

THE VALUE OF DREAMS IN ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

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ÖZET

Tasavvufta Rüyâların Değeri

Tasavvuf yoluna giren kimselerin rüyaları, çoğu sufuye göre rûhî/mânevî eğitim için birer yol gösterici olarak kabul edilirler. Nefsânî eğitim (bedende kötülük odağı olan nefsi doğrudan etkisiz kılma) metodunu benimseyen Mevleviyye, Şâzeliyye, Halvetiyye, Sühreverdiyye, Rifaiyye, Kadiriyye vb. tarikatlarda rüyalar mânevî eğitim için vazgeçilmez bir öneme sahiptir. Bu tarikatlarda rüyâlar nefsin "emmâre", "levvâme", "mülhime", "mutmainne", "râziye", "merzıyye" ve "sâfiye" mertebeleri dikkate alarak yorumlanır. Her mertebede görülecek olan rüyâ ve tâbirleri farklı olup, müridin bulunduğu nefis tabakasındaki durumuyla ilgili mesajlar içerirler. Tasavvufî eğitimde rûhânî (bedende rûhu güçlendirmek suretiyle kötülük odağı olan nefsi etkisiz kılma) metodu benimseyen Nakşibendiyye tarikatında ise rüyaların mânevî eğitim açısından herhangi bir değeri yoktur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rüyâ, Tasavvuf, Tarikatlar, Nefis mertebeleri.

Reliable or true dreams (*rûyâ-yı sâdıka*) have a considerable value as sources of information. The Qur'an mentions dreams of the prophets Abraham, Joseph and Muhammad (peace be upon them all) (Saffat, 37/102, Yusuf, 12/4-5, Fetih, 48/27), and it is stated that Prophet Joseph was given the knowledge necessary to interpret dreams (Yusuf, 12/6). Again, according to the Qur'an, some dreams are clear and true (*sadik*), while others are confusing and meaningless (*edgasu ahlam*) (Yusuf, 12/43-44). Prophet Muhammad, who was a good interpreter of dreams, made many explanations about the value and types of dreams (for example, see: Bukhari, Tabir, 26; Muslim, Ruya, 8). According to what is recorded, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) would ask the Companions who had had a dream to tell him about it and he would then interpret the dream.

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In Islamic mysticism dreams are given importance as they help attain information from the metaphysical world (*gayb*) and they help in the training of the soul in that they reflect the inner world of the person to the outside. For this reason, leading Sufi scholars focused on the true nature of sleep and dreams, and they put forward their views about how the symbols that occurred in dreams should be interpreted. The author of the Sufi classic *er-Risâle*, Imam Kushayri (d. 1072), is just one of many Sufi scholars who gave examples of dreams that provide information about the world of the *gayb* in their works. Another important Sufi scholar, Najmaddin-i Kubra (d. 1221), made the following evaluation of sleep, dreams and the interpretation of dreams: the sensory organs are closed while we sleep and this means that the sensory organs of the heart are opened. When a person awakes the divine soul, which is blown into all humans by Allah, is entrapped in the body. When we fall asleep this soul goes to its real home, the divine source. By recognizing the metaphysical (*gayb*, *mânâ*) worlds, the soul is able to rest with the peace derived from being with other souls. What is seen while asleep here are examples from the visible, physical world (*âlam-i shahadet*). This is why we try to find counterparts for these examples from the physical world when we interpret the dream after awakening (*Risâle ile'l-hâimi'l-hâif min levmeti'l-lâim [Tasavvufî Hayat; prep. by Mustafa Kara], Istanbul 1980, p.89*).

The Sufi scholar Kutbuddin-zade Mehmed Izniki (d. 1480), a competent interpreter of dreams, provides more detailed information about the matter in his Arabic work, *et-Ta'bîru'l-münîf ve't-te'vîlü's-şerîf* (Istanbul Süleymaniye Library, Hasan Hayri, no. 112; The translation and publication of this work by the author is in progress), and he says the following:

When the human soul is released from the internal (*nefs*) and external world during sleep, or at other times (i.e. some people are able to go into a trance-like state, they are able to have dreams without actually sleeping), the person sees the forms of things in a detailed manner on the Guarded Tablet (*Levh-i Mahfuz*), including everything that has happened or will happen in the future. Then the soul descends to the world of shapes or forms where the general shape (*kiillî*) of objects exists. As a result of the connection of the soul

with the heart, things perceived at this time are reflected in the heart as a light. This then proceeds to the brain (*dimağ*) from the heart and takes on a form (3b, 17a). Apart from this, during the dream, all the mental powers, along with internal (*batınî*) feelings, (i.e., the power of false imagination—*kuvve-i vehmiyye*, the power of memory—*kuvve-i hâfıza*, the power of possession—*kuvve-i mutasarrife*, the power of thinking—*kuvve-i müdebbire*, common feelings—*hiss-i müşterek*, and intelligence—*akıl*) perform different functions (4a).

Kutbuddinzâde states also that in order to reach the different levels of Heaven, where one can receive knowledge from God, the angels, and the Guarded Tablet (*Levh-i Mahfuz*) the soul must be freed from the effects of the internal (*enfûsî*) and external (*âfâkî*) worlds. He perceives the balance between the inner and outer worlds during the dream as being essential for the reliability of a dream. If during the dream the dreamer's own nature (*hadîs-i nefis*) is dominant, or if there is an imbalance in the nature or brain (*dimağ*) of the dreamer, then that dream is not reliable. Consequently, the dreams of people who follow their evil desires, those who habitually commit sins, or perverted people and liars are not trustworthy. In the same way, when there is a strong effect on the body from the outer world, the dreams are no longer trustworthy, because the inner imbalance, caused by the influence of the outer world, affects the dreams as well. For example, a sleeper whose body is cold may also feel cold in his dream; while one who is hot because of heavy blankets may dream that they are sweltering under the hot sun (6a).

In connection with the interpretation of dreams Kutbuddinzade also divides people into three groups according to their spiritual level and emphasizes that interpretations must be carried out according to these groups

The first group includes people who yield to their physical and natural desires without developing their spiritual abilities and moral senses. Such people constitute the majority of the population, i.e., the general public. The second group consists of people who have developed their spirituality and have reached higher degrees by nearly completely eliminating their physical desires. The third group includes those people who have kept their spiritual and physical

powers and desires in balance, without letting one side prevail over the other. The dreams of people from different spiritual levels should not be treated as if they were all of the same level. The existing dream-interpretation books focus exclusively on the dreams of the people of the first group; that is the general public (or as Kutbuddinzâde terms them, the *avam*—commoners). These interpretations were produced by scholars using logic and philosophy. Most of the dreams of Sufis, who constitute the second group, are related to the inner (*enfisî*) or the spiritual world, as their efforts in this world are concentrated on the training of the desires of the self or the flesh (*nefis*). The dreams of this second group must be interpreted by sheiks through investigation and inspiration. Dreams of the people from the third group, the people with the highest level of spiritually, do not need to be interpreted because the meanings of their dreams are generally obvious. Such people are not only good interpreters of their own dreams, they also have the power to interpret the dreams of other people, according to the level to which the dreamer belongs (24b).

It is accepted by many Sufi scholars that the dreams of those who have entered the way of Islamic mysticism and who have received spiritual training can be a road marker for spiritual training. There are two different methods that are followed in spiritual training in Islamic mysticism, one is the *nefsani* (to directly make the *nafs*, the carnal self that is focused on evil in the body, ineffectual) while the other is the *ruhani* (to make the *nafs* that is focused on evil ineffectual by strengthening the soul in the body). In the Mevleviyye, Shazeliyye, Halvetiyye, Suhreverdiyye, Rifaiyye, Kadiriyye and in the other *tariqats* (religious orders) which have adopted the *nefsani* method, the dream has an importance that makes it an indispensable part of spiritual training. For this reason, the sheiks of these *tariqats* are also distinguished as people capable of interpreting dreams; the correct interpretation of the symbols perceived in dreams is focused on in some works, and separate treatises were written on this matter. Some examples of these are the treatises written by the sheikh of the Halvetiyye, Yiğitbaşı Ahmet Şemşeddin Marmaravî (d.1505) (*Mukaddimetü's-sâliha*), Kurt Mehmed Efendi (d.1589) (*Tâbirnâme*), Karabâş Velî (*Tâbirnâme*) (d. 1686), the small scale interpretation books by Niyâzî-i

Mısrî (d.1694) (*Tâbirâtü'l-vâkiât* and *Türk Edebiyatında Tasavvufî Rüyâ Tâbirnâmeleri* [compiled by Mustafa Tatçı-Halil Çeltik], Ankara 1995), Hâfız Hulûsî Efendi's (d.1918) *Mizânü'n-nüfûs*; this last author was one of the later Sufi scholars of the Nakshibeniyye *tariqat* (*Rüyaların Işığında Nefis Mertebeleri* [*Mizânü'n-nüfûs*], simplified by Abdurrahman Acer, Istanbul 2006). At the same time, those who were far from their sheikh would write to him to tell of the dream, and would continue their education according to the answer. Here we can quote two examples of this type of letter: *Rüyâ Mektupları: Âsiye Hâtun* (compiled by Cemal Kafadar, Istanbul 1994) and M. Nusret Tura, *Mektuplar* (compiled by M. E. Kılıç, Istanbul 1995). (For other examples of this type of letters, see "Reşat Öngören, "Mektup" " [Tasavvuf], *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Ankara 2004, XXIX, 22).

In the *tariqats* that employed the *nefsani* method the novice would complete seven levels (*mertebe*) during the *seyru sülük* (Sufi training), known as the *emmare*, *levvame*, *mulheme*, *mutmainne*, *raziyye*, *merziyye* and *safiyye*. When a novice would tell his sheikh about a dream, the sheikh would make the interpretation according to the *mertebe* of the novice. The dream and its interpretation are different at every level. The novice's situation at the said level could be determined according to the dream. The dream determined what the novice was to do and he would be warned if necessary. For this reason, it would be insisted that the novice explain the dream in detail, without leaving out anything. In the works indicated above the symbols perceived in dreams, according to the seven *mertebe* of the *nafs* (carnal self), are classified according to the *nefsani* method and interpretations are written in a summary as follows:

The *nafs* that is in the first *mertebe*, the *emmare*, prevents the person from doing good and encourages them toward evil; it is characterized by a partner being given to Allah (*shirk*), by committing serious sins, being conceited, becoming angry, being inclined to passion, miserliness, jealousy, bearing grudges, etc. The Sufi who is at this level will see things in their dreams that are forbidden in the religion, fierce animals, the objects of this world that distance one from Allah, dark places, smoke, cloudy flood waters, rocky mountains and forests, narrow roads, high and frightening places, cliffs and other symbols. The

animals that will be seen at this level are, for example, elephants and tigers as a symbol of pride, snakes as a symbol of strife, torment and suffering, donkeys as an inclination towards passion, wolves for jealousy, foxes as a sign of lies and deceit, raging bulls as a sign of miserliness, and cats as a symbol of the devil. Frightening, troublesome, tormented dreams are interpreted to mean that the evil desires of the *nafs* are being fulfilled and the soul is therefore suffering.

The *nafs* in the second stage, the *levvame*, tries to perform good and beautiful things and feels remorse at the occasional bad things it does. Color yellow is the superior quality of this *nafs*. Among the basic qualities are conceit, too much sleeping, fondness of food and drink, talking without need, and remorse for what one has done. To extricate the novice from these characteristics the guiding sheikh prescribes *dhikr* (reciting God's name), recommending that the novice repeat the name "Allah" many times. The dreams of the Sufi who is at this level are mostly about domestic animals, cooked food, meat, fruit, drink, oil, honey, clothing, shops, palaces, ships, fruit trees, houses, some of which are in ruins and some of which are inhabited, and some other symbols. The animals that are seen are often camels; if there is a burden on the camel then there is trouble for the soul, if not, then the soul has support; sheep, goats and cattle mean legitimate (*helal*) provisions and blessings, while the honey bee is interpreted as a sign of good morals. To vision fruit trees and green fields means sincerity (*ihlas*); butter and honey mean profit and strengthening the soul; houses that are ruined and orderly mean that the *nafs* and the soul have been brought to the same level. Cleaning something that has been soiled means forgoing those things that have been forbidden by the religion; shaving is a sign of increasing the light of the soul. Embracing one's spouse means the defeat of the *nafs* by the soul, while embracing another means that the *nafs* is opposed to the soul.

The third *meretebe* is the *mulheme* and the *nafs* at this level is one which has been inspired knowledge (*ilim*) by Allah. The person at this level is not only the possessor of knowledge, but they are also in danger of abandoning worship and becoming distanced from *ihlas* (sincerity). The superior quality of this *nafs* is symbolized by the color white. Knowledge, repentance, humility, patience,

gratitude, generosity, contentment and endurance are the qualities of the novice at the *mulheme mertebe*; the sheikh recommends that the novice chant the name "Hu". The dreams that are had at this level are of the devil, irreligious, perverted or ignorant people, people who are missing limbs or organs, like the lame, blind, deaf or mute, jesters, acrobats, magicians and the like, people who sell honey, melons, watermelons, salt or soap, scattering seeds on the ground, planting trees, abandoning a bad action half way through doing it, fighting, noise, shouting and screaming, girls and boys. Anyone who sees the devil in their dream is seen as being blessed if they fight him, but if they follow him this is a sign of evil. An irreligious person is considered to be a sign that the novice has not accepted advice. A lame person means not enough service has been performed on the right road, while a blind person means that they are pretending not to see what is right. Seeing a mute person means not speaking the truth, while magicians or jesters means abandoning the religion and being inclined to those things that Allah has forbidden. A man selling watermelons indicates the gaining of information and skills, while a man selling honey means the attainment of spiritual knowledge; fighting and arguing is a sign of incompatibility between the soul and the *nafs*.

The *nafs* in the fourth *mertebe*, the *mutmainne*, has rescued itself from negative attributes, with Allah's help, and has won the qualification of good morals. The superior quality of this *mertebe* is the color green. This is the *mertebe* of those who have knowledge and who act according to what they know. In addition, there is a danger that the *ihlas* (sincerity) can be destroyed at this level. The qualities of this *mertebe* is a large amount of worship, reflection and trust in Allah (*tevekkul*), eating little, sleeping little and not talking when not necessary; the novice at this level is recommended to chant the name of Allah "Hak". Those who are at this level envisage the prophets, saints, sultans, ministers (*viziers*), governors, judges, doctors, religious personages, teachers, religious institutions, schools, books and libraries, weapons like swords, rifles, bows and arrows and other symbols. All of these are positive indications, in different ways, for the Sufi novice. To break off green fruit in season means an absence of sincerity or frankness, while to do it in season indicates the opposite.

The fifth *meretebe* is *radiye*, and is known as the level of Allah's friends, the saints. Sincerity (*ihlas*), frequent commemoration of Allah (*dhikr*), maintaining a distance from the blessings of the world (*zuhd*), fearing Allah much (*vera*), the complete abandonment of useless and meaningless tasks and words, and possessing extraordinary powers (*keramet* – miracles) are qualities of this level, and it is recommended that the Sufi novice chant the name "Hayy". The dreams at this level are symbols that include angels, *hourî*, heaven, children, flying, getting on a ship, not burning when one steps into a fire and feeling pleasant there, and bright and enlightened places. All of these indicate, in different ways, the maturity of the person at this level, and show the knowledge (*marifet*) in their heart; they have gained delicacy and grace by being illuminated by the light.

The sixth *meretebe* is *merdiyye*, and the *nafs* here is pleased with Allah and this *nafs* accepts everything, good or bad, that comes from Allah with pleasure. This *meretebe* is that of those who know Allah with a definite knowledge (*yakin*), it is the level of the *arif* (wise man). The Sufi at this level has lost all interest in everything but Allah (*masiva*); emotions of tenderness to the creations of Allah are encouraged, and these Sufis are constantly close with Allah. They think about the beauties of His creation and those that He has created, they are pleased with the laws of Allah and know Allah with a firm knowledge (*yakin*). The name to be chanted at this level is "Kayyum". The dreams that one has at this level are of the seven layers of heaven, the moon, the sun, the stars, thunder, lightening, earthquakes, flaming fires, burning candles, lanterns, being alone on mountains and hilltops, etc. Of these, the sun, for example, is the illumination of ideas and stars are the illumination of the *nafs*, while being alone in mountains and deserts means abandoning everything but Allah.

The seventh *meretebe* is *safiyye/Zekiyye*, and this is the *meretebe* of the Prophets. The name of Allah at this level is "Kahhar". In the dreams at this level one sees rain, hail, snow, rivers, seas, spring water, fountains and wells. Of these, rain is a divine mercy, snow is excessive mercy, rivers, seas, wells or fountains mean that the heart will achieve what it desires.

In the Nakshbendi *tariqat*, which follows the *ruhani* method in Islamic mystical training, dreams have no value in spiritual training. Imam-i Rabbani, one of the leading sheikhs of the Nakshbendi (Ahmed Serhendi, d. 1624), emphasizes that if dreams and the states that become apparent in sleep were reliable, then there would be no need for sheikhs in Islamic mystical training; rather the Sufi would do what was required by the dream. Next to the guidance of one perfected sheikh one thousand reliable dreams have no value. According to him, the dreams of the person who is honored by being in the presence of his sheikh become meaningless as there is a danger that the devil will interfere with the dreams. Therefore, the Sufi who is undergoing training does not give importance to such dreams. However, those who have completed their spiritual training (*muntehi*) are protected (*mahfuz*) against the deceptions of the devil, and their dreams are reliable. But the same cannot be said for those who are just beginning or who are in the middle of the process. In fact, even if one sees Prophet Muhammad in a dream this is not to be relied on. Although Prophet Muhammad himself stated that the devil can never take on his appearance, it is necessary to understand this as the actual appearance of Prophet Muhammad, who is buried in Medina. In fact, the famous Sufi scholar Muhyiddin Ibnü'l-Arabi discussed this same matter. Therefore, it is possible for the devil to appear as Prophet Muhammad in a person's dream. Moreover, Imam-i Rabbani adds this: if one really sees Prophet Muhammad in a dream and receives some information from him, this information is not reliable, because it is possible that the devil puts his own statements among the expressions of Prophet Muhammad. Thus, the devil causes the one having the dream to doubt and puts across his own expressions as if they were those of Prophet Muhammad (see: *Mektubat*, vol. I, 273. Mektub).

In addition, although Imam-i Rabbani claims that dreams are completely non-functional in the matter of knowledge, he accepts that some information can be attained if the dreams are interpreted in the correct manner (see: *Mektubat*, vol. I, 212, Mektub).