

She Who Receives Visions: The Practice of Dreamwork

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We read in the Talmud [B. BERAKHOT 55B], “A dream uninterpreted is a letter unread.” According to the Zohar, the interpretation of a dream is more important than the dream itself. We offer here core practices of a *Ba’alat Halom*, a Dream Priestess. May your exploration of dreams and their power bring healing and transformation.

Sacred Sleep

Practice a regular sleep routine. Wake and retire each day at roughly the same time. You might offer traditional Jewish prayers right before sleep (such as the Shma and surrounding evening prayers) and first thing upon awakening (Modah Ani). Or, you might craft prayers to recite regularly, or offer spontaneous prayer each evening and morning.

Keeping a Dream Journal

Keep your dream journal by your bed, with pen and flashlight. Recording dreams as soon as possible upon waking, before getting out of bed, is ideal to maintain the most detail. If you are not able to record your dream immediately upon awakening, do so before leaving the house that day.

While the most common way to record dreams is in writing, work in whatever medium is most resonant for you when you are recording your dreams. Sketch, paint, sculpt in a way that captures the story of your dream.

Dream Incubation

Basic dream incubation — asking for insight through dream — includes clearing your mind before sleep, and grounding and centering yourself. The practice of *sh’eilat halom* is asking a dream question. As you are drifting asleep, call to mind your dream question, along with a prayerful request for guidance. You might bring your prayer shawl, a sacred text, or another ritual object to bed with you in support of your dreaming journey.

The practice of mystical weeping is a dream incubation technique discussed by Isaac Luria, Chaim Vital and later Hasidic teachers. Falling asleep weeping is said to clear the soul and to open one to receiving a dream message.

Dreaming in Community

Eve Ilsen, in the tradition of kabbalist Colette Aboulker-Muscat, leads a group dream incubation in which participants sleep in the same space, heads all pointing to the center. They are guided in a day-review practice and also an incubation prayer before sleep.

Dream circles are groups of friends who gather regularly or semi-regularly to support each other in dreaming. Dream circle practices and rituals may include prayer, space for dream sharing, and interpretation or dialogue. Gather a dream circle with folks in your community. Or, try a dream *hevruta*: having a friend with whom you share and interpret your dreams.

Dream Interpretation

In Kohenet dream circles, in accordance with the kabbalistic teachings of the contemporary mystic Colette, we receive and respond to a dream as if it were our own. When we hear a dream, we listen to it imagining that we had dreamed it. When we respond, we begin, “In my dream of this dream...” We share what we notice or are moved by, or what we feel is important symbology.

The Talmud records the practice of convening a Dream Court, invoking the support of three trusted friends to transform a disturbing dream for good by proclaiming it so. Another dream ritual is to ask a trusted spiritual teacher or companion to provide a positive interpretation of a frightening dream. For a text of a simple Dream Court Ritual, see *The Jewish Book of Dreaming* by Vanessa Ochs and Elizabeth Ochs. When a Dream Court is not feasible, it is traditional to pray for the transformation of one’s dream in a prayer service during the priestly blessing.

Healing and Medicine Dreams

On occasion, we are gifted with healing or medicine dreams. These dreams have a unique quality, a sacred energy and a physicality to them. When we awaken, we are aware that simply by the act of dreaming, something has transformed. Medicine dreams are gifts from Spirit. Upon receiving them, it is appropriate to give prayers or make offerings of gratitude.

Resources

For a wonderful overview of dreaming practices, work with *The Jewish Dream Book* by Vanessa Ochs and Elizabeth Ochs. For dream-supportive prayer practices, read *Entering the Temple of Dreams* (evening prayer) or *Minding the Temple of the Soul* (morning prayer) by Tamar Frankiel. *Kabbalah and the Power of Dreaming: Awakening the Visionary Life*, by Catherine Shainberg, is in the tradition of French-Algerian kabbalist Colette Aboulker-Muscat.

NOTES:

- 1 See Jeff A. Benner, "Letters missing from the Hebrew alphabet." http://www.ancient-hebrew.org/4_missing.html.
- 2 Ismar J. Peritz, "Woman in the Ancient Hebrew Cult," in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 17 (1898), p. 111-148.
- 3 J.H. Chajes, *Between Worlds: Dybbuks, Exorcists, and Early Modern Judaism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 114.

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