

Dreams in Islam

a. What is the Arabic for dream?

In the Qur'ān, two words are used to describe dreams:

المنام (*al-Manām*) This is taken from the Arabic for sleep, because a dream usually occurs when a person is asleep.

الرؤيا (*al-Ru'ya*) This means 'dream' as well as vision, taken from the verb to mean 'to see.' A dream is so called because it is a vision.

The fact that the word for dream in Arabic is taken from the same word to mean vision points to one of the great miracles of Allāh. We see through the means of our eyes. If our eyes are covered, then we cannot see a thing. But such is the magnificence of Allāh's creation that he can make us see with our eyes firmly shut. We can see the most beautiful of sceneries, people and places, with our eyes firmly closed during a dream. So it is not only the eyes by which we see, but our soul too, like what happens in a dream.

b. What happens during a dream?

The key to understanding what happens in a dream is the following verse from the Qur'ān:

It is Allāh who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those who do not die during their sleep. He keeps those (souls) for which He has ordained death and sends the rest for a term appointed. Verily, in this are signs for people who think deeply (39: 42).

What we learn from this is that when we are dreaming, the soul leaves the body, just like it does when a person dies. The only difference is that when a person dies, then the soul's departure is permanent whereas it is temporary in a dream. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

'Like you sleep that is how you will die. And like you awake, that is how you will be resurrected.'

It is quite often that people meet those who have died many years before in their dreams. Like Ibn Abbās (may Allāh be pleased with him) asserts, this is basically the meeting of the souls.

Moreover, the normal concept of time is suspended during a dream. What this means is that what we see in a dream seems to have taken a huge amount of time, though in real time, it might have only been a short while. In a power nap, a lot seems to happen in our sleep, but it takes only a few minutes in real time.

When we are sleeping in general, we lose concept of time. Were we to put someone in a darkened room and take away all forms of time telling, he would not know how long he has slept for.

The Qur'ān supports this idea. The People of the Cave went to sleep. When they awoke, they were asked how long they were asleep for. They said perhaps a day or half a day. They had in fact been sleeping for 309 years.

c. What did the Prophet (peace be upon him) teach us about dreams?

There are many *ahādīth* of the Prophet (peace be upon him) on dreams. In fact, the major collections have individual chapters on dreams, like *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* and *Sahīh Muslim*. Here a handful of the most prominent sayings on dreams:

و عن انس قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم : الرؤيا الصالحة جزء من ستة و اربعين جزء من النبوة (متفق عليه)

‘A nice dream is one part of the forty-six parts of *Nabuwwa*.’

In this hadīth, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) described a nice dream as ‘one part of the 46 parts of *Nabuwwa*.’ Clearly, the hadīth does not mean that whosoever sees a nice dream, then he is one forty-sixth on the way to becoming a Prophet. Mulla Alī Qārī explains that part of *Nabuwwa* does not make a prophet, in the same way performing one part of *Salāh* does not constitute *Salāh*. Moreover, the line of prophets and messengers finished with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).

What the hadīth means is that a nice dream is part of *Ilm Nabuwwa*, which still does remain. Mulla Qārī suggests that *Nabuwwa* consists of 46 parts, of which nice dreams is one.

Perhaps the Prophet is indicating here that dreams have played a pivotal role for the previous prophets and messengers:

- a. Prior to the public announcement of *Nabuwwa*, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) himself said that he would see ‘nice dreams’. What he would see at night in his dreams would come true during the day. Additionally, the Prophet saw a dream instructing him to perform *Umra* in Makka, when he was in Madina.
- b. Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) was instructed to sacrifice his son through the means of a dream that he saw. This example is instrumental in indicating the difference between our dreams and the dreams of prophets. Ibrahim was told to do something otherwise forbidden via a dream. He still had 100% conviction in the dream rather than his own consciousness.
- c. Yūsuf (peace be upon him) was an expert in the interpretation of dreams. He himself saw a dream (the sun, moon and stars prostrating to him) whose interpretation came true later.

- d. In fact, even today, the followers of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) can have their faith infinitely strengthened by being shown a vision of the Prophet in their dreams. The Prophet said that whoever is granted such a vision should know that it is him for sure, and not an eye-trick or the works of the devil.

d. Seeing the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Abū Hurayra (may Allāh be pleased with him) reports that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

و عن ابي هريرة ان رسول الله صلي الله عليه و سلم قال من راني في المنام فقد راني فان
الشيطان لا يتمثل في صورتي (متفق عليه)

Whosoever sees me in a dream has certainly seen me. The Shaytān cannot take on my form.

In other words, the dreamer should have no doubt that he has seen the Prophet (peace be upon him). In another report, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said, 'Whosoever has seen me has seen Haqq (the truth).' Remember that the Shaytān has no affect on the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). Even during his physical life, the devil could not touch the Messenger. In one hadīth, the Prophet explained that every person has one good jinn to encourage good and one bad one to entice evil. 'Even you O Messenger of Allāh?' he was asked. 'Yes' he replied, 'but I turned by bad jinn into a Muslim and now he only orders me to do good things.' This protection extends to the dream world too. The Shaytān cannot emulate or imitate the Prophet at all.

e. How can we see the Prophet in our dreams?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand there are three types of dreams (as outlined by Ibn Sīrīn):

- a. A dream that comes from Allāh.
- b. A dream that causes distress and is ascribed to the Shaytān.
- c. A reflection of what he/she has been doing and thinking in the day whilst awake.

The first two are not really in a person's control, but the last type is. Basically, a person's dream is sometimes a reflection of what he/she has been doing in the day. If a person has been driving all day, then they will have similar dreams at night. If a person has been playing football all day, then this will be reflected in his/her dream.

If this is the case, then what about a Muslim who recites *Dalā'il al-Khayrāt* each and every night? Imam Busīrī saw the Prophet (peace be upon him) because he

thought and thought about the Prophet during the day. So not only did he appear in his dream, he cured him too from his illness.

In short, the more salutations and blessings a person sends, the more chances one has of seeing the Prophet. The more you tell the truth the Prophet said, the more truthful your dreams will be.

f. What are the rulings regarding dreams?

* We are told that a nice dream is from Allāh and a nightmare is from the devil. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

الرؤيا الصالحة من الله و الخُلم من الشيطان

In reality, both are from Allāh. But out of respect to our Lord, we do not ascribe the negative to Allāh. Ibrahim said:

الذي خلقتني فهو يهدين و الذي هو يطعمني و يسقيني و اذا مرضت فهو يشفين

Here, Ibrāhīm (peace be upon him) ascribed the guidance he receives as coming from Allāh. He also described Allāh as the one who gives him food and drink. Allāh makes people ill too, but out of respect, Ibrahim ascribed that to himself by saying 'and when I am ill, then He gives me cure.'

* If someone sees a nice dream, then he should tell his beloveds (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 429: VIII).

* If someone sees a nightmare, then:

- a. He should read *Ta'awwuz* and seek refuge from its harm and from the devil (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 429: VIII).
- b. He should symbolically spit three times on his left side (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 429: VIII).
- c. He should change his position (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 430: VIII).
- d. He should not tell anyone (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 429: VIII).

* Ask the experts for interpretation. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) himself would ask his Companions after Fajr if anyone needed a dream interpreting (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 439: VIII).

* Certainly, he should not lie about the contents of the dream. This is because no one usually denies what a person sees in a dream (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 451: VIII). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) said:

من افري الفري ان يُري الرجل عينيه ما لم تريا

One of the biggest fabrications is that a man shows his eyes something they did not see.

* The most truthful dreams occur at *Suhūr (Sehrī)* time (*Mirqāt al-Mafātīh* 452: VIII) *ūsāī*

اصدق الرؤيا بالأسحار

g. The wisdom behind the world of dreams.

Seemingly, dreams are not fundamental to our existence. We get to sleep when we see dreams and when we do not. So why has Allāh has created this mystical world?

* If dreams did not exist, then we would find it even harder to believe in another world. They help us to appreciate that another world can exist outside our senses. Dreams help us to understand the life of *Barzakh* and the hereafter.

* Dreams help us to understand death. Allāh says:

الله يتوفي الانفس حين موتها والتي لم تمت في منامها

It is Allāh who takes away the souls at the time of their death, and those who do not die during their sleep. (39: 42)

In both death and dreams, the soul leaves the body. With death, it leaves the body permanently and with a dream, it leaves temporarily.

*As we move closer to the end of time (and thus further away from *Nabuwwa*) the dreams of the pious believers will become more and more truthful. This will be Allāh's way of compensating the believers for their distance from the time of the Prophet.

*Allāh wants us to realise we cannot understand & control everything. We have little control over what happens when we sleep. We are weak, we are ignorant, we are helpless.

*Dreams is a means of comfort quite often and a way of connecting with Allāh. Sharī'ah has even prescribed a prayer that depends on dreams (*Salāh al-Istikhāra*).

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