

The State When Asleep and Dreams: Their Interpretation and Wisdom

(From *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 1, compiled by Fāḍil Māzindarānī (Tihiran, 1954–55), pp. 318–327; provisional translations and notes are by Keven Brown unless a publication is cited.) [corrections made on March 5, 2011 added]

1. Moreover, thou hast asked about the dream state. It is a world distinguished among the divine worlds that expresseth and indicateth infinite conditions (*umūrāt*). For example, it is proof of a world without beginning and end, first and last, inasmuch as something is seen in a dream and after a period of years the same event is observed in this world. From one perspective, if it be said that it is the intermediate world of similitudes (*‘ālam-i mithāl*) resembling the Kingdom (*malakūt*), which some regard as *‘ālam-i mithāl*, located between the Dominion (*jabarūt*) and this mortal world (*nāsūt*), this is correct. In short, shouldst thou ponder deeply upon this state, thou wilt comprehend innumerable subjects.

In like manner, this world denoteth the place of gathering and resurrection after death, for as Luqmān [Aeosop] hath said to his son: ‘If thou art able to sleep, thou art able to die; and if thou art able to waken after sleep, thou art able to rise after death.’ Just as death is a reality, so is the world of the dream; and just as there is waking after sleep, there is rising after death.

Variation in dreams occurs due to the differences of souls and thoughts, and sometimes on account of food and drink. In the visions of holy souls, however, there is no disparity, because it is the same as their waking state.

O questioner, man is the supreme compendium and the most perfect talisman; he is the compendium which containeth a similitude of whatever hath been created in the heavens and the earth. When the soul is released from transitory restrictions and terrestrial states, it will traverse all the stages, and the greater its freedom (*farāgha*), the more strong, steadfast, and true will be its flight. (From a Tablet of Bahā’u’llāh, *Layālī al-ḥikmat*, vol. 2, p. 65–66)

2. One of the created phenomena is the dream. Behold how many secrets are deposited therein, how many wisdoms treasured up, how many worlds concealed. Observe, how thou art asleep in a dwelling, and its doors are barred; on a sudden thou findest thyself in a far-off city, which thou enterest without moving thy feet or wearying thy body; without using thine eyes, thou seest; without taxing thine ears, thou hearest; without a tongue, thou speakest. And perchance when ten years are gone, thou wilt witness in the outer world the very things thou hast dreamed tonight.

Now there are many wisdoms to ponder in the dream, which none but the people of this Valley [the Valley of Wonderment] can comprehend in their true elements. First, what is this world, where without eye and ear and hand and tongue, a man puts all of these to use? Second, how is it that in the outer world thou seest today the effect of a dream, when thou didst vision it in the world of sleep some ten years past? Consider the difference between these two worlds and the mysteries which they conceal, that thou mayest attain to divine confirmations and heavenly discoveries. (Bahā'u'llāh, *The Seven Valleys* (Wilmette 1978), pp. 32-33)

3. As to thy question concerning the worlds of God. Know thou of a truth that the worlds of God are countless in their number, and infinite in their range. None can reckon or comprehend them except God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Consider thy state when asleep. Verily, I say, this phenomenon is the most mysterious of the signs of God amongst men, were they to ponder it in their hearts. Behold how the thing which thou hast seen in thy dream is, after a considerable lapse of time, fully realized. Had the world in which thou didst find thyself in thy dream been identical with the world in which thou livest, it would have been necessary for the event occurring in that dream to have transpired in this world at the very moment of its occurrence. Were it so, you yourself would have borne witness unto it. This being not the case, however, it must necessarily follow that the world in which thou livest is different and apart from that which thou hast experienced in thy dream. This latter world hath neither beginning nor end. It would be true if thou wert to contend that this same world is, as decreed by the All-Glorious and Almighty God, within thy proper self and is wrapped up within thee. It would equally be true to maintain that thy spirit, having transcended the limitations of sleep and having stripped itself of all earthly attachment, hath, by the act of God, been made to traverse a realm which lieth hidden in the innermost reality of this world. Verily I say, the creation of God embraceth worlds besides this world, and creatures apart from these creatures. In each of these worlds He hath ordained things which none can search except Himself, the All-Searching, the All-Wise. (Bahā'u'llāh, *Gleanings* (Wilmette 1971), pp. 151-53)

4. Thou didst ask an interpreter of dreams to explain thy dream. Verily, We granted thee leave to do so and confirm thee again. He is the Almighty, the All-Powerful. But the principle thing is steadfastness in My Cause. Whoso hath attained to this station, God will cause oceans of truths and understanding to issue from his heart; and whoso hath rejected this station, verily, he is of the heedless. (From a Tablet of Bahā'u'llāh)

5. The dream state, according to the divine and expressly revealed precepts, cannot be equated or compared. Lay aside the dream and seize hold of that which the All-Bountiful hath revealed in His Book. (From a Tablet of Bahā'u'llāh)

6. Know that the revelation of all these verses and prayers, and these divine sciences, is because of a dream in which I witnessed the holy head of the Prince of Martyrs [Ḥusayn], upon him be peace, detached from his holy body, together with the heads of other companions. I drank seven handfuls of his blood with the greatest love, and it is now the blessing of the blood of that holy one that hath illuminated my heart with such indisputable verses and prayers. Lauded be God, who caused me to drink from the blood of His proof and made him the essence of my heart. Thus hath He sent down the affliction according to His decree. Verily, we are God's and unto Him do we return. Let those who act conform to His law. (The Bāb in the *Sahīfī-i-Uṣūl va Furū'*)

7. What thou hast seen in thy dream is conformable to the truth. Act accordingly and not to the contrary. (From a Tablet of the Bāb)

8. Verily, Thou hath made known to me what I formerly witnessed in a dream in the house wherein I used to dwell. In that dream I saw a grave upon which a mausoleum had been built. As I drew near, I saw the Most Bountiful One, Muhammad, come out from the mausoleum adorned in the most beautiful form, such that I am unable to describe His beauty. As soon as I recognized Him through the inspiration of God, I greeted Him. One was with Him like the one sent down to me in this Day from the favors of My Lord. I stood in front of the sanctuary (*al-ka'ba*) in my station, and taking a piece of fruit, I offered it to my Lord, may my spirit be a sacrifice unto Him. He accepted it most graciously and ate some of it. Then He took a sweatmeat from His pocket, which the Persians call *nuqli hill* (made with cardamom), and, with respect, He offered it to me. I took all of it and ate it in the presence of God. Praise be to God, who hath honored me through His bounty and favors with what He desireth, and who through the blessing of His loving-kindness hath illuminated my heart. (From a prayer of the Bāb)

9. Know of a certainty that in the dream state the soul of man is like unto the sun in its station. It hath not departed from the body, but by its light he beholdeth the kingdom of heaven and earth. If he is a believer, he will see all in accordance with his station,

and this will have an effect which will not leave him. If he is an unbeliever, he will see things as converse images on account of his unbelief, and this will have, in justice, an effect on him which cannot be altered. Verily, God hath created the dream state in His servants that they may be assured of the existence of the worlds hereafter and the life everlasting. The life of this world and its changes and chances, after death, are even as a dream that one seeth; once the dreamer hath arisen, he will see only the effect (*athar*) of its interpretation.

Exalted is God above those who lay all their hopes in this world and fear the abode hereafter and its felicity. Glory be unto Thee, O Lord, my God! Bring near the days of Thy meeting, for this world causeth me sorrow. Its people are hostile toward me, and I am an enemy of Thine enemies. Lord, distinguish between me and them and suffer me to enter among Thy favored servants. Verily, the separation of the soul [from the body] and the angel taking it away are at God's command. In the reality of every soul is a mirror in which can be seen the beauty of Ḥusayn, the son of 'Alī. But when the hour of death arriveth, the angel will take what is deposited on the mirror of his evil deeds and his affairs. Thereupon, the soul of the believer will ascend to Him with joy and gladness in such wise that were the hosts of heaven and earth to combine to prevent it, they would be powerless to do so. And though the unbeliever fleeth from His power, yet must he submit to the judgment of God, even should the hosts of heaven and earth combine to assist him. All things shall perish save the face of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, the Most Generous. (From a Tablet of the Bāb in *Amr va Khalq*, vol. 1, part 3, p. 323)

10. As to what thou hast asked regarding the dream, think of the dream state as being like the state of being awake. How often two souls meet and converse with one another, and one later remembers (what was said) while the other completely forgets. The world of the dream is also like this, and the reason for our forgetfulness is because the dream has not been properly preserved in the depository of the memory. (From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahā)

11. Among all the worldly bounties none is more wonderful than the dream. In this state the human spirit is able release itself in such a way that the contingent phenomena become cut away. The ability of the human spirit to free itself, however, is dependent upon a heart that is sanctified and pure. If the heart of man has not attained this state, it will become very fearful in the world of the dream, and things will appear distorted in its view. This is because his heart is not sanctified and pure.

But if the heart becomes purified, the dream for man is free. If he is in a prison, he will see himself in a rose garden; if he is under the weight of chains, he will see himself seated upon a throne. Indeed, he will be unaware of any bodily sensations. But if he has vain thoughts in his mind, his dream journey will not be marvelous.

How often it happens that man ponders a question in wakefulness, but he is unable to solve it. In the world of the dream, how often it happens that the answer is discovered. Frequently it occurs that a dream is a true dream, inasmuch as what is seen becomes manifested to the outer eye, requiring no interpretation.

There are three kinds of dreams. One is a true vision, which is even as the morning light and has no need of interpretation. Exactly what is seen, the same thing occurs. But most people, generally, do not receive this kind of dream. In the period of every person's life it may chance to happen that one's heart is free and one's mind clear of false suppositions. Then whatever the spirit discovers conforms to the reflection obtained. This is a true vision and has no interpretation; it is real.

The second kind of dream is that requiring interpretation, because the mind or the heart of the dreamer possesses false conceptions. When a spiritual journey is attained, it must be interpreted and false thoughts must be separated from spiritual discoveries. The soul is even as a fine white fabric.¹ Every color that you give to it, it will receive, and this is real. But if another color (other than white) is in the fabric and you give it a color, this is unreal. For example, if a yellowish color is in the fabric and you give it blue, it will become green. Then it is necessary to separate out the yellow until the blue is displayed. This is interpretation.

¹ 'Abdu'l-Bahā also often compares the soul or the heart to a mirror, which reflects whatever we place before it (cf. *Bahā'ī World Faith* 367; *Paris Talks* 176). If base thoughts are put before it, then it becomes darkened; if spiritual thoughts, then it becomes illumined with the light of the Kingdom. Bahā'u'llāh explains the importance of using volition to cleanse the mirror: "There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every man may consciously exert and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror can be so cleansed from the dross of earthly defilements and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh unto the meads of eternal holiness and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship" (*Gleanings* 262). More specifically on dreams and spiritual communication, 'Abdu'l-Bahā states: "When man's soul is rarified and cleansed, spiritual links are established, and from these bonds sensations felt by the heart are produced. The human heart resembleth a mirror. When this is purified human hearts are attuned and reflect one another, and thus spiritual emotions are generated. This is like the world of dreams when man is detached from things which are tangible and experienceth those of the spirit. What amazing laws operate, and what remarkable discoveries are made! And it may even be that detailed communications are registered..." (*Selections* 108).

Another kind of dream is the confused dream. For example, during the day a man becomes engaged in a quarrel and debate. Later in the world of the dream those same circumstances appear to him. This is a confused dream. It has no interpretation and contains no discoveries. Before the person dreamed, he was overcome with delusions. It is clear that this kind of dream has no interpretation and is confused.

According to the prophets, the dream is one of the forms of revelation (*wahy*). In the view of the prophets of the House of Israel especially, the subject of visions is very significant.² Some of the prophets were given their missions in the world of vision. In the world of vision one of them would see a luminous person or a heavenly being who would speak to him, saying: "Go thou to Israel and impart such a thing and say such a thing." In the morning he would arise and propagate what he had been shown.

This is a thing that causes minds to be amazed. Whatever is answered through the dream state happens without personal volition. But man can prepare himself that a better dream may be revealed. It is like a guest who comes. If the owner of the house freshens and cleans it, its coming is easier.³ (From a talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahā to pilgrims dated August 8, 1919)

²See also *Some Answered Questions*, chapter 71, on the visions of the prophets and communication with spirits.

³ Two Tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahā also mention this theme: "Arise and wash thy body, wear a pure gown, and, directing thyself to the Kingdom of God, supplicate and pray to Him. Sleep in a clean, well prepared and ventilated place, and ask for appearance in the world of vision. Thou wilt have visions that will cause the door of doubts to be closed, which will give thee new joy, wonderful dilation, brilliant glory. Thou wilt comprehend realities and meanings." Also: "When thou desirest and yearnest for meeting in the world of vision; at the time when thou art in perfect fragrance and spirituality, wash thy hands and face, clothe thyself in clean robes, turn toward the court of the Peerless One, offer prayer to Him and lay thy head upon the pillow. When sleep cometh, the doors of revelation shall be opened and all thy desires shall become revealed." (*Bahai Scriptures*, pp. 472, 477)