

Discourse Eighteen: Are Dreams True?

The natural scientists of Europe do not believe that dreams can be true and do not consider their relationship with external events to have scientific weight barring a few psychologists that have done research on the matter and use dreams that uncover hidden truths or reports of future events which cannot be considered accidental as rationales against the opposition.

What does the Qur'an say?

In the Glorious Qur'an dreams of prophets and other people have been cited and substantiated. Among these are the dreams of Prophet Abraham ('a) regarding the sacrifice of Ishmael, of Prophet Joseph ('a) and his fellow prisoners of Egypt's sovereign, and of the Holy Prophet (S) regarding the conquest of Mecca. There is also evidence in narrations cited from the Holy Prophet (S) and Imams ('a).

We have all either had dreams that indicated hidden matters, resolved scientific problems, or divulged future events ourselves or heard of them from others. These dreams, especially clear dreams that do not require interpretation, cannot be considered accidental and completely unrelated to the situation to which they conform.

Of course, it cannot be denied that various internal factors such as diseases, health conditions, fatigue, or a stuffed stomach, and also external ones such as heat, cold, etc. can affect the imagination which in turn affects dreams.

For instance, a person who was exposed to extreme heat or cold might dream of blazing fires or ice and snow; or a person who has an engorged stomach or indigestion might have disturbing or incoherent dreams.

A person's inner qualities and principles of behavior also have influences on dreams. As such, most dreams are the result of imaginations caused by external and internal factors and in truth indicate the effects of these factors. Natural scientists have mostly researched these factors whereby they conclude that dreams have no truth. However, just as we cannot deny the effect of these factors, we also cannot

deny the verity of some dreams and their relationship with external affairs.

Is the soul linked to dreams?

It is not possible to say that the soul of a person who dreams of the occurrence of a specific event at a specific time has connected to an event that has not yet come into being because existential association between an existent and non-existent is impossible.

Moreover, we cannot say regarding a person who dreams that a certain vessel is buried in a specific place containing a certain amount of gold and silver coins and after waking up goes there and recovers it that their soul has connected to that vessel because the contact of the soul with material things occurs through the senses and a vessel that is buried under the earth cannot be sensed. That is why it is said that the connection of the soul to these events and phenomena is through their causes.

By way of explanation, the world of existence incorporates three worlds:

The natural world [‘alam-e tab‘at] with which we are familiar;

The ideational world [‘alam-e mithal]: the existential status of this world is above that of the natural world. Beings residing in this world are forms devoid of matter and they are causal in relation to material beings.

The intellectual world [‘alam-e ‘aql]: This world is superior to the ideational world. It is where the truth of all beings exist free of both matter and form and are causal in relation to beings of the ideational world.

Because of its abstraction, the human soul is in the same class with supernatural phenomena. In sleep, a time when it is not engaged in sensory perception, it naturally returns to the world to which it belongs and apprehends truths from that world in accordance to its abilities.

The perfect soul, which possesses the faculty to perceive intellectual abstractions as such, apprehends causes as generalities. However, a soul that has not attained that level of perfection perceives general truths as discrete forms.

Just as we describe speed with a fast object and immensity with a mountain, a soul that has yet to attain intellectual abstraction, thus remaining in the ideational world, sometimes observes the causes of phenomena in the ideational world in its real form without alteration. These are the clear dreams that are usually seen by the people of truth and purity.

They sometimes perceive ideational beings in forms that they are familiar with, just as they see knowledge as light and ignorance as darkness. The mind might even transfer from one meaning to a contradicting one.

One such dream is cited as follows: a man went to Ibn S^ur^un, the famous interpreter of dreams, and said, “I dreamed that I held a seal with which I sealed the mouths and privates of the people.” Ibn S^ur^un said, “You will become a caller of adh^un [mu’adh^udhin], the people will fast by your adh^un, abstaining from eating and marital relations.”

Clear and unclear dreams

In accordance to what has been said, dreams are of either two types: clear dreams which have not been altered by the dreaming soul and do not require interpretation, and unclear dreams in which the soul alters what it perceives and therefore require interpretation and restoration of the mental form to its true and primary status, such as interpreting light as knowledge and darkness as ignorance and bewilderment.

Non-vivid dreams are also divided into two categories: dreams with a coherent story and transitions and can easily be interpreted, such as the previous example, and dreams wherein the soul has made complex and vague alterations. Understanding the original observation of the soul in the latter case is difficult or even impossible for dream interpreters. Such dreams are termed muddled dreams [adgh^uth ahl^um] and considered nonsensical and uninterpretable.

This was a summary of what scholars of the soul state about dreams that is also supported by the Noble Qur’an. For instance, the return of the soul to the supernatural realm in sleep can be understood from the following verses:

﴿...وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم بِاللَّيْلِ﴾

“It is He who takes your souls by night...”¹

﴿...اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ﴾

“Allah takes the souls when they die and also those that have not died He takes in their sleep; He keeps those whose deaths have been decreed and sends back the rest...”²

The surface meaning of these verses is that the soul is taken from the body when sleeping losing its attachment to the five senses, and it returns to the Lord—a return similar to death.

There are also indications of the three types of dreams. For instance, the dreams of Prophet Abraham (‘a) and the Holy Prophet (S) are of the first type, the dreams of Joseph’s (S) fellow prisoners are of the second type, and it also speaks of complex and vague dreams where the Egyptian dream interpreters of considered the dream of the pharaoh as a muddled dream [adgh^uth ahl^um].³

- [1.](#) Sirat al-An'am 6:60.
- [2.](#) Sirat al-Zumar 39:42.
- [3.](#) Extracted from the journal, "Kitab-e Fasl".

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