Talmud Brachot Top Ten Teachings, Daf 56:

1. **The dreams of rulers.** The Roman emperor once saw Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah and said to him, “The Jews say you are wise. Tell me what I will dream about tonight.” Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah replied, “In your dream, the Persians will make you serve their king. They will seize you and force you to take care of pigs with a golden staff.” He was probably referring to the Parthians, who waged war with Rome on occasion. The emperor thought about Rabbi Yehoshua’s words all day, and that night he had that exact dream.

Did Rabbi Yehoshua really predict Caesar’s dream? It’s more that the prediction caused the dream. There was a known rivalry between the Romans and the Parthians, and Rabbi Yehoshua knew this was obviously something that would be troubling Caesar’s mind. Since most dreams are about the things that preoccupy our minds during the day, all Rabbi Yehoshua had to do was bring this concern to the forefront of Caesar’s mind, and then Caesar had exactly the dream he predicted. On the other side of this conflict, a story is told about the Persian King Shapur. He told Shmuel, “I hear the Jews say that you are wise. Tell me what I’m going to see in my dream.” Shmuel told him, “I see the Romans taking you into captivity. They will force you to grind date pits with a golden mill.” King Shapur thought about this all day, and that night he had that exact dream.

Was it wise for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah and Shmuel to be provoking Caesar and King Shapur? Perhaps the rabbis were only revealing the obvious. These two nations often clashed, and naturally each ruler worried about being defeated and forced to serve the other. Alternatively, dreams are often an opportunity for the unconscious mind to play out different scenarios that the conscious mind doesn’t have the time to play out. Perhaps by bringing about these dreams and thereby revealing to each ruler his own fear of losing, Rabbi Yehoshua and Shmuel actually tempered the rulers’ urge to go to battle.

1. **Bar Hedya the dream interpreter.** Abaye and Rava had a series of the same dreams, and both approached Bar Hedya for interpretations. Abaye would give Bar Hedya a *zuz* in payment, but Rava did not pay, and so Bar Hedya interpreted Abaye’s dreams positively and Rava’s negatively. All of his interpretations ended up coming true. This shows us the power of money and how it affects the way we see people. Bar Hedya loved Abaye because Abaye gave him money, and so he saw things from Abaye’s point of view and gave the dreams favorable interpretations. Because Rava did not pay, Bar Hedya disliked him and could only see his dreams in a negative light. From this we can learn how important it is to pay for services rendered when payment is expected. Withholding payment can significantly affect the way the professional views the client, and as we see this can have devastating consequences. Although Rava was not officially asked to pay, it could be that there was an implied understanding and that Bar Hedya thought he deserved to be paid.
2. **Examples of the dreams.** Abaye and Rava were seeing verses in their dreams. In one dream they saw the verse, “Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you won’t eat from it.” Bar Hedya told Rava this meant that his business would fail and he would lose his appetite. He told Abaye it meant that his business would do well and it would make him so happy that he wouldn’t have any interest in eating.

In another dream they saw the verse, “You will bear sons and daughters, but they won’t be yours because they’ll be put into captivity.” Bar Hedya told Rava it meant his children would be taken away by bandits, but he told Abaye that he would have many children and his daughters would marry men from other places, making it seem like they were in captivity because he wouldn’t see them often.

When both rabbis dreamed of the verse, “Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation,” Bar Hedya told Rava that his wife would die and his children would be raised by a stepmother. He told Abaye that he and his wife would argue about shidduchim for their children and his wife would get her way, so he’d marry his children off to her family and it would be like they were in another nation.

At face value all of these verses sound negative, but Bar Hedya was able to come up with positive twists for Abaye. There are a couple of sections in the Torah known as *klalos*, curses. They sound very negative, but it is acceptable to put a positive spin on things and find ways to re-interpret verses that sound negative. A story is told about the son of the Alter Rebbe of Chabad. The Alter Rebbe would usually read the Torah on Shabbos, but one time he was unwell so someone else did the Torah reading. When the Alter Rebbe’s son heard this other person read the *klalos* section, he fainted. When he was revived, he explained that whenever he heard his father read that section, he only heard blessings. With someone else reading, he was hearing the curses for the first time, and that’s what made him faint.

1. **Rava’s anger.** All of Bar Hedya’s terrible interpretations of Rava’s dreams came true. One day Rava was traveling with Bar Hedya on a boat, and Bar Hedya saw that something was going to happen and that Rava would be saved by a miracle. Bar Hedya didn’t know if he was worthy of being saved himself, so he got off the boat. As he disembarked, a book fell out of his hand and Rava picked it up. Rava opened the book and saw “What happens in the dream follows its interpretation.” Suddenly Rava realized that Bar Hedya’s interpretations of his dreams had caused all the tragedies that had befallen him. He said to Bar Hedya, “Wicked person, you are the cause of all my pain and suffering. I could forgive you for everything but not the death of my wife.” (Some texts say “the deaths of my wife and children.”) He put a curse on Bar Hedya that he should be handed over to a government that has no pity. Bar Hedya was afraid, because he knew the curse of a great sage would be fulfilled, and he knew that Rava was right to curse him. So he decided to go into exile, because exile atones for sin.

Did he really cause Rava’s suffering just by interpreting his dreams in a negative way? Dreams are shrouded in mystery, and there are always multiple ways of interpreting them. But once an interpretation is given, it can lead a person in a certain direction that makes that interpretation more likely to come true. For example, the interpretation of one of his dreams led Rava to believe that he would be hit twice in one day. He interfered in a fight that day and the combatants hit him twice. They were going to hit him a third time, but he told them to stop because he was only meant to be hit twice that day, and they stopped. Perhaps if he hadn’t heard the interpretation he would have been hit three times that day. But it’s also possible that if he had heard the interpretation he wouldn’t have been hit at all, because he wouldn’t have put himself in that situation.

1. **The terrible end of the dream interpreter.** Bar Hedya exiled himself to Rome and sat in front of the treasury. The master of the treasury came to him and said, “I had a dream that my finger was pricked by a needle.” Bar Hedya told the man to give him a *zuz* in exchange for interpreting the dream, but like Rava, the man refused. So Bar Hedya did not give him an interpretation. Later the man came back to Bar Hedya and described another dream, in which a worm burrowed into two of his fingers. Again Bar Hedya asked for a *zuz*, and again the master of the treasury refused. Then he had a third dream, that a worm had eaten his whole hand. This time Bar Hedya said to him, “It seems the worms have gotten to the royal silk robes.” And it was true; the silk was ruined. When this was discovered by the royal court, the master of the treasury was sentenced to death. But before they could kill him, he told them, “I only just found out what was happening. But there’s someone who knew much earlier and refused to tell me.” So they brought in Bar Hedya and accused him of destroying the royal silks with his greed. As punishment, they tied together two cedar trees that were far apart and bound one of Bar Hedya’s legs to one tree and the other leg to the other tree. Then they untied the trees and let them spring apart, ripping Bar Hedya in half.

Did he deserve such a terrible punishment? He never gave any good interpretations for free. He could have warned Rava that if he didn’t pay he would get only curses, and he could have told the master of the treasury that the interpretation was bad and if he didn’t pay he would have trouble. But he didn’t give out any warnings, and as a result many people suffered. But we can also learn from this that things cost money, and refusing to pay can have consequences. Neither Rava nor the master of the treasury thought it was important to pay the dream interpreter. They didn’t realize that the way someone thinks of you can affect the way they interpret your dreams, which can affect their outcome.

1. **Rabbi Yishmael and the Sadducee.** A Sadducee had a series of dreams and asked Rabbi Yishmael to interpret them:  
   Sadducee: I had a dream that I was pouring oil into olives.  
   Rabbi Yishmael: You live with your mother.  
   S: I plucked a star from the sky.  
   RY: You kidnapped a Jew.  
   S: I ate the star.  
   RY: You sold the Jew you kidnapped and used the money.  
   S: I saw my eyes touching.  
   RY: You live with your sister.  
   S: I kissed the moon.  
   RY: You live with another man’s wife.  
   S: I treaded in the shadow of a myrtle.  
   RY: You cohabited with a betrothed Naira.  
   S: I saw a shadow above me and yet it was below me.  
   RY: Your bed has been turned around; you had intercourse in a reverse way.  
   S: I saw ravens surrounding my bed.  
   RY: Your wife is being unfaithful.  
   S: Doves were surrounding my bed.  
   RY: You defiled many women.  
   S: I was peeling an egg.  
   RY: You stripped the clothing of a corpse to wear.

S: All of your interpretations are correct, except the last one. I never took clothes from a dead person.  
But at that time a woman came and accused him of wearing a cloak that belonged to a dead person. Then the Sadducee had another dream in which his father told him he had left him property in Kapotkiya. Rabbi Yishmael asked some questions and deduced that the Sadducee’s father had left him money not in the city of Kapotkiya, but on the tenth beam. The Sadducee looked there and found the money.

This story is perplexing, because with each dream interpretation Rabbi Yishmael was belittling the Sadducee, but then he revealed the location of a hidden treasure. Perhaps the message was that the Sadducee was filled with illicit desire, but that there was still a buried treasure which his father (perhaps a reference to the Patriarchs) had left for him. This is the power of teshuva, which is connected to the tenth beam.

1. **Isaac’s well.** Rabbi Chanina says one who sees a well in a dream sees peace for himself, like the Torah says about the servants of Isaac that they dug in the valley and found a well of flowing water. Rabbi Nosson says a well in a dream means he’s found Torah. The well dug by Isaac’s servants represents finding something that was lost and relates to Isaac’s attribute of *gevurah* (strength). Abraham was the trailblazer, the inspiration. Isaac was perspiration and perpetuation; he created definitions and methods for implementing what Abraham pioneered, and the well is a symbol of all of that. Although initially the wells were a source of contention between Isaac and the people of Gerar, ultimately the fighting ended and Isaac named his well Rechovot, symbolizing peace and prosperity. Thus seeing a well in a dream is seeing Torah, life, and peace.
2. **The river, the bird, and the kettle.** Rabbi Chanan says there are three things in a dream that mean peace: a river, a bird, and a kettle. This is based on the verses “Behold I will extend peace to her like a river”; “Like a flying bird, so will G-d, Master of the Legions, protect”; and “G-d will set peace for us.” Rabbi Chanina says we are talking about a kettle that has no meat in it. If you see a river, a bird, or a kettle in a dream, you should say a positive verse about it, because they can each represent something positive and something negative and we want to highlight the positive before the negative can be realized. The river runs out of Eden to give water to the Garden. It connects upstream and downstream and brings blessings and plenty. But this can be negative, because sometimes there is conflict between the people upstream and the people downstream. A bird represents the soul, the thing that wakes you up in the morning. It can also be a person who “wakes you up” and challenges you to keep you from getting mentally old. The chirping of a bird is peaceful, but can also represent negative chatter - *lashon hara*. The kettle is domestication of passion. Fire can become controlled heat that makes our tea and coffee, representing the blessing of the home and family. But uncontrolled, fire can destroy.
3. **Manifest positive interpretations.** There are symbols we might see in our dreams that can be either positive or negative. As we have seen, dreams can be somewhat prophetic and all dreams follow their interpretations. Therefore, when you have a dream with one of these symbols, you should do what you can to spin it in a positive light. For example, grapes. There is a positive verse relating to grapes - “I found grapes in the desert” - and a negative verse - “Grapes are the grapes of G-d.” If you see grapes in your dream, upon waking you should say the positive verse. If you see a mountain, say the verse, “How pleasant are the footsteps of the herald upon the mountain” rather than, “Woe and terribleness upon the mountain, I’ll raise my voice and cry.” If you see a shofar, say the verse, “On that day the great shofar sound will be blasted.”
4. **More dream symbolism.** The rabbis taught that if you see a reed in a dream, you should anticipate wisdom. If you see multiple reeds, anticipate understanding. Rabbi Zeira says a gourd, a heart of palm, wax, and a weed are all favorable omens. A *beraisa* teaches that only one who fears G-d with all his might will see a gourd in a dream. If you see an ox in your dream you should say “The firstborn ox is nobility” when you wake. If you eat the ox in your dream, you’ll be healthy. If it gores you, you will have sons who will be strong in their Torah study and win arguments. If it bites you, bad things will happen. If it kicks you, you will have to journey a long while. If you ride it, you will rise to greatness. And if you see a donkey in a dream, anticipate a salvation.