

Light Insight

The Company We Keep

*“Take your staff and throw it before Pharaoh.
It will be a snake.” (Exodus 7:9)*

Nothing influences a person more than his surroundings. Even the most decadent and corrupt soul will change for the better when placed in a positive and elevating environment. And even the most noble soul will suffer spiritual decline and eventual collapse when subjected to an atmosphere of corruption and degradation.

Moses wished to convey to Pharaoh that even though the Jewish People had been reduced by the corruption of Egypt to the point where they were

barely recognizable as human, nevertheless, when freed from this spiritual cesspool they would ascend to the highest levels to be giants of the soul.

Moses demonstrated this to Pharaoh by taking ‘the staff of G-d,’ — a symbol of the highest spiritual elevation which was used in performing the greatest miracles and on which was carved the explicit Name of G-d — and casting it down, throwing it onto the floor. But Moses did not just throw the staff anywhere, he threw it ‘before Pharaoh’ — the human embodiment of everything that Egypt stood for — and the staff turned into a snake — a symbol of everything lowly and noxious. This same snake, groveling in the dirt, was restored once again to its former self, the great staff of G-d, when Moses stretched out his hand and raised it up again. How great is the influence of the company we keep!

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY

Giving people the benefit of the doubt

Judging favorably needn't end with people. Situations, too, can be judged favorably by looking for the good within them, a principle that is beautifully illustrated by the following anonymous essay:

I am thankful for:

The mess to clean after a party
because it means I have been surrounded by friends,
the taxes I pay
because it means that I'm employed.
the clothes that fit a little too snug
because it means I have enough to eat.
my shadow who watches me work

because it means I am out in the sunshine.
a lawn that needs mowing, windows that need cleaning and gutters that need fixing
because it means I have a home.
the parking spot I find at the far end of the parking lot
because it means I am capable of walking
all the complaining I hear about our government
because it means we have freedom of speech.
my huge heating bill
because it means I am warm.
the man behind me in synagogue who sings off key
because it means that I can hear.
the piles of laundry and ironing
because it means my loved ones are nearby.
the alarm that goes off in the early morning hours
because it means that I'm alive
weariness and aching muscles at the end of the day
because it means I have been productive.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Tifrach

The name of this settlement in the south of the Land of Israel comes from a passage in the

prophecy of Isaiah describing the revival of the desert that will accompany the redemption of the Jewish People. It means “to blossom” and refers to the desolate Holy Land “blossoming like a rose.” The nearby settlements of G’ilat, Ranen, Maslul and Pedium also took their names from words contained in that prophecy.

Tifrach is known for its outstanding yeshiva that attracts students from all of Israel and the world.

Response Line

I Had a Dream!

Behrooz Zinati wrote:

When one has a bad dream, does one have to do something about it?

Dear Behrooz,

It depends.

During the day, your body makes a lot of noise. Mundane occurrences and stimuli fill all your senses. Although you have an ‘inner voice,’ you can’t always hear it.

When you sleep, your body quiets and your mind relaxes. Your soul then ‘rises above’ daytime entanglements. In such a state you can sometimes receive actual inklings of the future. “In a dream — in a vision of the night ... G-d opens the ears of man” (Job 33:15).

But a bad dream can result just as easily from an extra piece of pizza or some leftover chicken too

close to bedtime or a monster movie from ten years ago. It’s difficult, therefore, to know what is an actual premonition, what is a reverie re-run, and what is chicken.

Many dreams are also influenced by what one thinks about during the day and indeed, if you are able to see a connection to your thoughts during the day, then you can certainly ignore the dream.

And even true dreams contain at least one false element. This we see from Joseph’s dream of the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing to him. Although this dream was a true portent of Joseph’s future greatness, nonetheless it did contain one untrue element — the moon. Jacob said to Joseph, “Will I, your mother and all your brothers come and bow down to you?” As the commentators point out, Joseph’s mother — represented by the moon — had already died, so it was impossible for this element of

the dream to ever materialize.

If despite this you are still worried about a bad dream, one option is to fast the next day. This particular option is not common today, since most people become depressed and weak when they fast, and therefore the negative effects may be greater than the good.

The most prevalent practice is to do what is known as ‘making the dream better’. The Talmud records in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, “One who saw a dream and is depressed about it should ‘make it better’ in front of three people — providing they love him.” This means that one should tell a close friend that he is distraught by a bad dream and ask him together with two other friends to state (with conviction) “You have seen a good dream” — three times. Some authorities record the custom of telling the dream to the local rabbi, and ask him for a positive interpretation of the dream.