

We are dreamers (Psalm 126)

Dreams inhabit untamed psychological, emotional, and spiritual terrain.

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Dreams are powerful and mysterious. Carl Jung called them the “impartial products of the unconscious psyche ... they show us the unvarnished, natural truth.” Other researchers claim that dreams have no meaning, that they are simply a neurobiological function that sorts and pulls together random thoughts and images from our memories. Shakespeare’s *Tempest* says we are made from the stuff of dreams, fleeting and ephemeral. And numerous biblical narratives depict God communicating with people through dreams—issuing warnings, foretelling future events, or sharing wisdom. Not easily defined, dreams inhabit untamed psychological, emotional, and spiritual terrain.

Psalm 126 opens with the psalmist declaring, “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.” One of 15 “Songs of Ascent,” Psalm 126 was most likely used as a road song by those making pilgrimages to Jerusalem for festivals, to serve as a reminder of God’s blessings.

If you’ve ever participated in a protest march or ridden on a bus full of school-aged children, you know the way a shared song or chant can shift energy and lift the collective mood while you journey together. As I imagine groups of pilgrims traveling an arid path to reach Jerusalem, I hear a poignant note in their song. Singing to remember the return of their kinfolk (the fortunes of Zion) held in Babylonian captivity, they liken themselves to dreamers. Suffering is interwoven in the song, but

the dream of past and present joy is the brighter threads.

Joy propels us forward, even as we look back on painful histories.

When Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his now iconic “I have a dream” speech, he painted a clear picture of his vision for the future. In King’s American dream landscape, the red hills of Georgia became the setting for a table of brotherhood. As it sweltered with the heat of oppression, Mississippi transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. The valleys were exalted, the mountains humbled, and the crooked roads made straight. “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,” King said, quoting Isaiah, “and all flesh shall see it together.”

Here, too, the remnants of pain are present, but the dream is laden with an inexorable hope for a kind of heaven on earth.

When we label someone a dreamer, often it comes with a hint of the pejorative. Sometimes we mean that a dreamer isn’t a “serious” person. Sometimes we use the word *dream* to dismiss our youth, who use dreams to disrupt the status quo we’ve grown comfortable with. Sometimes we use it to indicate that something we desire is out of reach, unattainable. But, whether unconsciously or consciously constructed, a dream can be a blueprint for making the immaterial material—and manifesting the heart of God. As we face the stark reality of what seems to be a world in chaos, there may be nothing more important than turning toward our dreams.