves the latter by means of wordplay, quoting Isaiah 38:16, "And you will restore me and make me live." In this phrase, "restore me" (v'tachalimeni) contains the root of the verb "to dream" (ch-l-m), which creates an undercurrent of meaning: make me have a dream, and I will live.
Battles of Interpretation

"repentance." In accordance with this conception, R. Huna comments that "a good man is not shown a good dream, and a bad man is not shown a bad dream" (Ber. 55b). The impression arises that the response to a dream is even more decisive than the dream itself; Berakhot gradually refutes the assumption that dreams are intrinsically good or bad. The simile that likens dreams and letters also challenges our ordinary ideas of reading, because the message of a dream is not fixed, and depends on the interpretation it receives. If interpretation influences the significance of a dream, then there appear to be no univocally good or bad dreams; the dreamer is most endangered by negative interpretation. As a result, R. Chisda intimates, it may be best to avoid dwelling on the meaning of dreams, potentially causing misfortune.

Berakhot 55b explains how to cancel the effects of disturbing dreams: "One who sees a dream and whose soul is grieved will go and have it interpreted before three [men]." More precisely, one should not interpret the bad dream, thereby strengthening its message, but merely improve it. The dreamer who feels grieved has, in a sense, already performed an interpretation. Such a person should go to three others and say, "I have seen a good dream," to which they must respond, "Good it is and good may it be." To cancel negative consequences, the three others must repeat biblical verses that refer to three turns, three redemptions, and three assurances of peace. To make a bad dream good is to displace it by returning to repentance, redemption, and peace—in scriptural contexts. This and the following procedure have entered the traditional ritual known as "improvement of a dream (hatavat chalom)," just as another prayer has been incorporated into the priestly blessing for the benefit of those who have dreamed but do not remember their dreams. Such rituals are attributed with the power to reverse negative effects. Similarly, one of the Amoraim made a practice of annulling negative dreams and enhancing positive dreams. When he had a bad dream, Samuel cited Zechariah 10:2, saying, "And the dreams speak falsehood." When he had a good dream, he modified this phrase, saying, "Do the dreams speak falsehood?" Then he added a verse from Numbers 12:6, recalling that "I [God] will speak with him in a dream" (Ber. 55b).

8. The number three suggests a legal court (bet din), illustrating the close connection between the legend (aggadah) and law (halakhah) related to dreams.

9. Compare Nedarim 8a: If a man dreams that he has been excommunicated, a minyan of ten must release him from the dream. In this case, the dream and its fulfillment are treated as if they were identical; the dream performs its meaning. According to Shabbat 11a, fasting can also serve to cancel bad dreams. For further halakhic references, see the article on hatavat chalom in the Entsiqlopedia Talmudit, ed. S. J. Zevin (Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia, 1980), vol. 7, pp. 753–58.
As in the ritual of hatavat chalom, Samuel employed scriptural intertexts to assure either a positive outcome or the elimination of negative effects.

“All Dreams Follow the Mouth”

Prophetic dreams are commonly misunderstood as visual images of future events, albeit in disguised or distorted forms. Talmudic stories show that the actual locus of dream prophecy is neither the dream nor even the reported dream text. In the narrowest sense, a prophecy must state what will occur in the future; since dreams seldom provide such direct statements, their prophetic content depends on interpretation. A prophetic dream interpretation must, on the basis of a dream report, conclude that some future reality is imminent. Such a prophecy is fulfilled when the dreamer accepts it, perceiving a correspondence between the prediction and later events. This is not the only sense in which prophecy is attributed to biblical prophets; Hebrew and Aramaic sources refer to the prophet (navi) more broadly, as one who can speak God’s words.

Certain voices in the Talmud propose that dreams may be God-given and prophetic although they do not literally represent what will happen. Dream distortions are inescapable, for “just as there is no wheat without straw, so there is no dream without worthless things” (Ber. 55a). Because even prophetic dreams are not literal representations, interpretation is necessary. The freedom of interpretation leads rabbinic authorities to fear that dream interpreters may retrospectively rewrite the dream message, and cause whatever they predict.

According to a long line of Tannaim, when R. Bana’ah went to twenty-four interpreters with a single dream, “each interpreted differently, and all of their interpretations were fulfilled.” This story culminates in a metaphorically complex phrase: “All dreams follow the mouth (Kol ha-chalomot holkhim achar ha-peh).”¹⁰ The Gemara asks whether this phrase is scriptural, as is implied by the introductory word, she-ne’emar, “as it is said.” This is not a biblical verse, although it purportedly derives from Genesis 41:13, when Pharaoh’s chief baker explains that “as he interpreted to us, so it was.” If “the mouth” is a synecdoche for the interpreter, and if “dreams” stand for prophetic consequences, then this assertion indicates

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¹⁰ Ber. 55b. Kristianpoller discusses the Midrashic versions of this formulation in his Traum und Traumdeutung, in Monumenta Talmudica, vol. 4, pt. 2, pp. 37n and 52n. Löwinger, in Der Traum in der jüdischen Literatur, pp. 25–27, oversimplifies this metaphorical assertion by viewing peh as a scribal error for an abbreviated spelling of pitron. But Löwinger also cites traditions, contained in the En Ya’akov, which take this “mouth” literally: “After an opulent meal at night, one has many and confused dreams; thus all dreams follow the mouth that takes in food.”
that a prophetic dream will be fulfilled in accordance with its interpretation. Nevertheless, there are other senses in which "all dreams follow the mouth." After an emperor is told what he will see in his dream, he thinks about it all day and sees it at night (Ber. 56a). It is not clear whose mouth has the power to influence dreams or their consequences. In the case of the emperor, the words he hears during the day are the "residues" (Freudian *Tagesreste*) that return in his dream. But the words that are spoken after a dream, by the dreamer and the interpreter who retell and evaluate it, may also dominate or create meaning. At stake is the relationship between dreams and speech, as between Scripture and commentary, the written and the oral Torah.

The Talmud does not support an unquestioning belief in dream prophecy. A dream may be a minor prophecy (Ber. 55b; compare Genesis Rabbah 17:5), and yet "there is no dream without worthless things." 11 The manifest content of a dream always contains trivial elements; even a prophetic dream requires interpretation. When R. Bana'ah tells his dream to twenty-four interpreters, their interpretations are all fulfilled, but there is no way to determine whether the prophecies inhere in the dream or generate the effects that follow. Modern psychology cannot easily disregard the suspicion that, as "all dreams follow the mouth," dream interpreters perform self-fulfilling prophecies. In order for this to happen, the dreamer need only perceive or create conditions that reflect the interpretation. When interpretation is combined with powers of suggestion, as facilitated by the transference relationship between analyst and patient, the dreamer is indeed likely to enact whatever the interpreter proposes. As the Midrash on Genesis 41:13 comments that "all follows the interpretation," Talmudic sources are eminently aware of the pitfalls of dream interpretation. Dreams are like written messages, the meaning of which appears to be altered by acts of reading.

A lively tale of Bar Hedia illustrates the dangers of dream interpretation and at the same time modifies all previous theoretical assertions. The Gemara never definitively establishes whether the interpreter is a mercenary quack, a man capable of providing dreams' prophetic content, or both. In any event, the text unmistakably shows antagonism between the rabbi (Raba) and the dream interpreter (Bar Hedia). This story opens with a blunt statement of the economics of dream interpretation: "Bar Hedia was an interpreter of dreams. To one who gave him money, he interpreted for good, and to one who did not give him money, he interpreted for evil" (Ber. 56a). Bar Hedia's example suggests that dreams are in themselves

11. Skeptical voices in the Talmud frequently repeat that "things of a dream are worthless." See, for example, Sanhedrin 30a, Baraita. Deep, unspoken tensions characterize the relationship between dreams and Scripture.
neither good nor bad, and that the interpreter may impose a positive or a negative meaning. His story begins in a humorous vein and becomes increasingly tragic. At first, dream interpretation is simply a business, for which Bar Hedia is obliged to accept money. Serious matters are at stake, however, because his prophecies are fulfilled.

Abaye and Raba are famous rivals who disagree about many issues including the nature of dream interpretation, and who test Bar Hedia's interpretive powers by bringing him identical dreams. Abaye bets on Bar Hedia's talents, while Raba doubts them; consequently Abaye pays the usual fee, while Raba does not. In this context, then, Abaye represents the view that dream interpretation may be prophetic. Raba either believes that dream interpretation has no prophetic power, or that the power of dreams is contained in them, apart from interpretation. As a student and son-in-law of R. Chisda, Raba should know better, for R. Chisda's ideas about dreams include the comparison of an uninterpreted dream to an unread letter. He might have guessed that reading a dream letter could have drastic consequences. Raba and his family suffer as a result of his skepticism concerning Bar Hedia's prophetic interpretations.

In accordance with his business practices, Bar Hedia interprets identical dream reports positively to Abaye and negatively to Raba. While Abaye and Raba say that they have dreamed identically, at first they refer only to scriptural verses that appear in their dreams. This makes Bar Hedia's dream interpretations virtually equivalent to textual interpretations. Implicitly, then, Abaye and Raba disagree over methods of understanding the Bible and over Bar Hedia's claims to read Scripture as prophesying an individual's future. Previously, scriptural passages assisted the evaluation and amelioration of dreams. At this point, Scripture constitutes the dreams, underscoring the parallel between dream interpreters and rabbinic commentators.

To Abaye, Bar Hedia interprets: "Your business will prosper... You will have numerous sons and daughters"; to Raba, he interprets: "Your business will fail... Your wife will die" (Ber. 56a). Raba returns to Bar Hedia alone and recounts additional dreams without offering payment. Bar Hedia interprets: "Your sons and daughters will die... You will receive two blows." A light moment intervenes, signaling that Raba has begun to acknowledge Bar Hedia's powers. After he hears Bar Hedia's most recent prophecies, Raba finds two blind men quarreling in the House of Study. He tries to separate them, and they strike him twice, fulfilling Bar Hedia's prophecy. They are about to hit him again, but he objects with a mixture of humor and resignation: "Enough! [In my dream, as interpreted] I saw only two!" (ibid.).

Some time later, probably after the death of his wife and children, Raba cedes to Bar Hedia's monetary demands. Finally Bar Hedia interprets
Raba's most recent dreams positively: "You will acquire wealth without limit. . . . Abaye will die and his school will go to you. . . . Your learning will be spread throughout the world. . . . Miracles will happen to you" (Ber. 56a). This final prophecy is a connecting link to the next story.\(^{12}\) Bar Hedia has shown himself to be a merciless businessman, resolved to prophesy the worst for those who do not pay him.\(^{13}\) Yet not until their next encounter does Raba believe he understands what Bar Hedia has done.

The dream interpreter and Raba are traveling in a boat when Bar Hedia recalls his previous prophecy and asks himself: "Why should I travel with a man to whom miracles will happen?" He perhaps imagines that the boat will sink and that only Raba will be miraculously saved. Bar Hedia's thought implies confidence in his own prophecy combined with the hope that it can be delayed or deflected. Bar Hedia attempts a quick escape, but "as he was disembarking, a book fell from him. Raba found it, and saw (chazah) written in it: All dreams follow the mouth" (Ber. 56a). A text within the text—perhaps an early dream manual—reveals one of Bar Hedia's interpretive principles. Either Raba was not previously aware of this maxim, or he did not realize that it played a part in Bar Hedia's interpretations. Raba instantly assumes that "all dreams follow the mouth" indicates the interpreter's power to influence events. When this theoretical proposition, already mentioned in the Talmudic discussion, becomes an active force in the story, Raba exclaims: "You wicked man! It was all fulfilled through your hand, and gave me all this great pain." In his angry response, Raba conceives the metaphoric dictum to mean that dreams' consequences follow the interpreter's mouth; Raba finally admits the power of dream interpretation. Raba also wields power, and now curses Bar Hedia: "May it be God's will that this man be given over into the hands of a kingdom that has no pity on him." Curses, like dream prophecies, may predetermine events; dream prophecies may also work essentially as curses, as in the stories of R. Ishmael and his students.

Bar Hedia's desperate reaction helps to fulfill the curse. Convinced that "a wise man's curse, even if undeserved, comes to pass," Bar Hedia sees no escape from punishment. He believes that he has been justly blamed, for he understands that interpretation may produce prophetic ef-

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12. This prophecy also recalls the Mishna that opens Berakhot, chapter 9, which prescribes a benediction for "one who sees a place where miracles were performed for Israel" (Ber. 54a). These words of the Mishna allude to the crossing of the Red Sea, and contextualize the present references to the Hallel and to miracles.

13. Bar Hedia's demands may appear in a new light if, as Freud argues in connection with his fees, the payment is an essential part of the interpretive process without which he cannot perform.
fects such as the death of Raba's wife. Like Raba, who insists on receiving only two blows because the interpretation of his dream predicted only two, through his actions Bar Hedia effectively fulfills a curse. He flees in order to atone for his sin by exiling himself among the Romans, and Bar Hedia's story repeats itself. While he sits at the doorway of the emperor's wardrobe, the overseer recounts dreams. Bar Hedia's mercenary practices have not changed, and he refuses to offer interpretations without payment. After some time has passed, he nonetheless proclaims the meaning of what the overseer has dreamed: "Worms have been eating all the silks." The emperor prepares to punish the overseer for his negligence, but the man shrewdly displaces the guilt: "Why me? Bring the man who knew and did not tell!" All assume that the dream interpreter knew what was happening to the silks from the outset. Bar Hedia meets a terrible end, symbolically suited to his manner of giving equivocal interpretations: he is strapped to two cedars that are tied together, and when the rope is released, he is torn apart.

No clear lines separate the experience, recollection, transcription, translation, and evaluation of a dream; similarly, there is no firm distinction between fictive and prophetic contents. According to one reading, the saying "all dreams follow the mouth" means that the interpreter is a kind of sorcerer whose prophecies are invariably fulfilled. Another reading suggests that the interpreter may be a powerful personality whose suggestions influence the dreamer's future actions. The prophesied future is not intrinsic to the dream; it is actualized by an interpreter. The narrative of Bar Hedia, Raba, and Abaye does not merely illustrate this abstract statement, but proposes several possible interpretations and revisions. One conclusion is self-evident: dream interpreters can be dangerous both to others and to themselves. The meaning of dreams lies beyond them, and their interpretation may alter actions and events.

The story of Bar Hedia thus revises the meaning first given to the adage it contains. "All dreams follow the mouth" comes to mean, in part, that dream interpreters may create prophetic results by imposing their interpretations. This justifies Raba's initial skepticism, and yet the story narrates Raba's realization that dream interpretations do have prophetic potential. Thus he cannot forgive Bar Hedia's prediction about his wife, which anticipates her death. The assertion that "all dreams follow the mouth" hints at the linguistic structures that precondition dreams and the power of language to modify reality.

"Your Father Has Left You Money in Cappadocia"

Following the story of Bar Hedia's execution, the Talmudic discussion takes a new turn. The statement that "all dreams follow the mouth" does not
receive a definitive commentary, and the relationship between interpretation and prophetic consequences remains inconclusive. In any event, since "mouth" is a figure for the interpreter or his interpretation, the significance of dreams appears to depend on language. This idea conforms to both Talmudic and Freudian practices of dream interpretation. The dream work and linguistic reformulation of a dream turn out to be essential to dream interpretation, and in practice they constitute the primary dream reality; this is a further sense in which "all dreams follow the mouth." As in its usual exegetical procedures, the Gemara places special emphasis on the linguistic component in dream interpretation. Whereas Freudian psychology bases its interpretations on personal associations of the dreamer, however, Talmudic interpreters most frequently associate dreams with scriptural language. In their milieu, Scripture provided familiar associations for a wide range of dreamers.

The Talmud offers numerous examples of dream interpretation on the basis of wordplay. According to one story, Bar Kappara tells Rabbi of a dream in which his nose (af) falls off. Because Hebrew and Aramaic employ the word for "nose" in expressions describing anger, Rabbi interprets: "Seething anger (charon af) has been removed from you." Similarly, Bar Kappara dreams that others tell him: "You will die in the month of Adar and not see Nisan." Rabbi converts these Hebrew names of months into signifiers, and interprets: "You will die in all honor (adruta), and not come into temptation (nissayon)" (Ber. 56b).14 Wordplay of this kind is prominent in rabbinic commentary; the commentators would have maintained that to recognize the interactions of Hebrew signs is to receive God's meanings, not to impose or project one's own.15 The rabbis assume that the essential structure of signification is divine, and for this reason dreams must be in-

14. The Palestinian Talmud, Ma'aser Sheni 4:6, ascribes this positive interpretation to R. Akiba. See also the parallel account in Lamentations Rabbah 1:1:16, in which R. Johanan performs the interpretations. These are evidently stock tales without clear historical basis.

terpreted in accordance with scriptural language. But even an appropriate allusion to Scripture requires interpretation, and does not simply convey the literal meaning of a dream.

While Freud finds meaning through free associations of the individual, Talmudic dream interpretations, like rabbinic commentaries, center on quotations from Scripture. Textual tradition is the basis for a shared symbolic code. For instance: "One who sees a reed (qaneh) in a dream may hope for wisdom, as it is said, 'Acquire (q'neh) wisdom' [Proverbs 4:5]." If one sees several reeds (qanim), one may expect understanding, "because it is written, 'And with all your acquisitions (qinyanekha), get (q'ne) understanding' [Proverbs 4:7]." According to Baba Kama 55a, the letter Tet is a good sign in a dream, because this letter first appears in the Torah when God creates light and sees that it is good (tov). Later passages in Berakhot 56b–57a explain diverse dream images by reference to Scripture. This practice supports the belief that dreams are sent by God, at least in the sense that God's Torah is the key to meaning and truth. Rabbinic sources actively prescribe recourse to Scripture; to assure good outcomes of dreams it is essential to place their imagery in a favorable scriptural context. If one sees a river, one should say, "I will extend peace to her like a river" (Is. 66:12), in order to avoid the negative consequences of thinking, "for distress will come in like a river" (Is. 59:19). If one sees a bird, one should say, "as birds hovering, so [the Lord of hosts] will protect" (Is. 31:5), in order to forestall the association, "as a bird that wanders from its nest" (Prov. 27:8). The Talmud gives numerous examples of this kind.

One hardly knows what one has seen in a dream until it is placed in a scriptural context. Some sexually charged dreams lose their unsettling manifest content by being related to linguistic associations: "One who has intercourse with his mother (imo) in a dream may hope for understanding, for it is said, 'Yes, if (im) you call for understanding' [Prov. 2:3]." Or again, "One who has intercourse with a betrothed girl (m'orasa) may hope for Torah, for it is written, 'Moses commanded a Torah, an inheritance (morasha) of the congregation of Jacob' [Deut. 33:4]. Do not read morasha, but m'orasa" (Ber. 57a). In Freudian terms, the rabbis appear to deny sexual wishes by resorting to puns. From the Talmudic standpoint, however, such wordplays are not only possible, but necessary. 16

In another case, local usage rather than Scripture provides the proof text: "One who sees a cat in a dream, in a place where it is called shunara—for him a beautiful song (shira na'ah) is made; in a place where it is called shinara, a change for the worse (shinui ra') will occur to him" (Ber. 56b). Such verbal plays on dialect variants begin to detract from Scripture as the exclusive place of signification.

The dreams of an unnamed min (sectarian or heretic) illustrate both the linguistic subtleties and sexual significance of dreams. This passage is especially significant, since it enacts a drama of interpretation relating to R. Ishmael—who is remembered for his thirteen rules of scriptural commentary. R. Ishmael has no qualms about interpreting negatively, in this case, possibly because he is dealing with a notoriously wicked person; or perhaps the dreamer is called a sectarian precisely because he dreams at a distance from the language of Scripture. Berakhot 56b places R. Ishmael in a position of power, confidently revealing the meaning of dreams. The interpreter seems to anticipate certain Freudian precepts, and many of the interpretations refer to sexual transgressions. First, the sectarian dreams of pouring oil on an olive tree, and this image of oil returning to its source leads R. Ishmael to pronounce, "He has had intercourse with his mother." A dream of one eye kissing the other suggests to R. Ishmael, "He has had intercourse with his sister." A dream of kissing the moon indicates that "he has had intercourse with the wife of an Israelite." A dream of ravens coming to his bed signifies, according to R. Ishmael, that "your wife has prostituted herself with many men." Unlike Joseph and Daniel, in this story R. Ishmael interprets dreams in relation to the dreamer's mundane past. The interpretations are not prophetic, but diagnostic or descriptive; as Freud argued in general, these dreams are like symptoms that form part of the mental life of the dreamer. This conforms to the saying attributed to R. Jonathan: "A man is shown [a dream] only from the thoughts of his heart" (Ber. 55b). R. Ishmael is evidently a skillful judge of dreams' meanings, but he does not prophesy events. A long sequence of incriminating interpretations leads the dreamer to confess his guilt and confirm R. Ishmael's powers.

In Berakhot, after hearing several unfavorable interpretations, the sectarian dreamer adds, "I dreamed they were telling me: Your father has left you money in Cappadocia" (Ber. 56b). R. Ishmael first confirms that the dreamer has no money in that city, and that his father never went there. He then treats Kapadokia as a bilingual signifier, and interprets on the basis of linguistic clues. Kapa means either "beam" in Aramaic or "twenty" in Greek. Dokos means "beam," and deka means "ten," both in Greek. R. Ishmael interprets: "Kapa means 'beam' and deka means 'ten.' Go and examine the beam (kapa) which is at the head of ten, for it is full of coins." Even Freud would have had reason to be pleased with this story, when the dreamer returns home and finds coins at the tenth beam. From a Freudian standpoint, this dream demonstrates the effectiveness of unconscious pro-

17. Gen. Rab. 68:12, Lam. Rab. 1:1:17, Sanhedrin 30a, and the Palestinian Talmud, Ma'aser Sheni 4:6, contain versions of this popular Cappadocia story. Compare Marcus Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and
cesses; the dream seems to have revealed a repressed awareness. Yet money could also have been located near the twentieth beam, or nowhere at all; the interpreter chooses a meaning that the subsequent narrative confirms. The Gemara does not explain how the interpretation works, and only reaffirms that language is the blueprint for the world. Nevertheless, the presence of Greek words in a dream is troublesome; a serious threat lurks on the horizon if certain dreams are structured and deciphered by associations outside the Hebrew Scriptures. The linguistic diaspora of the Jews threatens to displace the totalizing claims of Scripture when several languages signify infinitely and elusively, as does the holy tongue (leshon ha-qadosh).

The rivalry between rabbis and other interpreters is most explicit in one parallel encounter between a later R. Ishmael and a Samaritan. The variations in the two stories attest to the considerable anxieties and polemics associated with such meetings. In Berakhot 56b, the rabbi acts as dream interpreter, ruthlessly bringing to light the sectarian’s sins. In Lamentations Rabbah, however, a Samaritan sets himself up as a dream interpreter, and R. Ishmael ben R. Yose comes to disparage him. Whereas Bar Hedia infamously gives opposite interpretations for a single dream, the Samaritan gives the same interpretation to many dreams, and R. Ishmael corrects his vague, empty prophecies:

A Samaritan (kuti) made himself out to be an interpreter of dreams. R. Ishmael ben R. Yose heard this and said, “Shall I not go and see this foolish-hearted Samaritan who tricks people?” He went and sat by him. A person came and said, “In my dream I saw an olive tree feeding oil.” The Samaritan told him, “The olive denotes light and

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Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature (1903; repr. New York: The Judaica Press, 1971), pp. 288, 1398. Because of the references to Greek in this example, Quf has been transliterated by ‘k.’

18. Saul Lieberman’s Greek in Jewish Palestine (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1942) shows the extent to which Greek language permeated rabbinic thought, but de-emphasizes the associated threat to Hebrew and Aramaic which arose—as the linguistic concomitant of assimilation—in Hellenized Jewish culture. If the significance of dreams can derive from all the languages of the nations, for example, then prophecy threatens to exceed the boundaries of leshon ha-qadosh. Cf. Max Weinreich, History of the Yiddish Language, trans. Shlomo Noble and Joshua A. Fishman (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), pp. 59–65. Weinreich concludes that, despite the famous words of R. Judah concerning study of Greek wisdom, “in Greek there lurked danger for Jewishness” (p. 64).

19. The author wishes to express his debt to Bruce Birdsey, David Blumenthal, and Michael Swartz, who suggested several insights concerning this Midrashic variant.
oil denotes light; you will see light in much light.’ R. Ishmael said to the interpreter: ‘May that man’s spirit faint! [The dream signifies that] he had intercourse with his mother.’ Another person came and said, ‘I dreamt that one of my eyes swallowed the other.’ He told him, ‘You will see light in much light.’ R. Ishmael ben R. Yose said to the interpreter, ‘May that man’s spirit faint! That man has two children and one of them had intercourse with the other.’ Another came to him and said, ‘I dreamt that I swallowed a star.’ He told him, ‘You will see much light. The star denotes light and you are light, so it is light added to light.’ R. Ishmael said to the interpreter, ‘May that man’s spirit faint! He has killed a Jew.’ Whence did R. Ishmael know this? From the verse, ‘Look now toward heaven and count the stars’ [Gen 15:5].

In each instance, after the Samaritan offers a favorable, prophetic interpretation, R. Ishmael ben R. Yose curses him (in the third-person form) and asserts a more immediate and incriminating meaning. Only in the final interpretation cited here does R. Ishmael interpret in relation to Scripture. Concluding that a star symbolizes a Jew, as God suggests to Abraham in Genesis 15:5, R. Ishmael imposes a scriptural meaning on the dream of one who has already turned away from rabbinic views of Scripture. This explicit scene of rivalry over interpretation is absent from the story in Berakhot.

The subsequent dénouement recalls Bar Hedia’s demise, but here R. Ishmael ben R. Yose self-righteously wields power. The rabbi exposes a dreamer to financial ruin, as if to punish him for his misguided faith in the Samaritan interpreter:

Another came and said, ‘I dreamt that everybody pointed their fingers at me.’ He [the Samaritan] told him, ‘You will rise to greatness and all will point their fingers at you.’ R. Ishmael said to the man, ‘Give me a fee and I will interpret for you’; but he replied, ‘It is already interpreted.’ The same man came again and said to the interpreter, ‘I dreamt that all the people were puffing at me with their cheeks and praising me with their fingers.’ He told him, ‘You will rise to greatness, and everybody will praise you with his cheeks.’ R. Ishmael said to him [the interpreter], ‘May that man’s spirit faint! He has a store of wheat; and when he dreamt that people pointed their fingers at him, it denotes that the drippings [of the rain] had fallen

upon it; and when he dreamt that people were puffing at him with their cheeks, it denotes that the wheat had become swollen; and when he dreamt that the people praised him with their fingers, it denotes that the wheat had sprouted so that he would get nothing from it.’” (Lam. Rab. 1:1:14)

The dreamer sustains a loss as a result of his lack of confidence in R. Ishmael, whose timely interpretation could have saved his store of wheat. Whereas Bar Hedia is executed for withholding his presumed knowledge of worms spoiling the Emperor’s wardrobe, by showing his skill R. Ishmael triumphantly defeats a false interpreter.

The Midrash to Lamentations next describes the Samaritan’s efforts to avenge himself on R. Ishmael ben R. Yose. He says, “I will go and see a certain old Jew who jeers at everybody’” (Lam. Rab. 1:1:15). In an attempt to reverse the roles, he comes to the rabbi with a dream: “I dreamt of four cedars, four sycamores, a hide stuffed with straw, and an ox riding upon them.” R. Ishmael ruthlessly foretells the Samaritan’s death:

R. Ishmael said to him, “May that man’s spirit faint! The four cedars are the four bedposts, the four sycamores are the four legs of the bed, the hide stuffed with straw indicates its cords, and the ox riding upon them is the leather mattress upon which you sleep. You will rise up [into bed] but not come down.” And so it happened to him. (Ibid.)

The narrative shows its concern with punishing interpreters who oppose rabbinic interpretations.

This version of the story has special contextual significance. In connection with the Book of Lamentations, which mourns the fall of Jerusalem, Lamentations Rabbah contains a sequence of stories about the relationship between Jerusalemites and Athenians. Every Athenian who comes to Jerusalem is outwitted. These stories play on the anxious condition of Hellenized Jews, for whom Greek language and culture—and alternative forms of dream interpretation—potentially threatened the primacy of Scripture. This threat was obvious to R. Ishmael ben R. Yose, who reportedly sought to discredit a Samaritan interpreter.

Because Talmudic sources conceive Scripture as divine language, they suggest that dreams are most genuinely meaningful by juxtaposition with Scripture. Dreams do not intrinsically contain their prophetic power, but rather await fulfillment through a process of textual substitutions and displacements. While a scriptural passage is not the literal meaning of a dream, it can function as an intertext that makes interpretation possible. Ideally, a dream is associated with a biblical story that contains a favorable outcome. The rabbinic practices of interpretation struggle to ensure that
Jewish life will be defined by Scripture; an opposing view has, however, tacitly intervened: all linguistic associations are meaningful.

"Because of Your Mouth . . ."

Sefer Chasidim, a medieval work by German pietists, returns to and extends the Talmudic discussion of dreams. One lengthy analysis in this text focuses attention on the enigmatic ways in which "all dreams follow the mouth." As in Lamentations Rabbah, highly charged interpretations take place during meetings between Jews and non-Jews.

A first example illustrates the possibly hazardous effects of dream interpretation: "One of the priests told a Jew one of his dreams. He interpreted it that they [the Christians] would give him [the priest] several matters of idol worship, and that he would approve them and teach the people to imitate the [pagan] nations" (par. 440). The implicit assumption is that Christians are not necessarily idolatrous, but that they are in danger of becoming so. A friend of the dream interpreter complains: "Since dreams follow the mouth, because of your mouth (al piekha) he [the dreamer] will perform idol worship." In more general terms, the paragraph comments that "whoever interprets to a Jew that he will sin, it is as if he caused him to sin." A moralistic conclusion completes the passage: "Although the interpreter may be a sage and know that even if he does not interpret, it will happen thus, even so he should not interpret that the man will fall into the hands of sin" (par. 440). The figures of "mouth" and "hand" interact, signaling the dangerous relationship between language and power. As a result of their linguistic force, negative dream interpretations play into the hands of evil.

The consequences of dream interpretation may follow the mouth of the interpreter, but Sefer Chasidim indicates that not all dreams derive from human thoughts. The problem is to distinguish between those dreams that come "at the hands of" angels, and those that come from demons. The pietists propose a simple criterion to determine which dreams do not come from angels: if while dreaming "a man thinks of a picture that he has seen and if he has [previously] thought the thought [which he dreams], this is not a dream at the hands of an angel" (par. 441/382). Dream images that derive from waking experiences—the Freudian "day's residues"—indicate non-

21. I refer to the editions based on Bologna and Parma manuscripts, respectively, indicating paragraph numbers separated by a slash: Sefer Chasidim, ed. Reuben Margulies (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1957); and Das Buch der Frommen, 2d ed. by Jehuda Wistinetzki and J. Freimann (Frankfurt am Main: M. A. Wahrmann, 1924). The first passage cited is, however, extant only in the former edition.
angelic origins. A simile likens the process of dreaming to the situation when someone "throws something round and it rolls by itself to a place which the thrower did not aim at." Such dreams appear to evolve beyond the dreamer's intention, but they are no more significant than is the random course of a thrown object. Following an associative path backward we may discover day's residues, as does Freud, but these are insignificant and "neither the thought nor the dream will be fulfilled" (par. 441/382). Truly significant dreams are given by angels, whose divine intervention assures meaning. And yet even these dreams require an interpretive agency, in turn provided by God's assistance.

*Sefer Chasidim* explicitly links problems of dream interpretation to those of scriptural interpretation, in an extended discussion of the Talmudic views:

> Why does a dream follow the mouth? It is because if dreams did not follow the mouth, we would have to say that dreams are not from God. For behold, the Torah is from Him and follows the mouth and the heart for the interpretation. Now [if you were to say that] one cannot know a dream—and everything that is from the Holy One, blessed be He, is given a heart to know and a mouth to interpret—[then the dream would not be from God]. If not, what is a dream for except to tell us that it is from God, to make known that He knows all the future and makes known to the people what will be in the future, so that one will do repentance, pray to Him, and not sin? (Par. 441/382)

If the written Torah constitutes the collective dream of the Jews, the oral Torah provides interpretations that give meaning and practical force to these dreams. One modern scholar explains, in connection with *Sefer Chasidim*:

> "The written Torah which is God-given can only be understood through the oral Torah. . . . Just as the written Torah's meaning is determined by the oral Torah (*she-be'al peh*), just as the oral Torah is in an ultimate sense God-given, so is the dream interpretation [i.e., following after the mouth, oral] also God-given in an ultimate sense; for it is God who has given the interpreter a heart to understand and a mouth to interpret." Thus the belated oral traditions claim a unique authority based on God's support of their interpretive activities. Dreams and Scripture follow the mouth of the interpreter; "the dream is a kind of divinely written Torah that needs an

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22. While agreeing with this devaluation of the day's residues, Freud might add that they also lead to deeper complexes that will be fulfilled by lived repetitions.

oral Torah (she-be'al peh) to interpret it” (ibid.). The rabbinic commentators appear to justify their own activity of interpretation in relation to the concurrent practices of dream interpreters.

*Sefer Chasidim* repeats the Talmudic story of twenty-four dream interpreters in Jerusalem, whose interpretations of a single dream are all fulfilled. This does not necessarily reflect badly on the interpreters, as *Sefer Chasidim* explains by reference to an assertion in the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 34b: “A single scriptural verse gives rise to several interpretations (ta'amim)” (par. 444/1522). But the pietists add the proviso that “the interpretation should be of the same genre (me'ein) and like (domeh) the dream” (ibid.). Similarly, “the interpretation of a scriptural verse is like its meaning [as it sounds, domeh le-mashma'uto].” In other words, the meaning of Scripture is inseparable from its oral performance, or from its meanings as interpreted by the oral Torah.

The Talmudic discussion and narration of dreams comments on its own operative methods. The dream is like a story or material from the ag gadah, and thus dream interpretation is analogous to the interpretation of a legend. A dream containing its own interpretation is likely to be fulfilled (Ber. 55b); similarly, the story of Bar Hedia incorporates its thesis: “All dreams follow the mouth.” As becomes apparent, however, no interpreter can entirely master the consequences of this metaphorical assertion, and the statement cannot control the narrative frame that surrounds it. To understand Talmudic narratives, then, we need to apply methods of interpretation similar to those employed in the interpretation of dreams. We can no longer maintain the opposition between transcendent and immanent views of dream prophecy, because this dichotomy has been translated into a distinction between two literary and linguistic forms that may blur into each other: the scriptural source and the personal association.

The Babylonian Talmud orients the interpretation of dreams—and of ag gadah—toward Scripture, although life in the diaspora presupposes an alienation from sacred language: written Torah and spoken Hebrew are dis-

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24. Solomon Almoli’s sixteenth-century Pitron Chalomot rejects the associated view of dream interpretation on the grounds that it would make all interpretation as arbitrary as it is binding. In his *Jewish Magic and Superstition* (New York: Behrman, 1939), p. 236, Joshua Trachtenberg comments that Almoli has professional reasons for disputing the Talmudic view. And yet differences of opinion are already present in the Talmud. Apart from the complications suggested by Berakhot, other passages in Yoma 83b, Gittin 52a, and Horayot 13b question the supposed prophetic character of dreams. The hazards of dream interpretation are only mitigated if God presides over the interpretive process, but Berakhot unsettles any confident belief that God or Scripture controls dream interpretation. Contrast Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed*, II, 36–38.
placed by oral Torah, Aramaic, and Greek. Despite its claim to complement the teachings from Sinai, the Gemara adds a multilingual dimension that brings with it all of the problems of translation. The tension between law and legend reappears, transformed into a competition between scriptural and vernacular languages. As the interweaving of halakhah and aggadah might have complicated legal conclusions, so the decentraling of biblical Hebrew was an implicit danger. Can God’s language be maintained and understood despite the dispersion of Jewish expression into all the languages of the nations?

Berakhot implicitly depicts a contest between conflicting schools of interpretation. At one extreme is the belief that dreams literally prophesy future events; at another extreme is the view that dreams do not bear meaning until interpreted. Thus when twenty-four dream interpreters offer R. Bana’ah different readings, all are fulfilled, because—as Torah has seventy faces—there are countless possible interpretations of a dream text, and all may contain or create truth. One cannot simply discover the meaning of a dream or text if finding meaning invents meaning. Every interpretation may be prophetic to the extent that it imposes itself as truth; the meaning of dreams cannot be severed from the interpretation of their meaning. Prophetic contents are not the underlying component of dream texts, but futures to be actualized.25

Caught in the tension between interpretive theories and dream narratives, or propositions and figures, the sources quoted in tractate Berakhot never definitively privilege either mode. Storytelling occurs within the discussion of essential questions, but it neither subordinates itself to nor refutes the accompanying statements. Bar Hedia’s execution stands as an emblem for the dangers of prophetic dream interpretation, especially in exile, since every postexilic interpreter is prey to analogous disasters. By claiming a meaning outside the realm of Scripture, the interpreter may stand in opposition to this Great Original. Berakhot does not deny the efficacy of interpretation, although it does emphasize its risks. Ultimately, the text recognizes, we desire only to make our dreams good; but a positive interpretation is not always a good interpretation. A sectarian narrates dreams that reveal the extent of his wickedness, and yet his story ends when

25. Samuel Edels (Maharsha) attempts to resolve these difficulties by distinguishing three types of dreams: 1) dreams that come from demons and depend on interpretation for their meaning; 2) dreams that have some inner truth, but whose meaning may be influenced by interpretation; 3) dreams that come from God and are in themselves prophetic, even without interpretation. This system of classification strives to protect dream interpretation from the radical threat of arbitrariness, while acknowledging that in some cases the interpreter can impose his prophecy on the dreamer. Cf. Löwinger, Der Traum in der jüdischen Literatur, p. 8.
he finds treasure "at the tenth beam." Theories of good and bad dreams cannot master their actual consequences. Oral Torah strives to complete the written Torah; meaning unfolds in the revisionary processes of storytelling. The role of oral Torah becomes clearer if we read between the lines of dream interpretation: as an interpreter partially creates a dream, so interpretation of Torah recreates it. Thus the Midrash to Ecclesiastes 1:9 pronounces that "if you have heard Torah from the mouth of a scholar, let it be in your estimation as if your ears had heard it from Mount Sinai."26

Berakhot and Lamentations Rabbah describe three antagonistic pairs: Raba and Bar Hedia, R. Ishmael and a sectarian, and R. Ishmael ben R. Yose and a Samaritan. In all three cases, well-known rabbinic commentators oppose nonrabbinic dream interpreters. These passages discredit the rabbis' opponents and implicitly warn against consultations with dream interpreters. The Talmudic and Midrashic narratives strive to secure the rabbis' position as the authoritative interpreters of Scripture and dreams.

Some interpretations may transgress the bounds of acceptable reading, even if they cannot be replaced by a single, definitive statement. Dreams are neither legal assertions nor moral judgments, and can only be imaginatively translated by juxtaposition with scriptural or personal contexts. Rabbinic interpretation seeks the meaning of a dream or Midrashic text in the Great Original, in order that human existence may continue to fulfill itself as a retelling of God's Torah. After Babel, however, and following exile from a world structured primarily by Hebrew, interpretation is endangered by meaninglessness amid the infinite possibilities for translation. Chaos threatens if Scripture is merely one text among many. "All dreams follow the mouth," together with the accompanying stories, comes perilously close to hinting that every interpretation alters reality.

26. In Midrash Rabbah, 3d ed., ed. Freedman and Simon, vol. 8, p. 34. Mixing metaphors synesthetically, the original in Ecclesiastes Rabbah reads: "If you have heard Torah from the mouth of a scholar (talmid chakham), let it be in your eyes as if your ears had heard it from Mount Sinai."