

Dreams and religious conversions: A study of Malaysian Muslim converts

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Summary. This study attempts to implement the Islamic mode of dream interpretation as well as assess its significance in religious conversion by examining the Muslim converts' form of dreams, whereby their dreams were studied in terms of religious dream imageries and dream elements, and eventually, the impacts of religious dream imageries and dream elements to them. It is discovered that the religious dream imageries of the seven participants were explicit and implicit with specific forms of messages such as paradise and hell revealed through dream, reminder dreams, contemplate-like dreams, and 'savior' dreams. Results also reveal that the 10 most frequent dream elements recounted by the seven participants were garment (robe), servant of God, turban, elderly person, *imam* (religious leader), lights, mosque, prayer mat, Qur'an, and sky. The results expose that the impacts of the religious dream imageries and dream elements to the participants were that they either seek for an answer, followed the instructions or hints given in the dreams, or straight away made the decisions to embrace Islam - all of which eventually led them to their conversions to Islam. Thus, dream imageries and dream elements are two aspects that rely on one another in the course of interpreting dreams. The participants' dreams show that dreams facilitated the reception of religious beliefs by providing personal experiential confirmation of incoming information or events to dreamers.

Keywords: Dream interpretation, religious conversion, Muslim converts, form of dreams, religious dream imageries, dream elements

1. Introduction

Dream is generally known to occur in sleep state, and it is inseparable from human lives since it is an overview of the content of human heart and soul in which evidences the existence of the vast spiritual realm in a normal human body cavity. In other words, dream is able to provide an insight into the self-habit and reality of human spirit and soul (Baltah Jay, 2010) which is then represented in human personality (Zarkasi, 2010). Dream is also known to be beneficial, both in religiosity and in human life (Baltah Jay, 2010) due to the fact that religiosity is positively correlated with good mental health, since religion is associated with good coping skills, lower rates of depression, higher reports of life satisfaction and happiness, lower rates of anxiety disorders, lower rates of suicide, lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse, higher self-esteem, higher rates of success in cognitive behavior therapy treatment (Salem, 2006). As dream influences human lives, educators utilize it as a form of education in order to shape human character and behavior (Baltah Jay, 2010). Hence, dream extends to a variety of knowledge disciplines such as religion, philosophy, psychology et cetera (Zarkasi, 2010).

Based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah* (legal ways of the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h.), there are basically two types of dreams, that is, truthful dreams (*ru'ya*) and false dreams

(*hulm*). Truthful dreams are dreams from God which means spiritual experiences of the soul and inspiration from God (Zarkasi, 2010). Hence, as these dreams are of Divine origin, they serve as glad tidings from God (Al-Akili, 1991; Salem et al., 2013) or premonitions (Salem et al. 2013), and thus, are regarded as a part of the revelations as mentioned in a *Hadith* narrated by Anas bin Malik r.a. that Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. said, "A good dream (that comes true) of a righteous man is one of forty-six parts of *An-Nubuwa* (Prophethood) (*Sahih Bukhari*, 2176).

In brief, truthful dreams are more likely to be experienced or received by Muslims who are pious and esoterically clean (Zarkasi, 2010; Edgar, 2007; Edgar, 2015). Dreams for such people will be a light which brightens the darkness of life journey and reveals the complicated and vague matters in front of him/her and that his/her dreams reap him/her benefits and advantages in solving all matters accordingly (Zarkasi, 2010). This condition can be explained in which truthful dreams can be a form of warning message to inform the dreamer of some impending threat or danger in the near future or to prepare him/her for some bad news (Bulkeley, 2002; Salem et al., 2013).

Ibn Khaldun proposes that God made sleep as an open door for selected people to lift the shroud of the faculties and access divine substances and higher type of knowing. In this way, when soul ended up further, the spirit can be freed from the imperatives of the outer sensations and get reflections from the unseen spiritual world. Ibn Khaldun further explained that the first revelation from God to Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. began with a dream vision which appeared as the break of dawn (Ibn Khaldun, 1967).

Therefore, Muslims believe that truthful dreams are dreams from God which means spiritual experiences of the soul and inspiration from God (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Zarkasi, 2010). Hence, as these dreams are of Divine origin, they serve as

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