

## Some Dreams of Ibn 'Arabi

The following dreams are among the eighteen recorded in the Shaykh's short "Epistle of Good Tidings" (*Risâlat. al-Mubashshirât*),<sup>1</sup> whose title alludes to a famous hadith where the Prophet explains that these "'good tidings...are the dream of the *muslim*, either what that person sees or what is shown to them, which is one of the parts of prophecy.' ...So I decided to mention in this section some of what I have seen in dreams that involves a benefit for others and points out for them the means for reaching the Good, since there is no need to mention what only concerns myself."

- (When I was young), before I had acquired any religious learning, a group of my companions were strongly urging me to study the 'books of opinions' [Ibn 'Arabi's disparaging term for the books of *fiqh* ('Islamic law'), as opposed to the collections of hadith], at a time when I had no knowledge of them or of hadith. Now in a dream I saw myself as though I were standing in a wide open space, with a group of people all around me with weapons in their hands who wanted to kill me; there was no place of refuge to which I could turn. Then I saw a hill just in front of me, and God's Messenger was standing on it. So I took refuge with him, and he put his own armor on me and hugged me with an extraordinary embrace, saying to me: "O my friend, stick with me, so you will be safely in peace!" Then I looked for those enemies, but I didn't see a single one of them on the face of the earth. So from that time on I've busied myself with studying hadith.

- I saw in a dream that I was at the Sacred Shrine in Mecca, and it was as though the Resurrection had already begun. It was as though I was standing immediately in front of my Lord, with my head bowed in silence and fear of His reproaching me because of my negligence (*tafrîr*). But He was saying to me: "O My servant, don't be afraid, for I am not asking you to do anything except to admonish My servants. So admonish My servants, and I will guide the people (*al-nâs*) to the straight path." Now when I had seen how rare it was for anyone to enter the Path

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<sup>1</sup>Translations based on the text of the *Epistle* included in Yusuf al-Nabhani's *Sa'adat al-Darayn fi al-Salat 'ala Sayyid al-Kawnayn* (Beirut, n.d.), pp. 472-478 (copy thanks to Prof. Denis Gril). The Epistle is No. 485 in O. Yahya's *Histoire et Classification de l'oeuvre d'Ibn 'Arabi* (Damascus, 1964), vol. II, p. 394, where it is noted that the work is mentioned in both Ibn 'Arabi's *Fihris* (no. 71) and his later *Ijaza* (no. 76). [Subject treated in more detail in chapter 188 of *al-Futûhât al-Makkîya*, II, 375-380 in Beirut edition.]

of God I had become spiritually lazy. And that night I had resolved only to concern myself with my own soul, to forget about all the other people and their condition. But then I had that dream, and the very next morning I sat down among the people and began to explain to them the clear Path and the various evils blocking the Path for each group of them, whether the learned jurists, the 'poor' (*al-fuqarâ'*) the Sufis or the common people. So every one of them began to oppose me and to try to destroy me, but God helped me to overcome them and protected me with a blessing and lovingmercy from Him. (The Prophet) said: "Religion is admonishment (or 'straight advice,' *al-nasîha*), for God, for the leaders of the Muslims, and for the common people among them," as is mentioned in Muslim's Sahîh.

- I saw (in a dream where) it was as though I was in Mecca with the Messenger of God, in the same dwelling. There was an extraordinary connection between him and me, almost as though I was him and as though he were me. And I saw that he had a little son, such that whenever anyone came to see (the Prophet), he would have that little boy go out with him so that the people might be blessed by him and come to know him. It was as though that little one had a very special standing with God. Now we were all sitting there when someone knocked at the door, and the Messenger of God went out to see them, taking the little one along with him. Then he came back to see me and said to me: "God has ordered me to go to Medina and pray the evening prayer there." And I [the Arabic here leaves it unclear whether this is still the Prophet, speaking of the little boy, or Ibn 'Arabi now speaking of the Prophet] never leave him and never take my eye off of him; it is as though I were his very essence, for I am not him, but I am not other than him.

Now while he was between Mecca and Medina, suddenly he saw a tremendous good descending from the sky, and he said: "O Gabriel, what is this tremendous good, whose like I have not seen?" Then he said: "It descended from the loftiest paradise upon those keeping the night-vigil [*al-mutahajjidûn*: see Qur'an 17:79]. And how is it that you are among them?!" Then Gabriel began praising these keepers of the night-vigil to God with such praises as I had never heard before, and (the Prophet) was among the loftiest and noblest of them. Then I realized that this was all in regard to me and that his saying "How is it that you are among them?" was addressed in reference to me, and I woke up.

- I entered Seville to see the scrupulous, righteous Shaykh Abu 'Imran b. Musa b. 'Imran al-Martuli,<sup>2</sup> and I informed him about a matter which made him happy and which he took as good tidings. So he said to me: "May God give you good tidings of the Garden (of Paradise), as you have given me good tidings!" Not many days had gone by when I saw in a dream one of our companions, among those who had died, and I said to him: "How are you doing?" So he mentioned something good (regarding his own state), in the course of saying a great deal and telling a long story. Then he said to me: "God has already given me the good news that you are my companion in the Garden!" So I said to him: "This is (all taking place) in a dream. Give me a sign of (the truth of) what you are saying!" Then he replied: "Yes, tomorrow at the noon prayer the Sultan will send someone to look for you in order to imprison you. So watch out for yourself!"

Then I woke up, and there was nothing at all to indicate anything like that (was about to happen). But when I was praying at noon, suddenly the request came from the Sultan. So I said (to myself): "The dream was right!," and I hid out for fifteen days, until that (royal) request was cancelled. Now this is (an example of) the spiritual blessing (*baraka*) of the petitionary prayers (*du'a*) of the righteous (the *salihin*).

- I saw while I was sleeping as though God was calling out to me, saying to me: "O My servant, if you want to be close to Me, honored and enjoying delight with Me, then constantly say '*My Lord, cause me to see, that I might look upon You!*'"<sup>3</sup> Repeat that for Me many times."

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<sup>2</sup>See the account of this shaykh in *Sufis of Andalusia* (trans. R. Austin), pp. 87-91 (including accounts from both *Ruh al-Quds* and *al-Durrat al-Fakhira*); the first account begins with more detail on the same incident alluded to at the beginning of this story.

<sup>3</sup>*Rabbî ârinî anzur ilayk*: this formula of *dhikr* is very close to a famous prayer of the Prophet recorded among the hadith: "O my God, cause us to see things as they really are!" (*allâhumma ârinâ al-ashyâ' kamâ hiya*).