Introduction

> The Prophet (Muhammed), now quite ill, is carried into the Mosque on the shoulders of two companions. He tries to lead the prayer, but is too weak. He delegates his duties to Abu Bakr. And as he leaves, proclaims: "[When I am gone] there shall remain naught of the glad tidings of prophecy, except for true dreams. These the Muslim will see or they will be seen for him."
> (Lamoreaux: 2002: 84)

Islam is the largest night dream culture in the world today. In Islam, the night dream is thought to offer a way to metaphysical and divinatory knowledge, to be a practical, alternative, and potentially accessible source of imaginative inspiration and guidance and to offer ethical clarity concerning action in this world. Yet dreams, even purportedly true dreams, are notoriously difficult to validate and, sometimes, to interpret. This book explores some key aspects of Islamic dream theory and interpretation, and as well as exploring the role and significance of night dreams to contemporary Muslims in general, it considers many examples of the inspirational guidance claimed by many of the best known al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders and jihadist activists. I thematically analyze these jihadist dream narratives.

The foreword and introductory essay by Dr. Steve Lyon contains two fascinating examples of the power and significance of night dreams in the Pakistani village that he studied in 1999, which he has subsequently realized were significant aspects of cultural creativity in such a Muslim community. Chapter 1 introduces the metaphysical theory and practice of dream interpretation in Islam. I also reflect on the "true" dream tradition in other cultures and on how reported night dream narratives are ideologically significant in contemporary global conflict with examples from Israel/Palestine and Kosovo. I introduce many examples of contemporary reported true dreams among Muslims from several countries where I have been privileged to undertake fieldwork, in the United Kingdom, United States, Bosnia, Turkey, Pakistan, and Northern Cyprus. These examples illustrate that Muslim reported experience of sacred and perceived true imagery in night dreams is a contemporary and not solely historical phenomena. Moreover, it appears widespread throughout the Muslim world

with a confirmatory study by Amanullah (2009) in Malaysia. A focus on night dreams is most explicit amongst Sufi groups, and indeed in such contemporary Sufi groups as the Golden Dawn centers in California and the United Kingdom, a Jungian-oriented dreamwork practice is clearly central to their overall spiritual practice.

While, broadly speaking, in Western Christianity dream interpretation became after a few centuries relegated to superstition (Kruger 1992), this has not apparently happened in Islamic cultures. Indeed while all other forms of divination are regarded in Islam as unlawful (*haram*) as the future belongs solely to the will of Allah, dream interpretation, due to the prophetic example of Muhammed, is generally considered acceptable and even possibly very beneficial.

Indeed as the opening quotation in this introduction shows, while major prophecy ended with the death of the Prophet Muhammed, the seal of the Prophet, minor prophecy and guidance can come in the form of true dreams, "glad tidings." Such a metaphysical belief and perception, rooted in the remarkable dreaming abilities of the Prophet Muhammed, gives an occasional powerful role to the phantasmagoric experiences of the night dreamer. A salutary corrective to this potential Pandora's box that this high valuation of dreams denotes is the elaborate art, even science, of dream interpretation in Islamic cultures that has grown up over the centuries and that this book intends to unravel as far as possible.

Chapter 2 considers the methodological issues in researching dreams and reflects particularly on the evidential sources used for this study. I have previously written a book (2004a) on the methodological issues concerning researching the inner world of the imagination and the dream. The collection of primary sources was by participant observation and unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. Secondary sources used were books, articles, the web, and a trial transcript.

Chapter 3 introduces the little-known (outside of Muslim societies) dream incubatory practice of *Istikhara*. Almost no studies of this widespread divinatory practice has been made to date, though Aydar (2009) has written a thoughtful study on the practice in Turkey. I particularly encountered *Istikhara* in my fieldwork in Pakistan in 2005 and was surprised by how commonplace and accepted this practice was by men and women, young and old, and how diverse were the concerns of such a dream incubation practice, whose roots must surely go back to the well-known dream incubation practices of ancient Greece and even before (Bulkeley 2008). While *Istikhara* was most commonly used around marriage choice, I found it was also used for business and even political decision making. Moreover, I have now found its use is not uncommon among Pakistani communities in the United Kingdom. This chapter unearths

many earlier references by social anthropologists to the use of *Istikhara* across Islamic cultures in Northern Africa such as Morocco, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. I also present a recent (Edgar and Henig 2010) case study of *Istikhara* gathered in Sarajevo, Bosnia, with my PhD student colleague David Henig. Interestingly, the data from this case study involves opposing reported local sorcery as well as a focus on assisting supplicants in making marriage choices.

The fourth chapter presents, illustratively, the rich history of night dreaming in the Sufi tradition, history, and narrative. I have found among the Sufi communities that I have encountered and spent time with that a very high value is placed on the potential spiritual significance of night dreams by both members and their leaders, the shaykhs. Islam contains as a central narrative that the empirical world that we assume is reality is but a way station toward hidden future, yet metaphysically present, other worlds, particularly heavens and hells. Such coexisting existential possibilities are continuously reiterated in the Qur'an. These unseen worlds—discovered by the Prophet Muhammed in his famous night journey, in either a vision or dream, from Mecca to Jerusalem, the *Laylat ul-isra wal miraj*—are universally and even necessarily accessible to humans through the medium of night dreams, the only virtually universal experience that humans have of an altered state of consciousness separate from, but often related to, this world. All humans dream at night, and dreams seem to have some necessary but still unproven function for human well-being. Evolutionary psychologists consider their value to be in offering opportunity and "space" for rehearsing future strategies, while cognitive psychologists focus on their value being in the unconscious categorization of the day's experiences (Foulkes 1985).

The enigma of the dream is that while the human ego experiences the night dream, it does not, unless the dreamer is a lucid dreamer or a practitioner of Tibetan dream yoga, generate the content of the night dream, and this has led human societies to speculate on the significance and import of at least some night dreams. Islam has hierarchically codified this metaphysical terrain underpinned by the very significant role that night dreams appear to have had in Islamic history, inspired by the example of the Prophet Muhammed. It is the Sufis, the mystical seekers of inner knowledge and illumination, who have become most conversant with dream interpretation and their reported holy guidance received through night dreams. A very little and playful example from my experience of a Sufi community: A visiting shaykh told me how he had dreamed the night before of the Prophet Muhammed feeding him a piece of bread; this shaykh told the senior shaykh in the community of this dream, and the next day at the senior shaykh's birthday party, the senior shaykh playfully

put a little piece of bread into the first shaykh's mouth. This action can be read as a ludic play on the power relations between the two shaykhs, an affirmation of the senior shaykh's status as the "friend of God." Also I present a mini-ethnography of dreaming in a UK Sufi community. This chapter should perhaps be read in tandem with Dr. Lyon's mini-ethnography of two dream examples he studied in a Pakistani village that is contained in the foreword and introductory essay.

Chapters 5 and 6 really enter the hornet's nest, or even metaphorically the gateway to hell, of the Islamic night dream. Following 9/11, I read the odd newspaper snippet about Osama bin Laden relating fearfully to his followers that the secret of 9/11 might be disclosed due to so many of his followers having dreams of planes flying into tall towers. I also read a report that Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, had founded the Taliban following a commandment from a sacred figure in a night dream. Moreover, Richard Reid, the notorious shoe bomber, had talked of being guided in his militant jihad to his planned terror plan, in one of his final three e-mails to his sister. My curiosity led me to study the role of reported true inspirational dreams among contemporary al-Qaeda figures and related militant jihadist groups. I present this material gleaned particularly from newspapers, trial transcripts, and books, albeit with necessary source critical awareness. In particular as part of my British Academy–funded fieldwork study of the role of night dreams generally in contemporary Islamic cultures, I was privileged to interview Rahimullah Yusufzai, the very well-respected Muslim Pakistani BBC journalist who lives in Peshawar and who was virtually the only foreign journalist who had access to Mullah Omar before the events of 9/11. Chapter 6 reports and extensively quotes from my interview with Yusufzai. This interview confirms the centrality of the inspirational role that Mullah Omar's reported dreams, whatever their actual veracity, had and possibly have today on the Taliban leaders and foot soldiers. I contextualize this interview by drawing on contemporary academic and journalistic analyses of the rise and development of the Taliban in Afghanistan in the last fifteen years. I did not interview any militant Islamist fighters or jihadists directly.

In this chapter I thematically analyze this material and conclude that several themes run through these dream narratives: their legitimating function for militant jihad, for their followers, and for the Islamic *Ummah* in general; the dreams' role in experientially connecting the dreamers to the Golden Age of Islam; the militant jihadists' focus on the manifest content of dreams; the interpretation of dreams within the Islamic dream tradition with a focus on understanding dream material similarly to how daytime reality is understood; the relationship between night dream

data and future divined events; and the strategic role of night dreams in warfare.

That militant jihadists believe that some of their night dreams are inspired by Allah sits ironically, even tragically, with the Christian guidance reported by the then US president George Bush and the then UK prime minister Tony Blair. But then, as in World War I, the various European armies were each and every one blessed by the Christian establishment as being "just wars." If there are worlds beyond our empirically experienced one and if there is a transcendent being, he, she, or it is certainly incomprehensible to myself!

Chapter 7 is a detailed study of a selection of the most commonly used dream dictionaries in the Islamic world and so gives us a clear, contemporary insight into how dreams are currently being understood and interpreted in Islamic cultures today. The work of the historical figure of Ibn Sirin is the mostly commonly used Islamic dream dictionary, the first port of call for millions of Muslims worldwide, even being reported as the most popular book purchase at the 2007 Algerian book fair! The work attributed to Ibn Sirin is partly based on earlier dream dictionaries from before Islamic times, such as that of Artemidorus (1992), the ancient Greek dream interpreter. Clear similarities as well as differences occur. While Ibn Sirin is the named author and is thought to have died in 728 CE, Lamoureaux (2002: 19–25) has made an extensive study of the dream interpretation texts and concluded that Ibn Sirin is not the actual author of this most famous Islamic dream dictionary. Lamoreaux writes that later dream interpretation authors drew on anecdotal traditions of Ibn Sirin's dream interpretive practices, and he has subsequently been credited with having divine powers in this field. Moreover, hundreds of dream manuals have been ascribed to him in a variety of languages. Lamoreaux concludes that there is evidence that Ibn Sirin took a great interest in dream interpretation, that there are traditions that state that the prophet Joseph initiated Ibn Sirin in his dreams into a mastery of dream interpretation, and that Ibn Sirin "put into circulation" (Lamoreaux 2002: 24) a significant tradition of dream interpretation in Islamic lands. I have studied three contemporary versions of Ibn Sirin's work published in London, Karachi, and Delhi and find them almost indistinguishable.

In all probability, the codification of the human interpretation of dreams goes back to the beginnings of human history, and Islamic dream dictionaries draw implicitly upon ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, Jewish, and Christian interpretative traditions. These dream dictionaries show the complexity of dream interpretation in Islam. For instance, the spiritual and professional status of the dreamer is very significant, as is the time of the night of the dream and the season in which the dream occurs. Also,

idiomatic word play is significant, and to cap it all, dreams can mean the opposite of what they appear manifestly to signify!

Chapter 8 analyzes the differences and similarities between classic Western psychoanalytical dream interpretative practices and Islamic approaches. In Islam there is a strong interpretive tradition in which the dream specialist defines directly the meaning of the dream for the dreamer. In the Western dreamwork movement, an offshoot of humanistic psychology, the dreamer is their own expert, and the role of the group leader is definitely facilitative rather than directive. It is a crucial difference, but both traditions deeply respect the potential value and insight of some dreams. I suggest that the Jungian dreamwork tradition, with its concept of the collective unconscious and its related therapeutic practice of active imagination, is closest to the Islamic dream interpretative model.

My conclusion in chapter 9 weaves the material and themes of the previous chapter into an analytical "flying carpet"! Particularly I argue from my textual studies and ethnographic fieldwork that there is a commonality across Islam and among many, if not most, Muslims as to the creative and dynamic role of the imaginal (non-egoic imagination, the Sufi concept of *alam-al-mithal* as defined by Corbin 1966) from which arise some night dreams and some human visions, *al-ruya*.

Acknowledgements

I think that all publications are works in progress, and even a book is the same. Some of the ideas contained in this book have had embryonic outings in some of my earlier publications and in earlier forms: Edgar 1995; 2002; 2004a and 2004b; 2006, 2007, 2009, and Edgar and Henig 2010.