

**EXPANSION OR CONTRACTION OF THE PROPHETIC  
EXPERIENCE?**  
**An Analysis of the Prophetic Dream Theory of ‘Abd al-Karīm  
Surūsh**

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**Abstract**

This paper analyzes the theory that ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh proposes through an article series called *The Prophet Mubammad: The Messenger of Prophetic Dreams*, in light of previous approaches about revelation (*wahy*) with regard to dreams and imagination. For this purpose, the first chapter of this paper centers on the distinction between the word “dream” (*ru’yā*), as in Surūsh’s theory, and traditional approaches to revelation to determine differences in terms of content. The second chapter associates the explanation of revelation with dreams in order to compare alternative “imagination” (خیال، متخیلة) based approaches in Islamic philosophy and Sufism, in turn clarifying how Surūsh distinguishes them and resolves the relevant problematics.

**Key Words:** Revelation, ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh [Abdolkarim Soroush], imagination, prophetic dream

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## Introduction

‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh, a thinker known for his innovative ideas in religious thought, stands out in regard to his approach to revelation. His first views in this respect can be seen in *The Contraction and Expansion of Religious Knowledge*.<sup>1</sup> Presumably, views in this work are molded in parallel with his post as a counselor of culture and education on the Advisory Committee on Cultural Revolution in the wake of Iran’s Islamic Revolution back in 1979. Indeed, following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, problems arising from new social and educational practices led Surūsh to reconsider both the constant and changing aspects of religion. Thus, he sought to open the door slightly for change through distinguishing between “religion,” which is constant, and “religious understanding,” which denotes human understanding of religion. Accordingly, the ultimate meaning of religion is only within the knowledge of Allah, whereas what we understand about religion remains within the realm of knowledge, which in any case includes errors and may evolve depending on historical circumstances. Therefore, the realm of jurispudent provisions (*sharī‘ah*) is contracted (قبض), and it becomes possible to make religious life coexist in a more peaceful manner with the period in which one lives.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, in a later text called *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience*,<sup>3</sup> Surūsh is no longer content with the abovementioned separation between religion and religious understanding, and feels the need to expand the sphere of change. In this regard, he scrutinizes the phenomenon of “prophecy” that matures in parallel with the evolution of the Prophet Muhammad over the course of history. Accordingly, the

<sup>1</sup> ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh, *Qabd u baṣṭ-i ti’ūrik-i sharī‘at: Naẓariyya-i takāmul-i ma‘rifat-i dīnī*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Širāt, 1387). The book was translated to Turkish and published under the title *Maximum & Minimum Din*, trans. Yasin Demirkıran (Ankara: Fecir, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> For further information, see Asiye Tiğlı, *İran’da Entelektüel Dinî Düşünce Hareketi* (Istanbul: Mana, 2017), 91-105.

<sup>3</sup> This paper was published as a book with the same name, together with other writings by Surūsh about historicity, pluralism, etc. See *Baṣṭ-i tajruba-i nabawī*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran, Mu‘assasa-i Farhangī-i Širāt, 2006).

For an English translation of the work, see Abdulkarim Soroush, *The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience: Essays on Historicity, Contingency and Plurality in Religion*, trans. Nilou Mobasser, ed. Forough Jahanbakhsh (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

prophetic experience contains a divine characteristic, as well as a human feature that evolves gradually. Indeed, the Qurʾān has such a quality that it is molded not only by historical circumstances, but also by the personality, mind, and even joys and sorrows of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the Prophet gradually improved in acknowledging divine messages, and gained more experience and depth in comprehending visible and hidden realms (عالم الغيب) alike. The divine quality of this experience does not necessarily require overlooking human factors therein, or stipulating that all phrasal patterns in its wording have to be divine. In the words of Surūsh, “divine quality of experience does not entail a divine or holy quality for the language conveying this experience.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Prophet Muhammad is not a “mediator” who merely echoes what he is told as a recorder. In contrast, just as a bee digests pollen from a flower to make honey, the Prophet has internalized divine messages in line with his personal faculties.<sup>6</sup>

In his later article series called *The Prophet Mubammad: The Messenger (Narrator) of Prophetic Dreams*, Surūsh elaborates on his views about the “expansion of the prophetic experience.” This time, however, he adopts a different approach as to divine experience and the nature of divine speech. In this recent series of writings,<sup>7</sup> Surūsh indicates that the Qurʾān is actually a crop of holy dreams from the Prophet Muhammad. Accordingly, the Prophet Muhammad was an

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Hoebink, “Kalām-i Muḥammad: Goftehḡū bā ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh dar bāra-i Qurʾān,” in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rüyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1)” in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rüyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 86.

<sup>6</sup> Surūsh likens this situation to the fact that a fruit is named after the tree it grows on. To be a believer of oneness, you do not have to say the fruit is created by Allah, and that it is not a peach tree. Surūsh, “Bashar u Bashir,” in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rüyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 25.

<sup>7</sup> This series of articles by Surūsh includes his latest thoughts on revelation. The series was published on his website (<http://drsoroush.com/>) in Persian between 2014 and 2016. See <http://drsoroush.com/fa/category/articles/page/2/>, accessed February 28, 2021. In 2019, these articles, including certain additions, were published by “Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt” and “Madrasah-i Mawlānā” under the title *Kalām-i Muḥammad rüyā-yi Muḥammad*. (These papers were also translated in Turkish. See Asiye Tıḡlı, comp. and trans., *Güncel Vahiy Tartışmaları: Nebvî Rüyaların Râvisi Hz. Mubammed* (Istanbul: Mana, 2018).

object of divine revelation (*waḥy*) through dreams, and articulated what he saw in his dreams in sentence patterns within the framework of his culture, language and personality—just like a reporter. Therefore, we need interpretation to comprehend the Qurʾān, since its content consists of dreams. However, the interpretation (تعبیر) herein should not be understood as an explanation of literary methods or concepts (such as allegories, metaphors, representations, or figurative expressions). Indeed, the Prophet did not compile the Qurʾān's verses in a conscious way, making use of such literary arts. On the other hand, these visions presented to him when he was not awake and beyond his will have both divine (objective) and human (subjective) qualities, and are not immune to surrounding circumstances.

This theory, which is the final phase of perspectives by Surūsh on revelation, represents an effort to speak about the language of dream-based revelation. With this theory, he principally addresses those who believe the Qurʾān comes from revelation. Hence, Surūsh says he does not seek to demonstrate the truth of prophethood or the reliability of holy dreams. As will be analyzed in detail below, the objective of his theory is “to open a hitherto closed window towards comprehension of revelation.” Thus, he says, he complements all his relevant standpoints until then.<sup>8</sup>

The theory of prophetic dreams by Surūsh has received much criticism since day one. Critiques have vary greatly, including those based on the Qurʾān,<sup>9</sup> as well as through philosophical,<sup>10</sup> historical, and literary<sup>11</sup> perspectives. In this context, the theory of prophetic

<sup>8</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 87.

<sup>9</sup> For an example of this approach, see the following papers: Muḥsin Ārmīn, “Pāsukhī ba Duktur Surūsh,” <https://www.cgie.org.ir/fa/news/5545>, accessed October 17, 2020, and “Naẓariyya-i ruʾyāhā-yi rasūlānah wa masʾala-yi iʿtibār wa maʾnā-yi matn,” <https://neelofar.org/1398/04/08/080498-3/>, accessed October 17, 2020. ‘Abd al-‘Alī Bāzargān, “‘Hawā’ yā ‘Hudā’ dar kalām-i waḥy.” <http://bazargan.com/abdolali/soroush.htm>, accessed October 17, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Dabbāgh, Surūsh, “Az Tajriba-i nabawī tā ruʾyā-yi Rasūlānah,” *Falsafa-i New*, September 25, 2013; <http://new-philosophy.ir/?p=297>, accessed October 17, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Ḥasan Anṣārī, “Naqd-i naẓariyyah-i Duktur Surūsh dar bārah-i waḥy (1-5),” <https://ansari.kateban.com/post/2801>, accessed October 17, 2020. For a selection of papers translated in Turkish, see Asiye Tiğli, comp. and trans., *Güncel Vahiy Tartışmaları II: Nebvî Rüyaların Ravisi Hz. Muhammed Kitabına Eleştiriler* (Istanbul: Mana, 2018).

dreams—which argues that one should express a “never told,” problematic, approximately 1,400-year-old revelation—has become an issue of debate because of this discourse, and has been widely condemned for ignoring the historical context, as well as the literary, miraculous, and inimitable quality of the Qur’ān’s language (Arabic). In addition to objections about dreams, Surūsh and his theory were criticized for a lack of clear differentiation between exegesis and interpretation, the absence of a practical example about the methodology of such interpretation, and a lack of solid philosophical or religious grounds. Such criticisms also require an analysis. This paper, however, will essentially dwell upon the concepts of dreams, *mutakbayyilab*, and interpretation, which, in our opinion, have not been duly examined in pertinent criticisms, despite constituting the foundation of Surūsh’s theory. Indeed, it seems impossible to conduct the debate on a consistent and accurate basis without clarifying the meanings of these concepts within the context of his theory of prophetic dreams. For this purpose, theory of prophetic dreams shall be put through a brief analysis via its traditional foundations, before certain assessments are carried out within the context of revelation-*mutakbayyilab*. Hence, our objective is to lay down a more solid foundation for discussion by explaining how Surūsh and his theory of dreams are differentiated from earlier views, which problems he seeks to resolve, and whether the theory is consistent in and of itself.

## **I. The Traditional View of Revelation and the Theory of Prophetic Dreams**

### **A. Revelation not in Dreams, but in the Quality (ماهية) of Dreams**

The theory of prophetic dreams by Surūsh asserts that the conventional perception of revelation has to change. Therefore, the theory claims to have developed a new perspective for understanding the content of revelation, and to express what is hitherto unsaid about the Qur’ān. Thus, Surūsh does not worry about aligning his views with the traditional lens; instead, he wants the latter to be abolished:

The envisagement that the Qur’ān’s verses were brought down to the heart of Muhammad (pbuh) by an angel and that he said them should change. Instead, it is necessary to adopt the approach that “the Prophet

reported the facts just as if he were a reporter who was present at the scene in person and animated and molded the incidents.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, in regard to interpreting prophetic dreams, Surūsh also pays attention to historical circumstances, social structure, and the culture in which the Prophet was raised. Accordingly;

His [the Prophet's] experiences, even at the level of coming-into-being (*takawwun*), incorporate numerous images such as the history and geography of his society or the lifestyle of his tribe, in addition to his personal and mental situations. In brief, Allah neither spoke nor wrote a book. In contrast, it is the historical human who spoke and wrote a book in His place. This, however, happened upon the word of Allah, whereupon divinity almost wrapped Himself in the guise of a human and became a man.<sup>13</sup>

For Surūsh, it is possible to make use of traditional concepts such as disclosure, an example (مثال), united or separated imagination (*kbayāl muttaşil* or *kbayāl munfaşil*), etc. instead of a "prophetic dream." Nevertheless, a "dream" seems more appropriate to him than ambiguous and intimidating metaphysical concepts, since a "dream" renders the truth of prophethood more accessible and more distinct. At first glance, such an approach may seem objectionable to the reliability of revelation. In this sense, Surūsh complains that the concept of a dream is deprived of its earlier value:

Unfortunately, we live in a time where dreams have lost their original importance and value. The word "dream" brings confusing and scattered images to mind, and all dreams are thought to be equivalent ... However, a dream, just like a true poem or work of art, exists whereby the unsaid can be stated and the unrepresented can be embodied ... Dreams and facts, and sleep and wakefulness, are interrelated. Where the language of wakefulness falls short, dreams come to the rescue to express the unsaid.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Surūsh, "Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1)," in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rüyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 88.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>14</sup> Surūsh, "Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2): Khāb-i Aḥmad Khāb-i Jumlah Anbiyāst," in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rüyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 113-114. In this context, Watt indicates that Arabs think dreams are real experiences, unlike our modern and materialist approach. He demonstrates a well-known narrative as evidence of this argument. According to

Surūsh is well aware that “dream” evokes a more complex meaning in the minds of contemporary humans. This is why he refers to the earlier value of dreams as a way to communicate with a hidden realm. According to Surūsh, we also have dreams that can be qualified as “supreme” in addition to complex or ambiguous ones. Hence, the visions and sights of prophets can be likened to “supreme, noble, high” (رفيع) dreams. The differences in the dreams of messengers and the wise should be established in terms of their heavenly faculties.<sup>15</sup>

However, it is impossible to assert what Surūsh means, as “dream” herein is synonymous with the word in light of Arab understanding. He does point out exploration of spiritual truths through dreams with a method similar to Sufism. Nevertheless, the meaning Surūsh attributes to “dream” is not immune to human and social influences, and thus to a modern scientific perspective. Moreover, for Surūsh, any dream—including a prophetic one—has a different space than the state of wakefulness and requires interpretation.<sup>16</sup> As such, the most controversial and distinguishing point of his theory arises from these attributes of revelation in the quality of a dream. By means of these expressions, Surūsh talks about “revelation in the quality of a dream” rather than “revelation in a dream.” In other words, this theory differs from classical tradition in the sense that revelation is not received/heard through dreams, but is seen and watched in dreams, and it is not independent of sociological or psychological factors.

Therefore, Surūsh considers dreams to not be real experiences corresponding to an awakened world at the time of the Prophet, but rather visions of an imaginative language that is not truly dependent

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this narrative, ‘ĀḤ\_ah, who saw in her dream that they would lose the Battle of Badr, faces a reaction from Abū Jahl: “*O the sons of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib! Aren’t you done with allegations from your men for prophethood now that even your women claim to be prophets?*” This narrative is shown as an example of the difference between the Arab view on dreams and today’s common approach. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad’s Mecca: History in the Quran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), 61; For the narrative, see Abū Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. Ṭāhā ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf Sa’d (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), III, 154; Mustafa Fayda, “Ātike bint Abdūlmuttalib,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, IV, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2): Khāb-i Aḥmad Khāb-i Jumlah Anbiyāst,” 114.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

on the earthly atmosphere. In his earlier texts, Surūsh insists that Islam is a historical movement, and that revelation is molded within the framework of the Prophet's spiritual and social surroundings. In his latest theory, he maintains that the language of dreams also has a history, similar to wakeful literature.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, for Surūsh, prophetic dreams take form in terms of coherence with the Prophet's heart and mind, namely, his inner and outer world.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, these dreams are described in relation to the language of dreams:

We read the Qur'ān as if we forget it is a book of a dream in the language of a dream, and not a book of wakefulness. For sure, the language of the Qur'ān is customary, human, and sounds sweet to the listener. However, it also contains the language of a dream. A dream, in turn, is always mysterious and misty, even in its most explicit form, and thus requires interpretation...<sup>19</sup>

Hence, Surūsh identifies the nature of revelation with a dream; for him, the purpose becomes to use each of these two concepts in place of one another.<sup>20</sup> In his latest book, Surūsh reminds us gradually more often that a dream incorporates sensual phenomena such as sounds, smells, tastes and touch, in addition to sight.<sup>21</sup> In any case, his view differs from the conventional perspective about revelation, where the Prophet sees Jibrīl in a dream or vision (بِقِطَّة) and literally transmits words he hears from the angel.

In fact, given the expressions in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah about the nature of the prophetic experience and the pertinent literature, it is possible to claim that the connection between dreams and revelation is somewhat grounded. As is known, in classical texts, revelation is used in the sense of confidential, private, and serial information or pointing out. Nevertheless, the concept of revelation is also provided with broader meanings such as "a report through a dream or inspiration, and delivering [a message in a way] other than [through]

<sup>17</sup> Surūsh, "Rūyārū-yi Rūyā (3): dar Bāb-i Naqd-i Ḥasan Anṣārī," in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 368.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>19</sup> Surūsh, "Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1)," 95.

<sup>20</sup> Surūsh clearly indicates that dream means revelation. Surūsh, "Rūyārū-yi Rūyā (2)," in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 302.

<sup>21</sup> Surūsh, "Rūyārū-yi Rūyā (3)," 367.

oral expression,<sup>22</sup> unlike oral communication. “Dream” has often been distinguished from the word *ahlām*<sup>23</sup> and is considered a form of contact with a hidden realm; in this regard, dreams are seen as worthy of being described as “truthful.” In this vein, the word “sleep” (نوم) has also been discussed and shown, like dream, to be one of the paths of revelation (الْوَحْيُ فِي الْمَنَامِ). Classical references include various relevant reports, such as the following: revelation began in truthful dreams;<sup>24</sup> true dreams are one of the 46 parts of prophethood;<sup>25</sup> and Abraham intended to sacrifice his son upon having a dream.<sup>26</sup> Then again, the Prophet Muhammad said that divine messages would be over after his demise, whereupon believers would have nothing but truthful dreams as gospel.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For instance, *اللقاء*, which is used in the expression “وكلُّ ما ألقينته إلى غيرك يقال,” is one of the concepts used in this sense. See Abū l-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn ‘Alī Ibn Manẓūr al-Anṣārī, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, XV, 379. Likewise, Rāghib al-Isfahānī (d. the first quarter of V<sup>th</sup>/XI<sup>th</sup> century) mentions the meanings, such as sayings without implications, allegories, implicit statements, or any other sentence. Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, n.d.), 668.

<sup>23</sup> In light of the expression *أضغاث أحلام* in the Qur’ān (12:44), this concept is often loaded with negative connotations. For instance, according to *Lisān al-‘Arab*, *ḥulm* is from Satan while *ru’yā* is from Allah. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, XII, 145. Additionally, see al-Bukhārī, “Kitāb at-Ta’bīr,” 3.

<sup>24</sup> The narrative, based on Aisha, reads as follows: “The revelation to the messenger of God began with a faithful dream in his sleep. Whatever he saw in dreams became real like morning light...” al-Bukhārī, “Ta’bīr,” 1; Muslim, “Īmān,” 252.

<sup>25</sup> Surūsh frequently refers to this narrative. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, XII (I-XV), 145; al-Bukhārī, “Ta’bīr,” 4; al-Tirmīdhī, “al-Ru’yā,” 1. According to some ḥadīths, it is one of 45, 70 or 40 fascicles. That is, faithful dreams of true believers are also considered part of prophethood.

<sup>26</sup> Q 37:102.

<sup>27</sup> “Revelation is over, what good news is left? They said: ‘What is good news?’ He replied: ‘It is the truthful dream.’” See al-Bukhārī, “al-Ta’bīr,” 5. In addition, the following ḥadīth, narrated through Jābir—albeit based on a weaker chain of evidence—is meaningful in this sense: “The most truthful dream is the one you have during the day, for Allah sent revelation to me in daytime” (أصدق الرؤيا ما كان) (نهارا لأن الله خصني بالوحي نهارا). See Abū l-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *Al-itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Markaz al-Dīrāsāt al-Qur’āniyyah (Medinah: Muḥamma‘ al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā‘at al-Muṣṣhaf al-Sharīf, n.d.), I, 148.

The term “through a dream” (إلا وحيا) in the Qurʾān (42:51) is often referred to as the main theme of descriptions and interpretations about revelation through dreams; exegetes and linguists have mostly interpreted the term as “inspiration; delivering which occurs in sleep or dreams, or even is realized by means of admission to one’s heart.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, the term إلا وحيا is considered an expression for revelation through dreams in classical sources. However, there are also examples of broader senses being attributed to this expression, such as inspiration, instruction, or meaning put in the heart.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as Izutsu points out, the term إلا وحيا signifies not direct verbal revelation in technical terms, but rather in a sense similar to inspiration, that Allah delivers His will to man in a direct manner without any intermediary (angel).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For instance, in his *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān*, the early exegete Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822), interprets the term *illā waḥy<sup>am</sup>* as “seeing in sleep” (يرى في المنام) and “inspiring.” Likewise, in his *tafsīr*, Abū l-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) mentions the ḥadīth “dreams of prophets are revelation” and indicates that *illā waḥy<sup>am</sup>* refers to inspiration or a dream. See Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn Ziyād al-Farrāʾ al-Daylamī, *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ṣābūnī (Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurā, 1409 AH), VI, 146; Abū l-Barakāt Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī: Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl*, ed. Marwān Muḥammad al-Shaʿār (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 2000), IV, 163.

For similar uses about the relationship between dreams and revelation, see Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar ibn Muḥammad al-Zamaksharī al-Khwārazmī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāiq ḡhawāmīdī al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūnī l-aqāwīl fī wujūb al-taʾwīl*, ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), IV, 238; Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 1141; Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn ibn Masʿūd ibn Muḥammad al-Farrāʾ al-Baghāwī, *Tafsīr al-Baghāwī (Maʿālim al-tanzīl)*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh al-Namr, ʿUthmān Jumʿah Ḍamīriyyah, and Sulaymān Muslim al-Ḥarsh (Riyādh: Dār Ṭībah, 1997), VII, 201; Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ḥikām al-Qurʾān*, XVI, 48., Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 2000), XXI, 558.

<sup>29</sup> For example, in his comment about verses 7-9 of Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) mentions the narrative where a revelation is sent to the mother of Moses in her dream, and includes the phrase حكاة ابن عيسى ، أنه كان رؤيا منام ، al-Māwardī, *ʿĀlām al-Nubuwwa*, ed. M. Muʿtaṣimbillāh al-Baghādādī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1987), 42.

<sup>30</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qurʾān* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2008), 174. The second alternative for the reception of revelation is defined as

On the other hand, the other option, namely, revelation “through sending of a messenger” (أَوْ يُرْسِلَ رَسُولًا), is often considered actually seeing the appearance and hearing the voice of Jibrīl or Rūḥ.<sup>31</sup> This third way of delivering a message, indicated in Sūrat al-Shūrā, corresponds to the most solid way of conveying the Qurʾān. Indeed, the arrival of revelation to a messenger through both hearing and sight constitutes the distinguished quality of the Qurʾān.<sup>32</sup> In this case, the traditional approach states that it is plausible that this form of revelation—which includes both hearing and sight—would occur in a dream. Indeed, an angel could have appeared to the Prophet when he was asleep and made him into a vehicle for verbal communication. According to a narrative (*riwāyah*), while the Prophet Muhammad was asleep, Jibrīl came to him; then, he woke up after the revelation was complete, as if writing were imprinted into his heart.<sup>33</sup>

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being “behind a curtain” (من وراء حجاب) and signifies receiving it without any image, and thus by “hearing.” For Watt, these three forms of revelation might be the same; nonetheless, he also allows for the classification traditionally adopted by exegetes. See *Muhammad’s Mecca*, 63.

<sup>31</sup> al-Isfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, 1141; al-Farrā, *Maʿānī l-Qurʾān*, IV, 146; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, XXI, 558; Abū ‘Abd Allāh Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar ibn Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, XXII, 619. Additionally, see other foregoing references.

<sup>32</sup> In this context, in *The Venture of Islam*, Hodgson explains how revelation is realized through hearing and ocular vision, using examples from the Qurʾān. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad receives revelation when he sees a bulky image wherever he looks (Q 53:5-18). Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), I (The Classical Age of Islam), I, 161-162. Likewise, Izutsu approves that Muhammad not only heard a revelation, but also saw the person who spoke it. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qurʾān*, 191.

<sup>33</sup> قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: فجاءني جبريل ، وأنا نائم ، بنمط من ديباج فيه كتاب ، فقال اقرأ ؛ قال: ....؛ قلت: ما أقرأ ؟ قال: ففتنتني به حتى ظننت أنه الموت فقرأتها ثم انتهى فانصرف عني وهببت من نومي see, Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-nabawīyyah* II, 72; According to another narrative, al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām asked Muḥammad how he received his revelation. The Prophet replied: “Sometimes it comes to me with a sound like a rattle. This is the most intense form of revelation. Once I was relieved of this state, I had already memorized the subsequent one. Sometimes the angel appears in the form of a man and talks to me. In addition, I memorize what he says.” See al-Bukhārī, “Bad’ al-waḥy,” 2; the same ḥadīth is available in al-Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasā’ī, etc.

After all, the term *إلا وحيا* in Q 42:51 is presented in classical references as an option that includes dreams; it is seen as a broader manner of reporting which, in the case of Moses, covers his relationship with his mother, bees and angels,<sup>34</sup> or, in the case of Jesus, with his apostles, or even the order given to Moses to cast down his staff.<sup>35</sup> Dreams might well be one of these divine ways of delivering a message, in addition to the technical concept of revelation that is unique to prophets. In this regard, exegetes interpret this last option (*أَوْ يُزِيلُ رَسُولًا*) as the way of revelation unique to prophets, and consider it the way the Qurʾān was brought down to earth.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, traditional texts and reports point out a relationship between prophethood and dreams, but do not use the latter in a broader sense to correspond to revelation. More importantly, this approach does not provide us with any evidence to enable us to consider visions or incidents seen in sleep, as the Qurʾān's verses are more about content. Moreover, in the traditional sense, there is no serious problem in saying that the Qurʾān was completely revealed through a dream. Indeed, even if the Prophet saw Jibrīl in his dreams and heard the Qurʾān's verses from his voice, this fact changes nothing in the content of revelation, for there is a significant difference between revelation through dreams and revelation in the quality of a dream. The aspect that requires interpretation is the dream quality of a revelation in terms of content. Thus, the main discrepancy in theory is illuminated: It is about accepting revelation as a symbolic, misty phenomenon that requires interpretation (*تعبير*). In other words, neither the Prophet nor his people used the words "dream" and "interpretation" in the sense employed by Surūsh with regard to their relationship with revelation. Hence, the most controversial aspect of

<sup>34</sup> Q 28:7-9; Q 16:68; Q 41:12; Q 99:5.

<sup>35</sup> Q 7:117.

<sup>36</sup> Even though Q 42:51 is often interpreted by exegetes in this manner, there are some exceptions, and varying comments are also possible. For instance, the early *tafsīr* scholar Abū Jaʿfar al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950) defines *illā wabiy<sup>m</sup>* as "what is blown into one's heart" (*ان ينفث*). For al-Naḥḥās, the word *rasūl<sup>m</sup>* in a *yursila rasūl<sup>m</sup>* is "all messengers sent for humanity" (*ان يرسل رسولا إلى الناس عامة*). See, Abū Jaʿfar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Murādī al-Misrī al-Naḥḥās, *Maʿanī al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ṣābūnī (Mecca: Jāmiʿah Umm al-Qurā, H. 1409), VI, 327. For alternative interpretations about Q 42:51, see also *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* by Ṭabarsī, *al-Zarīʿa* by Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *al-Hidāyah* by Makkī ibn Abū Ṭālib, and *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān* by al-Qurṭubī.

Surūsh’s theory arises from the meaning attributed to the concept of “interpretation.” In the end, Surūsh adopts a reformist approach that goes beyond providing a long-lost meaning due to the institutionalization of religion over time; accordingly, he suggests that the Qur’ān be reassessed through the language of dreams, and not through the awakened world (i.e. to interpret it).

### **B. Interpretation (تعبير): The Translation of Prophetic Dreams (Past) into a Wakened (Contemporary) World**

Surūsh does not give a proper definition for “interpretation.” Nevertheless, what he means by the word is apparently dissimilar to the symbolic interpretation of, say, the story of Adam and Eve. Alternatively, Surūsh’s process of interpretation does not intend to interpret well-known words—such as *balance* (ميزان) or *pencil* (قلم)—in a way that is different from the established one, such as “writing and measuring all.” Indeed, according to Surūsh, such literary uses—namely figures, metaphors, or allegorical uses—have no place in the language of dreams, because such denominations involve consciousness and mind. However, it is necessary to follow the path of the Prophet Joseph, and to take into account the method of interpretation (تعبير) instead of referring to the abovementioned explanations and words to better comprehend the Qur’ān’s verses.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, even though the Prophet transmitted into Arabic whatever he saw and heard in his dreams, he must have adopted words from the Qur’ān’s verses (such as *mountain, sun, sea*) into his dreams.<sup>38</sup> For Surūsh, this is obvious because something—which is classified as a type of dream—will be expressed in the same manner.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, there is no controversy between the inner experience of a wise person or a prophet, and the expression of revelation in the form of a report. In other words, the Prophet may have indicated the Qur’ān’s verses as he heard them in dreams. Surūsh, however, claims that the Prophet can also express some of these images in his own language. However, revelation essentially consists of his visions in dreams.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 96.

<sup>38</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (3),” 359.

<sup>39</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (4): Dar Bāb-i Naqd-i ‘Abd al-Bashīr Fikrat,” in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 375.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 404. Statements that revelation is not entirely based on observation are seen in his responses to criticisms.

Well then, as the Prophet expresses the visions in his dreams in the form of the Qurʾānic verses, does he perceive them as real experiences corresponding to facts? Or even during or after his reporting of verses, does he give an explanation that might account for interpretation? In addition, according to numerous reports, the Prophet told his companions about his dreams in words different than revelation, and even interpreted them in person.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the Prophet apparently allocated a different place for the Qurʾān's revelation than his dreams in the quality of truthful reports. If so, what is the criterion of distinction between the Qurʾānic verses and other dreams he saw and interpreted in person? Moreover, how should one explain the absence, in the narrations, of any expression by the Prophet Muhammad such as "I was called over in my dream" and then "And the Trumpet will be sounded, when all that are in the heavens and on earth will swoon..." (Q 39:68), or why do we not come across any report of his interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses about doomsday?<sup>42</sup>

Given such questions, Surūsh apparently underlines our capacity to better understand the Qurʾān than its early addressees, thanks to interpretation and by means of contemporary science. Even though Surūsh considers such dreams superior to being awake, he seems to believe they have yet to be interpreted. He even argues that we are to carry out this interpretation today. Surūsh most likely did not overlook the fact that the interpretation—which is nourished by modern approaches (such as the subconscious, personality, surroundings, etc.) and should be realized with the help of contemporary science—is not mentioned in classical references in this sense. Further, Surūsh does not claim that prophets did not interpret the revelation they received. Rather, he says prophets may have erred in the explanations (interpretation) they gave within the circumstances of their time. In

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<sup>41</sup> Such dreams, abundant in chapters by al-Bukhārī and Muslim about "interpretation" and "dreams," often appear in reports about afterlife occurrences or future incidents in real life. One narrative reads as follows: "One night, I saw myself in the house of 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' in my dream. We were served dates of Ibn Tāb. I interpreted (*ta'wīl*) it as the sublimity of the world, a beneficent outcome in the afterlife, and perfection for our religion." See Muslim, "al-Ru'yā," 18. For similar narratives, see al-Bukhārī, "al-Ta'bir," 44; Ibn Mājah "al-Ru'yā," 22 ff.

<sup>42</sup> In this regard, it is important that, based on the abovementioned Qurʾānic verses, Montgomery Watt states that dreams and observations are not expressions related to the way the Qurʾān was revealed. Watt, *Muhammad's Mecca*, 60, 62.

parallel, relevant theories to comprehend revelation incorporate a kind of perfection.<sup>43</sup>

In this respect, Surūsh follows the comments of Ibn al-‘Arabī: Even though a dream is an experience belonging to the world of imagination, the Prophet Abraham tried to directly realize this dream without any interpretation. Indeed, since Abraham’s dream could not coincide with the awakened world, it would become clear that he should sacrifice a sheep and not his son. For Surūsh, it is wrong to interpret an image (which occurs in the world of imagination) as if it corresponded to or coincided with reality. Therefore, we need another practice, namely, the science of interpretation, to unearth the will of God.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, Allah revealed to Muhammad that the number of enemy soldiers was smaller it actually seemed. Muhammad followed Abraham’s example; he was convinced that the dreams directly coincided with reality, whereupon he reported them to his people as they were. For Surūsh, however, this misinterpretation should be considered holy since it turned out to be psychologically useful in battles. Thus, interpretation might always incorporate a mistake. Nevertheless, a dream is not right or wrong in and of itself.<sup>45</sup>

Surūsh has been subject to criticism about “who is authorized to carry out the most accurate interpretation” given that even prophets can err in comprehending their very own dreams.<sup>46</sup> Even if the need to interpret the Qur’ān is acknowledged, it is still unclear who would do so. For Surūsh, just as in the example of Abraham, anyone who aims to interpret the Qur’ān has to explain the truths therein by adapting them to the realm of observation in compliance with the structure of a dream. Nevertheless, since Surūsh himself “cannot dare to climb such high roofs,” it is necessary to ask the gnostics, who are capable of seeing the world of sovereignty and follow esoteric paths, about the meaning of such peculiarities.<sup>47</sup> On another occasion, he claims that most figurative expressions in the Qur’ān can be clarified via a holistic

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<sup>43</sup> Surūsh, “Rüyārū-yi ‘rüyā’ (3),” 352.

<sup>44</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 118.

<sup>45</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (5): Shabī bar Nishast az Falak Dergodhasht,” 306-307.

<sup>46</sup> Ārmīn, “Pāsukhī ba Duktūr Surūsh;” Ārmīn, “Kur’an’ın Rüyā Olarak Tasavvuruna Eleştirisi,” in *Güncel Vahiy Tartışmaları: Nebvî Rüyaların Ravisi Hz. Muhammed Kitabına Eleştiriler*, comp. and trans. Asiye Tıgılı (Istanbul: Mana, 2018), 85.

<sup>47</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2),” 104-105.

interpretation, namely, preserving their apparent meaning and without the need for glossing. In this respect, he criticizes a comment by Ṭabāṭabā'ī about verse 10 of al-Şāffāt, as follows:<sup>48</sup>

If al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī thought that the pursuit of Satan was a dream of the Prophet, then he would have given up this far-fetched exegesis, headed for anthropology and sought out such a meaning. How should we interpret the fact (given cultural and historical conditions in the Hejaz region at the time) that a person sees a meteor chasing Satan in his dream? If we do not follow such an approach and consider the words *meteor* and *Satan* in the language of the awakened world, we cannot help but make a comment that takes us to a situation of deadlock.<sup>49</sup>

The suggestion herein is that the interpreter of a dream does not necessarily have to be a wise religious man; instead, he must be a person with sufficient knowledge in terms of geography, history, anthropology and even dreams. Within the framework of the actual scientific approach, psychiatrists and psychologists should also be included. In this case, the interpretation must be carried out by a wise man who is familiar with the humanities of his time and who shares the “pleasure of this experience”<sup>50</sup> because his interpretation can be valid. Therefore, on the one hand, “the dreams which are superior to wakefulness” should be explained by the wise who are equally “awakened.” On the other hand, it is necessary to make use of current scientific developments in light of human aspects of revelation. Accordingly, in his earlier writings, Surūsh often underscores the influence of the Prophet’s human aspect on the formation of revelation:

According to traditional accounts, the Prophet was only an instrument; he merely conveyed a message passed on to him by Jibrīl. In my view, however, the Prophet played a pivotal role in producing the Qur’ān.

The metaphor of poetry helps me to explain this. Just like a poet, the Prophet felt that he was captured by an external force. However, in fact—or better: at the same time—the Prophet himself is everything:

<sup>48</sup> أَلَا مَنْ حَظَفَ الْحَظْفَةَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَائِبٌ (Q 37:10); Surūsh indicates that according to al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the foregoing verse should be reevaluated in light of new scientific data. Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 100-101.

<sup>49</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 100-101.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

the creator and the producer. The question of whether inspiration comes from outside or inside is truly not relevant, since at the level of revelation, there is no difference between outside and inside. The inspiration comes from the Self of the Prophet. The Self of every individual is divine, but the Prophet differs from other people in that he has become aware of its divinity. He has actualized his potential. His Self has become one with God...<sup>51</sup>

Another striking point in the citation above is that the Prophet Muhammad felt as if he were seized by an external force, just like the poets of that era, who were inspired by *jinn*. For Surūsh, however, this is not the case, even though the Prophet was not aware, for there was no distinction made between internal and external in this regard. Through the perspective of Surūsh’s theory, the Prophet’s holy dreams are wrapped up in a form within the framework of his own language, style and knowledge, similar to those of a poet. In addition to the personality of Muhammad, his past, experiences, and even sorrows or joys influence the formation of the Qur’ānic text.<sup>52</sup> As a result, since the truths introduced to Muhammad in a specific dream language will always have a human quality, their interpretation requires a human approach.

Notwithstanding, it is questionable how prophetic dreams—which differ from scientific or philosophical experience—can be explained through sciences such as anthropology and psychology.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Surūsh sounds paradoxical for he, on the one hand, complains that “unfortunately, we are living in a time when dreams have lost their former importance and value.” On the other hand, he proposes benefiting from the humanities for interpreting prophetic dreams. In parallel with his suggestion, it would be necessary to claim that the Prophet and his people were incompetent in interpreting dreams, since they lacked today’s humanities such as anthropology. Moreover,

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<sup>51</sup> Hoebink, “The Word of Mohammad: An Interview with Abdulkarim Surūsh,” 2007, <http://drsoroush.com/en/the-word-of-mohammad/>, accessed May 15, 2020; for Persian translation, see Hoebink, “Kalām-i Muḥammad: Goftehū bā ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh dar barah-i Qur’ān,” *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad*, 15-16.

<sup>52</sup> Hoebink, “Kalām-i Muḥammad,” 17.

<sup>53</sup> Surūsh actually indicates that scientific experience and religious experience are different from one another; otherwise, we had to consider both as one. Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yī Rūyā (3),” 379.

according to Surūsh, this long-lasting perception has been overlooked by Islamic scholars throughout history.

Evidently, Qurʾānic verses are meant for believers much more than the transmission of what Muhammad saw in his dreams, and they were understood by addressees as told by the Prophet. The best evidence for this argument is the actual history. Indeed, 23 years of Muhammad's prophetic experience is interwoven with real life. Qurʾānic orders, such as Hegira and war, are literally implemented by believers who never considered them to be misty or in need of interpretation. Beyond his experiences, wise thoughts, and literary joys, the Prophet stands before us as a concrete, historical figure who bore witness by putting his life at stake. In fact, Surūsh is well aware that in the course of history, believers perceived Qurʾānic expressions and accordingly molded their lives in compliance with actual incidents, and without the need for further interpretation. Instead, Surūsh often stresses the influence of historical facts on the Qurʾān's formation during those 23 years, and he keeps including this phenomenon in his theory. Then again, what does Surūsh actually mean by the interpretation of prophetic dreams? At this point, an analysis on the conception of Allah and the external aspect of revelation in the eyes of Surūsh may prove decisive to better scrutinize the problem and determine the points of objection.

### **C. The External (Objective) Quality of Revelation**

Sunnī scholars, as well as other Muslim scholars (e.g. Shīʿī and Wahhābī), agree that Allah's call to the Prophet Muhammad during his retreat in the cave of Hirāʾ was an external (objective; through external power, without the Prophet's own involvement) intervention, and that the words of the Qurʾān were conveyed to Muhammad as both "wording and meaning" by means of Jibrīl, the angel of revelation.<sup>54</sup> The transmission of revelation through a messenger angel upon divine order, and not through a jinn or Satan, is often emphasized by tradition as the most important feature that ensures the divine, binding nature of revelation. Accordingly, notable scholars such as Goldziher, Hodgson and Izutsu point out the realization of revelation without Muhammad's intervention, and share some expressions approving this

<sup>54</sup> Surūsh determined two essential features of the classical approach to revelation: (1) Revelation was conveyed to the Prophet within word patterns; (2) The difference between who brings down verses and who receives them. See Surūsh, "Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (7): Zabān-i Rüyā Zabān-i Hāl," 255.

argument. For instance, Goldziher indicated that the Prophet Muhammad was addressed in an order-like manner through vision, waking dreams, or hallucinations. According to Goldziher, the Prophet was asked to inform the public about the outcomes of good and devil deeds, and to behave as a compulsory guide.<sup>55</sup>

Izutsu, in turn, claims that the Qurʾānic dialogue took place in a vertical and unilateral manner; he thus confirms the external nature of revelation in a different way. In other words, as A moves actively as the speaker, some of his/her requests and thoughts are conveyed to B through certain signs. Therefore, this is unilateral communication, and B is only a receiver. An explicit introduction to B and outsiders can never comprehend the content of this perfect communication. For Izutsu, this feature also distinguishes the Qurʾān from bilateral inspiration between *jinn* and *seer*.<sup>56</sup> At this stage, Izutsu makes an important inference; B (Jibrīl), who reports what A (Allah) says, must have memorized the speech of A, word by word. In other words, memorization is necessary for the reporter so that what is said can be literally conveyed to C.<sup>57</sup> In such cases, the Prophet Muhammad inevitably displayed the same attention while receiving and transmitting the revelation.

The factors that led Izutsu to this conviction include classical religious texts and, at least, the apparent meaning of the Qurʾānic verses, for they lay a solid foundation for such a perception. The following Qurʾānic verses are put forth as evidence of this objective aspect of revelation: “O Prophet! Convey what has been revealed to you from your Lord!” (Q 5:62); “And so We have sent to you a revelation by Our command. You did not know of ‘this’ Book and faith ‘before’” (Q 42:52); “And indeed, you ‘O Prophet’ are receiving the Qurʾān from the One ‘Who is’ All-Wise, All-Knowing” (Q 27:6). Then, again, according to the Qurʾān, the prophet has no esoteric knowledge

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<sup>55</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1910), 7.

<sup>56</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qurʾān*, 174-175.

<sup>57</sup> Izutsu explains this situation as follows: “The Divine words, as an objective *sprachwerk* in this sense, are called the *Qurʾān*.” More precisely, divine words are presented to the Prophet in a relationship of receiver and transmitter. In such a case, the Qurʾān becomes a divine word, literally conveyed as objective *sprachwerk*. For the concept used by Izutsu, see his *God and Man in the Qurʾān*, 192-195.

beyond what is revealed to him since he is only human (Q 6:50). Since the prophet is obliged to obey Allah (Q 41:6), he cannot speak on his own behalf (Q 53:4), so much so that he is told to say "...nor do I know what will happen to me or you... I am only sent with a clear warning" (Q 46:9). He is condemned for tending to come to terms with polytheists due to a lack of progress in Mecca (Q 17:73) or for facing Umm Maktūm, who interrupts his speech with prominent figures of the city (Q 80:2). While he receives the revelation, he is put to a heavy test to perfectly listen to what is said, and not to hurry in receiving and conveying the revelation (Q 20:114).

As a matter of fact, Surūsh has been subjected to severe criticism whereby it is impossible to overlook such explicit verses in the Qurʾān.<sup>58</sup> For Surūsh, however, the apparent aspect of the Qurʾān can only represent an image of its spiritual meaning. These verses are a manifestation of truth. The truth, however, inevitably adopts a human aspect once it comes down to earth into the patterns of language. According to Surūsh, we cannot expect Allah to be subjected to environmental factors. This is plausible only for the Prophet, who is human. As indicated in the Qurʾān, it is impossible to claim that Allah undergoes emotional ups and downs, or becomes seized by conditions such as happiness or anger.<sup>59</sup> At this stage, Surūsh argues that we should inquire about the "role of the Prophet in receiving revelation."<sup>60</sup> Is the Prophet merely a receiver? For Surūsh, this question has to be answered, whereupon we should not dwell on the apparent aspect of the Qurʾānic verses. As a result, the Qurʾānic verses become wrapped up in the "Muhammadan" image in this regard, and are formed pursuant to his personality. Their ascription to Allah is figurative.<sup>61</sup> For instance, when a piece of iron melts and glows, it is called fire; likewise, thanks to his affinity with Allah, the words of the Prophet are a quality of divine speech.<sup>62</sup>

However, again, how can we explain the emphasis on the external aspect of revelation received by the Prophet, as shown in the foregoing

<sup>58</sup> For relevant criticisms particularly by Muḥsin Ārmin and ‘Abd al-‘Alī Bāzargān, see footnotes 9, 10, and 11.

<sup>59</sup> Surūsh, "Rūyārū-yi 'rūyā' (2) Dar Bāb-i Naqd-i Muḥsin Kadīwar," in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Şuqrāt, 1397 HS), 314.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

<sup>62</sup> Surūsh, "Rūyārū-yi 'rūyā' (4)," 413.

examples? Does this show that the Prophet also has such a perception? Apparently, the concept of a “dream” in the theory of Surūsh—which he calls “the last closed window of revelation”—makes sense in this way. Indeed, even though the Prophet is the one who makes Jibrīl send down revelation or visualizes it,<sup>63</sup> he sees all these in dreams, where his senses are off. In other words, no matter how “Muhammadan” the Qur’ān is, this is not a conscious product by the Prophet. In a dream, passive imagination is at work—not the mind or contemplation. This is why the Qur’ān has an untidy style of verse and a semiotic language.<sup>64</sup>

Changes in the Prophet’s physical condition or even ecstasy (ناهوشیاری) during the reception of revelation are often referred to in narratives; this is what Surūsh calls a dream.<sup>65</sup> However, his surprise and fear in the beginning of prophethood,<sup>66</sup> his wakefulness (يقظة) while receiving the revelation, extreme sweating, and the call for a cover on himself are all considered by tradition to result from external intervention and the struggle to comprehend the Qur’ān’s verses, which do not belong him. In the words of Hodgson, these narratives tell us that revelation is not under the control of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>67</sup>

Surūsh agrees with this view. For him, this suggestion is not contradictory to the theory of prophetic dreams. Dreams, by nature, require such ecstasy. Therefore, by defending the dreamlike quality of revelation, Surūsh does not object to the apparent discourse of the Qur’ān. For him, this does not mean that the Prophet Muhammad did not intervene in revelation, or that the text points out a “metaphysics of separation [*firāq*]” between Allah and His messenger. In fact, pursuant to the metaphysics of union [*wiṣāl*] adopted by Surūsh, the Prophet is submerged in truth through his enchanted self. Therefore, his words cannot differ from the speech of Allah.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (2),” 318.

<sup>64</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (3), 353; “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (1): Dar Bāb-i Khwānīsh Ḥussayn Wālī,” in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Ṣuqrāt, 1397 HS), 300.

<sup>65</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (2): Dar Bāb-i Naqd-i Hussayn Wali,” 298.

<sup>66</sup> Muslim “al-Īmān,” 255-257.

<sup>67</sup> Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, I, 162.

<sup>68</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad Rāvi-yi Rūyāhā-yi Rasūlanah (7): Zabān-i Ru’yā Zabān-i Ḥāl,” 256.

## II. The Theory of Prophetic Dreams within the Context of the Conception of Allah and Imagination

### A. The Conception of Allah and the Theory of Prophetic Dreams

In the beginning of his writings called *The Prophet Muhammad: The Narrator of Prophetic Dreams*, Surūsh opts for a phenomenological approach to explain revelation without allowing for an ontological conception or an epistemological content. Nevertheless, it seems fair to claim that, in contrast with his allegedly phenomenological method, Surūsh approaches the Qurʾān with the premise of resolving problematic issues, rather than understanding metaphorical expressions therein.<sup>69</sup> In addition, as a believer of revelation, Surūsh not only adopts an epistemic premise, but also acts in an ontology close to Sufism. As a result, it was revelation that complied with the Prophet, not the Prophet who complied with revelation. For “Allah created the Prophet Muhammad, and Muammad compiled the Qurʾān.”<sup>70</sup>

For Surūsh, the main mistake of his critique is “to separate the Creator (*al-Kbāliq*) from the creature (*makblūq*).” In his eyes, the common mind—which cannot comprehend this oneness—distinguishes the creature from its Creator, places Allah on a throne like a sovereign sultan, and believes that Allah sends His messages to His subjects from far away.<sup>71</sup> At this stage, Surūsh adopts the “metaphysics of union” and not the “metaphysics of separation.” For him, Allah speaks not from outside, but from inside the Prophet:<sup>72</sup> “Since Allah is in the Prophet and the Prophet is in Allah, whatever Muhammad thinks

<sup>69</sup> Even though Surūsh claims to have adopted a phenomenological approach to reach this conclusion, this method actually does not enable us to analyze how the experience of revelation, which is unknown to us, evolves, but rather to focus only on what it yields. This finding has been indicated in previous criticisms as well. See Muḥammad Manşūr Hāshimī, “Naqd-i Ruʾyā-yi Rasūlānah,” <http://mansurhashemi.com/2020/10/17/نقد-رؤیای-رسولانه/>, accessed December 20, 2020. The Iranian critic Ḥasan Anşārī makes a similar point, stating that in any case, we are facing the literary criticism of the available word or text. See Anşārī, “Naqd-i Nazariyyah-i Duktur Surūsh dar bārah-i waḥy (1-5).”

<sup>70</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (6): Zi Hay Marātib-i Khāb-i ki bah zi Bidārist,” 211-212.

<sup>71</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2),” 109.

<sup>72</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (7),” 250.

is the same with the divine. According to followers of oneness, Allah is present in the universe in a ceaseless and uncovered manner; likewise, the realm of possibilities in the universe is not distinct from Him.”<sup>73</sup>

Foregoing expressions show how Surūsh utilizes the concept of Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*); however, he does not entirely adopt the Sufi conception of prophethood. During his attempts to demonstrate the manifestation of revelation through the language of dreams, his approach also allows for philosophy and modern sciences in interpretation. Yet given that he is also a Neo-Mu‘tazilite, it is fair to claim that Surūsh<sup>74</sup> rather lays a foundation on a philosophical *‘irfān*. In his last book, he places particular importance on benefiting from metaphysics as rarely as possible, and explicitly declares his attitude, saying, “We are living in a post-Kantian era.”<sup>75</sup> In the same book, he acknowledges the traditional origins of his theory of prophetic dreams, but also indicates that “I cannot disregard truths I attained in modern world.”<sup>76</sup> This is because Surūsh wants to derive reasonable aspects of both approaches, and tries to establish a dialogue between past and present.<sup>77</sup>

Therefore, according to Surūsh, incidents such as al-Isrā and al-Mi‘rāj,<sup>78</sup> angels worshipping Adam,<sup>79</sup> or, more strikingly, eight angels carrying the throne of Allah (heavens) on their shoulders,<sup>80</sup> can be explained through nothing but dreams. Likewise, stories similar to the

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<sup>73</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2),” 110; “... He (the Prophet) is the message. He is the prophet not because he receives the message (payāmgīr) (from Allah), but because he is full of the message (payāambar)...”; “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (7),” 249.

<sup>74</sup> Surūsh, “Neo-Mu‘tazilī Hastam: Goftegū bā Duktur ‘Abd al-Karīm Surūsh,” Interview by: Matīn Ghaffaryān, 1387 HS, <http://www.dr.soroush.com/Persian/Interviews/P-INT-13870200-NoMotazeli.html>, accessed November 24, 2020; Mohammed Hashas, “Abdolkarim Soroush: The Neo-Mu‘tazilite that Buries Classical Islamic Political Theology in Defense of Religion Democracy and Pluralism,” *Studia Islamica* 109 (2014), 147-173.

<sup>75</sup> Surūsh, “Rüyārū-yi ‘rüyā’ (3),” 344.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> See the Qur’ān chapters 17, 18, and 53.

<sup>79</sup> Q 2:34.

<sup>80</sup> Q 69:16.

example of “the table descending from the sky to the Apostles” (Q 5:112-120) or verses about doomsday scenes, should be considered as dreamscapes within this framework.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, bidding and forbidding (*amr u naby*) are also seen in dreams.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, provisions of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) are not heavenly. Since they do not belong to the realm of mysteries, they cannot be considered religious experiences. Indeed, they already exist in society. Such Qur’ānic verses are results of the mind of the Prophet. Since they are reinterpretations and implementations already present in society, we do not have to repeat them. These non-profound Qur’ānic expressions can be considered superficial dreams.<sup>83</sup> After all, the Qur’ān has only one language. In addition, this is the language of dreams.<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, Jibrīl (Rūḥ) is not an external being, but an image seen in dreams, even though the traditional approach to revelation considers this character to be an intermediary between Allah and His subject, and as a messenger of divine speech told to the Prophet after preserving it from satanic intervention. According to Surūsh, the verse in Sūrah al-Faṭir, namely, “All praise is for Allah, the Originator of the heavens and the earth, Who made angels as His messengers with two, three or four wings...” (Q 35:1) should not be considered even metaphorical, let alone the conception of angels as being ontological in the common mind. Indeed, Jibrīl should be accepted as a divine sight seen by the Prophet in his dreams. Similarly, an angel or angels, which write down human deeds (Q, 82:10-11), blow the trumpet,

<sup>81</sup> A question that springs to mind in this case is the presence of these anecdotes in the Old and New Testaments. However, Surūsh tries to explain this fact by indicating that the dreams of Muhammad include experiences of former prophets as well. In other words, “The dream of the Prophet Muhammad becomes the dream of all prophets.” For sure, since this argument is merely for apparent consistency and has no evidential value, we will not dwell upon it.

<sup>82</sup> According to Surūsh, we should read the Qur’ān from two angles: one includes elements of invisible realms such as angels, *jinn*, the heavens, doomsday, etc., whereas the other incorporates problems of real life with all its order and inhibitions. In regard to the visible, the explanations are highly consistent with the real world, whereupon the state of a dream is overlooked. In the eyes of Surūsh, ascription of this aspect to the entire Qur’ān, as did earlier exegetes, would mean converging descriptive language into a shar’ī language. Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2),” 108-109.

<sup>83</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (3),” 381.

<sup>84</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2),” 109.

recite the name of Allah day and night, settle in seven heavens (Q, 82:11; 3:11; 2:102) etc. are not intermediaries that drive a wedge between creature and Creator, but are rather images seen in dreams. According to Surūsh, once the distinction between Creator and creature is eliminated, the distance between the two will disappear, and the language of the Qurʾān will attain a rational explanation that coincides with dreams. Hence, Surūsh claims a close relationship between the imagination-based language of revelation and the conception of Allah. Once the conception of Allah is accurately placed, we can better understand and explain the nature of language of the Qurʾān.

### **B. The Theory of Prophetic Dreams with Regard to the Faculty of Imagination**

For Surūsh, the theory of prophetic dreams is based on the evidence that the language of revelation originates from imagination (خيالين).<sup>85</sup> Ḥashwiyya and Ḥanbaliyya aside, all Muslim philosophers, including al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and Shīrāzī, agree that the occurrence of revelation to the Prophet is connected with imagination. According to Surūsh, “Even if there is a Jibrīl, [he] has also become an image in the imagination of the Prophet...”<sup>86</sup> There is a parallelism between the efforts of Surūsh to explain the imaginative language of the Qurʾān through images in a dream, and how Islamic scholars explain prophethood via the faculty of imagination. Both explanations are based on the argument that the common mind—which cannot comprehend beyond the senses and imagination toward abstract thinking—needs to ascribe an image to both God and angels to define them.

In the eyes of Surūsh, whoever understands the language of the Qurʾān as if it coincided with facts, and distinguishes Creator from creature, represents the ordinary mentality, which is incapable of comprehending the oneness in being. Hence, Surūsh’s thinking seems very close to Islamic philosophers, who underline religion’s need for an imaginative language due to its all-pervasive universal message.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>86</sup> Surūsh, “Ṭūfī ve Zambūr,” in *Kalām-i Muḥammad rūyā-yi Muḥammad* (n.p.: Intishārāt-i Ṣuqrāt, 1397 HS), 64. For another reference to al-Fārābī, see “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (2),” 321.

Surūsh even claims that Arabs do not understand everything the Prophet says.

Conceptions (*taṣawwurāt*) that the Prophet utilized were understandable for the public. The Prophet also incorporated the assents (*taṣdīqāt*), which constitute the heart of this new call. Inevitably, the entirety of these assents was not comprehensible. Future generations had to understand and steep themselves in some of these assents.<sup>87</sup>

Surūsh then quotes Iranian Shīʿī scholar al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1090/1679), who says, “Allah revealed the Sūrat al-Ikhlās and the verses at the beginning of the Sūrat al-Ḥadīd, which state that He is the Apparent and the Unapparent, for He knew people with a deeper understanding would eventually come along.” According to Surūsh, the first addressees could only comprehend the apparent meaning of these verses. It is improbable that the simple and ordinary Arabs some 1,400 years ago could exceed superficial meaning and explore the deeper one. Indeed, to explain the conceptual meaning of these verses, years after the revelation, it has become necessary to learn from sages like Mullā Ṣadrā.<sup>88</sup>

Given such similar statements, Surūsh and Muslim philosophers apparently agree that only ordinary minds consider the imaginative language of the Qurʾān as if it directly coincided with the facts. For instance, Ibn Rushd indicates that Allah grants ordinary minds the ease of understanding, through examples and similes, the deep truths they cannot comprehend due to the inability to attain absolute demonstrations. The esoteric aspect of these examples, which, on the surface, address the public, can only be known by profound persons.<sup>89</sup> Accordingly, those who cannot attain the level of scholars or wise persons (الخواص) should be addressed through imagination. The Prophet said that on one occasion, when a black concubine said “Allah is in the skies,” Allah told her owner “to free her, for she is a believer.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (3),” 351.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Ibn Rushd [as Ibn Rūṣd], *Faṣlu’l-Makāl: Felsefe-Din İlişkisi*, trans. Bekir Karlıǧa (Istanbul: İşaret, 1992), 92.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 94. The hadith is narrated as follows: “In the renowned authentic ‘Hadith on Concubine,’ the concubine asks: ‘Where is Allah? (أَيْنَ اللهُ) He is in the heavens’ (فِي السَّمَاءِ). Then, Rasūl Allāh asks: ‘Who am I?’ (مَنْ أَنَا) The concubine replied: ‘You are

In fact, the woman was excused, for she had yet to attain the level of abstract thinking necessary. Therefore, those unable to comprehend the allegorical interpretation [*ta'wīl*] of the Qur'ān's verses might perceive Allah in an anthropomorphic manner; this is not a huge problem. Indeed, religion uses an imaginative language because it addresses the masses.<sup>91</sup>

A similar classification applies to the residents of the Virtuous City of al-Fārābī. The people of the Virtuous City are categorized as elites (those with reasoning) and commoners (those with imagination) pursuant to their capacity to comprehend theoretical knowledge (reasoning) to lead them to happiness. Indeed, not everyone can know on his/her own what to do to attain true happiness. They need an instructor or a guide.<sup>92</sup> This is where the Prophet's function becomes meaningful; most people [*'awām*] are incapable of reasoning about principles of apparent thinking, or reaching conceptual thinking from the particular to the universal. Consequently, due to their nature or habits, they lack the privilege of theoretical thinking and comprehend the principles behind the apparent to lead them to true happiness. Therefore, these principles should be indicated to them through imaginative language.<sup>93</sup> This duty, in favor of the masses, is carried out by prophets, who are equipped with an extraordinary capacity of imagination. As a result, according to Muslim philosophers, the power

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Rasūl of Allah.' (أَنْتَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ) Thereupon, the Prophet said: 'أَعْتَبَهَا فَإِنَّهَا مُؤْمِنَةٌ' 'Let her free for she is a believer.'" For this hadith, see also Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, I, 381; Mālik ibn Anas (d. 179/795), *al-Muwattā'*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'zamī (Abu Dhabi: Mu'assasah Zāyid ibn Sulṭān Āl-i Nahyān, 1425/2004), V, 1129-1130.

<sup>91</sup> According to Ibn Rushd (Averroes), sharia addresses three types of people: The first class consists of people of rhetoric (اهل الخطاب). They cannot carry out allegorical interpretation [*ta'wīl*] like wise men about evidential truths. The second group are people of *ta'wīl* based on dialectics. This class is inclined towards dialectical thinking and is more likely to be convinced through discussion. The true experts of *ta'wīl* [*burhāniyyūn*] are those with a nature suitable for wisdom and philosophy. Since the first group lacks the capacity for allegorical interpretation, one should not share evidential knowledge with them, Ibn Rushd, *Faṣlu'l-Makāl*, 103-107.

<sup>92</sup> Al-Fārābī, Abū Naṣr (d. 339/950), *Kitāb al-siyāsah al-madaniyyah al-muqallab bi-mabādi' al-mawjūdāt*, ed. Fawzī M. Najjār (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1993), 78.

<sup>93</sup> Al-Fārābī (as Fārābī), *Kitābū'l-Mille: Din Üzerine*, trans. Yaşar Aydın (Istanbul: Litera, 2019), 108-109. Al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsah al-madaniyyah*. 73-74.

of imagination plays an important role to provide divine knowledge with practical value and to make it functional.

“Divine scenes” are another similarity between Surūsh, who insists on the dream-based language of revelation, and the theory of prophethood by Islamic scholars. For instance, al-Fārābī explains prophethood in regard to dreams, like Surūsh. In *al-Madīnah al-fāḍilah*, al-Fārābī establishes a significant connection between dreams and prophethood. According to him, prophethood incorporates two different aspects. In the first aspect, the truth, which emanates from active intellect (‘*aql al-fa‘āl*) to imagination, might be a hidden report about particular incidents of the past, present or future. Such reports are among truths that originate from practical reasons and not theoretical ones; consequently, because of their particular features, they might be manifested as they are, or even through the imitation of other sensitive phenomena. According to al-Fārābī, truthful dreams arise from such particulars, provided by the active intellect for imagination in sleep. However, in case the active intellect carries out an emanation about the universal—in other words, the intelligible (*al-ma‘qūlāt*)—thence emerge divine things and prophecy (prophetic reports as to the metaphysical realm). For sure, their reflection will become actual once again through their imitations, in line with imagination, thanks to their universal character. More importantly, the power of imagination is often activated in sleep. In turn, most of those seen during sleep are about particulars. On the other hand, the emanation of the active intellect to the power of imagination while wake is mostly about the intelligible, and can be attained by very few.<sup>94</sup> In other words, a human being, who is at the utmost level of perfection thanks to intelligible and imaginative faculties, can convey reports (*nubuwwah*) about divine things thanks to the intelligible thoughts he receives from the active intellect while awake.<sup>95</sup> True “vision” becomes real only when the imagined thing(s) is/are collected in the power of common sense, and is/are transformed into an image/images. Thus, a person experiences images as if he actually sees them.<sup>96</sup> In other words, whatever emanates from the active intellect to the power of imagination becomes a vision seen by the person just before him/her.

<sup>94</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Ārā’ abl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah ve muḍāddātubā*, ed. ‘Alī Bū Mulhim (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1995), 107-108.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

Consequently, in the explanations by both al-Fārābī and Surūsh about prophethood, the truth is manifested in the form of contemplated divine visions in terms of content. These visions may become more qualified depending on a person’s intellectual and inner purification-based level. There is, however, a slight difference: In the theory of al-Fārābī, divine scenes of intelligible quality are expressed with the word “vision,” whereas information about news of the past, present and future is included among dreams everyone can have. Therefore, unlike Surūsh, al-Fārābī indicates that the truths, which emanate in the imaginative power of prophets, take place mostly while they are awake. Being subjected to revelation during a state of reverie is considered superior in the traditional approach as well. Indeed, a prophet, as a kind of superman, can eliminate the effects of senses even when awake.

On the other hand, for Surūsh, even though sublime dreams of messengers and the wise are “superior to being awake,”<sup>97</sup> they take place, in terms of content, in sleep, similar to anyone’s experiences. This is why Surūsh points out the narratives about the Prophet’s ecstasy during revelation, and considers it strong evidence for prophetic dreams. Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad did not deliberately make up the anecdotes in the Qur’ān.<sup>98</sup> At this stage, Surūsh refers to Egyptian thinker Amīn al-Khūlī and Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh, since they claim the Qur’ānic anecdotes do not have to abide by history and facts:

It is worth noting that the Prophet told these anecdotes after he regained consciousness. Therefore, we cannot say he deliberately made his point through anecdotes. He merely told what he saw [*ru’yab*]. This does not reduce the factual and exploratory aspect of revelation (شناختاري و کاشفیت وحی).<sup>99</sup>

Another similarity between Islamic scholars and Surūsh is that the prophets used their own words while telling their visions to the public.

<sup>97</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwī-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 98.

<sup>98</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (1),” 300.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 300. Elsewhere, Surūsh says that while the Prophet was experiencing the revelation, the content of unveiling and creation became intertwined. He explains this fact through the analogy of a sculptor employed by philosophers. A sculptor creates a beautiful sculpture using a rock. You may either say the sculptor just carves off the excessive parts in the rock and sets it free, or he attentively carves the rock to create work of art. Likewise, both the Prophet’s God and his religion are both his unveilings and creations of his mind and dream. See *ibid.*, 333.

According to Surūsh, the divine nature of an experience does not necessarily entail divine language. Therefore, these major truths, born out of the inner spring of the Prophet, are introduced to the latter with the specific language of dreams, whereupon he relates what he has seen to those around him.<sup>100</sup>

Al-Fārābī also thinks that prophets have an extraordinary power of imagination, which they use to express divine truths to their addressees (in line with the intellectual capacity of the latter) through imitative phrases, allegories or similes.<sup>101</sup> According to both approaches, the foundation of the Qurʾānic sentences is carried out by the Prophet himself. Hence, since prophethood is understood not as a miraculous and external intervention, but in a cause-effect relationship, the wording of revelation is elucidated in a parallel manner with this. Unlike the classical approach, the prophet is no longer a mere receiver; a prophet plays an active role in forming revelations and carries out the wording of the truth, without the need for a miraculous external intervention. Moreover, the essential definitive feature of a prophet for al-Fārābī is that he conveys to citizens what they should know<sup>102</sup> through a symbolic language they can understand, and establishes laws to lead them to happiness. Thus, various representations of truth become possible in different communities.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, the arrival of revelation by way of imagination points out the imaginative, the particular, the localness, and therefore something with a certain limit and image. After all, the religion, or *millab* in the words of al-Fārābī, is equipped with a definition with regard to ordinary man, who appreciates and determines the complex of faiths and deeds pursuant to actual circumstances.<sup>104</sup>

Muslim philosophers, however, do not mention the interpretation of “dreams” in any manner when they highlight the power of imagination as a faculty necessary for explaining universal truths to the

<sup>100</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (2),” 105-106.

<sup>101</sup> Al-Fārābī, *al-Madīnah al-fāḍilah*, 110.

<sup>102</sup> For the First Cause and its attributes, see things other than matter and their respective attributes, divine substances, etc., see al-Fārābī, *Kitābū'l-Mille: Din Üzerine*, 88.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 108-109; Al-Fārābī, *Taḥṣil al-sa'ādah*, ed. 'Alī Bū Mulhim (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1995), 52-53; al-Fārābī, *al-Madīnah al-fāḍilah*, 107-108.

<sup>104</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Kitābū'l-Mille: Din Üzerine*, 9.

masses. The only interpretation—if any—applies to truthful dreams that arise from the particulars provided by the active intellect for the power of imagination in sleep. Images—which prophets equip with divine emanation thanks to their faculty of imagination—do not require interpretation; moreover, they should remain as they are so they can be useful to the public. In the end, philosophers do not need to interpret representations used in the language of religion to attain the truth. They are already elite persons who have reached the level of acquired intellect (*al-‘aql al-mustafād*) and come together with the active intellect, which is the origin of truth. Pursuant to this perspective, clearly no one but them can know what the Qurʾān truly means, and what Ibn Rushd calls the esoteric meaning behind the exoteric, in light of the truth they attain. Indeed, according to Islamic scholars, prophets first comprehend the universal truth in their mind and then present it in the form of images and verbal expressions of the sensual world, thanks to their strong faculty of imagination.<sup>105</sup>

The problem of interpretation, introduced by Surūsh as a resolution of the accurate comprehension of the Qurʾān, also becomes a point of differentiation in his approach to imagination. The interpretation in Surūsh is different from the theory of allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) by Ibn Rushd or imitative phrases, allegories, and similes indicated by al-Fārābī. According to Surūsh, the language of dreams does not allow for figurative expressions, allegories, or literary metaphors. This is why the Qurʾānic language, which is symbolic and misty even in its most explicit state, requires not *tafsīr* or *taʾwīl*, but interpretation.<sup>106</sup> Hence, as the Prophet tells the public about his divine visions, he relates them

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<sup>105</sup> In the end, Ibn Rushd, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā agree that since the religion addresses all of society, it needs a language understandable to everyone, namely, a representative and figurative narrative expression. Prophets are capable of comprehending intellectual knowledge; moreover, they have the (imaginative) ability of relating such sublime truths to people by means of representation. Nevertheless, Ibn Sīnā also allows for “verbal revelation,” or more precisely, the representation of truth with words in representative expression. See, Abū ‘Alī Ḥusayn ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā, *Tis‘ rasāʾil fi l-ḥikmah wa-l-ṭabīʿiyyāt*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cairo: Dār al-‘Arab, n.d.), 66; Fazlur Rahman says that Ibn Sīnā, unlike al-Fārābī, considers seeing the appearance and hearing the voice of an angel as an intellectual phenomenon, which does not harm the objective solidity of the message. See Fazlur Rahman, *The Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1958), 38-39.

<sup>106</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rüyāhā-yi Rasūlānah” (1), 95.

without opting for methods such as metaphors. The Prophet tells of whatever he sees, and even tastes and hears in his dreams with passive imagination<sup>107</sup> in the quality of a reporter. This is why Surūsh describes the Prophet as a “messenger” (*rāwī*).

Accordingly, Surūsh is convinced that prophetic dreams reflect the Prophet’s personal circumstances, knowledge, and limited imagination. In other words, the Qur’ān includes a narrative version of truths that are presented to Muhammad in his dreams within the framework of his religious experience and sphere. In his article, “The Expansion of the Prophetic Experience,” Surūsh refers to the verse “My Lord! Increase me in knowledge,”<sup>108</sup> and defends Muhammad, who improved day by day and became a better prophet. Surūsh even claims that the content of revelation evolved in parallel with the Prophet’s improvement in terms of the prophetic experience.<sup>109</sup> Experience inevitably entails maturation and perfection. Hence, mistakes and fallacies are inevitable on the way to perfection.

In the eyes of philosophers, religion is a manifestation of not the truth conceived of by prophets via the active intellect, but of their expressions, depending on the level and circumstances of nations. In the end, however, both perspectives agree that religion is a varying reflection of absolute truth depending on time. At this stage, Surūsh emphasizes perfection, claiming that religion can only survive if it abides by gradual maturation and improvement. Moreover, not only the material and social aspects, but also the spiritual side of religion, such as the “ascension and experience of the Prophet,” are open to enrichment and perfection. Such enrichment will be provided by the wise person, who experiences the pleasure tasted by the Prophet.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, all unveilings (*kashf*) are incomplete. This is where Surūsh differs from other gnostic philosophers. For Surūsh, even prophets cannot carry out a complete exploration:

In regard to the expression of ultimateness, the gnostic says that the Prophet of Islam has attained the highest level of exploration and conquered all horizons of possible faculties. Muhammad is the last prophet, for he has not left anywhere to conquer to others...However,

<sup>107</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (3),” 367.

<sup>108</sup> Q 20:114.

<sup>109</sup> Surūsh, *Baş-i Tajriba-i Nabawī*, 10.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

I am not convinced that the experience of unveiling is complete and over. Indeed, this unveiling is not consistent with the Prophet’s limited knowledge. In fact, all divine unveilings are incomplete. For sure, it is hard to compare these deficiencies, and we cannot easily claim whether there is any unveiling better than that of the Last Prophet ... This experience, unveiling or dreams are so diverse, roundabout, and intertwined that it is hard to say if one is superior to other. In this regard, we may talk about [matters] with relatively weaker or stronger ones, but no exact completeness can be in question...<sup>111</sup>

In another, later article, Surūsh says that the theory of prophetic dreams does not include “any content related to the Five Divine Presences [*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilābiyyah al-khams*] or their epistemology” and separates his views from this perspective. Nevertheless, he clearly benefits from mystic tradition if needed. For instance, in his article “Obvious Contrasts,” Surūsh indicates that the text of the Qurʾān reflects an atmosphere beyond nature, and shows this feature as evidence of it being a dream. Accordingly, the lack of causality, the coexistence of conflicting facts, and differences in the concept of time (in words of Ibn al-‘Arabī, “*jāmi‘ al-aḍḍād*” in the Qurʾān are manifestations of the realm of dreams and imagination.<sup>112</sup> These features, highlighted by Surūsh, are also observed in explanations by earlier Islamic scholars about imagination, including Ibn al-‘Arabī on imaginative faculty. However, these features do not correspond to the same meaning in Surūsh with regard to Islamic philosophers or the Sufi conception of revelation.

For example, in the philosophy of Ibn al-‘Arabī, imagination (خیال)<sup>113</sup> has ontological value as well as epistemological value. In other

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<sup>111</sup> Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (1),” 287-288.

<sup>112</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (3): Maqrāḍ-i Tiz-i Tanāquḍ,” 129-130.

<sup>113</sup> For Ibn al-‘Arabī, since imagination (خیال) is created in such a way as to be accepted in its aspect as *jāmi‘ al-aḍḍād*, it is the closest faculty to comprehending Allah. It is also called *barzakh*, for it is between matter and the metaphysical (the apparent-esoteric), soul and body, divine and inferior. Therefore, the faculty of imagination enables man to talk about Allah in a representative way. In other words, it enables likening Allah to His creations through His attributes and vice versa, thus speaking about Him. Moreover, according to Ibn al-‘Arabī, no existence other than Allah truly exists; anything other than Allah is mere “fantasy” or “shadow.” Hence, this real universe also requires interpretation. Indeed, all of humanity is asleep in this

words, a dream is an element of not only thought, but also a realm outside man. Since imagination reflects pure meanings in an imaginative manner by means of images, it has an important function in the process of revelation and inspiration. Surūsh presumably agrees with this. However, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, in addition to their capacity to include contrasts, dreams gain a clearer meaning in regard to the seat of messengers. For the Prophet, we can talk about neither mediation nor ambiguity as related to the content of revelation. There is a significant difference between the Qurʾānic verses having an apparent meaning and the specific language of dreams, unlike the language of the awakened world. More importantly, according to Ibn al-ʿArabī, the angel of revelation is embodied ceaselessly in a psychological dream; in other words, through dreams independent of humans. More precisely, Jibrīl (a) is not an image that comes to mind in the imagination of the Prophet, but an ontological being that may be manifested as a human, and is even sometimes observable by others.<sup>114</sup>

The state of quiescence, also stressed by Surūsh, is defined by Ibn al-ʿArabī as the transition from the visible world to the world of imagination (*barzakh*), which is the most perfect place, and where the origin of all is located.<sup>115</sup> According to Ibn al-ʿArabī, Allah created the states of quiescence and reverie to make man comprehend certain things. Nevertheless, what ordinary people can only see in their sleep can be seen and conceived of by prophets and Islamic saints in reveries (يقظة).<sup>116</sup> In case the revelation arrives in one's sleep, it becomes a dream; if it happens in a reverie, just like when Jibrīl appeared in human form, it becomes imagination. Then, the angel of revelation appears to him and makes him hear its words.<sup>117</sup>

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universe, and will wake up only once dead. In this regard, *barzakh* is the realm where the cosmos comes into the stage of existence. Imagination in the absolute sense (or distinguished/ontological fantasy) is the first level of divine appearance. Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥyī al-Dīn Muḥammad Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1999), III, 275-276; Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, gloss. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī (Cairo: Dār Āfāq li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzīʿ, 2016), 99-101; William C. Chittick *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1989), 180-182.

<sup>114</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, III, 445, 467, 468.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 5-6.

<sup>117</sup> Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, 99-100.

As emphasized by Ibn al-‘Arabī, receiving the revelation in a state of reverie is the distinguishing feature of the seat of the Prophet in both the traditional approach and Islamic philosophy. Prominent figures of Islamic thought, including al-Fārābī—probably the closest thinker to Surūsh in this regard—agree that prophets, like superhumans, can relieve their faculty of imagination from the effects of the senses, even when they are awake. Ibn Sīnā indicates that a prophet knows everything as if it were ever present in himself, even without the need to communicate with the active intellect.<sup>118</sup> Hence, traditional Islamic philosophy asserts that the Prophet Muhammad is the perfect human being. For Surūsh, the spiritual experience of even the Prophet is open to improvement.

Consequently, within boundaries of this paper, Islamic thought traditionally acknowledges dreams and thus imagination as a source of obtaining hidden knowledge; in any case, the capacity of prophethood and one’s seat as a guide have always been granted a privileged level superior to ordinary humans. Indeed, ordinary people lack the required depth in the sense explained by philosophers and Sufis; as a result, they cannot comprehend the truth as necessary. This fact also clarifies the need for guidance formulated through sharī‘ah. In this regard, traditional Islamic thought considers imagination a highly functional and valuable faculty because it enables introducing the necessary and practically applicable laws of Islam to lead people to salvation.

For Surūsh, however, the “true objective of Shāri‘ is to constrain fiqh and spread morals,”<sup>119</sup> even though he acknowledges spiritual experience in the form of exploration as a common ground among the gnostics and prophets. In this case, the only outstanding difference of prophets is that, having stuck to their religious experience and “ascended to mi‘rāj” for guiding the public,<sup>120</sup> they come back.

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<sup>118</sup> According to Ibn Sīnā, this state of material intellect should be called “Holy Intellect” عقلا قدسيا or “sacred spirit” الروح القدسية for it is a kind of “dispositional intellect.” Such knowledge may also overflow as “heard speech” in addition to all examples perceived or seen through the senses pursuant to the faculty of imagination. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Nafs min Kitāb al-shifā*, ed. Ḥasan Ḥusayn-zādah al-Āmulī (Qom: Maktabat al-‘Ilām al-Islāmī, 1417 AH), 338-339.

<sup>119</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (4),” 185.

<sup>120</sup> To put forth his view, Surūsh cites the following phrase, which Muhammad Iqbal quotes from ‘Abd al Quddūs Gāngahī: “The Prophet ascended to *mi‘rāj* and came

Therefore, neither a religious experience nor seeing an angel is sufficient to make someone a prophet.<sup>121</sup> When we reason as Surūsh does, however, it is difficult to give a contemporary explanation for the return of prophets to the public in material or spiritual terms.

### Conclusion and Evaluation

Suggesting that the Prophet Muhammad “heard the Qur’ān’s verses in a dream,” Surūsh objects to the classical approach on revelation. Essentially, he lays a foundation for the possibility of change and positions himself closer to alternative perspectives about the revelation. As of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Surūsh began to question practical problems caused by new rules put into effect by sharī‘ah; accordingly, he tried to instill some dynamism in the religious sphere. Therefore, his arrival at the point of “theory of prophetic dreams” is not independent of his earlier views, and perfection, in parallel with change, constitutes the focus of all his theories.

Change and related perfection can only be in question in the human realm; therefore, it should be the Prophet, and not Allah, who speaks in the Qur’ān. Once the Qur’ān is provided with human quality in terms of its image, any mistakes therein become understandable. Surūsh asks the following question: How can we get involved in the modern world if neither justice nor freedom is considered among the principles of *fiqh*?<sup>122</sup> For him, if we ascribe to God some facts that contradict contemporary science and universal values, a more serious problem will follow. Therefore, the issue is not only whether Islamic jurisprudence is in line with universal human rights, justice or freedom. Surūsh also touches upon expressions of faith in the Qur’ān, such as the anthropomorphic presentation of Allah, His sending angelic envoys to humans as the sultan of the heavens, scenes of doomsday, etc.

In brief, the theory of prophetic dreams developed by Surūsh seeks to clarify certain matters, including the conceptions of Allah, heaven and hell, the world of sovereignty, the afterlife, doomsday, and miraculous anecdotes, because these problems are hard to explain in the modern world, despite their relative reasonability in the world of

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back; if I were him, I would have never come back down.” Surūsh, *Baş-i Tajruba-i Nabawī*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Surūsh, *Baş-i Tajruba-i Nabawī*, 6-7.

<sup>122</sup> Surūsh, “Rüyārū-yi ‘rüyā’ (1),” 293.

the imagination of the past. Indeed, if it is understood that the Qurʾān’s verses are heard in dreams, controversial questions—such as whether Adam’s descendants are born out of incestual relationships, whether this contradicts the theory of perfection, how clay became flesh, the number of wings of angels, etc.—will become pointless, since it will become clear that such anecdotes only apply in the world of imagination.<sup>123</sup> Anything that happens in the realm of imagination or dreams does not have to comply with reason (the realm of the awakened). We need to seek help from the sciences, which is the language of this world, to adapt them to reason (interpret).<sup>124</sup>

Therefore, interpretation in Surūsh’s thinking means explaining the Qurʾān’s verses, seen in prophetic dreams, in a manner consistent with the language of the awakened world, or more precisely, the rules of this world. Hence, science is the language of the realm of the awakened, whereas dreams are the language of the world of sovereignty. Revelation, as a phenomenon in the quality of a dream, signifies that Qurʾānic texts, which are a product of this experience, have language and imaginative content different from real life. As a result, it is no longer necessary to construe Qurʾānic verses with regard to real life without interpretation. In addition, in employing the concept of a “dream,” Surūsh brings prophethood closer to the human experience, and explains the revelation in a more natural, rational manner. Moreover, such an explanation will bring a definitive end to debates about the “word of God.”

Surūsh uses the word “dream” instead of a mythological, representative, or metaphorical explanation about Qurʾānic language; in this way, he also wants to stress that the Prophet was not awake when he received the revelation. More precisely, the Prophet was right in his claims, and was in a passive position when he received the revelation. In other words, he had no conscious intervention in the

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<sup>123</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (7),” 243.

<sup>124</sup> In this regard, Surūsh gives the metaphor of rain as example. When we say, “it is Allah who makes it rain” and attribute the action directly to Allah, we use a symbolic language far from the causalities of real life (the language of dreams). Likewise, it is possible to explain the phenomenon of revelation as if it were the speech of Allah in the language of dreams. Nevertheless, in the real world, we have to explain all divine deeds in a natural manner, namely through causes, for the language of the awakened world is the natural sciences, which explain how Allah creates in nature. Surūsh, *Kalām-i Muḥammad*, 54, 266, 379.

process of revelation. That is, the Prophet did have a role in receiving the revelation, but did not carry it out deliberately. The Prophet received the revelation not in a reverie, but in a dream; this is important to show his unconsciousness. Therefore, despite contrary allegations by Muslim philosophers, the Prophet did not have the mission of reducing the revelatory truths—which had an image in his powerful imagination—to the inferior public understanding. Instead, the Prophet received such truths and explained them to the public as he believed and understood them. In his articles, Surūsh insists that his aim is not to claim that Qurʾānic anecdotes have a symbolic or allegorical language. Unlike Yaḥyá al-Suhrawardī, Surūsh does not see the Prophet as a man of letters who refers to figurative speech or metaphors. Muhammad was a prophet, and truths were shown to him in dreams, which are superior to being awake.<sup>125</sup>

Apparently, as a thinker of the post-Kantian world, Surūsh is convinced that both classical and alternative approaches to revelation bring different problems. Even if we are to reject the classical perspective on revelation and prefer imagination-based explanations of Islamic scholars, we still have to acknowledge a metaphysical background that is no longer applicable in terms of contemporary philosophy. In addition, since it is impossible to see the Prophet as a man of literary skills (with active imagination), dreams become the most rational way to attain hidden, invisible knowledge. This approach enables the comfort of understanding and leads to a collective solution to various problems, including scientific contradictions and surrealistic depictions, provisions belying human rights or the conception of Allah.

In this regard, the theory of dreams by Surūsh can be compared with methods employed to seek scientific explanations for miracles, or to eliminate contradictions between science and religion or reason and revelation. Indeed, these efforts try to introduce revelation, which does not seem rational today, to coincide with the rules of the real world. Surūsh, in turn, tries to realize such rationalization through an external approach and as a whole. Accordingly, he identifies the experience of revelation with dreams and its correspondence in the real world.<sup>126</sup> For

<sup>125</sup> Surūsh, “Muḥammad rāwi-yi rūyāhā-yi Rasūlānah (1),” 98.

<sup>126</sup> The nature of revelation is no different than something similar to a dream, and so is its language. Surūsh, “Rūyārū-yi ‘rūyā’ (2),” 321.

him, any expression contrary to the rules of the real world (causality) and reason cannot belong to this world.

Interestingly, Surūsh, on the one hand, distinguishes between the realms of sleep (vision, religion, theology) and being wake (reason, science, philosophy), while on the other hand, he tries to put his theory of dreams to their service. In other words, he seeks a way of bringing together these two completely separate realms by means of “interpretation.” Moreover, he proposes realizing interpretation with the help of science, which should be accepted as the language of this world. In this case, is it not paradoxical to explain the realms of dreams and being awake through one another after declaring they are two separate realms? Indeed, is not the imaginative language of religion considered necessary for, as philosophers claim, these two realms cannot be reduced to one another?

In addition, if we explain incidents in a metaphorical narrative as a manifestation of the world of sovereignty in the world of wakefulness, does this mean that the true message is missing? Indeed, the representative language, used in areas such as metaphysics—which is beyond ordinary human understanding—has to be a sign of a picture of truth that can never be entirely revealed. This may be likened to literary genres called fables. Thanks to this method, concrete language is employed to tell children (the public) about abstract values that they cannot easily comprehend. In this regard, any argument that these stories occur and end in a dream on the grounds that no such thing happens in the real world will be equivalent to a discussion on whether animals actually speak. Accordingly, in their explanation of the language of revelation through the faculty of imagination, Islamic scholars never thought it was necessary to interpret these expressions, even though they believe in an esoteric truth hidden behind them. According to them, the symbolic language of religion is a necessity for society to abide by the rules.

On the other hand, if interpretation is to be carried out with the help of sciences such as anthropology or psychology, how can we assure the authority of the Qur’ān? Once handed over to science, how can the influential aspect and sanction of the power of religion survive? On the other hand, any allegation about possible mistakes by the Prophet in interpretation means that an interpretation, which makes use of contemporary sciences, may be more accurate. Moreover, any actual interpretation will have no final meaning as long as human progress continues. Well then, how can we talk about the consistency of a

religion or a religion without constant aspects? In other words, if the Prophet can err even in issues about faith, what can the religion, which is to be reinterpreted, offer us today?

Another reasonable criticism of Surūsh is the lack of a system or integrity in which he presents his views. Regardless of their acknowledgment, the relationship between revelation and dreams throughout Islamic philosophy and Sufism is located in a meaningful position within their respective structural integrity. For instance, explanations by Islamic scholars about imagination are in parallel with their knowledge of their lifetime, coincide with their ontological and epistemological conceptions, and are well placed within the hierarchical structure of the universe. Surūsh, however, does not appropriately define dreams or imagination as necessary, even though he claims to adopt a phenomenological method before introducing his explanations; nor does he clarify the ontological or epistemological grounds of his theory.

Nevertheless, the theory of prophetic dreams, presented by Surūsh to solve the problems expressed and experienced within the framework of the Qurʾān, is worth studying for the challenges it points out, particularly with regard to the traditional approach to revelation, rather than his suggestions. Having been interested in the matter of revelation and suggested unusual theological opinions in this regard, Surūsh makes a significant contribution to the contemporary Muslim world and particularly Iran. However, while seeking solutions to the problems pointed out, Surūsh makes us doubt how faithful he is to the Qurʾān's right to express its own truth. For sure, it is open to discussion as to what extent the conceptions of revelation throughout the history of Islam reflect the genuine truth of the Qurʾān. For the Qurʾān, which is nothing but a text available to us, cannot disclose itself; it always has to be subjected to exegesis, allegorical interpretations, or the interpretations of some people. Nevertheless, this fact should not give us the right to read independently of the Qurʾān, and the hitherto relevant literature should be, I guess, a common ground where we will agree at a minimum level.

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