

**Parshat Beha'alotekha**  
**All Dreams Follow the Mouth**  
**Jamie Schwartz - Class of 2025**

---

The third *aliyah* of *parshat* Beha'alotekha tells the story of what would become Second Passover, *Pesach Sheini*. In their second year of wandering in the desert, God commands the people to observe the first post-Egypt Pesach. Those who were not able to bring the Pesach sacrifice in its appointed time because they had become impure through contact with corpses (perhaps through the *mitzvah* of burying the dead) come to Moshe, asking “לָמָּה נִגְרַע לְבַלְתָּ הַקְרִיב אֶת־קִרְבָּנְךָ הַ” “Why should we be held back, not to bring the God’s sacrifice at its appointed season, among the Children of Israel?” (Bamidbar 9:7). Moshe brings the question to God, who, in response, institutes *Pesach Sheini*, a chance to bring the Passover sacrifice a month later, for those who were impure or far away, “בְּדֶרֶךְ רְחֹקָה,” during the first Pesach (9:10).

In recent years, the story of *Pesach Sheini* has been adopted by the religious LGBT community in Israel as a model for religious change. An innovation in religious practice is born out of a desire by a segment of the community not to be excluded from an important ritual. *Pesach Sheini* has been reimagined as a holiday of religious tolerance and education, and has become an opportunity to make space in religious communities for queer and trans people. LGBT *Pesach Sheini* events take place all over the country.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Moshe in the *Pesach Sheini* story, we are not able to bring our religious concerns directly to God (though some in Jewish history did think that was

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://pesachsheni.org.il/>. First proposed by [Dina Berman and Tamar Gan-Zvi Bick of Bat Kol in 2009](#). For a beautiful, more recent, articulation see [Born of Fire and Water: The Necessity of Queer Inclusion](#) by Rabbi Avi Strausberg.

possible, but more on that later). Toward the end of the *parsha*, God describes how Moshe alone spoke to God directly, while for other prophets — “בְּחִלּוֹם אֶדְבָּר” בוּ “In a dream I speak to them” (12:6). Rava, on Chagigah 5b, uses this *pasuk* to explain that while God’s face is hidden from us in the day, God still speaks in dreams. And it is not only prophets who dream. As part of a longer discussion on dreams, on Brachot 55b, the Talmud relates that Shmuel would quote this phrase, “בְּחִלּוֹם אֶדְבָּר בוּ” “In a dream I speak to them,” whenever he had a good dream, in the hope that it would come true. There, Rava states that this phrase refers to dreams brought by an angel, which are true, while dreams brought by a demon are false.

The truth or falsehood of dreams was a complicated issue for Rava. On Brachot 56a, the Talmud tells the story of Rava and Abaye’s dream interpreter, Bar Haddaya. Rava and Abaye dream a series of identical dreams. Each time they go to Bar Haddaya for an interpretation. Abaye would pay Bar Haddaya and receive a favorable interpretation, while Rava would not pay, and the interpretation he received would be a prediction of misfortune. This keeps happening, with the fortunes and misfortunes seemingly coming true, until Rava goes to Bar Haddaya alone, pays for his interpretations and gets positive ones. He also discovers, written in Bar Haddaya’s book, the maxim “כָּל הַחִלּוֹמוֹת הוֹלְכִין” אַחַר הַפֶּה “All dreams follow the mouth.” The story doesn’t end there, but this much is clear: the truth of a dream depends not on its content, but on its interpretation.

Jacob of Marvège, the author of *ShuT Min Hashamayim* (Responsa from Heaven), which comes to us from 13th-century Provence, was one of those who did bring his religious concerns directly to God. He practiced the technique of *she’elat chalom*, asking questions to God in his dreams, and receiving answers



relayed by angels. Some of the answers are long and involved, while others merely quote *psukim*. Though Jacob of Marvège is not alone in Jewish history to practice *she'elot chalom*, he is the only one to use it to ask a series of halachic questions. The issues he raises are usually cases where there is disagreement between rabbis in different locales, or strong halachic precedents in both directions.<sup>2</sup> The answers he receives are taken seriously by some, and are quoted by *poskim*, for instance, by the Shibolei Haleket. His [first question](#), about whether women can make brachot on taking the *lulav*, and the answer saying they can, is quoted by the Chida as a reason to permit women to recite this bracha.<sup>3</sup>

However, it doesn't always seem like an easy process for Jacob of Marvège. Sometimes the angels or God don't like his question. Sometimes they don't answer. Sometimes he has to ask his questions twice to get a response. When he asks about our Bar Haddaya story he needs to repeat his question three times. His [twenty second question](#) is not about a specific legal disagreement, but about dreams themselves.

He asks, regarding the Bar Haddaya story, and it's final maxim,

על זה אנו תמהים, ושואלים: אם אפשר שישתנו גזירות הבורא בעבור פתרון  
הפותר...!?

About this we are astonished, and we ask: Is it possible that the decrees  
of the Creator can change through the interpretation of the interpreter?!....

The angels respond,

גזירה היא, דוק ותשכח

It is a decree, search and you will find.

---

<sup>2</sup> For this, and more on Jacob of Marvège, and dreams' use in halakha see Ephraim Kanarfogel's ["Dreams As A Determinant of Jewish Law and Practice in Northern Europe During the High Middle Ages."](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Women and Arba'at Ha-minim • Deracheha.](#)



Jacob of Marvège asks again, and receives the same answer. He is troubled, and asks a third time.

What is he so troubled by? To me it seems that Bar Haddaya's story puts his whole project in danger. He is the dream interpreter! His dreams are from Heaven. If their meaning, or the truth of them, depend not on their content, but on him as the interpreter, how can ever know that his answers are right or true?

The third time the answer comes more at length,

הלא ידעת וגם שמעת כי יש אנשים שמזל תולדותם להיות עיניהם ולשונם  
רעה... גם יש אנשים שרגליהם טובה... אף אתה אל תתמה עליו כי יש אנשים  
במזל תולדותם לפתור חלומות ויתקיים פתרונם בין לרעה בין לטובה, ובלבד  
שיהיה לפי הענין, ובר הדיא הי' מהם, ולא נתקיימו הפתרונים בזכותו רק  
במזלו...

Don't you know, haven't you heard, that there are people whose [astrological] birth[-hour] sign (= *mazal*) causes them to have poor eyes or tongue....? That there are also people with fit legs...? So you should not be astonished that there are people whose birth *mazal* [causes] them to be interpreters of dreams, and the interpretations will come true, whether for good or for ill, as long as [the interpretation] is relevant, and Bar Haddaya was one of them, and the interpretations did not come true through his merit, but only through his *mazal*...

The answer ends with,

ואחר שעה השיבו אל תהרהר אחר דברינו זה, כי האמת הודענך והסוד עמו  
And after an hour they answered [again], do not trouble  
yourself/think too much about our words, because we have  
informed you of the truth, and the secret is deep.



Does that answer satisfy Jacob of Marvège? Maybe not, given the angel's attempt to reassure him. Bar Haddaya was created to be an interpreter of dreams and so his interpretations came true. But was Jacob of Marvège? Did he feel that he too was born that way, created by God to be an interpreter of dreams? Did that give him confidence to believe that the answers he received were true? And we, who don't get to bring our questions directly to God, can we be the interpreters of our own dreams?

*Sefer Chasidim*, [444](#), asks and answers a similar question to that of Jacob of Marvège.

ואם תאמר למה החלום הולך אחר הפה, לפי שאלו לא ילכו אחר הפה החלומות, היינו אומרים אין החלומות מן הקב"ה, שהרי התורה היא ממנו, והולכת אחר הפה והלב לפתרון, ועתה חלום אין יכול דעתו וכל מה שאין הקב"ה נותן ללב האדם לידע ולפה לדרוש... ועוד אמרו חכמים: כ"ד פותרים חלומות היו בירושלים. ומה שפטר זה לא פטר זה, וכולן נתקיימו, כמו שמקרא אחת יוצאת לכמה טעמים. והוא שיהיה הפתרון מעין החלום...

If you say, why does the dream follow the mouth? For if dreams did not follow the mouth, that would be to say that dreams are not from God, because behold the Torah is from Him, and it follows the mouth and the heart for interpretation. So too, the dream which one cannot know, and whatever also comes from God, God gives one a heart in order to know, and a mouth in order to interpret... And the sages also said (Brachot 55b) [Rabbi Ben'ah said:] There were twenty four dream interpreters in Jerusalem. [And once I dreamed a dream and went to each one]. And they all gave different interpretations, all of which came true. This is similar to "from one verse can emerge several interpretations" (Sanhedrin 34a), as long as the interpretation corresponds to the dream...<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Translation adapted from "[Dreams in 'Sefer Hasidim'](#)" by Monford Harris, p. 62.



According to *Sefer Chasidim*, the answer is that of course dreams are dependent for their meaning on the interpretation! After all, the same is true for the Torah, which is interpreted in many ways. All things given by God require human integration to come true, which is why God has given us a heart to know how to interpret, and a mouth with which to do it. We were all created to be interpreters of God's Torah, through the lens of our own particular *mazal*.

In this LGBT Pride Month of 2023, may God grant us the courage of those who stepped forward in the desert demanding that they not be left out, the *chutzpah* of Jacob of Marvège's demand for answers from God, as well the humility of his realization of human limitations, and finally, a heart to know what needs to be done, and a mouth to interpret in accordance with the Torah and our dreams.



Jamie Schwartz hails from Englewood, NJ. She has spent time learning at Pardes, Hadar, Drisha, SVARA, and Hebrew College. The places she has taught include Hebrew College's Eser Young Adult Learning, BBYO Israel Journey, and at the National Eshel Shabbaton. Jamie currently lives in Washington Heights, enjoys watching murder mysteries, and makes a mean potato kugel.