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Whispers of the Divine: Dreams and their Contested Place in Sunni Islamic Legal Tradition

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Abstract

Islamic law is renowned for its meticulous rules, reliance on material evidence, and detailed procedural standards. Yet, throughout Islamic history, there have been notable cases where dreams and visions, often seen as divinely inspired, have influenced legal decisions. This paper delves into the complex issue of whether and under what circumstances dreams or inspirations can be accepted as legal evidence in Islamic jurisprudence. Through the exploration of classical and contemporary scholarly views, legal texts, and historical precedents, this research aims to provide a nuance understanding of the Sunni Islamic legal perspective on the use of dreams and visions as a basis for legal rulings. The prevailing view in Sunni Islamic jurisprudence largely dismisses dreams as valid legal evidence, interpreting them as symbolic gestures or historical anomalies. However, a minority of scholars advocate for their legal relevance in specific contexts. This study proposes a more refined, intermediate position, suggesting that such experiences may serve as supplementary legal evidence under particular conditions. This study also seeks to analyze the broader theological implications of relying on non-material evidence in a legal system that traditionally values certainty and material proof. While spiritual experiences such as dreams hold great importance in Islamic thought, their place in legal matters remains a topic of debate.

Keywords: Dreams, legal impact, Shari‘ah, Islamic law, mysticism, Sufism.

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1. Introduction

Throughout Islamic history, dreams[1] and inspiration have been regarded as meaningful spiritual phenomena, often interpreted as manifestations of divine communication. Both the Qur'an and

[1] In this study, the term ‘dreams’ is used to encompass the Arabic concepts of *ru’ya* and *ḥulm.* In Islamic terminology, *ru’ya* typically refers to positive dreams or visions believed to have spiritual significance, whereas *ḥulm* denotes negative or unsettling dreams, often associated with the influence of Shaytan (Satan). Although these terms are distinct in Arabic, the English language commonly uses the single term "dreams" to describe both. The term "vision," however, is more specifically used in English to refer to experiences or perceptions occurring while one is awake. For the purposes of this study, we adopt the general term "dreams" to describe all phenomena experienced during sleep, regardless of their nature. This approach helps bridge the linguistic and conceptual gap, as *ḥulm* in Arabic can also be used in a broader sense to signify dreams as a general category. There is also the Arabic term “*ilham*”, which refers to an inspiration that a man finds within himself. That inspiration can occur while one

Hadith, along with large body of Islamic scholarship, have consistently acknowledged their importance in human life, particularly as indicators of personal spiritual guidance. However, the question of whether inspirations and dreams have legitimate place in Islamic legal rulings remains a contested issue.

Islamic jurisprudence emphasizes the necessity of material evidence, procedural rigor, and the reliance on clear, verifiable testimony when formulating legal judgments. Despite these stringent requirements, there have been noteworthy, though relatively few, instances where dreams have been cited as a basis for legal decisions. Two examples can be cited to that effect:

> The first example dates back to the Day of Yamamah in 632 CE, a pivotal battle in early Islamic history. Thabit ibn Qays, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad, advanced into battle after preparing himself for martyrdom by donning two white garments. Before joining the fray, he prayed, "O Allah, I exonerate myself from what these people (i.e., the disbelievers) have done, and I excuse myself from the actions of these (i.e., the Muslims)." He fought with great courage until he attained martyrdom. Sometime after the battle, a man saw Thabit in a dream, where Thabit revealed that his armor had been stolen and hidden in a specific location, under a saddle at a designated spot. In the same dream, Thabit entrusted the man with several bequests. When the man relayed the dream to others, they searched for the armor and, as the dream indicated, found it exactly where Thabit had described. The people then fulfilled Thabit's bequests as instructed in the dream, treating the vision as credible (Al-Dhahabi 2006, 191).

Centuries later, another man saw a vision of the Prophet Muhammad, informing him of a buried treasure. The Prophet told him that he does not have to pay the prescribed Zakah on this treasure (20% of the total amount of the treasure to be paid to the treasury house of Muslims). When the man woke up, he went to the designated location in the dream and discovered the treasure exactly as described. He presented the case to the religious scholars of his time, who, upon verifying the accuracy of the dream, relieved him of the obligation to pay the Zakah, accepting the vision as a legitimate basis for their ruling (Al-Zurqani 2003, 149).

In both of these cases, legal actions were taken that contradicted normative Islamic legal principles. In the first case, Thabit ibn Qays's bequests regarding the distribution of his inheritance were executed based solely on the testimony of a dream, without any written or witnessed documentation—key requirements under Islamic inheritance law. In the second case, the dreamer was exempted from paying the obligatory Zakah, despite the established legal ruling that mandates a fixed percentage (20%) of the value of discovered treasure to be given to the public treasury.

These cases pose fundamental questions about the intersection of dreams and Islamic jurisprudence: How can Islamic legal scholars justify using dreams as legal evidence in a system that places a high value on tangible proof and procedural rigor? What is the Islamic legal stance on dreams and visions in general? Are they ever deemed acceptable as sources of evidence, and if so, under what conditions? Additionally, how frequently do dreams and visions been invoked as a form of legal evidence in Islamic history, and how have scholars interpreted and addressed these occurrences within the framework of Shari'ah? This paper seeks to answer these questions by

is asleep or awake. In this study the researcher will not debate much the linguistic differences as the main research question is on the use of such phenomenon as sources of Islamic legal system.

exploring the extensive debate among Sunni Muslim scholars on the role of dreams and inspiration in legal rulings.

2. Research Question and Methodology

The hypothesis of this study posits that, although dreams and visions carry significant spiritual and symbolic weight within Sunni Islamic tradition, their legal status remains a subject of considerable debate. Two predominant positions emerge in this discourse. The majority stance largely rejects dreams and visions as valid sources of legal evidence, viewing their occurrences as either historical anomalies or symbolic gestures meant to underscore deeper spiritual truths, rather than as justifications for legal rulings. On the other hand, a minority of scholars argue in favor of the legal validity of inspirations and dreams, suggesting that such experiences can, in certain contexts, inform legal decisions. However, this binary characterization—between majority rejection and minority acceptance—proves to be simplistic upon closer examination. This paper contends that a more nuanced, middle-ground position exists within Islamic jurisprudence, wherein dreams and inspirations can, under specific conditions, be utilized as supplementary forms of legal evidence. This argument challenges the conventional dichotomy, proposing that Islamic jurisprudence has the capacity to incorporate spiritual experiences in a way that maintains the integrity of the legal system while acknowledging the significance of personal revelations.

Adopting an analytical and critical approach to the examination of legal texts, this paper is organized into two primary sections. The first section provides a review of the Muslim discourse on inspiration and dreams, highlighting their spiritual significance and the ways in which they are perceived within the broader Muslim community. The second section shifts focus to the legal discourse, examining the various positions taken by Muslim jurists regarding the use of dreams and inspirations as legal evidence. It identifies the key arguments supporting and opposing their legal validity. Through this exploration, the study seeks to unpack the complexity of the debate and illuminate the nuanced perspectives that have shaped the discourse, ultimately pointing to the existence of a middle-ground position that transcends the conventional binary narrative.

3. Dreams in the Islamic Discourse

Muslim scholars do not perceive dreams merely as an intuition that strikes a wise individual, nor do they regard sleep as simply a detachment from the material world, a state of unconsciousness or physiological relief. Instead, they hold that dreams and inspiration manifest the subconscious state of a person's life –his/her aspirations, preoccupations, as well as their spiritual condition. Given this perspective, dreams are seen as meaningful and should neither be dismissed nor understated.

In fact, Muslim scholars extend this view by recognizing true dreams as not solely the domain of prophets and saints but as an inherent phenomenon of human experience, an attempt to reveal hidden realities (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 149-152). Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406), a renowned Muslim historian and philosopher, argued that human nature has got the inner spiritual potentials to lift the veil of the senses through sleep. When this veil is lifted during sleep, the soul is exposed to knowledge in *'alam al-amr*, i.e. the realm of truth, sometimes allowing it to glimpse the insights it desires. This belief situates dreams and inspirations as significant phenomena in the broader spiritual and intellectual landscape of Islamic thought, highlighting their potential to reveal deeper truths (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 149-152).

In Islamic discourse, veridical dreams and inspirations have long been considered significant indicators of true prophethood, as prophetic revelation is traditionally believed to commence with truthful dreams and profound inspiration. Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350) and Ibn Khaldun contended that dreams '*ru'yah*' were the initial stages of revelation, emphasizing that the veracity of these dreams signified the truthfulness of the dreamer (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 2019, 80; Ibn Khaldun 1967, 150). Ibn Khaldun asserted that God's messengers possess a unique quality in their dreams, which spiritually prepared them for the prophetic role, rendering them more receptive to divine revelation (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 149). Ibn Khaldun highlighted that the first six months of revelation to the Prophet Muhammad were conveyed through dreams. He elaborated: "In the case of the prophets, this preparedness is a preparedness to exchange humanity for pure angelicality, which is the highest rank of spiritualia. It expresses itself repeatedly during revelations. It exists when (the prophet) returns to the level of corporeal perceptions. Whatever perception he has at that moment is clearly similar to what happens in sleep, even though sleep is much inferior to (revelation)." (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 149). Due to this resemblance, the Prophet described dreams as "one part of forty-six parts of prophecy" (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 149). While the prophets and messengers of God have an exceptional readiness for divine communication, Ibn Khaldun acknowledged that ordinary humans may also have a readiness for truthful dreams. However, this inherent capacity in humans is often hindered by their distractions of the five senses which are considered the main obstacle for spiritual realization (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 150). He says,

> "The remote preparedness is commonly found among human beings. However, there are many obstacles and hindrances that prevent man from translating it into actuality. One of the greatest hindrances is the external senses. God, therefore, created man in such a way that the veil of the senses could be lifted through sleep, which is a natural function of man. When that veil is lifted, the soul is ready to learn the things it desires to know in the world of Truth. At times, it catches a glimpse of what it seeks." (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 150).

Ibn Khaldun attributed to the self the ability to perceive truthful things not mere illusions. He said:

> "Real dream vision is an awareness on the part of the rational soul in its spiritual essence, of glimpses of the forms of events. While the soul is spiritual, the forms of events have actual existence in it, as is the case with all spiritual essences. The soul becomes spiritual through freeing itself from bodily matters and corporeal perceptions. This happens to the soul (in the form of) glimpses through the agency of sleep, whereby it gains the knowledge of future events that it desires and regains the perceptions that belong to it. When this process is weak and indistinct, the soul applies to it allegory and imaginary pictures, in order to gain (the desired knowledge) …
>
> The occurrence, in the soul, of such glimpses is caused by the fact that the soul is potentially a spiritual essence, supplemented by the body and the perceptions of the body. Its essence, thus, eventually becomes pure intellection, and its existence becomes perfect in actuality…
>
> The soul, now, is a spiritual essence having perception without the help of any of the bodily organs. However, among the spiritualia, it is of a lower species than the angels, who inhabit the highest stage, and who never had to supplement their essences with corporeal perceptions or anything else. The preparedness (for spirituality) comes to (the soul) as long as it is in the body. There is a special kind (of preparedness), such as saints have, and there

is a general kind common to all human beings. This is what 'dream vision' means" (Ibn Khaldun 1967, 148-149).

But are all human dreams true and is the veil of the senses lifted for everyone during sleep, allowing the soul to connect with the divine?

Muslim scholars have approached the question of veridical dreams from various perspectives, often examining it in relation to both the dreamer and the nature of the dream itself. Fundamentally, dreams were categorized into three primary types: the truthful dream, the satanic dream, and the self-induced dream. Ibn al-Qayyim further elaborates on this categorization, identifying three distinct sources of dreams: divine (*rahmani*), which emanates from God; self-induced (*nafsani*), arising from one's inner thoughts and desires; and satanic (*shaytani*), stemming from the whisperings of Satan (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 2019, 82).

3.1. Truthful dreams

Arabic language speakers use two distinctive terms when referring to dreams: **"***hilm***"** and "*ru'ya*." The term "*ru'ya*" typically signifies veridical or true dreams, whereas "*hilm*" may refer to both true and false dreams. Additionally, the Arabic term "*ilham*" encompasses all forms of inspiration that come to one's heart or soul, whether through a vision, a feeling, or an inner prompting. 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 1078) defines "*ilham*" as what settles in the heart without knowledge and calls for action without relying on a Qur'anic evidence or clear logical evidentiary argument" (Al-Jurjani N.D., 51).

The idea of divine inspiration also intersects with the concept of *muhaddath* (the "inspired"), a term explored by the 17th-century jurist Zayn al-Din al-Manawi (d. 1622). Al-Manawi describes a *muhaddath* as a person who, while not a prophet, is gifted with knowledge or understanding imparted to their soul through inspiration or spiritual unveiling from the angelic realm. Such individuals act or speak under divine guidance, often receiving profound insights or revelations that are later confirmed as true, as if the knowledge had been directly instilled in their heart by the divine. Al-Manawi portrays this as a unique blessing granted by God to virtuous individuals among the saints, signifying it as an exceptional level of spiritual distinction (Al-Manawi 1972, 507).

This form of inspiration or dream vision may manifest in various ways. A Muslim may hear or sense a voice from an angel, always commanding something good. If it is an illicit thought or intention, the whisper is attributed to Satan. The angel's voice might be heard or perceived in the heart as a form of intuition, as it happened to one of the Prophet's companions, whose name is 'Umran ibn Husayn (d. 673 CE). Inspiration may be communicated through dream-visions (*ru'ya*) in the form of guidance instructed by a teacher to do this or that act. In such instances, Ibn al-Qayyim delineates three criteria for judging its truthfulness. First, it does not violate any established legal boundaries; second, it does not exceed any divinely set limits; and third, it is free from error. Thus, this type of inspiration does not violate legal boundaries of the Shari'ah. Furthermore, it does not contradict legal injunctions, such as prohibitions against spying on private matters. Finally, unlike satanic inspirations—which often incite sinful deeds, disobedience, falsehood, or doubt—true inspiration is inherently infallible (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya 2019, 69-73).

How can one discern whether their dream is a true one? Moreover, is it possible for the self to be trained to recognize veridical from deceptive dreams?

3.2. Satanic Dream

In contrast to the modern psychological approach, which often lacks detailed classifications and interpretations of dreams, Islamic perspectives offer a more comprehensive and structured understanding of their types and meanings. For instance, the prophetic tradition states: "The *ru'yah*, i.e. veridical dreams, is from Allah, and the *hilm*, i.e. false dreams, is from Satan. So, if any one of you has a dream that he dislikes, let him spit lightly to his left and seek refuge with Allah from it, and it will not harm him" (Al-Bukhari 1893, 35). To differentiate between a true dream and a satanic one, two aspects must be considered: "First, if the dream presents something distressing or disliked, as Satan seeks to disturb the sleeper by showing them what will cause sadness and anxiety. Second, if the dream lacks any foundation or logical sense. For example, when a man told the Prophet that he dreamt of his head being cut off and that he was chasing after it, the Prophet replied, 'Do not tell people about the devil's play with you in your sleep.' This exemplifies a dream from Satan, characterized either by something disliked by the dreamer or by a complete lack of logic or coherence. In contrast, true dreams (*ru'yah*) are believed to come from Allah and are clear, direct, and meaningful, unlike the confusion associated with satanic dreams" (Al-Uthaymeen 2013, 2). Furthermore, a vision can often be distinguished by its positive interpretation and the joy it brings to the dreamer, whereas a satanic dream typically involves distressing and unfounded imagery intended to cause sorrow and disruption in a person's life (Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs – Kuwait 1983, 7).

3.3. Dreams from the Self (*Hadith al-Nafs*)

Does dream bring something new or is it a reiteration of curbed desires and unfulfilled needs? The Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (d. 1939), elaborated on the nature of the dreams in which he detailed the psychological relationship between the waking state of a dreamer and his/her dreams that relives him from the burden of the unachieved passions or desires (Freud 1908, 6). In his masterpiece, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud discussed Aristotelian interpretation of dreams which rejected the idea that "the dream is not a supernatural revelation, but is subject to the laws of the human spirit" and "The dream is defined as the psychic activity of the sleeper, inasmuch as he is asleep" (Freud 1908, 6). For Freud, the material in a dream originates from one's experiences, and that it's replayed or recalled during the dream (Freud 1908, 6).

Although Freud does not acknowledge the possibility of divine dreams that have no connection to personal experiences or issues, his theory partially aligns with the Muslim interpretation in the sense that some dreams reflect the mind's preoccupations, concerns, or wishes. There is a prophetic tradition that states, "There are three types of dreams: a good dream, which is glad tidings from Allah; a dream that reflects a person's inner thoughts; and a dream that brings sadness from Satan. So, if any one of you sees a dream he dislikes, let him not speak of it to anyone, but rather get up and pray" (Al-Tirmidhi 1975, 541).

In conclusion, the Islamic discourse on understanding inspirations and dreams demonstrates a sophisticated and multifaceted understanding of their significance, categorization, and impact on

a person's spiritual and legal life. Dreams are seen not merely as random mental occurrences but as deeply reflective of an individual's spiritual state and connection to the divine. By distinguishing between true *ru`yah*, satanic dreams, and those arising from personal desires, Islamic thought provides a framework for evaluating the authenticity of dreams and their potential as sources of guidance. This nuanced approach acknowledges both the spiritual and psychological dimensions of dreams, emphasizing the need for discernment in interpreting their meaning. Ultimately, while truthful dreams hold the possibility of divine insight, they are carefully regulated within the broader principles of Islamic belief system and law, ensuring that only those dreams in harmony with established divine boundaries are considered valid and meaningful.

4. The Juridical Discourse on Dreams and Inspiration as Legal Evidence

There is a consensus among Muslims that dreams and inspirations play a significant role in people's lives. Ample evidence supporting this belief can be found in both the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. The Qur'an talks about inspirations to prophets, to righteous people, to animals, etc. In the hadith, there are nearly 400 traditions that report the occurrence of inspirations and dreams and how the Prophet and the Companions responded to them (Jumu'ah 2004, 64-ff). Furthermore, Muslim scholars throughout history have dedicated extensive treatises to the study and interpretation of inspirations and dreams (Ibn Abi al-Dunyah 1995; Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani N.D.).[2] The central question that arises, however, pertains to the legal significance of such experiences. Specifically, can dreams or inspirations be admissible as valid sources of legal evidence in the derivation of Islamic rulings? If so, where do they stand within the established hierarchy of legal evidence? Additionally, what conditions or frameworks must be satisfied for such experiences to be legitimate in the formulation of Islamic jurisprudence?

In addressing such questions, Muslim jurists have presented competing positions and raised several critical inquiries. They ask whether a true dream or inspiration can be experienced by one person or should be shared by multiple individuals? Does it pertain to matters of creed, rituals, or transactions? Is it related to a strict legal command, or is it a recommendation or advice concerning specific behavior? Additionally, they question its application to the dreamer, the one inspired, or if it can be extended to the public. Sources suggest that two distinct orientations can be observed among Muslim scholars. The majority position categorically rejects the validity of inspirations and dreams as a source of legal evidence. A second position takes the opposite stance, accepting the validity of inspirations and dreams as legal evidence and a basis for legislation. There is still a third position which occupies a middle ground, contending that inspirations and dreams may serve as supporting arguments in legal cases, provided certain legal conditions are met. Modern scholarship largely adheres to this categorization and claims to support the scholarly consensus of not accepting inspiration and dreams as a source of legal evidence (Ali Jumu'ah, 2004, al-Khattab, 2023, al-Yamani, 2013). However, this research challenges this view and argues that the majority position actually aligns with the third category—acknowledging the legal relevance of inspirations and dreams, but under strict conditions. In the following paragraphs, the different positions will be reviewed and analyzed to provide a clearer understanding of the Muslim debate on the legal status of inspirations and dreams.

4.1. Dreams and Inspirations: Advocating their Legal Status

[2] (This text is derived from Ibn Hajar's commentary on Sahih Muslim).

Some scholars argue that dreams and inspirations can act as independent legal evidence on their own. In his *Fatawa*, while addressing a question about how one can be certain that his inspiration and dream vision is from God, the Shafi'i jurist Ibn al-Salah (d. 1245) asserted that "*ilham khatir al-Haqq min al-Haqq*", i.e. inspiration is a sound genuine intuition from Allah. He explained that its sign is a sense of tranquility in the heart, along with the absence of any conflicting intuitions (Ibn al-Salah 1986, 196).

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210), the renowned exegete and theologian, affirmed the validity of inspiration (*ilhām*) in Islamic legislation, viewing it as a form of "revelation" (*wahy*). He argued that revelation, though primarily associated with prophets, encompasses various forms of divine communication, each with its own distinct meaning. Al-Razi cited several examples from the Qur'an to support this view. Revelation is mentioned in connection with prophets, as Allah states: "And it is not for any human being that Allah should speak to him except by revelation" (42:51). Additionally, inspiration is mentioned in relation to the *awliya* (saints), as in the verse: "And [remember] when I inspired the disciples" (5:111), and even with ordinary individuals, as seen in the verse: "And We inspired the mother of Moses" (28:7). Lastly, inspiration is applicable to non-human entities, such as animals, as Allah says: "And your Lord inspired the bee" (16:68). While these categories of inspiration differ in their specific nature and recipients, al-Razi contended that they all represent legitimate forms of divine communication, illustrating the broad scope of inspiration in Islamic thought (al-Razi 2000, 293).

Sufi scholars have been reported to attribute an absolute legislative nature to inspiration and dreams. Abu 'Ali al-Tamimi, in his *al-Tadhkirah fi Usul al-Din*, argued that some Sufis hold the belief that knowledge is transmitted to individuals through divine inspiration, in fulfillment of God's promise, provided the person is righteous. Sufis supported this view by referencing Qur'anic verses that suggest Allah always guides the righteous. For example, "Oh you who believe, if you fear Allah, He will bless you with clear guidance," that you can use to distinguish the right from the wrong, and "Whoever fears Allah, He will ease their path," i.e. guide them to the right ruling in matters that confused people (al-Zarkashi 1994, 114).

The great sufi scholars, al-Ghazali (d. 1111) argued "the work of the heart is contemplation and witnessing the secrets of the divine kingdom, just as the work of a camel is carrying burdens. Through these means, it becomes a cause for unveiling. When the heart is purified, the truth may sometimes be revealed to it in the form of a vision or in an organized speech that resonates in the ears, which is referred to as the voice of the unseen if it occurs in a wakeful state, and as a dream if it occurs while asleep. This is one part of forty-six parts of prophethood" (al-Ghazali N.D., 19). Al-Ghazali explains why sufis place absolute trust in *Ilham* (divine inspiration) as follows:

> "Know that the inclination of the Sufis is towards divine, inspirational knowledge rather than formal, instructional learning. Therefore, they do not emphasize the study of scholarly works, the collection of what authors have written, or the investigation of various opinions and arguments. Instead, they say the path lies in prioritizing spiritual struggle, eliminating reprehensible traits, cutting off all attachments, and turning one's full attention to God Almighty. When this is achieved, God takes charge of His worshipper's heart and is responsible for illuminating it with the light of knowledge. When God takes over the heart, mercy flows upon it, light shines within it, the chest expands, the secrets of the unseen

realm are revealed, and the veil of heedlessness is lifted from the heart by the subtlety of mercy. Thus, the truths of divine matters sparkle within it. Therefore, the worshipper's role is merely to be prepared through pure purification, to maintain sincere resolve and full thirst, and to continuously wait for the mercy that God will bestow" (al-Ghazali N.D., 19).

Al-Suhrawardi (d. 1234) also argues for the validity of *ilham* as a basis for legal rulings, citing the Qur'anic verse regarding bees: "And your Lord inspired the bee, 'Take for yourself among the mountains, houses.'"(16:68) According to him, this verse affirms that Allah inspired the bees, and this type of inspiration represents a form of knowledge that arises in an elevated, tranquil soul (al-Shawkani 2000, 1017).

In the same vein, al-Dabusi argued that some of the Jahmiyyah[3] have said that *Ilham* is an evidence equivalent to the revelation heard from the Prophet Muhammad. They based their argument on a citation from the Qur'an, "And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it with its discernment of its wickedness and its righteousness" (91: 7-8) which means that Allah made it known by casting it into the heart. Another Qur'anic verse supports the same argument is "So whoever Allah wants to guide, He expands his chest to Islam; and whoever He wants to misguide, He makes his chest tight and constricted" (6: 125). Jahmiyyah considers that the expansion of the chest is by the light of knowledge, and tightness and constriction are by the darkness of ignorance (al-Sam'ani 1997, 348-349).

Al-Dabusi cites, as supporting evidence for those who consider the validity of *ilham* in forming juristic rulings, the Prophetic saying that "the insight of the believer is from the light of Allah." This suggests that *ilham*, or spiritual insight, is something that arises in the heart without the need for reasoning based on external evidence (al-Sam'ani 1997, 349). In this evidence *ilham* is considered something that occurs in the heart without the need for reasoning or evidence. Multiple prophetic traditions recommend consulting one's heart, and some even consider people's *fatwas* as a testimony to the heart's ability for discerning right from wrong. This perspective, according to the Jahmiyyah's understanding, extends even to legal matters (al-Sam'ani 1997, 349).

Al-Dabbusi's conclusion reflects a moderate stance, asserting that divine inspiration falls into two categories: those that comply with Shari'ah or those which conflict with it. When aligned with Shari'ah, inspiration is valid; when it is not compliant, it is invalid. Inspiration may originate from Allah Almighty, Satan, or oneself. If it originates from Allah, it is truthful, but if from Satan or oneself, it is considered deceptive (al-Sam'ani 1997, 350-351). He further argued that "denying the principle of divine inspiration is not permissible. It is within Allah's grace to bestow honor with this inspiration upon His servant. To distinguish between truth and falsehood in this matter, one must adhere to the Prophet's Shari'ah. If the inspiration aligns with the Qur'an and Sunnah and does not contradict them, it is considered acceptable. However, whatever does not conform to the Prophet's Shari'ah is to be rejected, as it stems from the whisperings of the self or Satan and must be dismissed. We do not deny the possibility of Allah increasing His servant's light as an honor, thereby enhancing their insight" (al-Sam'ani 1997, 352).

[3] The Jahmiyyah, or Jahmites, were the followers of Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 746 CE), an early Islamic theologian who established the Jahmi school of thought. The Jahmiyya are known for their distinctive theological positions, particularly in the areas of divine attributes and predestination.

In further support of this position, scholars who advocate for the validity of using inspiration as a legal argument cite several Prophetic traditions that reinforce their stance. One such tradition refers to the Prophet's statement: "Among the nations before you, there were people who were inspired. If there is any such person among my followers, it is 'Umar" (referring to 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab, d. 644 CE) (al-Tirmidhi 1975, 522). It is narrated that 'Umar, the third caliph in Islam, made statements on certain matters—such as the call to prayer—that were sanctioned by the revelation, suggesting that he had been divinely inspired beforehand (Ibn Hisham 1955, 509).

In summary, the majority of scholars who accept the validity of inspirations and dreams as legal evidence condition their acceptance on the requirement that such experiences align with the teachings of Shari'ah. Their endorsement is therefore not unconditional or absolute.

4.2. Dreams and Inspirations: Denying their Validity as a Legal Source

In the Islamic context, there is no denying that dreams and inspirations exist in the human life. But what is their significance? The majority of Muslim scholars have consistently maintained that dreams and inspirations do not constitute a legal foundation to provide jurisprudential rulings, cannot be considered legitimate evidence, and cannot be used to establish permissibility or prohibition.[4] However, on what basis was this conclusion reached, especially given the recognition of dreams and inspirations as attested phenomena and the arguments presented in the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the actual practices of Muslims. An even more intriguing question is why these scholars initially opposed it? Is the objection based on a lack of verifiable evidence or other underlying reasons?

Categories of legitimate proofs used in legal arguments are primarily examined in the books of *Usul al-Fiqh* (the science of the foundations of jurisprudence) under the section dedicated to legal evidence. Notably, the major classical works do not address dreams or inspirations within this context. Only a few authors reference *ilham* (inspiration) in the section on 'secondary legal evidence', typically placing it at the end of the list.[5]

Scholars who rejected the use of dreams or inspirations in legal matters based their objections on their subjective nature, the credibility and condition of the dreamer/visioner, and the inherent unreliability of the process.

In his book *Fusul Al-Bada'i' fi Usul Al-Shara'i'*, the Hanafi scholar al-Fanari (d. 1430) rejected the juristic consequences of inspiration and dreams, as presented by those who are argue for its validity, for four reasons: First, such claims can be contradicted by the same type of argument (i.e., if someone uses inspiration/dream to prove a point, another can equally use inspiration/dream to negate it). Secondly, inspirations and dreams are entangled with illusions and delusions, and thus should not be followed on their own merits unless they align with other recognized legal evidence. Furthermore, in the process of legal deduction, any hadith that contradicts the Book of God must

[4] See: For example, the Shafi'i imam Muhammad ibn Isma`il al-Qaffal (d. 365AH) (Al-Zarkashi, *Al-Bahr al-Muhit*, vol. 6, 103); and ibn Hajar al-Haytami (d. 973 AH) (See Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, *Al-Fatawa al-Kubra al-Fiqhiyya*, vol. 4 (Egypt: 'Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Hanafi, N.D.), 184.

[5] See 'Ali Jumu'ah's discussion of legal sources in 'Ali Jumu'ah, *Mada Hujjiyyat al-Ru`yah*, footnotes 68-69. He provides examples such as Imam al-Haramayn's *al-Burhan*, Al-Ghazali's *al-Mustasfa*, and al-Qarafi's *Tanqih al-Fusul* as works that make no reference to inspiration. In contrast, he cites Al-Sarakhsi's *Usul* and Ibn al-Subki's *Jam` al-Jawami* as works that include inspiration in the list of secondary legal evidence.

be rejected. By extension, other forms of statements, such as those derived from dreams, are even less admissible as evidence. Third, Al-Fanari cited the verse: "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge" (17:36), emphasizing that dreams do not provide a valid basis for confirmed knowledge. Lastly, he noted that the consensus (*ijma'*) indicates that for a prophet's words to be accepted, they must be supported by a miracle to prove his prophethood. Without this, a false prophet could not be distinguished from a true one, and accepting the words of a false prophet would be blasphemous. Therefore, the words of an ordinary person (or in this context, his inspirations) cannot be accepted as legal evidence on their own merit, as they are not supported by a miracle (al-Rumi 2006, 445-446).

Imam Al-Shawkani (d. 1250 AH), following the view of Abu Ishaq al-Isfarayini (d. 1027), argued that dreams cannot be considered evidence or used to establish legal rulings, even if the Prophet himself appears in the dream to give instructions. While acknowledging that seeing the Prophet is possible—as Satan, according to a prophetic narration, cannot impersonate him —, a dream of the Prophet cannot be accepted as legal evidence for two main reasons: first, a person who is asleep is incapable of transmitting narrations reliably due to the lack of retention. Even if someone argues that the dreamer has good retention, it is still not possible to consider the dream as a valid legal proof. If one were to convey a legal ruling from the Prophet through a dream, this would imply that the Shari'ah—which Allah prescribed for Muslims through the Prophet—is incomplete. This contradicts the Qur'anic verse: "Today I have perfected your religion for you." (5:3) There is no evidence to suggest that seeing the Prophet in a dream after his death, and hearing or witnessing his words or actions, constitutes legal proof. Rather, Allah took the Prophet after having perfected the religion for this *Ummah* through him, and there is no further need for new legal rulings after his death.[6] The mission of conveying and clarifying the Shari'ah ended with the Prophet's passing, even though he remains a messenger in both life and death. Therefore, even if the sleeper's retention were assumed to be accurate, what they see of the Prophet's words or actions in a dream is not considered evidence for them or others in the *Ummah* (Al-Shawkani 2000, 1020-21).

In this regard, al-Nawawi (d. 1277) commented on the rejection of the Qadi 'Iyad (d. 1149) to the use of dreams in legislating juridical rulings by saying the following:

> "This is the opinion of Qadi 'Iyad, and it has also been said by some of our companions and others as well. They have reported the consensus that what is established in Shari'ah cannot be changed based on what a sleeper sees. This does not contradict the saying of the Prophet, peace be upon him, 'Whoever sees me in a dream has indeed seen me,' for the meaning of the Hadith is that seeing him in a dream is genuine and not a deception of the devil. However, it is not permissible to implement a legal ruling based on it as the state of sleep does not allow for precision or verification of what the dreamer perceives or hears. There is a consensus that someone's narration and testimony cannot be accepted unless they are awake, conscious, have no memory loss or frequent mistakes, or lack precision. The sleeper does not meet these conditions, so their narration is not accepted due to their

[6] It should be noted that a *mujtahid* can originate rulings, but this process is always based on established principles or foundations within Shari'ah. Even though these rulings may be innovative in addressing contemporary issues, they are fundamentally rooted in precedents or derived from previous rulings within the framework of Islamic jurisprudence. Therefore, while this process is significant, it would be more accurate to describe it as the application or extension of existing principles rather than the generation of entirely new rules. This ensures that the rulings remain consistent with the overarching principles of Shari'ah.

> lack of precision. All of this applies to dreams related to establishing a ruling contrary to what the authorities judge. However, if one sees the Prophet, peace be upon him, instructing them to do something recommended, prohibiting something forbidden, or guiding them to act in a beneficial manner, there is no disagreement about the desirability of acting accordingly because that is not a ruling based solely on the dream but is already established in principle" (al-Nawawi 1973, 65).

In brief, dreams and inspiration cannot be legally binding according to the wording of ibn Amir al-Haj because it cannot be attributed to God. Legal evidence requires proofs as it is clear from Qur'anic references "Say: bring in your proofs if you are truthful." (2: 111) What we have here is mere delusion. Some scholars even authored treatises on gravity of the sin of those who use inspiration in legal deduction. Al-Sha'rani's (d. 1565) treatise for example is called, "The sword's sharp edge falls upon those who mandate action through inspiration" (Al-Maktaba Al-Islamiyya, 2015).

The intriguing question in this legal debate is whether the acceptance or rejection of inspiration and dreams as legal evidence is purely based on the weight of legal arguments, or if other factors come into play. Research suggests that the debate is not solely about evaluating the merits of each argument, but also about the authority and influence of different legal schools in various societies and about defending their theological positions. Proponents of using inspiration and dreams as valid legal evidence are predominantly from Sufi, Shi'i, or Jahmi theological traditions. For these groups, various forms of *wahy* (revelation, or in other words, inspirations and dreams) play a critical role in their theology. Sufis, for example, claim to have a special connection with God, to the extent that some claim they receive specific instructions regarding rituals or guidance on "sinful" acts that, if performed as directed by God, are not to be considered sinful. Many of the dreams recorded in Islamic literature pertain to sufi experiences. Ibn Hajar al-Haytami reports in his *Tuhfat al-Muhtaj* that al-Yafi'i had been inspired that if Allah permitted his slave to put on silk clothes, and then the slave obeyed this command, he would not be committing any sins (al-Haytami, N.D, 88-89). In another incident, the famous sufi imam 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani is reported to have seen, while asleep, a magnificent fire. He hears a voice coming out from this saying, "O 'Abd al-Qadir, I am your Lord. I have made permissible for you what is prohibited". 'Abd al-Qadir immediately recognized the voice as Satan's and rebuked it, saying, "Damn you, enemy of God!" He stated that what God has forbidden to His Prophet cannot be permissible for anyone else (al-Rajhi, 2024). Although the rejection of al-Jilani to Satan's instruction denotes the ability of al-Jilani to recognize the authenticity of the dream and consequently approving and accepting the true one.

Similarly, Shi'i theology, as presented by sunni scholars, relies heavily on the concept of inspiration and communication with the hidden Imams, who are believed to impart instructions to their followers. If inspiration and dreams are deemed unreliable sources, the theological foundation of Shi'i thought, according to sunni theologians, would be significantly undermined (al-Qaradawi 1994, 62).

The Jahmiyyah, based on their denial of the reality of divine speech and their assertion that Allah's speech is merely a created sound, have argued that Allah's communication with Moses (peace be

upon him) is analogous to the inspiration experienced by ordinary individuals. They contend that anyone can hear the voice of Allah in the same way that Moses did (Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 2:229, 12:402). They challenge Sunni traditional Muslim theology, which reserves direct communication with God for the prophets.

In light of these theological positions, the categorical rejection or acceptance of inspiration and dreams as legal evidence from sunni jurists becomes understandable. The acceptance was formulated to support the theological position of certain schools while the rejection was formulated as a response to the claims made by Sufis, Shi'is, and other non-orthodox theological groups, whose mystic stories often captivated the masses. Al-Dabbusi articulates this concern, noting the emergence of a Shi'i sect known as "the Beloved Ones" (*al-Muhibbin*), who claim that God appears to their hearts and communicates with them. They then use these supposed communications as legal justification for their actions, while in fact they are using their desires as gods (al-Dabbusi 2001, 393). In the same vein, Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273) states that Imam Abu Al-Abbas (d. 1229) spoke of a group from the heretical Batini sect who claimed that the general rulings of Shari'ah apply only to the wealthy and the common people, while the *'awliya'* (saints) are exempt from these laws. Instead, they assert that the saints are guided by what occurs in their hearts and judged by the thoughts that dominate them. He declared that this belief is heresy and disbelief. Anyone who holds such views must be executed without being given a chance for repentance, as it constitutes a violation of what is definitively known of the Shari'ah (al-Qurtubi 1964, 40).

To refute those who consider inspiration a legitimate legal proof, the Hanafi scholar Al-Sarakhsi (d. 1096) argues, "Whoever believes that inspiration is a valid source of legal knowledge, his testimony must be rejected, as it may stem from this erroneous conviction" (al-Sarakhsi N.D., 373).

In conclusion, while this position may seem to categorically reject the use of inspiration and dreams in the legal sphere, it raises the question of whether this rejection is truly conclusive and unconditional, or if it is primarily driven by theological concerns and sectarian apprehensions.

4.3. Dreams and Inspirations: A Balanced Perspective

Although the majority position reject the use of dreams and *ilham* (inspiration) as a legal source may appear stronger, particularly given the theological arguments against its use, Ibn Taymiyyah observes: "Those who entirely deny that inspiration can be a path [of legal evidence] are mistaken, just as those who consider it an absolutely legitimate path are also in error" (Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 10:473). A closer examination of the literature from both proponents and opponents of dreams and *ilham* reveals that they were not definitive positions. Both groups were willing to compromise. They stipulated some conditions that must be met with, rather than outright rejection.

For example, the Hanafi scholar Abu Zayd al-Dabusi asserts: "the majority of scholars have said: inspiration is an illusion, and it is not permissible to act upon it [in legal deduction] except in the absence of all other evidence and in matters where action is permitted without knowledge." (al-Sam'ani 1997, 348). In other words, while most scholars dismiss *ilham* as a primary source of Shari'ah, they leave room for its conditional use in the absence of stronger proofs. For example, Ibn Taymiyyah advised jurists who are hesitant to choose between two equal pieces of evidence

and have no clear preference, to follow their inspiration (Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 10:473). On the other hand, the renowned sufi scholar Muhyi al-Din Ibn ‘Arabi (d. 1240) stated that if someone sees the Prophet Muhammad giving them instructions in a dream, what the dreamer sees is considered legitimate legislation. Such a ruling is binding unless it contradicts an established ruling derived from a sound transmitted report that has been accepted and followed by the Muslim community” (al-Ghurab 1993, 12).

Thus, it can be argued that *ilham* or dreams belong to the “*zanni”* (speculative) category of legal evidence. While it cannot independently establish a legal ruling, it can play a supportive role in the process of legal deduction. As Ibn Taymiyyah explains, inspiration is not a primary legal source but a secondary one, used to complement other sound, legally transmitted evidence (Ibn Taymiyyah 2005, 1:250-265). At the very least, *ilham* as evidence is stronger than weak analogies, imagined presumptions, and ambiguous indicators that are often used as evidence by legal theorists. This position is held by a good number of Muslim scholars, including Ibn Daqiq al-‘Id (d. 1302), Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 1350), al-Bilqini (d. 1403), etc., (al-‘Arusi 2024).

The conditional approval of dreams and inspirations as legal evidence had been debated among scholars, focusing on the specific conditions that must be met to be recognized as valid. This debate reflects the varying legal and theological perspectives of the scholars involved. Key aspects of the discussion include the character of the individual receiving the inspiration, the frequency and consistency of such experiences, the nature of the dreams or inspiration, as well as its subject matter.

4.4. Approval Conditions

A key condition for recognizing a dream or inspiration as valid within the legal process is the evaluation of the dreamer’s character, particularly their level of piety and depth of knowledge. These qualities served as a critical criterion for both proponents and opponents of using dreams in legal deliberations, allowing them to exclude individuals whose views were perceived as unorthodox or divergent. This dynamic reflects the underlying legal and theological schism of the time. Essentially, the acceptance or rejection of an individual's dreams or inspiration often depended on their alignment with a particular doctrinal stance: if their beliefs aligned with the evaluator’s perspective, their dream or inspiration might be deemed legitimate; if not, it could be dismissed as being from Satan, or attributed to a misguided or corrupt heart.

In his "*Majmu‘ al-Fatawa*," Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) explicitly defends the validity of dreams and inspiration in making juridical rulings, based on the condition of the heart and the condition of piety and obedience of the inspired person:

> “The heart, *fortified by piety*, when it inclines towards a particular opinion, it constitutes a legitimate inclination. Whenever it occurs to him and he attains within his heart that this matter or this discourse is pleasing to Allah and His Messenger, then this inclination is deemed valid by a religious evidence. And those who refute the notion that inspiration is not a means to absolute truths have erred. Thus, *when a worshipper exerts effort in obeying Allah and maintaining piety*, his inclination towards what he favors is stronger than many weak evidences ...” (Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 20:27).

Ibn Taymiyyah elaborated on the level of purity and clarity the heart must attain to receive true inspiration. He said:

> "It is narrated from Makhul[7], from the Prophet (s) that he said, 'A worshipper does not devote himself to *worship for forty days except that Allah will cause wisdom to flow through his heart, and his tongue will articulate it*,' or in another narration, 'The fountains of wisdom will appear from his heart onto his tongue.' Abu Sulayman al-Darani (d. 830) said: When hearts gather in piety, they traverse the dominion and return to their owners with the essence of benefits, without an educator conveying knowledge to them… (Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 20:27).
>
> Omar Ibn Al-Khattab (d. 644) said: Truth shines most brightly and cannot be hidden from those who are perceptive . When nature is upright, illuminated by the light of the Qur'an, matters become evident to it …, and the darkness of misunderstandings is dispelled from it. It sees things manifestly with its unseen, unlike others…(Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 20:28).
>
> Thus, when cosmic matters unfold to the believing worshipper due to the strength of his faith, both in certainty and presumption, religious matters are easier for him to uncover through the primary means. Indeed, he is in greater need of their disclosure. The believer experiences in his heart indications towards matters he cannot express, for not everyone can articulate the existing meanings with his heart" …(Ibn Taymiyyah 2004, 20:29).

Ibn al-Qayyim follows Ibn Taymiyyah and recommended the road for true inspiration, "whoever wants their dreams to come true should strive for honesty, consume lawful food, adhere to commands and prohibitions, sleep in a state of complete purity facing the Qibla, and remember God until sleep overtakes them. By doing so, their dreams are almost never false. The most truthful dreams occur at dawn, as this is the time of divine descent, the approach of mercy and forgiveness, and the quieting of devils. In contrast, dreams during the night are influenced by the spread of devils and evil spirits." (Ibn al-Qayyim N.D., 1:83).

While Ibn al-Qayyim does not explicitly state in his writings that dreams can serve as exclusive sources or initiators of any juristic rulings, his words do not also exclude this possibility, as long as one is able to attain a special condition, his dreams are always true, and consequently influence one's judgement.

A second fundamental condition for considering the validity of dream and inspiration as legal evidence is that the dream or inspiration must not contradict established legal rulings. If they conflict with any clear legal ruling, they cannot be regarded as truthful. Instead, they may be either a product of personal imagination or a delusion from Satan. Al-Shatibi illustrated this point with an example: if someone experiences an inspiration [whatever the way through which he received such an inspiration] that a specific water source is usurped or impure, or that a certain witness is lying, it is not permissible for that person to act upon this inspiration. For instance, he cannot

[7] Makhul (d. 730), also known as Al-Makhul Al-Shami or Makhul Al-Hudhali, is a prominent hadith narrator, jurist, and memorizer, recognized as a leading scholar of the people of Al-Sham (the Levant). He is considered one of the eminent figures among the *Tabi'in* (the next generation after the Prophet Muhammad's companions) and the most renowned jurists in the region of Al-Sham.

punish the supposed “usurper,” or switch to *tayammum* (dry ablution), or reject the testimony of the witness based solely on this inspiration (al-Shatibi 1992), 332).

In other words, inspiration and dreams may only be considered in cases where no clear legal ruling exists. When faced with a situation lacking definitive legal judgment, supported only by speculative evidence, and where it is impossible to reconcile the evidence through the established principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), the majority opinion is to suspend judgment and refrain from acting on any of the speculative evidence. However, some scholars propose that inspiration/dreams can serve as a guide in such ambiguous speculative cases. Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, argues, as stated earlier, that "a heart filled with piety, when it inclines towards something by its own will, may provide legitimate evidence." He explains that if a person’s heart is guided by love for what Allah loves and hatred for what Allah hates, and they feel an inclination toward or against a particular matter, this inclination becomes a decisive factor. If the seeker has thoroughly examined the apparent legal evidence and found no clear preference, and then is inspired with a choice between two actions, this inspiration, given the seeker’s sincere intention and pious heart, can be considered a valid indicator in guiding their decision.

Alongside these two main conditions, additional guidelines have been emphasized to prevent the misuse of dreams and inspiration as a legal force. One such guideline is that rulings derived from them are to be applied exclusively to the individual receiving them, and not to anyone else. For example, *Al-Mawsu‘ah al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kuwaytiyyah* states: "It is argued that inspiration serves as evidence solely for the inspired individual (*mulham*), provided there is no conflicting textual evidence, juristic interpretation, or valid reasoning from others. Several scholars have mentioned this viewpoint. Consequently, adherence to it is obligatory for the inspired individual, and it is impermissible to apply it to others." (Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs – Kuwait 1983, 188).

One other intriguing guideline is the frequency of the dream and its occurrence among more than one person. So, if a group of people saw the same dream, then it becomes more reliable, and people are to base their attitude accordingly (al-Qayyim 2019, 82).

To what extent is this legal discussion reflected in actual legal opinions? Legal texts provide considerable evidence that jurists, when issuing *fatwas* and dealing with practical cases, have used inspiration and dreams as supportive evidence, a conclusion that supports the prevalence of the third position and not as claimed in literature of rejecting inspirations and dreams as sources of law. For example, Ibn Taymiyyah cited a truthful dream to validate a will based on a dream, asserting: "A will is valid based on a truthful dream when accompanied by indications of its truthfulness... as in the case of Thabit bin Qays, which was carried out by Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him." (al-Ba‘li 2014, 255).

Similarly, Maliki jurist Ahmad al-Dardir (d. 1786) supported the idea that the reward of reciting the Qur'an on behalf of the deceased can reach the deceased, despite this view being contrary to the established position of his own Maliki school. He justified this view by citing the visions of the righteous, stating that: "It is disliked to recite [the Qur'an] at someone's grave after their death, as this was not the practice of the early generations. However, later scholars have maintained that there is no harm in reciting the Qur'an and making *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah) and dedicating

its reward to the deceased." This, he argued, aligns with the views of the people of unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*) (al-Disuqi, N.D., 423).[8]

A third example of the use of dreams as evidence can be seen within the Hanbali school. Ibn Rajab, a well-known Hanbali jurist, discussed the issue of missed prayers and the order in which they must be performed. The Hanbali position insists that all missed prayers be performed in sequence, regardless of how many prayers are missed. The Shafi'i school, in contrast, does not obligate anything beyond making up the current missed prayer, because the fundamental principle, according to them, is that observing the proper order is not obligatory but rather recommended. Interestingly, Ibn Rajab was swayed by a dream seen by some Hanbali imams, which led him to conclude that the Shafi'i opinion is stronger. Here, once again, a dream influenced legal reasoning and shaped a jurist's final stance on a practical matter of *fiqh* (Ibn Rajab Hanbali 1996, 129).

The legal rulings discussed above illustrate the intricate debate over the boundaries between inspiration and formal legal sources in Islamic law, showing that the issue is far from a simple binary of rejection or approval. The nuances in these discussions reveal the hybrid nature of the Islamic legal system. This hybridity contributes to the flexibility and adaptability of Islamic law, allowing it to survive and thrive across different times and contexts.

5. Conclusion

In mainstream Sunni Islam, dreams and inspiration are not merely seen as sources of personal comfort and solace; they are also regarded as potential mediums of divine guidance, offering either endorsements of, or warnings against, certain actions. Despite the common misconception that dreams hold little to no significance in Islamic jurisprudence, considerable debate persists among scholars regarding their juristic implications. While the dominant discourse often presents two opposing positions on their admissibility in legal rulings, this study argues for the existence of a more nuanced, middle-ground perspective. This middle position, though often overlooked in academic discussions, incorporates elements from both extremes within carefully established parameters. It underscores the need for Muslim jurists to consider inspiration and dreams in legal deliberations, albeit in a subtle and tightly regulated manner.

One of the primary challenges in this debate is the reconciliation of personal spiritual experiences with the established legal frameworks of Shari'ah. Majoritiy sunni jurists are particularly skeptical of using inspiration as legal evidence, largely due to concerns over maintaining the credibility and integrity of Islamic law. They assert that legal rulings must rest on clear and verifiable sources, such as the Qur'an, Sunnah, and consensus *(ijma')*, and argue that the subjective nature of dreams and inspiration introduces a degree of ambiguity. This ambiguity, they claim, undermines the precision and accountability necessary for sound legal rulings, making the legal system susceptible to manipulation if personal spiritual experiences are allowed to influence legal decisions. On the other hand, proponents of the middle-ground position maintain that a/an dream/inspiration is valid as long as it does not contradict these foundational sources, thus attempting to bridge the gap between subjective experience and established legal norms.

[8] There is a reference in the text to the vision of imam al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salam confirming the validity of the legal ruling pertaining to the legality of reciting the Qur'an on behalf of the deceased.

The issue of authority also plays a central role in this discourse. The legitimacy of Islamic law is derived from its consistency in following certain procedures and its foundation in divine revelation, with legal scholars (jurists) serving as the primary interpreters of Shari‘ah. This raises a critical question: who has the authority to verify the legitimacy and credibility of an individual’s dream/inspiration? While scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim emphasize the role of personal piety and divine guidance, their reliance on internal spiritual states raises concerns about the role of external legal authorities in scrutinizing these experiences. *The challenge lies in ensuring that personal inspirations are evaluated and validated within the boundaries of* Shari‘ah *without compromising the objectivity of the legal process.* This invites further inquiry into how legal institutions might develop mechanisms to regulate the use of dreams and inspirations in judicial contexts, striking a balance between individual spirituality and the broader legal framework.

Closely tied to the issue of authority is the challenge of subjectivity. Although scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah argue that inspiration arising from a heart purified by piety can be considered valid legal evidence, it raises the difficult question of how to objectively assess the purity and piety of the individual receiving the inspiration. Islamic law is predicated on objective legal principles and procedures designed to ensure fairness and consistency. The introduction of subjective elements, such as personal inspiration, risks undermining these principles, making it imperative to establish rigorous criteria for assessing the legitimacy of such evidence. Without clear guidelines, the subjective nature of spiritual experiences could jeopardize the reliability of legal rulings, further complicating the relationship between spiritual insight and legal objectivity.

The sociopolitical implications of permitting deams and inspirations as legal evidence add another layer of complexity to the debate. Islamic law functions not only as a personal moral guide but also as a public legal system governing communities and states. Allowing dreams or inspiration to serve as legal evidence, even under strict conditions, could lead to inconsistencies in legal rulings, public confusion, and, in extreme cases, sectarian division. Historical instances of mystical or sufi groups making unchecked claims based on dreams have demonstrated the potential for divergent legal positions and, in some cases, the emergence of sectarian interpretations. Therefore, any acceptance of dreams and inspirations as legal evidence must be carefully managed to avoid undermining the coherence and unity of the legal system. This challenge underscores the delicate balance that must be struck between preserving the personal spiritual dimensions of Islamic law and safeguarding its public and communal integrity.

Theological and legal differences among scholars further exacerbate the debate. Proponents of *ilham* as a legal source often belong to Sufi or Shi'i traditions, where mystical experiences and esoteric knowledge hold central importance. Conversely, scholars aligned with mainstream Sunni orthodoxy regard such positions with suspicion. For instance, the Jahmiyya's assertion of the equivalence between divine speech and *ilham*, or the Batini sect’s claim that saints are exempt from Shari‘ah represent theological stances that scholars like al-Qurtubi and al-Dabbusi deemed heretical. The acceptance of *ilham* as an independent legal source thus transcends purely legal theory, challenging the foundational principles of Islamic orthodoxy and transforming the debate into a contested arena for competing interpretations of Islamic authority and legitimacy.

In response to these challenges, scholars have developed strict conditions for the acceptance of inspiration as legal evidence, ensuring the centrality of the legal system, the authority of jurists, and the primacy of undisputed sources of Shari‘ah. These conditions reflect an effort to maintain the integrity of Islamic law while accommodating personal spirituality within its broader legal framework. Through this lens, the nuanced middle-ground position remains a viable option, allowing for the integration of spiritual experiences without undermining the objectivity and coherence of the legal system. This balance ensures that Islamic law retains its flexibility and adaptability while safeguarding its foundational principles.

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