

## Undoing Time and the Syntax of the Dream Interlude

### A Phenomenological Reading of *Zohar* 1:199a-200a

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In pondering temporality and the phenomenon of dreaming, a prudent place to begin would be to acknowledge that the time of the dream must be thought from the time of the dream, that the duration of the dream can be measured only from the duration of the dream. The reversal of the timeline, such that one can progress to the past and regress to the future, and the consequent assumption that the effect may, in effect, be the cause of the effect—characteristics of the dreamtime that can be profitably discussed from the vantage point of certain trends in quantum physics—are sufficient to account for the circular reasoning of these tautologies. The matter, however, should also be considered in light of the Husserlian notion of the *temporal field* wherein the objects of experience both fabricate and are fabricated by the unity of time-intuition.<sup>1</sup> Herein lies the fundamental paradox of what Husserl construed to be the uniqueness of the human condition in the world. Despite his best efforts, Husserl was finally not able to flee from the intractable grip of this paradox. Rather than being a shortcoming, however, the self-contradictory nature of Husserl's cogitation on internal time-consciousness provides a useful lens through which to speculate on the temporal curvature of the dream. If an object is constituted by the mental intuition that is itself constituted by the object, then the sense of time—or what might amount to nonsense—conveyed by this circularity puts into question the strictly linear conception of a sequence commencing at a certain point and culminating at another, the egological inscribing of the tale we typically identify as the story of our lives. The larger problem looming here concerns the hermeneutical role of imagination and the

<sup>1</sup> Given the plethora of studies on time and temporality in Husserl, I will refrain from listing any here. The readers interested in my own account of this topic should consult Elliot R. Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau: Kabbalistic Musings on Truth, Time, and Death*, Berkeley 2006, pp. 12, 17-24.

temporal concocting of the imagined objects that cohere in the myriad life-worlds of our experience. This is obviously not the context to do justice to this topic, but it is requisite to ask if there is something eccentric about the dream image in this regard. Many philosophers, especially those who adopt phenomenological psychology, have engaged the matter of time and dreaming. I initiate my reflections by turning to the view tendered by Sartre.

In exploring the claim that ‘the time of the object as imaged is an irreality’, Sartre provides the example of dream-images as ‘irreal objects that appear to consciousness without any temporal determination’.<sup>2</sup> Elaborating the point, he writes:

It is well known that most of our dreams are extremely short. Nevertheless the dreamed drama can occupy several hours, several days. It is impossible to make this drama that is spread through a whole day coincide with the rapid flow of the consciousness that dreams it. One will perhaps attempt to reduce the duration of the dream to that of the dream consciousness, to make of the dreamed *story* a rapid procession of images. But this explanation is very ambiguous. What should we understand here by image? Will one speak of the imaging consciousness or of the imaged object? If it is a case of the imaging consciousness, it is evident that it can flow neither faster nor slower than it does flow: all that one can say is that it absolutely fills (*remplit*) its duration and that it is this very fullness (*plénitude*) that measures the duration. In what concerns the imaged object, can one truly speak of a more rapid succession? ... It is necessary therefore to admit here a phenomenon of *belief*; a positional act. The duration of irreal objects is the strict correlate of this act of belief: I *believe* that these truncated scenes are welded one to another in a coherent whole, which is to say I join the present scenes with past scenes by means of the empty intentions accompanying positional acts. Moreover, I *believe* that these scenes together occupy a duration of several hours. Thus the duration of the object as imaged is the transcendent correlate of a special positional act and consequently participates in the irreality of the object.<sup>3</sup>

Building upon the groundwork laid by Sartre, we may say that the temporality of the dream is to be discerned from the confluence of the irreal duration of the object and the real duration of the flow of consciousness parallel to it. It is

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, Revisions and Historical Introduction by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, Translation and Philosophical Introduction by Jonathan Webber, London 2004, pp. 129-130.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131 (emphasis in the original).

exactly this convergence that facilitates, and helps us comprehend, the commonly attested phenomenon that a brief span of time in a dream can be experienced as if it were long, sometimes interminably so, or that an expansive span of time can be experienced as if it were short, a flash of light in the dark, as it were. It is even possible that a whole lifetime may pass in a dream that in actual time—which is not to say that I think there can be any time that is actualized outside the mind that is not itself a product of mentation<sup>4</sup>—is naught but a moment,<sup>5</sup> the ‘trifle that holds a lot’,<sup>6</sup> indeed a moment, we are wont to say, that vanishes like a dream.

The matter of dreamtime problematizes the prevailing computation of time in wakeful states, a temporal register determined by an objectifying

<sup>4</sup> Numerous thinkers and philosophers have weighed in on this topic. For a learned survey from antiquity to the present, see J.J.A. Mooij, *Time and Mind: The History of a Philosophical Problem*, Leiden 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Maurizio Ferraris, ‘What is There?’ in Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, translated from the French and Italian by Giacomo Donis, edited by Giacomo Donis and David Webb, Cambridge 2001, p. 111: ‘Metaphysically speaking, it is not unlikely that there should be a dream lasting a lifetime (i.e. that a mental state should proceed coherently independently of constant references to an external world)’. For a contrary opinion that calls attention to a closer proportionality between estimated time in dreams and the clock time of waking reality, see Stephen LaBerge, *Lucid Dreaming*, Foreword by Robert Ornstein, Los Angeles 1985, pp. 74-78. The author does not deny the sensation of extended passages of time in the dreamscape, and in that sense dream time may not equal clock time, but he insists that the evidence from experiments with oneironauts is that it takes as long to dream that one is doing something as it does to actually do it.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Shamsian, *Sod Pitron ha-Halomot*, Tsfat 2001, p. 11: ‘The time of the dream is the “trifle that holds a lot” [*Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 11:5], for one can see many things and many places in a dream, which is not possible if the vision were to occur when one is awake (in reality); even a whole year would not suffice for what one dreams within a short time’. See Kelly Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World’s Religions: A Comparative History*, New York 2008, p. 2: ‘What strikes most people about their dreams is how weird and bizarre they sometimes appear. A dream can put you in any place, with anyone, doing anything—the ordinary limitations of waking life are suspended, allowing for a seemingly infinite range of possible scenarios and interactions. ... Oddities abound in dreams—sudden shifts of time and location, strange mixtures of people and personalities, inexplicable behavior and feelings, extraordinary abilities and powers. Nothing is impossible in dreams. Everything seems to be permissible’.

intentionality that is shaped principally by the structures of presentation and judgment. The dream, by contrast, embodies a non-objectifiable intentionality that presumes an ideality wherein the kinesthetic-noematic sense is not regulated or restricted by logical coherence or linguistic meaning.<sup>7</sup> The destabilizing of the chronoscopic offers an alternate perspective on human temporality as relates to memory in its dual department as retention and protention. In his celebrated introduction to the French translation of Ludwig Binswanger's *Traum und Existenz*, which appeared in 1954, Michel Foucault challenged the dominant Freudian conception by arguing that the dream is not primarily about reliving a past trauma but it is the 'future making itself, the first moment of freedom freeing itself'.<sup>8</sup> The psychoanalytic perspective on the regressive component of the dream is a consequence of Freud's more general allegation that processes of the unconscious 'are *timeless*, i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time'.<sup>9</sup> Since the past is not subject to time, it can be replayed at any time with the prodding of the proper therapeutic intervention. For Foucault, by contrast, the dream as the future repeatedly making itself is not timeless but rather the fullest endowment of time. One does not simply revive an experience that is decisively terminated; one refashions it as a memory that is steadfastly underway to becoming once more what it always never was. More recently, Kelly Bulkeley has emphasized that dreaming can be described as a means to expand the range of our temporal perceptions. This expansion can extend in either direction, stretching-back or extending-forward, but more weight appears to be placed on the latter, particularly as this relates to the predictive nature of the dream or its prophetic potential. Bulkeley recommends that we view the premonitional aspect of dream phenomenology against the backdrop of the human mind's enriched aptitude to think ahead and to plan for the future, which he further claims is rooted in the complex physiological development of our brain, specifically its larger and more densely interconnected cerebral cortex.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See Hiroshi Kojima, 'The Vertical Intentionality of Time-Consciousness and Sense-Giving', in *Husserl in Contemporary Context: Prospects and Projects for Phenomenology*, edited by Burt C. Hopkins, Dordrecht 1997, pp. 79-93.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Dream, Imagination and Existence', translated by Forest Williams, in Ludwig Binswanger, *Dream and Existence*, translated by Jacob Needleman and edited by Keith Hoeller, Atlantic Highlands 1993, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Freud, 'The Unconscious', *Standard Edition*, 14:187.

<sup>10</sup> Bulkeley, *Dreaming*, pp. 110-111.

In spite of, or perhaps due to, the soundness of this contention, it is incumbent upon us to shake loose of the temptation to view the temporal sway of our experience as insufferably auspicious—even finding hope in hopelessness may be too hopeful<sup>11</sup>—stimulated by our experience of the ‘rhythmic time marked by oscillations, a seasonal time where absence is always a pledge of return, and death, the pledge of resurrection’.<sup>12</sup> We can speak of the hope imparted by the dream renewing itself sporadically as the hope deferred perpetually. Neither pessimism nor optimism seem appropriate to categorize the surpassing of hope to which I allude in professing the bequeathing of hope in the dream through its adjournment, a sentiment that circumvents axiological appraisal—as Heraclitus reportedly mused, ‘He who does not expect will not find the unexpected, for it is trackless and unexplored’.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps it is hopeless to imagine letting go of the inclination to hope but then we would do better to think of hope, phenomenologically, as the unremitting projection of an elementally calibrated retrospection, to foretell what has been in the recollection of what is to come. Every undertaking, on this score, would be a return of what can never be but what can never be, the loop of the double negative that yields the positivity of our becoming the being we are not to be, a proclivity well understood through time by mystic visionaries and contemplative masters. The promise we customarily associate with the dream, an association doubtlessly underlying the archaic link of dream and prognostication, is veritably a call to reminiscence or what may be termed

<sup>11</sup> My thinking coincides with the observation of Edith Wyschogrod, ‘Between Phenomenology and the Negative’s Power’, in *Portraits of American Continental Philosophers*, edited by James R. Watson, Bloomington 1999, p. 225: ‘But a difficulty in the commonsense view of history that has gone unnoticed is the interpretation of time as most primordially future time. Heidegger’s ecstatic view of time is in accord with this perspective in that he sees the past primarily in future terms. It is as if one were to say: “Even then, in the past, what was of importance was that one always looked ahead, for even then one was always already thrown over the abyss of one’s own future nonexistence”.’ See as well Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others*, Chicago 1998, pp. 240-245.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, ‘Dream, Imagination and Existence’, p. 64. These terms are used by Foucault to describe the ‘time of the epic’, but I have taken the liberty to extend them more generally to our ordinary temporal experience.

<sup>13</sup> The fragment, cited by Clement, *Stromateis* II.17.4, is rendered in Charles H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary*, Cambridge 1979, p. 31.

*prospective memory*. With respect to this constituent of consciousness, the dream state and waking reality are on equal phenomenal footing, since there is no compelling reason to ascribe more credibility to what is recollected in the latter than to what is recollected in the former. Not only is there no deficiency of memory with respect to the dream, but there seems to be an intricate connection between the facility to remember and the propensity to dream—not necessarily the ability to evoke the dream but the very activity of dreaming; the stuff of the dream, as it were, is woven from memory-threads encoded in and thus retrievable from various regions of the brain,<sup>14</sup> especially the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, an internal stream of imagery that one researcher has called the ‘autonomous imagination’ in contrast to the emotionally-coded memory register of outside consciousness.<sup>15</sup> To translate the neurobiological insight mythopoeically: in the truth of its appearance, the dream is an interior state of anticipatory remembering. Even if we propose a scenario in which one dreams that one has forgotten one’s dream, this is still a manner of recollecting and, as such, it provides the prospect for anticipation. Viewing time from within the dreamscape, we can ascertain that expectation, in its deepest modulation, is a form of commemoration.

In this spirit, let us consider the following passage in a zoharic homily in which an anonymous Jew, who is described as having carried a wineskin (*qap̄ira de-ḥamra*) while escorting R. Yeisa and R. Hizqiyah on their sojourn from Cappadocia to Lyda,<sup>16</sup> expounded a number of esoteric matters, including the mystery of the dream (*raza de-ḥalma*) anchored exegetically in the verse ‘And Joseph recalled the dreams that he had dreamed about them’ (Gen. 42:9):

He remembered them because there is no forgetfulness before the blessed holy One.<sup>17</sup> A person should remember a good dream, so that it will not be forgotten,

<sup>14</sup> Bulkeley, *Dreaming*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Michele Stephen, ‘Memory, Emotion, and the Imaginal Mind’, in *Dreaming and the Self: New Perspectives on Subjectivity, Identity, and Emotion*, edited by Jeannette Marie Mageo, Albany 2003, pp. 97-129.

<sup>16</sup> *Zohar* 1:197b.

<sup>17</sup> *Eikhah Rabbah* 5:1; *Pesiqta Rabbati : A Synoptic Edition based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, edited by Rivka Ulmer, vol. 1, Atlanta 1997, 13:16, p. 206. On the related formulation that there is no forgetfulness before the throne of glory, see Moses de León, *The Book of the Pomegranate Moses de León’s Sefer ha-Rimmon*, edited by Elliot R. Wolfson, Atlanta 1988, p. 160 n. 15 (Hebrew section); Elliot R. Wolfson, *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings From Zoharic Literature*, London 2007, p. 223 n. 96.

and then it will be fulfilled, for just as it is forgotten before a person, so it will be forgotten above him. Come and see: A dream that is not interpreted is like a letter that has not been read<sup>18</sup> ... because it is not remembered, it is as if no one knows it. Accordingly, the one who forgets the dream and does not know it, it is not primed above him to be fulfilled. Therefore, Joseph remembered his dream, so that it would be fulfilled, and so that the dream would never be forgotten by him, and he waited for it constantly.<sup>19</sup>

On the face of it, the main point pronounced in this passage is obvious enough, indeed even somewhat banal: to know a dream, it must be remembered, and only then will it be implemented. It seems to me, however, that a more sublime meaning may be elicited from the text. Utilizing the dream, the author of this zoharic segment instructs us about lingering in the interval of the present lodged between past and future, the time lag that propels the temporal obstinacy of human destiny to keep moving, to get on with life, as we are wont to say. The dream informs us, therefore, about the most salient feature of memory alluded to in the comment at the end of the citation: by remembering his dream, Joseph *waited for it constantly* (*we-hawah mehakkeh leih tadir*).

Common sense would dictate that the quality of human remembrance that is most characteristic is not anticipation but retrospection. Nevertheless, since the dream both happened and did not yet happen, to remember it is to anticipate it. Hence the zoharic passage reminds us that from recalling our dreams we learn about the nature of waiting and the incongruity it entails. We cannot wait for something about which we have no knowledge, but not to know is integral to waiting, the capriciousness of what may be or not be endows the waiting with its tensiveness—I may think I am confident about the time of an incident for which I am waiting, however, if there is no possibility that it will not take place, if I can prognosticate with certainty that it will occur at the time of my expectancy, then the waiting is depleted of the temporal tension that confers upon it existential gravitas. The dream affords the dreamer the possibility to envision an experience that in some sense transpired beforehand, but, in the interlude of the dream, there is no beforehand that is not also afterward, and thus we do not merely expect what is still to come, we recollect, and thereby await, what is no more because it is what has already been what has always

<sup>18</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 55a. Regarding this theme, see Maren R. Niehoff, 'A Dream Which Is Not Interpreted Is Like a Letter Which Is Not Read', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992), pp. 58-84.

<sup>19</sup> *Zohar* 1:199b.

never been. The oneiric mystery lurks in the chasm that opens the past to the presentness of its future in revisioning the future of its present as the originary advent. In the intensity of the dream, the pure difference of which Foucault spoke, the ‘difference that displaces and repeats itself, contracts and expands, a singular point that constricts and slackens the indefinite repetitions in an acute event’,<sup>20</sup> what was and what will be are not turned into what is; the absolute now that is the dream is the moment that like a sword cuts the triple chord of time.<sup>21</sup>

Joseph, in particular, typifies the paradox. It is not irrelevant that in the kabbalistic symbolism, especially prominent in the zoharic anthology, this biblical figure incarnates the phallic potency of the divine, the covenantal sign, the locus of memory, the primal act of re/membering,<sup>22</sup> a truth implied in the rabbinic dictum that there is no forgetfulness before God.<sup>23</sup> There is something puzzling about the opening statement that Joseph remembered his dreams because there is no forgetfulness before God. If the cause of Joseph’s recollection is the constitutional inability of the divine to forget, then how do we explain the subsequent maxim that a person must remember a good dream so that it will not be forgotten? If in the case of Joseph the matter is dependent on there being no lapse of memory in God, then this would imply that the dream would be recalled irrespective of any human effort. It seems to me that the commencement of the passage is meant to underscore that just as Joseph remembered his dreams because he embodied the attribute of the Godhead that corresponds to memory, so it is incumbent on each person to remember one’s dreams in the manner that God remembers, that is, a memory that is free of the constraints and vagaries of time, a memory that is completely guarded from the corrosive effect of forgetfulness and the inevitable disintegration of the self.

<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Theatrum Philosophicum’, in *The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, vol. 2: *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James D. Faubion, New York 1998, p. 357.

<sup>21</sup> For discussion of this image in kabbalistic and Sufi sources, see Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 102-104.

<sup>22</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, ‘Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and History in the Zohar’, *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi*, edited by Elisheva Carlebach, David S. Myers, and John Efron, Hanover and London 1998, pp. 214-246, corrected and slightly revised version in Wolfson, *Luminal Darkness*, pp. 185-227.

<sup>23</sup> Palestinian Talmud, Pe’ah 1:1, 16b; Qiddusin 1:10, 61d; Sanhedrin 10:1, 27c; *Pesiqta Rabbati*, vol. 1, 13:16, p. 206.



Precisely the dream, which epitomizes the evanescence and contingency of existence, becomes the locus of this deeper sense of temporality in which the vestiges of memory are no longer erased by the ravages of amnesia. That this kind of recollection and the responsibility for the dream analysis that ensues therefrom should be tied to Joseph—positioned according to the end of this homily in the world of the masculine (*alma di-dekhura*) in contrast to the other tribes who were in the world of the feminine (*alma de-nuqba*)<sup>24</sup>—follows from the (conspicuously androcentric) correlation of the phallus and interpretation attested in kabbalistic literature, and even more particularly, from the dialectical disclosure and concealment of the secret that is linked symbolically to this divine gradation and its corresponding location in the human anatomy.<sup>25</sup>

Interpretation issues from the very place of memory.<sup>26</sup> To know one's dream but not its interpretation thus gives rise to some degree of agitation; the distress, however, is doubled when one forgets both the dream and its interpretation.<sup>27</sup> Joseph is extolled for recalling the dream, as the fulfillment, based on its explication, cannot be actualized if the dream is submerged in the waters of oblivion. But to recall the dream is to await its coming to pass. The past is anticipated in the future that is recollected. Dreamtime portends the inversion of the chronological, the inability to discriminate definitively

<sup>24</sup> Zohar 1:200a.

<sup>25</sup> My earliest formulation of this dimension of kabbalistic hermeneutics appeared in Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol', *History of Religions* 27 (1987), pp. 189-215, and see the more expansive discussion in idem, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton 1994, pp. 326-392. With all the criticisms leveled against my work on gender construction and kabbalistic symbolism, not one person has been able to bring evidence that contradicts the seminal claim regarding the link of secrecy and the phallus in Jewish mystical lore, inspired by a deeper phallogocentric element in the biblical-rabbinic tradition, and, as far as I am concerned, in the absence of such contradictory evidence, the reading I have promoted has not been undermined.

<sup>26</sup> Compare the commentary on this zoharic passage in Simeon Lavi, *Ketem Paz* (Livorno, 1795), 378b. On the centrality of interpretation to the dream, see the extensive discussion in *ibid.*, 353b-356a.

<sup>27</sup> *Midrash Bere'shit Rabba* 89:5, pp. 1091-1092; *Tanḥuma*, Miqqeṣ, 2. The contrast is made between the depictions of the agitation related to the respective dreams of Pharaoh (Gen 41:8) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:1); the former did not know the interpretation of his dream, whereas the latter had forgotten the dream as well as its interpretation.

between before and after, a disorientation that renders problematic the commonsensical presumption that one unvaryingly progresses linearly or even cyclically.

This characteristic of time and the self in dreams, or the nature of the unconscious more generally, was noted by Jung—reflecting the view of Freud briefly mentioned above—in his comments on the ‘timelessness of mind’ in which ‘past, present, and future are blended together’. Referring to the example of John William Dunne’s *An Experiment with Time* (1927), Jung observed that it is viable to dream the night before what one ought logically to have dreamt the night after.<sup>28</sup> The movement of the dream does not fit neatly into either the mold of the punctiform or the extended. The tenor of temporality in the dream state must be imagined from the paradoxical stance of the linear circle or the circular line in which nothing changes because everything changes, insofar as there is no thing to change. The memory that coheres in the crease of the dream partakes of the fabric of time stitched through this undoing of time. The activity of dreaming reminds us—if we care not to forget the remembering that can be remembered only through forgetting the need to remember—that the moment comes to be recurrently in its passing away incessantly, that the durability of the temporal consists precisely in its ephemerality.<sup>29</sup>

In the dream sequence, as in the design of a story, the antecedent may appear consequent to the consequent, and the consequent antecedent to the antecedent, since neither one nor the other comes before without also being after, that is, the meaning of before and after is dependent on what is before or after. It is thus possible to reverse the timeline without affecting the

<sup>28</sup> Carl G. Jung, *Psychology and Religion: East and West*, second edition, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Princeton 1969, p. 503. On the ‘psychic relativity of time’, see also Carl G. Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, second edition, translated by R. F. C. Hull, Princeton 1969, p. 433.

<sup>29</sup> I am here applying to the dream the sense of temporality I have discussed elsewhere in a number of published studies. Consider as well Florence Dee Boodakian, *Tormenting Angel: A Psychoaesthetic Theory of Imagination*, New York 1999, pp. 95-110. On the description of the dream as a weaving together of the ‘temporal reality’ (*mammashut ha-zemanit*) with the ‘supratemporal web’ (*ma’arag al zemani*), and the different perspectives by which to view the three modes of time implied thereby, see Rachel Elijor, ‘Reality in the Test of Fiction: Dreams in Mystical Thought—The Freedom of Disassociation and Combination’, in *The Spectrum of Opinions and Worldviews about Dreams in Jewish Culture*, edited by Dror Kerem, Rehovot 1992, p. 66 [Hebrew].

(mytho)logic of the narrative: one can follow the plot told from beginning to end or from end to beginning. Predictably, this insight has an ancient precedent. In the second-century, Artemidorus commented in his *Oneirocritica* (I.11), ‘When judging dreams, the dream interpreter must regard some of them from the beginning to the end ... some, from the end to the beginning. For sometimes the beginning indicates the end, which is obscure and not to be grasped as a whole; sometimes, however, the end shows the beginning’.<sup>30</sup> We may be accustomed to view the trajectory of life as a unilateral progression from beginning to end, and on occasion dreams, too, follow that expected pattern, but at other times they invert the order, thereby reminding us of the shortsightedness of the one-sided way of seeing time’s ebb and flow. Eschewing the monochromatic temporality bolstered by the perspective of the ego that initiates the measure of time’s duration at birth and terminates it at death, the dream illustrates that the inception of a yarn may portend its conclusion, and the conclusion, its inception. Hermeneutically, therefore, the dream is like a text, which, as Rosenzweig reminded us, may be read either from start to finish or from finish to start.<sup>31</sup> Within the swerve of this linear circularity, we must seek an opening to what has been called the ‘hyperdimension of the dream ... in which life and mind seem to be embedded’.<sup>32</sup>

The narratological dimension of this understanding of the oneiric is implied in the zoharic appropriation of the talmudic dictum that the dream that is not

<sup>30</sup> Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica*, translation and commentary by Robert J. White, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised and enlarged, Torrance 1990, p. 33. For discussion of the approach of Artemidorus, see S. R. F. Price, ‘The Future of Dreams: From Freud to Artemidorus’, *Past and Present* 113 (1986), pp. 3-37; Glen W. Bowersock, *Fiction as History: Nero to Julian*, Berkeley 1994, pp. 80-87.

<sup>31</sup> Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Terence McKenna, *The Archaic Revival: Speculations on Psychedelic Mushrooms, the Amazon, Virtual Reality, UFOs, Evolution, Shamanism, the Rebirth of the Goddess, and the End of History*, New York 1991, p. 91. For a different approach to the nocturnal time of dreams, also referred to as macochronos, and the diurnal time of wakefulness, or the microchronos, in Jewish texts, see Moshe Idel, ‘Astral Dreams in Judaism: Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries’, *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, edited by David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa, New York 1999, pp. 235-238, 246-247, and idem ‘Astral Dreams in R. Yohanan Alemanno’s Writings’, *Accademia: Revue de la Societe Marsile Ficin* 1 (1999), pp. 127-128.

interpreted is a like a letter that has not been read, that is, a dream that is not interpreted is less likely to be remembered and thus it will not be known. The comparison of the dream to a literary artifact raises another prospect regarding the complex interplay between truth and untruth that is characteristic of the dream. Even those of us who scarcely recollect our dreams will readily admit that this type of mental activity is distinguished by the proclivity of the brain to combine images we customarily deem to be true with others that strike us as evidently false. What in the dreamscape is real conforms to our shared sense experience—a term that has no evaluative function but simply denotes the range of intersubjective experiences that, as we can conventionally concur, constitute our common cultural lot—and what is fictitious contradicts our expectations. The judgment ‘true’ or ‘false’, therefore, does not reflect an absolute standard of either an epistemological or an ontological nature; it simply expresses the credibility and incredibility that we are likely to accord respectively to images in dreams that correspond to our everyday lived experience and those that do not. Even so, ancient thinkers, such as Artemidorus, already discerned that the dream illustrates the adage that there is *truth in lying*, and hence the line separating ‘creative imagination’ and ‘willful mendacity’ could easily be blurred.<sup>33</sup>

The rabbinic oneiric tradition, too, has given voice to this insight. According to a dictum attributed to Simeon ben Yoḥai and transmitted in the name of R. Yoḥanan, ‘Just as wheat cannot be without straw, so there can be no dream without nonsense [*devarim betelim*]’.<sup>34</sup> This maxim is presented in the Babylonian Talmud as an exegetical explication of the verse ‘Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream; and let him who has received my word report my word faithfully! How can straw be compared to wheat?—says the Lord’ (Jer. 23:28). These words occasion a query on the part of the redactor, ‘What is the connection of wheat and straw in relation to the dream?’ If we attend carefully to Simeon ben Yoḥai’s response, we notice that the rabbinic interpreter inverted the scriptural intent. The prophetic utterance seeks to establish a clear boundary between the true reception of the divine decree and the false dream, the former compared to wheat and the latter to straw. An

<sup>33</sup> Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, pp. 1, 17-18. On the Greek and Roman opinions about the truthfulness of dreams, see the extensive analysis in William V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge, MA, 2009, pp. 123-228.

<sup>34</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 55a.

adaptation of the talmudic dictum is found in the several zoharic passages,<sup>35</sup> including in the continuation of the homily that is the focus of this study:

R. Yose began to expound and said ‘Just as a dream comes with much brooding, the voice of the fool comes with many words’ (Eccles. 5:2). Just as a dream comes with much brooding’, it has been established that there the dream has various powers and agents, gradations upon gradations, so that some dreams are entirely true and some in which there is truth and falsehood. But to the truly righteous fabricated matters are not revealed, only that which is entirely true. Come and see what is written of Daniel, ‘The mystery was revealed to Daniel in a night vision’ (Dan. 2:19), and it is written ‘Daniel saw a dream and a vision of his mind in bed; afterward he wrote down the dream’ (ibid., 7:1). If there were false matters in it, why was it inscribed among the Writings? However, when the souls of the truly righteous ascend, only holy words are conjoined to them, to instruct them about true words, enduring words that are never uprooted. ... Come and see: when a person is asleep on his bed, his soul departs and wanders in the world above, and it enters the place that it enters. Several troops of alluring [demons]<sup>36</sup> come forth and go about in the world, and they strike that soul. If it is virtuous, it ascends above and it sees what it sees. If not, it cleaves to that side and they inform it of false matters or of things that are about to happen soon. When he awakens, the soul that is within him informs him about what it has seen. Therefore, a person who is not worthy is shown a good dream that is not true, all in order to lead him astray from the path of truth. Since he has swayed from his path, the path of truth, they defile

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, translated by David Goldstein, Oxford 1989, pp. 812-813.

<sup>36</sup> The word I have translated as ‘alluring demons’ is *tehirin*, which is from the root *thr*, luster, brilliance, or purity. It is clear from several contexts that in the zoharic lexicon the word connotes, inter alia, the nocturnal forces of destruction that allure human beings with their dazzle. See *Zohar* 1:94a, 125a-b, 130b, 198b, 203b, 232b; 2:56a, 130a-b, 198b, 205a, 207a; 3:62b, 213b, 266a, 286b. This terminology is likely based on the expression *ṭiharei* that appears in Targum on Song of Songs 4:6 to name a group of demonic forces. Compare the phrase *benei ṭiharerei* (or *ṭiharirei*) in Targum Jonathan ben Uziel to Num. 6:24 and Deut. 32:24. I surmise that the use of this locution in zoharic texts to designate demonic beings is equivalent to the Latin proverb *Non omne quod nitet aurum est* ‘not all that shines is gold’) and the related saying made famous by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* (II, vii), ‘all that glistens is not gold’, that is, at times what is harmful can attract people with a superficial and deceptive glow.

him. For whoever comes to purify himself, they purify him, and whoever comes to defile himself, they defile him.<sup>37</sup>

One can detect two principal interpretations of the rabbinic maxim that there can be no dream without nonsense in the zoharic milieu, either that some dreams are true and others are false<sup>38</sup> or that there is no dream that is not a

<sup>37</sup> *Zohar* 1:199b-200a.

<sup>38</sup> *Zohar* 1:150b; 3:25a, 156b. See also *Zohar Hadash*, edited by Reuven Margalio, Jerusalem 1978, 88a. In several zoharic contexts (1:83a, 130a; 2:130a, 267a), the defiled soul is said to receive 'deceptive words' from demonic beings during sleep. This theme may be based on the distinction in Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 55b, between the prophetic dream conveyed by an angel (*mal'akh*) and a false dream conveyed by a demon (*shed*). See *Zohar* 3:234b (*Ra'aya Meheimna*). Another possible source, which combines both talmudic dicta, is the passage cited in *Midrash Tanhuma*, edited by Solomon Buber (Wilna: Rom, 1885), Introduction, pp. 125-126. According to that text, a distinction is made between prophetic vision (*hezyon*) and a dream (*halom*) based on the fact that the latter always contains 'nonsensical matters' (*devarim beṭelim*). The sentiment expressed in the zoharic passages can also be compared to the Islamic *ḥadīth*, 'the true dream (*ru'ya*) is from God, the bad dream (*ḥulm*) is from Satan', cited in Jonathan G. Katz, *Dreams, Sufism and Sainthood: The Visionary Career of Muhammad Al-Zawāwī*, Leiden 1996, p. 209 n. 12, and see Menahem J. Kister, 'The Interpretation of Dreams: An Unknown Manuscript of Ibn Qutayba's "Ibārāt al-Ru'yā"', *Israel Oriental Studies* 4 (1974), p. 72 n. 26. The division of dreams into false and truthful, which can be traced to the ancient Greeks, is known from the oneiric classification attested in other Muslim and Christian sources in the Middle Ages. See Gustave Edmund von Grunebaum, 'Introduction: The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam', *The Dream and Human Societies*, pp. 7-9; Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 83-122; Katz, *Dreams*, pp. 208-210; John C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation*, Albany 2002, pp. 35, 61-62, 65-66; Maria Mavroudi, *A Byzantine Book on Dream Interpretation: The Oneirocriticon of Achmet and Its Arabic Sources*, Leiden 2002, pp. 160 and 166; Mittermaier, 'The Book of Visions', pp. 239-243; idem, '(Re)Imagining Space: Dreams and Saint Shrines in Egypt', *Dimensions of Locality: Muslim Saints, their Place and Space*, edited by Georg Stauth and Samuli Schielke, Bielefeld 2008, pp. 47-66. For the rejection of the view that demons are responsible for divination, see the evidence adduced by Kreisler, *Prophecy*, p. 341. In spite of the irrefutable historical evidence that systems of dream interpretation have been based on distinguishing true and false dreams, the philosophical import of this distinction is a complex matter that lies beyond the scope of this study. On dream-visions and oneirocriticism in Muslim sources, see also Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, 1:207-212, 3:103-110, and the

concoction of truth and falsity.<sup>39</sup> In the aforesaid extract, the predominant drift seems to be to stress that every dream is a confluence of the veridical and the specious, which may indeed have been the intent of the original dictum. In the above extract, a distinction is made between worthy and unworthy souls. The dreams of the former (personified by Daniel) are exclusively truthful, whereas the dreams of the latter comprise both true matters, limited to what will take place in the proximate future,<sup>40</sup> and false matters imparted by demonic forces that seek to tempt the soul with their illusive shimmer, so that it will swerve from the way of truth.

critical assessments of Nathaniel Bland, 'On the Muhammedan Science of Tabir, or Interpretation of Dreams', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 16 (1856), pp. 118-171; Leah Kinberg, *Morality in the Guide of Dreams: A Critical Edition of Kitāb al-Manām with Introduction*. Leiden 1994, pp. 11-48; Marcia K. Hermansen, 'Visions as "Good to Think": A Cognitive Approach to Visionary Experience in Islamic Sufi Thought', *Religion* 27 (1997), pp. 25-43; idem, 'Dreams and Dreaming in Islam', in *Dreams: A Reader on Religious, Cultural and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming*, edited by Kelly Bulkeley, New York 2001, pp. 73-91; Annemarie Schimmel, *Die Träume des Kalifen: Träume und ihre Deutung in der islamischen Kultur*, Munich 1998; Kelly Bulkeley, 'Reflections on the Dream Traditions of Islam', *Sleep and Hypnosis* 4 (2002), pp. 4-14; idem, *Dreaming*, pp. 192-212 ; Lory, *Le rêve*; Green, 'The Religious and Cultural Roles', pp. 287-313.

<sup>39</sup> *Zohar* 1:199b: 'Some dreams are entirely true and in some of them there is truth and falsehood'. In *Zohar* 1:183a, the admixture is related to the idea that dreams are consequent to the interpretation of the mouth, that is, since the dream contains both guile and truth, it can be either true or false based on its interpretation. This passage is cited by Solomon Almoli, *Pitron Ḥalomot*, Warsaw 1902, 6b, to support his claim that prophetic dreams, in contrast to ordinary dreams, do not contain anything false or nonsensical. See Monford Harris, *Studies in Jewish Experience*, Northvale 1994, pp. 39-63, esp. 41-43, 60-62; Annelies Kuyt, 'With one Foot in the Renaissance: Shlomoh Almoli and his Dream Interpretation', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 6 (1999), pp. 205-217.

<sup>40</sup> The possibility of demons having some premonition of the future is listed in a rabbinic passage as one of three things they have in common with the ministering angels. See Babylonian Talmud, Ḥagigah 16a; Moses Nahmanides, *Perushei ha-Torah le-Rabbenu Moshe ben Nahman*, edited by Ḥayyim D. Chavel, Jerusalem 1984, 1:95 (Lev 17:7); *Zohar* 1:83a. 130a; 2:251b; 3:25a. See also the section from *Midrash ha-Ne'lam stratum* in *Zohar* 2:17b, where it is stated that the way of the demons is to repeat to the soul what they have received, 'if it is false, they inform it of false matters, and if it is true, all that they will say for a brief time will be true'.

A similar sentiment is articulated in another passage where it is argued that the dream is a form of revelation that replaced both prophecy (*nevu'ah*) and the disclosure of the divine voice (*bat qol*):

Come and see: the dream is seen by everyone because the dream comes from the left side and it descends in several gradations. The dream is seen even by the wicked and even by the idolatrous nations, for sometimes the evil types seize the dream, hear it, and inform human beings. Some of whom mock human beings and inform them of false matters [*millin kedivin*] and sometimes of true matters [*millin di-qeshof*] that they have heard, and sometimes they are sent to the wicked and they inform them of supernal matters [*millin ila'in*].<sup>41</sup>

Of the three kinds of communication the dream is the most egalitarian, since it is seen by everyone, even the wicked and the non-Jews. To deny that people who are not Jewish dream would, of course, be ludicrous, but it is an extraordinary assertion in light of the fact that the dream is labeled an inferior prophecy, which is consistently understood as an idiosyncratic heritage of the Jewish people.<sup>42</sup> To be sure, in the above extract the dreams seen by the idolatrous nations are said to be brought about by evil forces. This proviso notwithstanding, the barrier that characteristically separates the holy seed of Israel and the demonic seed of the Gentiles is effaced to some degree. More expectedly, in another zoharic context, the reader is told about the Jewish soul (specifically the *nefesh*, which is the lowest level) that cleaves to the unholy forces and is notified by them of worldly events in truthful and false images; the idolatrous nations are similarly described as dreaming of truthful things that will come about in the future on account of the fact that they are conjoined to the side of impurity.<sup>43</sup> Kabbalistically, the dream derives from the left side, a symbolism that also underlies the identification of Gabriel as the angelic prince of dreams, since he, too, as his name indicates, draws his power from the attribute of strength (*gevurah*) on the left.<sup>44</sup> Thus the sinister forces occasionally take hold of the dream and toy with human beings by alternately conjuring images that are false and images that are true. The complexity, and perhaps ambiguity, of the zoharic view is amplified by the remark that at times

<sup>41</sup> *Zohar* 1:238a.

<sup>42</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, Oxford 2006, pp. 43-44, 58-73, 131-132.

<sup>43</sup> *Zohar* 3:25a.

<sup>44</sup> Compare the contrast between prophecy and the dream in *Zohar* 1:149a.



the oneiric spectacle is the tool by which these forces inform the wicked of what takes place above.

An even more arresting formulation is found in another zoharic passage where the evil spirit Sarṭiya and the myriad of beings beneath him in the second of the seven palaces of the demonic other side—the shadowy counterparts to the seven palaces of the side of holiness, the seven compartments of the supernal Garden of Eden, one of the standard symbolic prisms for *Shekhinah*, which correspond the seven palaces of the Garden of Eden below and to the seven sefirotic emanations above<sup>45</sup>—are said to communicate to the soul through a dream in which deceptive words (*millin kedivin*) are mixed with veritable words (*mit'arvei be-millei qeshot*), since a lie can only be sustained if it is expressed truthfully.<sup>46</sup> From this one may adduce that the dream issuing from the satanic powers dissembles its truth in the guise of the deceitful; the blending of the two blurs the boundary between divine and demonic. By contrast, consider the unequivocally negative assessment in the following passage from the *Ra'aya Meheimna* stratum of zoharic literature: 'Sleep is one sixtieth of prophecy and therefore the rabbis, masters of the academy, established 'And dreamers speak lies' (Zech. 10:2), but is it not written 'I speak with him in a dream' (Num. 12:6)? There is no difficulty, for here it is by means of a demon and there by means of an angel; the dream by means of an angel is one sixtieth of prophecy, the dream by means of a demon is a lie, from the side of death, and it is straw, as it has been established, just as it impossible for there to be wheat without straw, so it is impossible for there to be a dream without false matters'.<sup>47</sup> The last line might suggest an encroachment of border but a closer look at the full context indicates that the author, likely reinterpreting an earlier zoharic microform, is making a more rigid differentiation between the angelic dream and the demonic dream; the former is wheat and the latter straw. The presumption that the two kinds of dream can be kept apart is to be distinguished from the view that truth and treachery will always be jumbled together.

<sup>45</sup> Tishby, *Wisdom*, pp. 468, 591-594.

<sup>46</sup> *Zohar* 2:264a.

<sup>47</sup> *Zohar* 3:234b (*Ra'aya Meheimna*). For a similar use of the talmudic distinction between the angelic and demonic dreams, see Abraham Abulafia, *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 62-63. The gap between the two, however, is not so wide for Abulafia, since he recognizes that it is precisely when the sage enters into the gates of prophecy that the other spirit may take effect (pp. 68-69).

In his exposé of the second palace of impurity, which is called *shaḥat* based on one of the metaphorical designations for death in some parts of Hebrew Scripture (Ps. 30:10, 55:24, 94:13; Job 33:18, 24, 30), the Safedian kabbalist, Moses Cordovero (1522-1570), elaborated the zoharic perspective:

In this palace there is another impure force and his name is Sartiya and there are a myriad of destructive angels beneath him, and they are summoned when the dream descends into the world from the side of holiness. This spirit and all the destructive angels who are with him descend with this dream and are mixed in with it, and they inform this man of fraudulent words, mischievous words, together with the honorable dream. Thus the rabbis, blessed be their memory, said that just as wheat cannot be without straw, so there can be no dream without nonsense.<sup>48</sup>

Cordovero's reading is that the dream occasioned by demonic forces is a mishmash of honesty and mendacity. In its descent from the divine realm, the dream can be entwined with the spirits of unholiness and this results in the synthesis of the real and fantastic images. Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto (1707-1746) also attempted to harmonize the divergent views that can be culled from zoharic literature: 'Hence the principle of dreams—forms of the imagination [*ṣiyyurei ha-dimyon*], whether from itself or from what arouses the soul according to what it comprehends, but what is activated in all of these is one of the spiritual powers, which informs the soul, and the soul extends to the imagination ... and if that power is from the holy servants, the matter will be true, and if from one of the adversative powers, the matter will be false, and this is what the sages, blessed be their memory, said, 'here by means of an angel and there by means of a demon'. But in all of them there are mixtures of wayward images of the imagination, and this is what the sages, blessed be their memory, said,<sup>49</sup> 'it is not possible for there to be a dream without idle things'.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the Iraqi kabbalist, Yehudah Pedaya (1859-1942), distinguished sharply between angelic and demonic dreams. The dream brought about by an angel is well ordered and not a mixture of miscellaneous things and hence the dreamer does not feel any anxiety or fear in the moment of dreaming, whereas the dream caused by a demon is a compound of unrelated matters that

<sup>48</sup> Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* 26:2, 57a. See also the work of Cordovero's disciple, de Vidas, *Re'shit Hokhmah, Sha'ar ha-Yir'ah*, ch. 13, 1:258.

<sup>49</sup> See above n. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, *Derekh ha-Shemm* Jerusalem 1996, III.1.6, pp. 74-75.

confound and startle the dreamer.<sup>51</sup> Utilizing an idiom that is implied in a few zoharic passages<sup>52</sup> but which is made explicit in Lurianic sources,<sup>53</sup> Pedaya makes a further distinction between dreams that are caused by ‘Gentile demons’ (*shedin nukhra’in*) and those caused by ‘Jewish demons’ (*shedin yehuda’in*), for in the case of the latter there is the additional element that they assume the veneration of the patriarchs, prophets, rabbinic sages, or judges, and they instead of bewildering the dreamer, they manifest an image of heaven or an image of the throne and the attending angels, and they instruct him to study the *Zohar* or the book of Psalms each day, to rise every midnight to perform the midnight vigils (*tiqqun haṣot*), and to implement ascetic practices like ritual immersion, exchanging garments, refraining from touching a woman, and fasting. One must be especially vigilant with respect to the Jewish demons, therefore, since their mode of appearance and manner of operating (in a

<sup>51</sup> Pedaya, *Minḥat Yehudah*, p. 62. See *ibid.*, p. 70, where a third category of dreams is affirmed: confused and disorderly dreams but which do not cause agitation or fear. These dreams are said to come from the ‘image of the thought of the brain’ (*ṣiyyur maḥshevet ha-moah*), since the brain does not rest even in the time of sleep. One need not be concerned about such dreams because they do not add or detract, and they portend neither good nor evil.

<sup>52</sup> *Zohar* 3:253a, 277a (*Ra’aya Meheimna*); *Zohar Ḥadash*, 47a, 48d, 78d. In the last of these passages, the ‘dregs of the Jewish demons’ are identified as the source of the ‘other gods’ (Exod. 20:2) connected to Ishmael and Esau, that is, Islam and Christianity. In the continuation of that passage, it is stated unequivocally that Christians and Muslims are ‘brothers’ with the Jews from the body but not from the soul in any of its gradations. However, it is also asserted that ‘with respect to every non-Jew who repents and separates from idolatry and transgression, the holy One, blessed be he, places a holy spirit and a holy soul within him, and thus he has a share in the world-to-come, not with the people of Israel but a portion unto itself and a world unto itself’. Following one opinion implied in rabbinic literature (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 105a) and expressed more explicitly by Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah, Melakhim* 8:11), the author of this zoharic text presumes that the non-Jew can undergo a fundamental change and receive a holy portion by means of which he or she merits a share in the world-to-come. To some extent, this breaks down the inflexible ontological distinction between Jew and Gentile, as the matter of difference is more dependent on behavior, that is, if the non-Jew renounces the wayward path of idolatry and impiety, then he or she earns a stake in the afterlife. Notwithstanding the importance of this shift, even this text is clear that the status of the righteous Gentile is not on a par with the indigenous Jew and hence some disparity is preserved.

<sup>53</sup> Ḥayyim Vital, *Eṣ Ḥayyim*, Jerusalem 1963, 50:7, 116a-b.

nocturnal dream or when one is awake) could more readily dupe the person to the point of madness.<sup>54</sup> Most of the dreams that come through the medium of an angel are to be explained according to the secret (*al pi ha-sod*), for the angel is a spiritual being (*ruhani*) and thus they produce the allusion (*remez*) in accord with their way; the dreams that come through the medium of the demons, whether Jewish or Gentile, are not to be explained in this manner because they are inherently bogus and muddled.<sup>55</sup>

This perspective should be contrasted with the explanation offered centuries before by Joseph Gikatilla (c. 1248-1305), another Spanish kabbalist with close ideational ties to the zoharic compilation and possibly an active member of one of the circles responsible for a part of its literary invention.

Know that if not for the fact that combined together with dreams is a mixture of the corporeal residue, how great would they be for human beings, for the name *halom* ['dream'] intimates that a human being comprehends more than what matter comprehends, and this is the subject of dreams. One can mentally concentrate [*mitboded*] in concurrence with the dream of prophecy, even though there are some parables [*meshalim*] in it, but with respect to the rest of the dreams, if not for the straw and the refuse mixed in with them, they would be a great thing. And this is what the rabbis, blessed be their memory, said, 'Just as there is no wheat without straw, so there is no dream without false matters'. They informed us that if not for the false matters compounded with the dream, even the dream of a commoner would be one sixtieth of prophecy. The person who comprehends more than what the body comprehends is called *holem* ['dreamer']. ... You will find that the name *holem* alludes to the comprehension of people in the lower world when they ascend to comprehend a level superior to what the bodies comprehend. If the dreams are not perfect, their deficiency is only due to the abundance of the mixture .... It is impossible for a dream to be entirely true, as we have explained, but part of it of necessity will be true. ... From all of these words we can learn that when an ordinary human comprehends more than his matter comprehends, that comprehension is called *halom* from the language of *holem*, for from the vowel of the *holem* thousands of myriads of lights burst forth, and the [dreamer] merits that some of the lights that burst forth from the vowel of the *holem* will be revealed. Therefore, according to the power of the light that bursts forth in the one who sees the dream from the emanation of the vowel of the *holem*, so will his dream be true; if it bursts forth minimally, a small part of his dream will come to be, and if maximally, the dream will be fulfilled to the end of its matter. According to the

<sup>54</sup> Pedaya, *Minhat Yehudah*, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

bursting forth so shall the measure of the dream be realized. The one who knows the secrets of these mysteries hidden in the matter of the *holem* will know the secret of the comprehension of the dreams [*sod hassagat ha-ḥalomot*]. ... Now contemplate well and you will see the secret of the rank of the *holem* over the rest of the vowels,<sup>56</sup> and you will already know in these places the secret of the dreams, and how they are dependent on the *holem*, which is the secret of the supernal vowel, and according to the efflux that descends from it the comprehensions will come following their types, whether of prophecy or of the rest of the matters.<sup>57</sup>

Every dream is a fusion of vain matters and truth—even the dream of prophecy, which is distinguished from commonplace dreams insofar as it is completely truthful, employs figurative language that is literally false (with the exception of Moses)<sup>58</sup>—because of the inherent limitations of the material body, but the knowledge that we access through dreams transcends those very limitations. The artifice of the dream is a means to reach a higher level of gnōsis that is connected to the *holem*,<sup>59</sup> the vowel that theosophically

<sup>56</sup> The elevated status of the *holem* is affirmed in the early work of Joseph Gikatilla, *Ginnat Egoz*, Jerusalem 1989, pp. 434-435, but with a different symbolic connotation.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Gikatilla, *Sefer ha-Niqqud*, Jerusalem 1994, p. 16. For discussion of this text, see R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, 'Kabbalistische Buchstabenmystik und der Traum (Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla Exkurs über Herkunft und Bedeutung der Träume)', *Zeitschrift für Religion und Geistesgeschichte* 8 (1956), pp. 164-169.

<sup>58</sup> Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Sedeq*, 17a; idem, *Sha'arei Orah*, 1:161. And compare Ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Qodesh*, IV.26, p. 489: 'Because [the patriarchs] did not comprehend in the day but only through the intermediary of the night, which is the barrier and the concealment of the face, their prophecy was mixed with parable, image, and allegory that is not translucent, like the matter through which they comprehended, which is called the speculum that does not shine and is not transparent. The secret is 'for she covered her face' (Gen. 38:15), and this is the secret of 'in the hands of the prophets I was imaged' (Hosea 12:11)'.  
<sup>59</sup> On the link between the *holem* and the *ḥalom*, see *The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts*, edited by Daniel Abrams, Los Angeles 1994, sec. 27, pp. 131-133. As Gershom Scholem surmised, *Das Buch Bahir: Ein Schriftdenkmal aus der Frühzeit der Kabbala auf Grund der kritischen Neuausgabe*, Leipzig 1923, a possible literary conduit of this idea may have been the remark of the twelfth-century Spanish exegete, philosopher, and poet, Abraham Ibn Ezra, that the term *aḥlamah* is related to Arabic *al-ḥilma*, for by wearing this stone on one's finger, one can visualize one's dreams. See also Ronit Meroz, 'The Resplendent Light is in the East: On the Time and Place of the *Sefer Bahir*', *Da'at* 49 (2002), pp. 173-174 [Hebrew], and see the criticism of her stance in *The Book*

symbolizes the emanation of *Keter*, since, orthographically, it is the highest of the vowels, positioned on the top of the consonants. The full implications of this symbolism will be explored elsewhere but suffice it here to underline that dreams are explained by Gikatilla as the outcome of the stream of light that issues from the first of the sefirotic gradations, an efflux that facilitates the mental ascent of the soul of the dreamer separated from corporeal embodiment and the succeeding state of contemplation (*hitbodedut*), a depiction of the dream alluded to in the following zoharic homily interpreting the verses ‘In a dream, a night vision, when deep sleep falls on men, when they slumber on their beds. Then he opens men’s ears, and by disciplining them leaves his signature’ (Job 33:15-16) in light of the well attested motif of the nocturnal separation of the soul from the body and its ensuing ascent:

What is written? ‘In a dream, a night vision’. When people lie asleep in their beds, and the soul leaves them, as it is written ‘when they slumber on their beds. Then he opens men’s ears’. Then, through the gradation presiding over the dream, the blessed holy One informs the soul of the matters that will come upon the world or of things that concur with the imaginings of one’s heart,<sup>60</sup> so that one will take a path of admonition in the world. For one is not informed when one is still existing in the strength of the body, as we have said. Rather, an angel informs the soul, and the soul, the person, and that dream is from above, when souls leave their bodies and ascend, each one in accord with its own way.<sup>61</sup>

The mechanics of the dream as a mental ascent dependent on a separation of mind from body is developed by later kabbalists, for example, Meir Ibn Gabbai,<sup>62</sup> Ḥayyim Vital,<sup>63</sup> Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto,<sup>64</sup> and Menasseh ben Israel.<sup>65</sup> Even so, the rabbinic idea that just as there is no wheat without straw, so the dream comprises truth and falsity, imposed itself on subsequent

*of Bahir: Flavius Mithridates’ Latin Translation, the Hebrew Text, and an English Version*, edited by Saverio Campanini with a Foreword by Giulio Busi, Torino 2005, p. 14 n. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot, 55b.

<sup>61</sup> *Zohar* 1:183a. See also 130a.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn Gabbai, *Avodat ha-Qodesh*, IV.27, p. 495.

<sup>63</sup> Vital, *Sha’arei Qedushshah*, III.5, pp. 253-255.

<sup>64</sup> Luzzatto, *Derekh ha-Shem*, III.1.6, pp. 74-75.

<sup>65</sup> Menasseh ben Israel, *Nishmat Ḥayyim*, Amsterdam, 1652, 3.5, 104a-b. The dream is explained as a nullification of the corporeal faculties during sleep and the consequent strengthening of the rational soul. In support of his view, the author cites select zoharic passages.

interpretations of the oneiric phenomenon. For Gikatilla, the gist of this dictum is that the source of the dream is the infinite will,<sup>66</sup> the ‘world of mercy’ (*olam ha-raḥamim*),<sup>67</sup> where opposites coincide, and hence there is no truth that is not also untrue and no untruth that is not also true.<sup>68</sup> That dreams are a mix of the truthful and disingenuous signifies that they issue from the aspect of infinity wherein it is no longer possible to differentiate antinomies.<sup>69</sup> The rabbinic insight, consequently, insinuates that the dream is a superior, indeed the supreme, mode of knowledge, which is the absence of knowledge, an unknowing that destabilizes the distinction between sense and nonsense.

I will conclude with a comment made by Yosef Ḥayyim of Baghdad (1832-1909), known honorifically as the Ben Ish Ḥai. After citing several prominent kabbalists, including Isaac Luria, Ḥayyim Vital, and Shalom Sharabi, who affirmed emphatically that the divine secrets should not be taken literally, since this would lead inevitably to the erroneous conception of a corporeal God, the Ben Ish Ḥai comments, ‘We cannot comprehend the truth of the matter, as it is impossible for us to configure this matter in our intellect, but rather we learn these matters as a dream’.<sup>70</sup> The point here is not simply that the well-attested phenomenon that mysteries are disclosed in a dream, but that their comprehension itself assumes the form of a dream. It is of interest to mention here the remark of Rosenzweig in his commentary to Judah Halevi’s poem *liqra’ t meqor ḥayyei emet aruṣah*, which he translates as *Sehnsucht*.<sup>71</sup> ‘For this

<sup>66</sup> Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Orah*, 2:89-90.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:84. In that context, Gikatilla links Jacob’s dream vision of the ladder (Gen. 28:12) with this symbolism, arguing that he ascended by means of the median line, the aspect of knowledge (*da’at*), to the first emanation, the nothing (*ayin*), or the world of mercy (*olam ha-raḥamim*), whence he had a disclosure of the second emanation, the something (*yesh*), or wisdom (*ḥokhmah*), signified scripturally by the Tetragrammaton.

<sup>68</sup> For an analysis of *Keter* as a coincidence of opposites in Gikatilla’s kabbalistic thought, see Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, pp. 224-229.

<sup>69</sup> I have discussed this theme in greater detail in ‘Oneiric Imagination and Mystical Annihilation in Habad Hasidism’, *ARC, The Journal of the Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University* 35 (2007), pp. 131-157.

<sup>70</sup> Yosef Ḥayyim, *Sod Yesharim*, Jerusalem 1994, pt. 2, sec. 13, p. 128. See *idem*, *Da’at u-Tevunah*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 9.

<sup>71</sup> Barbara E. Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi: Translating, Translations, and Translators*, Foreword by Paul Mendes-Flohr, Montreal 1995, pp. 20-21; German original in Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk: Gesammelte*

poet, the forerunner of the great Kabbalistic movements for whom the vision of God served as Israel's topical heritage and always to be newly actualized on the holy ground, sleep and dream are the legitimate ways to the goal'.<sup>72</sup> As I noted in an earlier study,<sup>73</sup> this is a remarkable passage that both demonstrates a subtle grasp of Halevi's protokabbalistic sensibilities and offers an incisive understanding of the centrality of the visionary dimension in the kabbalistic worldview.<sup>74</sup> Rosenzweig's recognition of the ocularcentric nature of kabbalistic gnosis is impressive, but even more so is his insistence that the nocturnal dream is the most appropriate means to attain that vision. I propose, along similar lines, that, in the mind of kabbalists, what makes the oneiric condition commensurate to esoteric knowledge is that the formless object of the contemplative vision can be seen only in the imaginal forms in which it (dis)appears, the sefirotic potencies configured in the heart, and hence there is no substantial difference between appearance and reality. The dream, as metaphor, is a transference that presupposes a gap continuously crossed and hence never collapsed, an opening that begets the merger of dissimilar entities without resolution of their difference.<sup>75</sup> Rendered metaphorically, the metaphor is the bridge that spans the breach between literal and figurative, truth and fiction, the verbal leap that propels one across the space of an irreducible reducibility. Metaphor, on this score, is a form of language that materializes in the fissure that connects by keeping apart. The dream may present us with one of the more viable ways to bridge the difference in the metaphorical leap, for the dream seems inaccessible except through the portal of discerning that there is no truth that is not also a lie, as every lie must be true to itself, and hence no

*Schriften IV. Sprachdenken im Übersetzen, 1: Band Hymnen und Gedichte des Jehuda Halevi*, edited by Reinhold and Annemarie Mayer, Dordrecht 1984), p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Galli, *Franz Rosenzweig and Jehuda Halevi*, p. 187.

<sup>73</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Light Does Not Talk But Shines: Apophasis and Vision in Rosenzweig's Theopoetic Temporality', in *New Directions in Jewish Philosophy*, edited by Aaron W. Hughes and Elliot R. Wolfson, Bloomington 2009, pp. 87-88. On the vision of God as a state between dream and wakefulness, see the texts of Rosenzweig cited and analyzed, op. cit., pp. 101-104.

<sup>74</sup> I have dedicated many of my studies to clarify the point, but none as extensively as Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*. Halevi is discussed on pp. 173-187.

<sup>75</sup> For an elaboration, see Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Suffering Eros and Textual Incarnation: A Kristevan Reading of Kabbalistic Poetics', in *Toward a Theology of Eros: Transfiguring Passion at the Limits of Discipline*, edited by Virginia Burrus and Catherine Keller, New York 2006, pp. 342-343.



face escapes the fate of being but another disguise that covers up the face. Kabbalistic knowledge of the divine realm, as the Ben Ish Hai perceptively intuited, is similarly entangled in the web of metaphoricity, a mode of knowing predicated on a conflation of opposites by which the incorporeal is rendered corporeal and the invisible visible. Reversing the Platonic hierarchy that has dominated Western epistemology and metaphysics, the dream is not a spurious and deficient reason concerned with the image of what is real but rather a superior cognition through which one envisions the image that is real. Esoteric wisdom, accordingly, is likened to a dream and, as a consequence, a profound affinity between the two is established as a focus of meditation.