

Lesson Eleven, The Evidence of Experience part 2

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Man's ever-increasing curiosity first began to exercise itself on objects that were far removed from him the stars. Now it is his normal and natural states and circumstances that preoccupy him as he attempts to make out the factors which dominate his existence.

One of the topics that has attracted man's attention is that of sleep and dreams. This is understandable, considering the fact that a significant part of man's life is spent asleep in the world of dreams.

The various theories that have been put forth on this subject demonstrate the complexity of the subject and reflect all the lengthy experiments experts have conducted.

It is a characteristic of man like all living beings to sleep after engaging in effort and tiring activity. As a portion of his vital activity is suspended, the functioning of the body also decreases.

How sleep takes place is itself an important question; despite all the studies that have been made, a definitive answer cannot yet be given. The whole matter is shrouded in a variety of interpretations many of which are the result of hasty and unjustified deductions. All that science knows so far is restricted to certain physical processes which take place in the realm of the body.

There are as yet no indications that permit us to hope for a solution to this problem and it would be incautious to predict the emergence of precise and realistic theories. Nonetheless, the advance of human knowledge may one day enable man to solve this great mystery that confronts him.

Still more mysterious than sleep are dreams that configuration of various scenes, images and events in the mind of the sleeper. The phenomenon of the dream confronts us with all kinds of complex and knotty problems.

All the physiological functions of the body, all its non-volitional and reflexive acts, continue during sleep

with the utmost regularity. The nerves and the glands, the intestines and the muscles all continue their work. But man has no power of thought or decision; his will is inoperative, and his life resembles that of a monocellular being.

The sleeper looks like a lifeless and prostrate figure, but suddenly he awakens and comes back to life. Sleep and awakening are in fact comparable to death and resurrection. The Noble Qur'an says the following concerning the affinity between sleep and death on the one hand, and awakening and resurrection on the other:

“God takes men's souls at the time of their death, and the soul which does not die, He takes in sleep. Then He keeps the soul that is destined to die at that time, and returns the others to life for a set period.” (39:42)

In the view of the Qur'an, sleep is outwardly the suspension of the natural forces in man, but it is at the same time a return of man's spirit to his inner being. Sleep is the lesser death, and death is the greater sleep. In both cases the spirit is transferred to a different world. The difference is that on waking up a person is unaware that he has returned from a journey, whereas for the one who dies all things become clear.

Dreams have been divided into several categories. A large proportion of dreams derive from the hopes and desires of the dreamer, or reflect occurrences he has experienced.

Another major category consists of confused dreams that simply reflect man's imaginings and illusions.

Then there is a category of dreams of which the defining element is a kind of inspiration; these dreams foretell events. They sometimes reflect an as yet hidden occurrence in its exact and real form and sometimes in symbolic form that can be interpreted by those having the necessary skill.

Since the human spirit has an affinity with the supranatural realm, it is bound to depart for that expansive universe once sleep puts an end to its preoccupation with sensory perceptions. There it witnesses certain realities, in accordance with its degree of preparedness and capacity, and it is able to deposit the knowledge thus received in the mind in a way that permits it to be remembered after the sleeper awakens.

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There can be no doubt that confused dreams are connected to certain physical and psychological conditions; they are nothing but a series of illusions and imaginings. Similarly, the appearance in the mind of the dreamer of past events, without any reflection of events yet to come, has no particular value.

This, however, is not the case with dreams the interpretation of which permits one to forecast events that are still in gestation or which, being so clear as to leave no need for interpretation, present to us in the imaginal world the causes and occasions of things in their actual form.

Many instances of this kind of dream have been reported in historical sources. They occur, moreover, in the personal lives of many of us, and they cannot all be ascribed to coincidence. They cannot be attributed either to the reminders of past events of the day or to analyses of them that our nervous system provides us with, nor do repressed instincts and desires play any role in them.

Freud interprets dreams as follows:

“Generally speaking, what appears to us in the world of dreams consists of the sensory objects of which we have been aware during the day and of wishes which have remained unfulfilled for one reason or another. During the day a man may conceive a desire for a certain woman who is inaccessible to him; at night he gains possession of her in the world of his dreams. A hungry beggar dreams of riches and palaces; an ugly man acquires unparalleled beauty; an impotent old man recovers the vigor of youth; a hopeless and desperate man finds all his wishes fulfilled. In short, all the wishes and inclinations that remain unfulfilled during the day, all the feelings that remain hidden for one reason or another, come into the open and are freely satisfied in the world of dreams.”

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Here I will refrain from mentioning the numerous dreams foretelling the future which are mentioned in historical sources or have been experienced and related to me by countless trustworthy persons. Let me simply recount a dream I had myself. On Saturday, April 24, 1962, a violent earthquake shook the city of Lar, leading to heavy losses of life and damage.

About one week before the earthquake, I dreamed that a strong earthquake was shaking Lar, destroying buildings and raising up clouds of dust that covered the sky like thick fog.

With this terrifying picture pressing on my mind, I woke up in terror, probably at about midnight.

The next day I told some of the notables of Lar and my friends of my dream, and they still sometimes recall the occasion.

At the time, they naturally interpreted my dream in different ways, but two or three nights later an earthquake of medium force occurred, causing only moderate losses. One of the religious scholars of the city came to see me and said: “Yesterday's earthquake is the one that you dreamed of.” I replied that the brief and relatively harmless earthquake we had just experienced bore no resemblance to the horrifying scenes I had witnessed in my dream. (The person in question still remembers what happened.)

Finally April 24 arrived. Toward the end of the day a ruinous earthquake was visited on Lar. The city shook violently, buildings collapsed, clouds of earth and dust rose into the air, and countless people, young and old, men and women, were swallowed up by death.

Those who survived the earthquake rushed to the ruined buildings to help the wounded. The sight that

presented itself during those grim moments was truly shattering.

A particularly remarkable detail is that in my dream I had seen the small child of one of my relatives who lived in a neighboring house. I saw him passing in front of a part of the house that was about to collapse, so I called out to him to get out of the way, which he did.

When the earthquake occurred, the only part of the house that collapsed was the one that had done so in my dream; the rest of the house remained standing, and nothing happened to the child, because when the earthquake happened he began running from one corner to the other in panic, moving out of the way of danger just when that particular part of the house began to collapse!

Would be it at all logical to accept as an explanation for the countless dreams of this type which accurately foretell the future the interpretations of materialists who regard all dreams as the result of the appearance in the mind of everyday events or of the fear of the unknown? Can such dreams be regarded, as the Freudians claim, simply as the reflection of repressed desires that come to the surface of the unconscious in order to delude the ego?

How can our perceptive apparatus perceive events that lie beyond the material circumstances surrounding us? How can it become aware of an event that has not yet occurred? Is there any way of explaining such awareness except in terms of a link between the human spirit and the supramaterial world?

It must then be the case that man gains awareness from the world of the unseen, from a source which is aware of the future, in just the same way that astronomical facilities permit him to record the rays emitted by the galaxies. Why should it not be accepted that the waves emitted by the world of the unseen may be picked up by the spirit of man, acting as a receiver, with the result that matters that are not knowable by natural means are made manifest in the world of dreams?

Let us take another look at what the leaders leading materialist thinkers say on the general subject of dreams:

“Contrary to what was imagined for centuries, dreams do not foretell the future or disclose any mysteries to us. The question of interpretation does not therefore arise. On the contrary, if we fully believe what Freud says, we must agree that dreams depict events out of the past. In other words, dreams result from past occurrences, and are not indications of future occurrences.

“Apart from this, careful experiments have shown that dreams like all other ‘spiritual’ phenomena are an entirely material phenomenon, without any involvement of supernatural forces.”(Dr. Arani *Khabidan va Khab Didan*, pp.15–16)

Is this really the case? Do dreams never inform us of future events or other unknown matters?

The materialists are of course free if they wish to ignore realities and to give a totally unrealistic

interpretation of dreams that have nothing to do with the thoughts and occurrences of everyday life.

They pretend that their theories represent the pinnacle of perfection and they imagine they have discovered all the mysteries of the universe and the principles that govern the life of man. They suppose that whatever appears to be a mystery or resists explanation in terms of logic quite simply does not exist, so there is nothing left to explain or discover!

They should recognize, however, that such an attitude to clear and the self-evident truths is the sign of a spirit in revolt against established truths.

It is always the habit of the materialists, in their attempts to destroy the beliefs of others, to analyze hastily and impatiently whatever does not fit into their narrow framework of thought, imagining themselves able to supply answers to the most complex of questions.

However, if one studies matters soberly and patiently and attains some degree of acquaintance with non-sensory phenomena, one's vision expands and one becomes less inclined to accept mono-dimensional explanations.

It must not be forgotten that theologians have never denied the influence exerted on dreams by past thoughts and perceptions or by wishes and desires, as well as other factors, internal or external. Certain diseases and mental disorders cast their shadow on many dreams. But the phenomenon of the dream cannot be regarded simply as the reflection of the activity of the brain and the nervous system, or of repressed desires. Many dreams may indeed be related to such factors, but this is not the case with dreams that foretell future events. As we have seen above, such dreams cannot possibly be explained by referring to material factors and causes; they represent the distillation of a different form of reality.

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The astounding feats of ascetics must also not be dismissed out of hand. Many people have themselves witnessed their remarkable deeds, apart from which manifest examples of their feats are recorded in numerous books of history.

If we regard the spirit as an epiphenomenon of matter, feats such as these which draw on forces hidden within man are bound to remain inexplicable.

All the various phenomena we have discussed in the past two chapters point to the existence of a reality in man that is independent of his physical being, that survives death of the body. This is the only conclusion that profound thought will yield.

If we compare man to an airplane made up of different components, each of which has its own function, we must agree that this airplane needs a skilled pilot to guide and direct it with his expertise. The pilot does not belong to the same category as the components and instruments that make up the airplane, although his existence is absolutely necessary for its functioning. The spirit is the pilot of the material

body.

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