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# Dreaming Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate: Dreams and Knowledge in the Works of Shaykh Dan Tafa

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## Abstract

This article explores five remarkable works (currently in unpublished manuscript form) by ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Muṣṭafā (known as "Dan Tafa") (1804–1864), a 19th-century West African Sufi scholar of the Sokoto Caliphate, to examine the ways in which dreams were (and are) theorized in the unique synthesis of Sufi, occult, philosophical/medical, theological, and exegetical disciplines that characterized discourse about dreams and dream interpretation in Muslim West Africa on the eve of colonial conquest. Concluding with a brief discussion of what these texts can tell us about Dan Tafa's conceptions of cosmology, knowledge, and the human self, and the importance thereof for African and Islamic intellectual history, we will also consider the potential relevance of Dan Tafa's work for the importance and onto-epistemological status of dreams in contemporary West African Sufi communities and attempt to understand why dreams have been and remain so important in these traditions.

## Keywords

Dreams – West Africa – Sufism – Islamic Philosophy

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> *Is not the Vision He, tho' He be not that which He seems?*
> *Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?*
> ALFRED LORD TENNYSON[1]

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> Remove the form and release being (*inzaʿ al-ṣūra wa-aṭliq al-wujūd*)!
> SHAYKH MUḤAMMAD SAMBO

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In few traditions is dreaming as epistemically and socially important as it is in Islam,[2] especially in those traditions associated with Sufism, and particularly those that flourished on the African continent. To give but one example, the Sokoto Caliphate,[3] the largest and most populous state in 19th century Sub-Saharan Africa, was founded and legitimized, in part, on the basis of a series of visionary experiences and dreams of its founder, the scholar and Sufi master, Usman dan Fodio (ʿUthmān b. Fūdī, d. 1232/1817), the grandfather of the author who is the focus of the present study.[4] But despite the import and popularity of dream accounts and dream manuals in Sufi and other Islamic traditions, academic Europhone studies of dreams and dreaming have only recently begun to catch up with and significantly attend to the importance and roles of dreams in Muslim societies and Islamic literatures. However, this limited, but rapidly-growing body of work[5] has largely neglected Sub-Saharan Africa due to lingering racial/colonial divisions in scholarship; and for similar reasons, studies of dreams and dreaming in African societies have primarily focused on non-Muslim populations.[6] Furthermore, many of these studies of dreams and dreaming remain haunted by the odd Enlightenment teleology, taken up by Freud, Jung, and most 20th-century anthropologists of Africa, that banished both dreams and African and Muslim traditions of dream-interpretation societies to the realm of the "pre-rational/irrational."[7] Thus there are only a few outstanding studies that explore in any depth Islamic and African theories of dreaming and dream interpretation, and fewer still that treat them on the same level as modern, "Western" theories of dreaming, be they psychoanalytic or neuroscientific. In works that attempt to put Islamic dream theorists "into conversation" with the psychoanalytic tradition, the conversation tends to be fairly lopsided with the psychoanalysts explaining and analyzing the Sufis and not the other way around.[8] Notable exceptions to this trend, such as the works

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[1] This work was supported by a grant from the American Philosophical Society and the University of Virginia's Institute of the Humanities and Global Cultures.

[2] Numerous traditions attributed to the Prophet attest to the profound significance of dreams, such as "nothing remains of prophecy save for the true dream" and "the true dream is one forty-sixth of prophecy," For example, see Kister, "The Interpretation of Dreams" and Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions*, pp. 60–63, and Kinberg, "Literal Dreams and Prophetic Hadiths in Classical Islam."

[3] While this designation for the jihad state founded by Dan Fodio and his followers has a complicated history, it has become the standard term in academic English to refer to this polity, see Naylor, *From Rebels to Rulers*.

[4] Dan Fodio describes this dream, which occurred after a prolonged period of spiritual exercises, particularly prayers upon the prophet, "When I reached forty years, five months and some days, God drew me to him, and I found the Lord of djinns and men, our Lord Muhammad – may God bless him and give him peace. With him were the Companions, and the prophets, and the saints. Then they welcomed me, and sat me down in their midst … He [ʿAbd al-Qādir] sat me down, and clothed me and enturbaned me. Then he addressed me as 'Imam of the saints' and commanded me to do what is approved of and forbade me to do what is disapproved of; and he girded me with the Sword of Truth, to unsheathe it against the enemies of God." (trans. in Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth*, 66. Moreover, Lamin Sanneh has demonstrated the central importance of dreams and rituals of *istikhāra* (seeking dream tidings)

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among the Jakhanke and a great number of West African Muslim social movements such as jihads or the founding of towns and schools (see Sanneh, *The Jakhanke*, 185–218).

[5] See Felek and Knysh (eds), *Dreams and Visions in Islamic societies*; Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions*; Marlow (ed.) *Dreaming Across Boundaries*; Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim tradition of Dream Interpretation*; Taufiq Fahd, "The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society;" Hermansen, "Dreams and Dreaming in Islam;" Kinberg, "Literal Dreams and Prophetic Hadiths in Classical Islam;" Crapanzano, "Saints, Jinn and Dreams;" Gouda, *Dreams and Their Meanings in the Old Arab Tradition*; Elias, "A Kubrawī Treatise On Mystical Vision;" Leah Kinberg, *Morality in the Guise of Dreams*; Nile Green, "A Brief World history of Muslim dreams;" Maroth, "The Science of Dreams in Islamic Culture;" Hermansen, "Visions as 'good to think;" Katz, "An Egyptian Sufi Interprets His Dreams;" Katz, *Dreams, Sufism, and Sainthood*; Gilsenan, "Signs of Truth;" Lutfi, "The Construction of Gender Symbolism;" Lory, "L'interprétation des rêves dans la culture musulmane;" Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*; El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*; Stefania Pandolfo, *Knot of the Soul*; Abuali, "Dreams and Visions as Diagnosis in Medieval Sufism." Notable exceptions include Chapter 8 of Lamin Sanneh's *The Jakhanke*, and Shweder and LeVine, "Dream Concepts of Hausa Children."

[6] See Jedrej and Shaw, *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, Curley, "Dreams of Power," Lohmann, "Dreams and Ethnography." Notable exceptions include Earle, "Dreams and Political Imagination in Colonial Buganda," Rasmussen, "An Ambiguous Spirit Dream and Tuareg-Kunta Relationships in Rural Northern Mali," Amalia Dragani, "The Past of Dreams: Gender, Memory and Tuareg Oneiric Inspiration."

[7] See Jedrej and Shaw, *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*, pp. 1–5 and Katherine Ewing, "Dreams from a Saint."

[8] The most obvious example is Benslama's *Psychoanalysis and the Challenge of Islam*, but even Katz's otherwise outstanding study of the North African Sufi al-Zawāwī subjects

of Amira Mittermaier, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, Eyad Abuali, Leah Kinberg, Marcia Hermansen, John Lamoreaux, and Erik Ohlander have demonstrated the profound insights and relevance more balanced approaches can have to diverse domains of Muslim life and academic disciplines (history, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, philosophy etc.). Further complicating matters, due to the same lingering colonial legacies mentioned previously,[9] scholars of Islamic intellectual history have by and large neglected Sub-Saharan Africa,[10] and scholars of Islam in Africa (mostly trained as historians) have, until recently, tended to focus on the political, socio-economic, and cultural history instead of the intellectual history of the region (this can be discerned in the recent shift from "texts to meanings": from cataloguing and demonstrating the existence of Islamic intellectual traditions in Africa to the more recent detailed examination of these traditions and manuscripts).[11] The present essay seeks to outline the theory of dreaming and interpretation developed in one poem and four short treatises by Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Muṣṭafā (1218–1280/1804–1864), known as "Dan Tafa," one of the foremost scholars of the Sokoto Caliphate, and 13th/19th c West Africa more broadly.

Taken together, these works provide a uniquely detailed understanding of the theories of dreaming and dream interpretation circulating in Muslim West Africa in the 19th century, which in turn provides us with important understanding of conceptualizations and practices of ontology, anthropology, epistemology, and much more. Located at the crossroads of the spiritual and the sensory, the individual and society, the mundane and the momentous, the microcosm and the macrocosm, epistemology and ontology, dreams and their interpretation are a particularly rich *barzakh*, a liminal reality that both unites and separates opposites, and are thus a profound source of understanding of various aspects of reality. In Dan Tafa's writings, dreams are not purely subjective experiences "in one's own head," but are characterized by their "openness" to other people, forces, spirits, and God, due to the dreamer's focus being lifted from the body and the external, physical senses to the imaginal and spiritual worlds.

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al-Zawāwī's dream experiences and interpretations to a Freudian analysis, instead of taking al-Zawāwī's framework at the same level as Freud's or employing the North African's to analyze the Austrian's. Also see Pandolfo's *Knot of the Soul* and Katherine Ewing's, *Arguing Sainthood* for similar dynamics.

[9] See Ogunnaike, "Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate," pp. 136–139.

[10] To give but one popular example, Shahab Ahmed's monumental *What is Islam?* focuses on the "Balkans to Bengal" region with only a handful of references to Sub-Saharan Africa.

[11] Amir Syed and Charles Stewart, "From Texts to Meanings."

## Shaykh Dan Tafa

ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Muṣṭafā was widely considered to be the most erudite of the second generation of scholars of the Sokoto Caliphate, one of the most powerful polities and main centers of Islamic scholarship in thirteenth/nineteenth century West Africa. Dan Tafa was born to Khadīja, a prominent female scholar and the daughter of Usman dan Fodio, in the middle of the hijra that marked the beginning of the jihad movement and founding of the Sokoto state. Dan Tafa's father, Muṣṭafā b. Muḥammad al-Turūdī (d. 1261/1845), known as Mallam Tafa, was Usman dan Fodio's personal scribe and student, and founded the school and *ribāṭ* (fortified border town) of Salame (in contemporary Northwestern Nigeria), where Dan Tafa taught after his father's death. Dan Tafa studied with his father, maternal uncles, and other scholars in Usman dan Fodio's circle. Usman dan Fodio and his clan, the Fodiawa, managed to attract and train an impressive cohort of scholars specializing in a wide variety of Islamic disciplines, and as a result, Shaykh Dan Tafa was exposed to virtually all of the Islamic sciences circulating in West Africa in the 13th/19th century: he writes of his studies in a wide variety of disciplines, from medicine, mathematics, astronomy, physics/natural sciences, geography, and history, to the sciences of the Arabic language, jurisprudence, prophetic traditions, and Qur'anic interpretation, to logic, theology, Sufism, various occult and esoteric sciences, and unusually, Avicennan philosophy as well. His intellectual life and work represent a high-water mark of Islamic scholarship in the region, just a few decades before British and French colonization. Indeed, German explorer Heinrich Barth wrote that Dan Tafa was reputed to be "the most learned of the present generation of the inhabitants of Sokoto."[12] However, much of Dan Tafa's library and many of his writings were lost when the notorious French Voulet-Chanoine military expedition sacked Salame and burned the library,[13] but many manuscripts of his works have been carefully preserved by some of his descendants who fled the British conquest of the Sokoto state and helped established a caliphate in-exile in Maiurno, Sudan, as well as by those who remained in what became Northern Nigeria, especially the late Waziri Junaidu (d. 1417/1977). Shaykh Dan Tafa's descendants and family in Maiurno and Salame have carefully collected, preserved, and collated his writings, some of which they continue to copy and teach. Waziri Junaidu, a great admirer of Dan Tafa and his works, helped direct the efforts of the State and Federal government-supported Sokoto culture and History Bureau (founded in 1973) and named after him, that has also collected, catalogued, and photographed many of the manuscripts of Dan Tafa and other important figures of the Sokoto state. But it is mostly through the tireless efforts of Shaykh Muhammad Shareef of the Sankore Institute of Islamic-African Studies International, who has collected, digitized, translated, and made critical editions of manuscripts of Dan Tafa's works from private and national collections in Sudan, Nigeria, and Mali, that Shaykh Dan Tafa's life and writings have entered recent Europhone scholarship, despite the fact that Barth's works mentioning Dan Tafa were first published 1858. The present article is based on the critical editions of texts established by Muhammad Shareef based on manuscripts in the family collections in Maiurno and those held by the Sokoto History Bureau, supplemented by manuscripts from the Salame library provided by Dan Tafa's descendant, Muḥammad al-Amīn Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir Sālāmī, the current keeper of Dan Tafa's library at the Salame Central Mosque.

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[12] Kirk-Greene, *Barth's Travels in Nigeria,* p. 260.

[13] See Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*, p. 140.

## *Shukr al-Wāhib al-Mufīḍ li-l-Mawāhib* ("Thanking the Generous Giver for the Gifts")

In this remarkable 67-line poem, Shaykh Dan Tafa lists and categorizes the various disciplines/sciences/forms of knowledge he acquired, also explaining the means by which he acquired them. He writes that he composed this poem in order to "thank the Giver for the overflow of the gifts for which we were singled out with respect to forms of knowledge. This is in order to fulfill the obligatory right of giving thanks to Him, not for fame or in order to boast of them, but rather out of desire for increase in them by means of it [giving thanks]."[14] He groups these disciplines into six categories: 1) "The sciences of the sharīʿa," such as the various Arabic linguistic sciences, *fiqh*, *kalām*, *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, and the Sufism of character development (*taṣawwuf al-takhalluq*) acquired through transmission, study, memorization; 2) "the sciences of the ancients (*ʿulūm al-awāʾil*) such as medicine, logic, arithmetic, astronomy/astrology, magic squares, and various forms of divination which he acquired through independent study of texts as well as transmission from teachers; 3) "the sciences of realities" (*ʿulūm al-ḥaqāʾiq*), such as the knowledge of the Divine Names and Attributes and the Mother of the Book (*Umm al-Kitāb*), which he acquired through spiritual realization and elevation (*taḥqīq* and *taraqqī*); 4) "the sciences of the saints

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[14] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Shukr al-Wāhib*, pp. 5–6. While the work is undated, oral traditions in Nigeria and Sudan place its composition in the last few years of Dan Tafa's life (1280–1283/1862–1864).

(*awliyāʾ*), which are the knowledge of mysteries (*al-asrār*) from the Sufi path … for which there are no neither written texts nor rational proofs" such as annihilation (*al-fanāʾ*) and the science of imaginal forms (*al-khuyulāt*) and the Shadow, which he acquired through direct experience (*dhawq*) of spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*) and divine attraction (*jadhb*); 5) "the sciences of mysteries (*al-asrār*) from outside of the Sufi path" alluded to by symbolic titles such as "the Holy Divine Sea of Jesus" and "knowledge of the letters at the opening of Qur'anic chapters," bestowed directly by God; and 6) "the sciences of secrets from the greatest unveiling, which none but we have experience and none will disclose save the Muhammadan Seal, the Mahdi, upon him be peace" such as "the knowledge of the meanings of the concealed Greatest Name" and "the sciences of the Throne," which were acquired "in a true dream during sleep … without any difficulty." While this work is significant for many reasons,[15] for the present purposes of this article, we wish to focus on the fact that in this work, dreams appear at the apex of Dan Tafa's epistemic edifice, being the means by which the most exclusive and esoteric forms of knowledge were revealed to him. His writings on dreams in other works shed some light as to this is the case; that is, why dreams play such a prominent role in his epistemology.

### *ʿUhūd wa Mawāthīq* ("Oaths and Promises")

The epistemic significance of dreams is also highlighted in another remarkable treatise of Dan Tafa's that consists of a collection of oaths. Written in 1272/1855–6, this short work outlines a series of twenty-one oaths the author has taken "at the hand of the greatest *Nāmūs* and the most noble teacher" (probably a reference to the archangel Jibrīl and/or the Prophet Muḥammad), which he has recorded to "remind himself of them" and tell others who wish to follow him in taking these oaths, described as "part of the Muḥammadan character and angelic virtues."[16] Many of these oaths are ethical in nature, such as the pledge that opens the work:

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[15] See Shaykh Muḥammad Shareef's commentary upon this work, *ʿIlāwat al-muṭālib* and Ogunnaike, "Philosophical Sufism in the Sokoto Caliphate" for a discussion of the work's significance.

[16] The first oath of this text reads, "I have taken upon myself an oath and covenant to spread the wing of mercy to all things in creation; and to view them with the same eye which the Real viewed them when He desired to create them. In this, I desire all good and sympathy for them; and to extend affection and kindness to all of them; regardless of whether they be believers, disbelievers, righteous, sinful, human, jinn, animals, plants, stones or mere clods of dirt. To this extent, I have made it obligatory to daily make an all-embracing

> I have taken upon myself an oath and a promise to spread the wing of mercy to all things in creation; and to view them with the same eye which the Real viewed them when He desired to create them. In this, I desire all good and sympathy for them; and to extend affection and kindness to all of them; whether they be believers, disbelievers, righteous, sinful, human, jinn, animals, plants, stones or mere clumps of mud. To this extent, I have made it obligatory to daily make an all-embracing supplication for the good for the whole of creation by saying: "Oh God be merciful to the whole of Your creation and suffice them where they are incapable." I say this three times every day and intend by it to fulfill this oath with the duty of holding back evil from them to the best of my ability.[17]

And:

> I have taken an oath and covenant that I will not oppose or contend with anyone in a way in which that person may dislike; even when the bad character of the individual requires me to. For, contending with others in ways that are disliked is repugnant and harmful beyond reckoning. This oath is extremely difficult to uphold, so may God assist us to fulfill it by means of His benevolence and kindness.[18]

Many of the oaths, however, deal with the ethical status of various approaches to knowledge, teaching, and the practical application of certain forms of knowledge, such as:

> I have taken and oath and covenant not to call anyone from the people to what I have acquired from philosophy (*falsafa*) and the sciences of the ancients; even though I took these sciences in a sound manner, rejecting the erroneous perspectives within them. Along with that, I will not teach these sciences to anyone in order that they may not be led astray; and errors will thus revert back to me, may God protect me. On the contrary,

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supplication for the good for the whole of creation by saying: 'Oh God be merciful to the whole of Your creation and suffice them where they are incapable.' I say this three times every day and intend by it to fulfill this oath with the duty of holding back the law from them to the best of my ability." (Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *'Uhūd wa mawāthīq*, p. 4). Translation modified by author based on the Arabic original.

[17] Ibid., p. 4.

[18] Ibid., p. 5.

> I will call them to sound knowledge (*maʿrifa*), the Qur'an, the Sunna, jurisprudence and Sufism.[19]

And:

> I have taken an oath and covenant to keep secret what is with me from the sciences of realities and secrets and to conceal my works regarding these. This is because these [are only for] an exalted group, the people of special qualities, specifically the prepared among the People of God.[20]

But most relevant to the present work is a passing remark Shaykh Dan Tafa makes at the end of another oath:

> I have taken an oath and covenant not to disclose the unseen by means of divination (*ajfār*), divinatory tables (*ziyārij*), astrology (*tanjīm*), or any forbidden (*maḥẓura*) means. Yet, all of that [knowledge of the unseen] was shown to me by true dreams. For nothing has occurred in these times except that I have seen it effortlessly in my dream before it occurred.[21]

Taken together, these oaths further illustrate Dan Tafa's epistemology and expertise in various disciplines, as well as indicating the debates in his milieu over the status and permissibility of studying, engaging in, or teaching certain forms of knowledge.[22] But perhaps most striking is the claim that the knowledge of the unseen, particularly that of future events, attained by various occult sciences such as astrology was shown to the author in dreams, rendering such disciplines not only of dubious legal status, but also epistemically irrelevant.

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[19] In other oaths, Dan Tafa rejects the flat occasionalism of some Ashʿarī theologians of his day, implicitly defending his study of the natural and occult sciences and their efficacy though "efficient causes": "I have taken an oath and covenant to consider the established principles governing the majority of existents and what emerges from these principles in terms of the effects of some things upon others. I have not disregarded the benefits and blessings which are in these. Nor am I like the small-minded who say that existing things have no effective influence at all. All the while being fully aware of the reality from which all things emerge." (Ibid., p. 5).

[20] Ibid., p. 6.

[21] Ibid.

[22] See Marcus-Sells, *Sorcery or Science?* for descriptions of some of these debates.

### *Kashf al-ghitāʾ wa-l-rayb fī dhikr anwāʿ mafātiḥ al-ghayb* ("Removal of veils and doubts by Mentioning the Kinds of Keys to the Unseen")

The nature of and relationship amongst these various means of accessing knowledge of the unseen is the subject of this longer treatise written in 1244/1828. In this work, Dan Tafa describes six "keys" of means of obtaining knowledge of the unseen: 1) the luminous key, which is revelation (*al-waḥy*) for the prophets and unveiling (*al-kashf*) for the elite among the saints (*al-awliyāʾ*); 2) the spiritual key, which consists of angelic inspirations (*ilhāmāt al-malakiyya*) and addresses from unseen voices (*mukhāṭabāt al hawātif*), also for the elite among the saints; 3) the astral key of astrology and related lettrist practices for those who practice them; 4) the imaginal (*khayālī*) key "for people of veridical dreams and *istikhāra*," 5) the symbolic (*mithālī*) key for those who use symbolic auguries such as the tracks of animals or geomancy (*khaṭṭ al-raml*); and 6) the auditory key which is understanding the speech of the Real, either without permission, like the jinn who eavesdrop on heaven, or with permission, like the Prophets and the knowers by God (*al-ʿārifūn bi-Llāh*). Dan Tafa begins by explaining the origins and limitations of these various forms of knowledge before explaining each "key" in detail and the different uses (whether blameworthy or praiseworthy) of each key by different classes of people. He begins by asserting that "God has scattered his secrets throughout existence," but the unseen (*al-ghayb*) he has kept for Himself, and it is the Real without Its creation.[23] However, God has set up ladders for his slaves by which they can be raised to know these unseen realities. Nevertheless, the knowledge of creatures is something added or external to their essence, whereas the Real knows and perceives things by Its own Essence, which is also Its Knowledge of Its Creation. Thus the Real's knowledge is prior to the world's existence, while the knowledge of creation occurs only after its creation through emanation through the Pen and the Tablet, the celestial spheres and the elements. So the perceptions and knowledge of creatures are necessarily deficient, because they are existential matters, limited by the existential deficiencies of creation when compared to the perfection of the Real. Dan Tafa makes this argument in order to explain that while "none knows the unseen except for God," (citing Qur'an 6:59, the inspiration for the work's title: "He has the keys to the unseen, no one knows them but Him"), due to this emanationist cosmology, there are certain ways, of varying degrees of reliability, of knowing the unseen, but these forms of knowledge are just so many ways of interpreting signs and indications of the unseen, the direct perception or knowledge of which is reserved for God alone.[24]

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[23] Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *Kashf al-ghitāʾ*, p. 3.

What follows is a fascinating discussion of epistemology, cosmology, and various occult and Sufi practices drawing on numerous sources and citing authorities including Ibn al-ʿArabī, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, Aḥmad al-Būnī, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Ghazālī, and even the founder of the school of Illuminationist philosophy, al-Suhrawardī *al-maqtūl* is quoted by name. But it is the work's discussion of the fourth "imaginal key," that is of greatest relevance to the present study.

Dan Tafa begins this discussion by stating that the imaginal key is "among the subtlest of keys to the unseen. Some of it is freely granted and some of it is acquired."[25] Then, following longstanding precedent,[26] he distinguishes between three kinds of given dreams: natural dreams that come from a person's natural constitution, divine dreams from the light of God hidden within a person, and spiritual dreams that come from spirits, whether angels or jinn. All these dreams occur to people without any effort or intention on their part. Acquired dreams, however, are dependent upon the sincerity and truthfulness of the dreamer, "because the imaginal faculty (*al-khayāl*) of every one is determined by his external states … and the truthfulness of his dreams follows from the truthfulness of his states."[27] Alternatively, these acquired dreams can be based on the use of names or words that give the would-be dreamer a preparedness or capacity to have the desired dream.

Dan Tafa then includes a long citation from Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, giving an example of these "dream words" (*al-hālūma*) from the *Ghāyat al-ḥakīm* (translated into Latin as the *Picatrix*) of pseudo-Majrīṭī[28] from a section of the book on contacting one's perfect nature:

> In the *Ghāya* and other books by practitioners of magic, they mention words that you say just before falling asleep so that the dream will be about the things one desires. These words are called "dream words" (*al-hālūma*), and they are: "*qaṣāghis baʿadān yaswādda waghdanis tafwanās ghādis*" then the person mentions his need and he will see what he

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[24] Ibid., p. 4.

[25] Ibid., p. 31.

[26] Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions*, pp. 59–60.

[27] Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *Kashf al-ghitāʾ*, p. 31

[28] Ibn Khaldūn appears to be responsible for attributing this work to the Andalusian mathematician Maslama al-Majrīṭī, although this attribution is now contested.

> wants unveiled for him in his sleep and it is related that a man did that after his evening spiritual exercises with his meal, and then a person appeared to him and said "I am your perfect nature." So he asked him and he informed him about what he desired. And with these words, I have had wondrous dream visions by which I came to know things about my states that I wanted to know. However, this does not prove that merely intending to have a dream can make it happen. These dream words produce a preparedness in the soul for the dream vision. If that preparedness is a strong one, (the soul) will be more likely to obtain that for which it is prepared. A person may arrange for whatever preparedness he likes, but that is no assurance that the thing for which preparations have been made will actually happen. The power to prepare for a thing is not the same as power over the thing itself. This should be known and considered in similar cases.[29]

Then Dan Tafa approvingly cites another long passage from Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima,* which describes the Avicennan modification of the Galenic account of the psychobiology of dreams[30] in which the animating spirit (*al-rūḥ al-bukhārī*) retreats inward at night from the outward senses to the inward senses/faculties due to coolness. As a result:

> The spirit withdraws from the external senses and returns to the inward faculties. The preoccupations and hindrances of sensual perception lessen their hold over the soul, and it now returns to the forms in the faculty of memory, which through combination and imaginalization are depicted as an imaginal form. Most of these pictures are customary ones, because (the soul) has only just withdrawn from the ordinary objects of sense perception. Then it sends [these forms] to the common sense, which combines all the five external senses, to be perceived in the manner of those five senses.[31]

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[29] Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *Kashf al-ghitā'*, pp. 31–32, compare with Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddima*, pp. 152–153. Ibn Khaldun records somewhat similar, but distinct "dream words" in his *Muqadimma.*

[30] See Fancy, "The Science of Sleep in Medieval Arabic Medicine."

[31] Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *Kashf al-ghitā'*, p. 34. In Rosenthal's translation, Ibn Khaldun continues, "Frequently, however, the soul turns to its spiritual essence in concert with the inward powers. It then accomplishes the spiritual kind of perception for which it is fitted by nature. It takes up some of the forms of things that have become inherent in its essence at that time. Imagination seizes on those perceived forms, and pictures them in the customary moulds either realistically or allegorically. Pictured allegorically, they require

Seemingly switching perspectives, Dan Tafa then writes, "Then know that everything the sleeper sees in his dreams is only a depiction (*tamthīl*) of what his guardian angel shows him." He cites a passage from Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-ḥabāʾik fī akhbār al-malāʾik* ("Arrangement of traditions about angels")[32] to that effect, which also explains that the angel sometimes shows the dreamer things just as they occur, but sometimes presents intelligible meanings clothed in other forms, and sometimes shows things in both ways, either to give glad tidings or warning. However, Dan Tafa also cites a comment of a certain al-Qurṭubī that "what has been transmitted from the angel has to be confirmed by the lawgiver"[33] before concluding that Ibn al-ʿArabī has written about such matters in a similar way at length, and the interpretation of dreams by the Prophet and his companions is well known, as is the book of dream interpretations of Ibn Sīrīn,[34] "so not all of that requires proof of its origin."[35]

After a brief discussion of dream incubation or seeking dream tidings (*al-istikhāra*) through Divine Names, names of spirits, arranged letters, and special trees[36] (the last of which involves jinn), Dan Tafa concludes the section with a discussion of the ways in which jinn come to learn of things hidden

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interpretation. The synthetic and analytic activity which (the soul) applies to the forms in the power of memory, before it perceives what it can (of the supernatural), is what is called in the Qur'ân 'confused dreams'. Clear dream visions are from God. Allegorical dream visions, which call for interpretation, are from the angels. And 'confused dreams' are from Satan, because they are altogether futile, as Satan is the source of futility. This is what 'dream vision' really is, and how it is caused and encouraged by sleep. It is a particular quality of the human soul common to all mankind. Nobody is free from it. Every human being has, more than once, seen something in his sleep that turned out to be true when he awakened. He knows for certain that the soul must necessarily have supernatural perception in sleep. If this is possible in the realm of sleep, it is not impossible in other conditions, because the perceiving essence is one and its qualities are always present. God guides toward the truth." (*The Muqaddima*, pp. 151–152).

[32] See Burge, *Angels in Islam*.

[33] Likely referring to Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad b. Farh al- Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), author of *Tafsīr al-jamiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*; however, I was unable to find this particular quote in his *tafsīr*.

[34] An early Muslim *muḥaddith*, versions of some of the earliest and most influential Arabic dream manuals, have been attributed to the Baṣran scholar Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (d. 110/728). See Gouda, "Dreams and Their Meanings," pp. 3–33; Lutfi, "The Construction of Gender Symbolism," and Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Traditions of Dream Interpretation*, pp. 19–23 and 55–56.

[35] Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *Kashf al-ghitāʾ*, p. 34.

[36] This could refer to the use of incense made from these plants or the practice of sleeping underneath particular trees and other places considered residences of jinn. See Fahd, "Istikhāra" for a description of similar practices historically and in in contemporary Morocco.

from human beings and can then be made to apprise them of it, and the ways in which jinn and angels can change their forms at will due to their forms being imaginal.[37] While this whole discussion is very matter-of-fact, in the work's introduction, Dan Tafa does distinguish between two aspects of this "imaginal key": true dreams and seeking dream tidings (*istikhāra*) from God and angels, which is praiseworthy, and sorcery and employing jinn, which is blameworthy.

Among the many fascinating features of this section is the way the different perspectives on dreaming from different disciplines (Sufism, philosophy, medicine, occult sciences) sit next to each other without any explicit attempt to reconcile, for example, Ibn Khaldun's Avicennan account of dreaming with al-Suyūṭī's angelic account, or to explain how pseudo-Majrīṭī's occult dream-words work. This may be a case of mere bricolage, but I believe Dan Tafa's objective here was merely to document and highlight the accounts of various authors on the "imaginal key" to the unseen and its diverse uses and conceptualizations. To understand Dan Tafa's synthesis of these various perspectives into his own theory and practice of dreaming, we must turn to two other works of his, the short *Bayān al-taʿabbudāt* ("Exposition of Devotions") and his longer treatise dedicated to the topic of dreams and their interpretation, *Muqaddima fī ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-l-taʿbīr* ("Introduction to the science of dream visions and their interpretation").

## *Bayān al-taʿabbudāt* ("The Exposition of Devotions")

This short treatise, completed on the 24th of Muḥarram, 1256 (~March 28th, 1840) when the author was 37 years old, was actually occasioned by Shaykh Dan Tafa's interpretation of a dream. At the beginning of the text, he recounts that one of his students saw the deceased Shaykh Muḥammad Sambo, the son of Usman dan Fodio and spiritual master of Dan Tafa, in a dream, who recited a verse to the dreamer:

> *Will you not tell ʿAbd al-Qādir b. Muṣṭafā*
> *To explain my worship for he who is knowledgeable?*[38]

The student then woke up, jotted the verse down on a piece of paper and went to Dan Tafa to tell him about the dream. Dan Tafa writes:

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[37] *Khayālī* or "imaginal" – that is, these forms are neither physical nor spiritual but rather "the same stuff that dreams are made of," as will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper. Ibn al-Muṣṭafā, *Kashf al-ghiṭā'*, p. 35.

[38] Ogunnaike, "A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism," p. 164.

> So I said to him, “This dream is true, if God wills,” for I had a good opinion of it because I saw in him desire for this path in addition to his being marked by righteousness. For it is known that good dreams are transmitted from the people of righteousness, as the Book and Sunna testify to that. But [good dreams are even transmitted from] other than the people of righteousness as in the story of the dream of king of Egypt, and Nebuchadnezzar the dream of the muezzin[39] and others, but the dream of the believer is more trustworthy.
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> The two shaykhs[40] related, on the authority of Anas (may God be pleased with him), that the Messenger of God (saws) said, “The dream of the believer is 1/46th of prophecy.” … Al-Tirmidhī cited, on the authority of Abū Razīn that the Messenger of God (saws) said: “The dream of the believer is 1/40th part of prophecy and it is attached to the foot of a bird until it is spoken of, and when it is spoken of, it falls. So do not speak of a dream except to one who is wise or beloved.” Al-Ṭabarānī and al-Ḍiyāʾ related, on the authority of ʿUbāda b. al-Ṣāmit, going back to the Prophet [that he said]: “The dream of the believer is a speech by which the slave is spoken to by his Lord during sleep.” Ibn Māja related, on the authority of Umm Karza al-Kūfiyya who said, “I heard the Messenger of God (saws) say: ‘Prophecy has gone and all that remains are glad tidings.’” Ibn Māja also related on the authority of ʿUbāda b. al-Ṣāmit, who said, “I asked the Messenger of God (saws) about the statement of God, Most High, *for them are glad tidings in the life of this world and in the hereafter* [10:64], and he said: ‘these are the true dreams which a Muslim sees, or which is seen about him.’” And Ibn Māja also related on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās who said, “The Messenger of God drew aside the curtain when he was sick and the people were in rows behind Abū Bakr. He (pbuh) said, ‘O people, nothing remains of the glad tidings of prophecy save for the true dream which a Muslim sees or which is seen about him.’”[41]

Next, Dan Tafa cites a long passage from al-Shaʿrānī’s *Latāʾif al-Minan*[42] concerning the nature and origin of dreams:

> ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī said in *Latāʾif al-Minan*: “ Sīdī ʿAlī al-Khawāṣṣ said, ‘These events which occur to human beings in sleep are an army of

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[39] The call to prayer (*adhān*) was reported to have been revealed to ʿAbd Allāh b. Zayd, one of the Prophet’s Companions in a dream. See Martin Lings, *Muhammad*, pp. 130–131.

[40] Bukharī and Muslim.

[41] Ogunnaike, “A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism,” pp. 164–165.

[42] See Katz, “An Egyptian Sufi Interprets His Dreams” for a discussion of dreams in this work.

> the armies of God which strengthen the belief of their possessor in the unseen if the person is deserving of that, even though that is a deficiency in regard to the right of belief.'[43] And he also used to say, 'Only an ignoramus would be negligent of what he sees in sleep. For everything the believer sees in his sleep are part of the revelation of God (*waḥy Allāh*) upon the tongue of an angel of inspiration (*ilhām*).' This is because he [the believer] could not bear the burden of revelation in waking, nor could he endure the beauty of the angel, so he brings it to him by way of the common sense (*sensus communis/al-ḥiss al-mushtaraka*) in sleep, except that the governing principle in this case is spiritual, not physical. It is known that the spirits are among the classes of angels, and angels have the power of hearing the speech of the Real without intermediary. The Most High says, *It is not for any mortal that God should speak to him save by revelation or from behind a veil or that he should send a messenger in order to reveal what He will by His leave* [42:51], so understand from this verse that were it not for the veil of mortal humanity (*bashariyya*) upon the slave, God Most High would speak to him in terms of the knowledge of the spirits."[44]

Dan Tafa then concludes this work's introduction, "So if you have understood what I have said above about the station of the dream – that it is transmitted from both the righteous and other than them – then you will understand why I strove to confirm the dream of this man and realize it by mentioning the explanation which the shaykh ordered me regarding his devotions."[45] The rest of the work consists of a discussion of Muḥammad Sambo's habits, practices, character and temperament, and his spiritual method which emphasized fasting, humility, solitary retreats for dhikr, asceticism, abstaining from wealth and power, concealing his mystical states and miracles, strict adherence to the Sunna, and teaching and learning.[46]

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[43] That is belief (*īmān*) in the unseen should not require the support of such dreams.

[44] Ogunnaike, "A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism," p. 165. Relatedly, in another hagiographic work about his master Muḥammad Sambo, Dan Tafa describes a conversation with him in which Sambo, echoing Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Jīlī, explains the importance of the imaginal faculty. In perceiving the divine reality of the Presence: "I asked him about what the Sufis claim about the vision of the Presence, and he said to me, "Know that the Presence is a locus of manifestation of essential life, and a place of self-disclosure of living perfection. It takes form in the pre-temporal obscurity, wrapped in the robes of the first self-disclosure. No eye falls upon it, and for it, no how nor where can be perceived. But it has a manifestation in the forms of some of the beliefs of slaves – it appears to them in the form in which they believe. It is not the case that they see it really and truly, but rather imaginalized (*takhayyulan*) and as images (*mithālan*). However, its vision in these forms is restricted to the heart whose character is free from impurity and harm." So know this and believe it! Know that my discussions with this master and my questions to him were many, but this will suffice as an indication of his rank since our goal is to summarize it in the sense of being specific not in the sense of being comprehensive." (Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, p. 20).

[45] Ogunnaike, "A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism," p. 166.

This short treatise provides us with an example of Dan Tafa interpreting a dream, albeit a relatively straightforward one, but it also illustrates the common theme of deceased spiritual masters imparting direction and guidance to their charges[47] and the common phenomenon of messages meant for one person appearing in the dreams of another.[48] This latter point highlights a feature noted in several studies of dreams in Muslim societies and Islamic literatures (despite widespread warnings to only share dreams with the wise and beloved): the profoundly intersubjective, social, and even public nature of dreams and dreaming. To give but one example of many, the prominent Sufi scholar and Khalwatī shaykh, Muṣṭafā al-Bakrī (d.1162/1749), recounts that he once dreamt that he received an *ijāza* in the Qādiriyya and Naqshabandiyya Sufi lineages from his contemporary, the eminent Damascene Sufi author and scholar ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731). The next day, al-Bakrī visited al-Nābulusī at his home to requests these *ijāzas* in writing, but this request apparently infuriated the latter, who exclaimed, "I [already] gave you permission! I [already] gave you permission! The two worlds are one!"[49] In other works (including the one examined below), following Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Jīlī, Shaykh Dan Tafa describes the imaginal world (*al-ʿālam al-khayāl*) as the world in which certain dreams take place, and in which his shaykh, Muḥammad Sambo, used to hold classes. In another hagiographic work about Sambo, Dan Tafa writes:

> He had a secret assembly in which they would assemble, where a chair of teaching was set up for him in the lower levels (*darakāt*) of the imaginal world. He would reveal what he willed to his aforementioned companions [among righteous humans and jinn]. Being present in body or frame was not a condition of this assembly. The arrangement of the courtyard of

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[46] Ogunnaike, "A Treatise on Practical and Theoretical Sufism."

[47] The early Shadhīlī shaykh Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī even remarked one learns more from a sheikh after his death than during his life (see Katz, "An Egyptian Sufi Interprets His Dreams," p. 16).

[48] For example, the literature on the early Tijāniyya contains numerous accounts of the Prophet appearing to shaykh Aḥamd al-Tijānī's disciples with messages for al-Tijānī (see Wright, *Realizing Islam,* pp. 100–141).

[49] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufi Visionary of Ottoman Damascus*, p. 57.

> his assembly was known by the fragrant breezes from the gifts of Beauty or the storms of Majesty. On the right side of his assembly the breezes would be present, causing elation, repose, and delight. While on the left side, the storms of sorrow, anguish, affliction, and pain would make themselves present. Sometimes, I would enquire whether the assemblies of the right were present with him, but sometimes I would forget, and I would detect them by smell. [When those of the left were present] I would be overcome with a kind of grief and anguish that is impossible to describe. Sometimes I would get a headache or sore eyes, but this would soon pass. My knowledge of this affair came from an indication from the shaykh, may God have mercy on him. As far as I know, no one other than me was aware of that [affair].[50]

In this same work, Dan Tafa describes Sambo's entry into a particular part of the imaginal world, "the earth of the White Sesame," described by Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Jīlī[51] before him:

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[50] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, p. 17.

[51] This earth of sesame refers to the "earth of reality" (*arḍ al-ḥaqīqa*), sometimes called "God's vast earth" (in reference to Q. 4:97) described in the 8th chapter of Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* as being created from a small remnant of clay, the size of a sesame seed, leftover from the creation of Adam and his "sister" the palm tree. It is described as a land so vast that all of the cosmos compared to it is like a ring in a vast desert, and is identified with the world of Divine imagination (*al-khayāl*) where spirits take on tangible forms and all tangible forms are animate. See William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God,* pp. 333, 357–358; Claude Addas, *The Quest for the Red Sulphur*, pp. 117–120; and Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial* Earth, pp. 135–143, 148–159. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, whose works Sambo taught to Dan Tafa writes, "I said to him, 'Oh my lord, what is this world called the sesame left over from the clay of Adam?' 'That is the subtle world,' he said to me, 'a world forever imperishable, a place that does not pass away with the succession of nights and days. God created it from that clay; he selected this seed from out of the whole mould, then he invested it with an authority that extended to everything, to the great as to the humble. … It is an Earth where the impossible becomes possible, where the pure figures of Imagination are contemplated with the senses.'" (qtd. in Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, p. 155). Connecting this land to the miracles mentioned in this and other passages of Dan Tafa's about the imaginal world, Al-Jīlī also writes, "From this manifestation [namely, the manifestation of the divine attributes] come the miraculous powers of the People of Aspiration (*taṣarrufāt ahl al-himam*); and from this manifestation comes the world of imagination (*ʿālam al-khayāl*) and the strange, wondrous inventions (*gharāʾib ʿajāʾib al-mukhtaraʿāt*) that take form within it; and from this manifestation comes exalted magic (*al-siḥr al-ʿālī*); and from this manifestation things take on whatever colour (*yatalawwan*) the People of Paradise (*ahl al-janna*) want, and from this manifestation come the wonders of the sesame seed (*ʿajāʾib al-samsama*) that was left over from the clay of Adam, which Ibn al-ʿArabī mentioned in his book; and

> He also witnessed with his eyes the earth of the White Sesame, leftover from the clay from which Adam, upon him be peace, was created. This earth is located on the edge of the imaginal world (*al-ʿālam al-khayāl*), which runs parallel to the sensory world. The relationship of this earth [of sesame] to this [sensory] earth is like that of the animating spirit to the body. None of the saints can enter this world except those that have attained the station of the forty. The spiritual station of the forty is well known with the spiritual masters of this affair.[52]

So for Dan Tafa, his teacher Muḥamamd Sambo, and their students, dreams could provide access to this objective, imaginal world, whose relationship to the sensory world is described as like that between the animating spirit and the physical body. That is, just as the animating spirit controls and causes motion in the body (being ontologically and causally prior), the events of the dream world are ontologically and causally prior and thus cause and control the events of the sensory world, which is like a shadow of the imaginal world. Now we are in a position to understand better Dan Tafa's extraordinary pronouncement that "nothing has occurred in these times except that I have seen it effortlessly in my dream before it occurred"[53] and the profound epistemological significance of dreams, dreaming, and both the faculty and world of the imaginal for Dan Tafa. These topics take center stage in the last work we shall consider, the Sokoto scholar's *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr* ("Introduction to the Science of Dreams and Interpretation").

## *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr* ("Introduction to the Science of Dreams and Interpretation")

This relatively short work of 14 folios opens with a useful description of the author's intention, "this is an introduction to the science of dream visions and interpretation and what interpreters use in their interpretations of dream visions. It consists of various principles (*uṣūl*) and diverse branches (*furūʿ*)."[54] The work is then divided up into eight sections (*fuṣūl*), each on a different

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from this manifestation comes walking upon the water (*al-mashī ʿalā al-māʾ*) and flying through the air (*al-ṭayrān fī al-hawāʾ*) and making the little much and the much little (*jaʿl al-qalīl kathīran wa-al-kathīr qalīlan*), and other miraculous breakings [of the natural order] (*khawāriq*)." (qtd. in Fitzroy Morrisey, *Sufism and the Perfect Human*, p. 63).

[52] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-aḥzān*, p. 18.

[53] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *ʿUhūd wa-mawāthīq*, p. 6.

[54] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr*, p. 2.

topic of dreams and their interpretation (such as the physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits of sleep (implicitly countering the overwhelmingly negative depiction of sleep as an obstacle on the spiritual path in much of Sufi literature), the symbolism of numbers in dreams, or the conditions in which the most reliable dreams occur), five principles (such as the nature of the imaginal faculty and realm) and five addenda (*awṣāl*), clarifying matters connected to the topics of the principal sections.

The work begins with a summary paraphrase of Ibn Khaldun's Avicennan/Galenic account of sleep and dreaming,[55] which was partially cited in the *Kashf al-ghitāʾ*:

> know that sleep is an expression for the retreat of the senses [normally] directed to the sensory world, they enter into the heart's cavity as a vapor which rises from there to the brain, this then causes natural events in a locus called the imaginal faculty (*al-khayāl*), located in the front of the brain. In this locus the forms of living things take shape and all of the sense perceptions which thought has grasped show themselves to it.[56]

Then the author compares the relationship between this animating spirit and the body in the states of sleep and death to the relationship between a person and his shadow in the states of motion and stillness before developing his take on what in other contexts might be called the "mind-body" problem:

> As for the state of sleep, the spirit is "located in" its bodily frame, but it lifts its gaze/focus/attention (*naẓar*) to the realm of the *malakūt*, and in that way, it brings back meanings from that realm – not in themselves, but rather by turning to look at them, although the governing spirit is not other than this spiritual gaze/focus/attention (*naẓar*).
>
> The proof of that is that you know that you know that the human spirit is not incarnate in its body, and is not separate from its spiritual position originally because if it were to separate from it, it would vanish like the vanishing of this body if it were removed from its position and its nature. Rather it turns its gaze/focus/attention (*naẓar*) to this bodily frame. As a rule, spirits are located in the place of their gaze/focus/attention (*naẓar*), and by the location of this gaze on this body, the spirit is located in it, even though it is not actually located in it. This is a wondrous matter, the

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[55] See Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddima*, pp. 150 and 542.

[56] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr,* p. 2.

> intellect does not grasp it from its perspective, but it is only known by direct unveiling or correct faith (*kashf ṣarīḥ wa-īmān ṣaḥīḥ*).
>
> *Addendum:* This spirit, when it inhabits the body in the manner we have described, acquires a depicted body (*al-jism al-mutamaththala*)[57] in which the spirit spreads its rays. It [the body] is for it [the spirit] like a tool for a craftsman from one point of view, or from another, like the shadow of a person, or from another perspective, like the chair for a sitter. In this are spiritual secrets and luminous subtleties, of which is it not permissible to disclose more than this, so let us return to our topic, which is dreams and what is connected to them.[58]

To use a more contemporary analogy, in Dan Tafa's account, the spirit seems to acquire a body the way a video game player acquires an avatar through which he or she explores the world of the video game. Or perhaps better, just as a dreamer takes on a dream body in the dream-world while dreaming, in Dan Tafa's description, this is what happens to the spirit in the state of waking; when it focuses on the physical world it acquires a form there through which it explores and interacts with that world, much as a dreamer does in a dream.

During sleep, however, the spirit shifts its gaze to another realm, like a video game player dropping the controller to focus on "the real world" and eat lunch or go for a walk outside. Other prominent Islamic dream theorists, such as ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (following Qur'an 39:42, "God takes souls at the moment of their death, and those who die not, during their sleep. He withholds those for whom He has decreed death, and sends forth the others till a term appointed") described the spirit as leaving the body during sleep to travel in the unseen world of spirits and then return with insights.[59] However, given Dan Tafa's description of the different meaning of "location" for the spirit or soul, which in their shared Akbarī cosmology, exists in a presence (*ḥaḍra*) beyond physical space, such differences in description may be more semantic than substantive.

In other sections of the treatise, Dan Tafa provides a more detailed discussion of this imaginal faculty and realm (*al-khayāl*):

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[57] Through his choice of vocabulary, namely *tamaththala*, Dan Tafa is here alluding to the Qur'anic account of appearance of the angel Jibrīl to Mary (19:17).

[58] Ibid., p. 3. Similar notions can be found in earlier Sufi literature, such as Ibn ʿAṭā Allāh's *ḥikam* (another work that Dan Tafa studied with his uncle Muḥammad Sambo) #246, "The cosmos envelops you in respect to your corporeal nature, but it does not do so in respect to the immutability of your spiritual nature." (Danner, *The Book of Wisdom*, p. 107).

[59] Gouda, *Dreams and their Meaning in the Old Arab Tradition*, p. 4.

> So understand from that that the imaginal is a level connecting meanings and sensory things. Among its functions is that it embodies in itself each meaning in what corresponds to it, and this function applies to all existents: the necessary, the possible, and the impossible. Meanings descend in it shaped in symbolic forms (*ṣuwwar mithāliya*), but they have no permanence in themselves. Those forms come from what the senses have apprehended, or from the soul's speech – and those are confused dreams that have no interpretation. But as for what apprises human beings about themselves and in which they seek guidance is not confused dreaming, but rather the conveying of information, so understand.
>
> *Section:* If you say, "How do meanings descend into this presence?" The answer is that since the imaginal is an intermediary level, it is subtler than the sensible realm so it is fitting that meanings descend in it without apparent shapes, the dream gives it [forms] from the soul's knowledge, so understand.[60]

The author also expands upon this description of the imaginal world and its relationship to the sensory world:

> *Principle:* Know that the imaginal (*al-khayāl*) is an expression for the locus in which meanings are manifest in forms. It is as if it is a copy (*nuskha*) of the sensible world and everything that happens to a person in the waking state is inscribed in the imaginal locus. Humans perceive in the dream state in accordance with their purity and capacity. So whoever is most pure imaginally, his dreams are pure and unadulterated. That depends upon his states and actions. The stronger the imaginal faculty the keener the perception (*Man kāna aqwā khayālan kāna aqrab idrākan*). Some people perceive these imaginalized forms in the storehouse of their imaginal faculty in a waking state due to the power of their imaginal faculty, just as a dreamer sees them, but this is rare and unique to the people of the path of the Prophet and saints. This is the way that we know it.[61]

This description of perceiving imaginal forms during waking life, or even perceiving waking life as a dream is reminiscent of discussions of dreams and the imaginal in the works of Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Jīlī (upon whose *al-Insān al-Kāmil*

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[60] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr*, p. 3.

[61] Ibid.

Dan Tafa wrote commentaries after studying it with his teacher, Muḥammad Sambo). For example, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*:

> The Messenger of God would say, "Indeed people are asleep and when they die they awaken." Everything one sees while awake is like this, though the states may vary. … His entire life passed this way, being but a dream within a dream. Anything one encounters is like this and is called the world of imagination (*al-ʿālam al-khayāl*), and for this reason is to be interpreted … Know that whatever is referred to as "other than God," that is, the world, is related to God as a shadow to a human being. It is God's shadow, this is the essence of the relationship of being to the world … Know that you yourself are imagination. And everything that you perceive and say to yourself, 'this is not me', is also imagination. So the whole world of existence is imagination within imagination.[62]

But returning to Dan Tafa's treatise, the author goes on to synthesize this discussion of *al-khayāl* with al-Ṣuyūṭī's (and others') discussion of the role of angels in dreams explaining:

> This imaginal locus is in the hand of an angel of God, between heaven and earth. Everything that people do in the waking state and everything thought grasps, the imaginal faculty consolidates in the hand of this angel, so when the person sleeps, the angel shows him all he has done. Some people see all of this, while others only see a little of this, and in these latter cases, this is because the sleeper is not free of the [external] sensory impressions and cogitations and there is no interpreting this sort [of dream].[63]

Following the schema of Ibn Sīrīn (who derives it from a hadith),[64] Dan Tafa goes on to describe three categories of dreams: 1) those that come from God, either giving glad tidings or warnings, 2) those that arise from the confused "self-talk" of the soul (*ḥadīth al-nafs*), and 3) those that come from the grief-causing "castings" or meddling of Satan and malicious jinn. Only this first category of veridical dreams contain intelligible meanings and can be interpreted; sometimes these veridical dreams show things just as they appear in external, sensory world, and these do not really require interpretation, while other times the meanings are shown in forms that differ from those that occur in the sensory world, and these require interpretation. While this categorization can be found in earlier works such as Ibn al-ʿArabī's and has its origins in even earlier works by Islamic philosophers and Greek sources,[65] Dan Tafa goes on to emphasize that not only can dreams be an echo of the mental preoccupations and sensory impressions of what has already occurred in waking life or a window onto the descent of meanings and events from the spiritual world into the sensory/physical world, heralding things to come, but in fact, these dreams and their interpretations can even cause these events to occur. As he writes:

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[62] Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 104.

[63] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr*, p. 4.

[64] Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions*, pp. 60–63.

> So know that everything that the dreamer sees, the form of that dream is the very bridge by which it arrives in the external world, be it substantially or accidentally or by a connection to sanctity or other than that. Likewise, when the dream is of a son, if that dreamed son has not been born yet, he is created from the that dream-vision in the loins of his father. So when the water has descended into the womb, that dream gives form to the dreamed son. But if he is not preceded by a dream, then his origination is like that of all other sons, so know that. Each son born from a dream is noticeably distinguished from others, being closer to spirits than others. So if you want to know more about this, you can see the *Meccan Openings*. He said, "so know that, for it is a wondrous secret and a correct unveiling."[66]

Later in the same work, Dan Tafa comments on the previously-cited hadith that "The dream of the believer … is attached to the foot of a bird until it is spoken of, and when it is spoken of, it falls. So do not speak of a dream except to one who is wise or beloved." He explains that the bird (*al-ṭāʾir*) is a symbolic representation of this dream-bearing angel and/or of one's fate (*al-ḥaẓẓ*) based on Qur'an 36:19, "your fate/omen (*ṭāʾirukum maʿakum*) is with you." In fact, Dan Tafa argues, this bird is the dream itself, and so when it is interpreted, it falls as well and the bird ceases to exist, since the dream has now "crossed over" from a suspended imaginal form into a concrete interpretation or physical event.[67] Later in the treatise, Dan Tafa explains how telling a dream to an interpreter can transfer the form of dream to the interpreter's imaginal faculty, and his interpretation of the dream can make it occur in the sensory world, even if the dream is just “self-talk” or satanic meddling. The author concludes:

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr*, p. 4.

[67] Ibid., p. 5.

> Know that nothing occurs to humans whether good or ill, save that we see it before it appears in our dreams. According to the statement of the Prophet, “There is not one of you who does not see in his sleep what he [will] see in his waking, whoever among you recognizes this, knows it, and whoever is ignorant of it, does not. If the dream does not appear for its subject, then it will appear for his namesake, or relative, or someone from his clan or tribe.” The prophet saw Asad b. Abī Qays in a dream in paradise after his death, while he died as an idolator. The Messenger of God interpreted the dream as referring to his son, ʿAttāb.[68]

The remaining sections of the treatise cite authorities such as Ibn Sīrīn and al-Kirmānī (the interpreter of the dreams of Hārūn al-Rashīd and the author of what is thought to be the oldest dream manual composed in Arabic) to discuss the best times of the year for reliable dreams (winter and fall), the best positions of sleep (on one’s right side), the best times for veridical dreams (the end of the night and at noon), and the symbolism of numbers, colors, and common dream elements (snakes, honey, milk, birds, etc.). One of the most remarkable things in these sections is the prominent role of puns in Arabic in decoding these symbols. As Geert van Gelder noted his study of Arabic dream manuals:

> A general characteristic of the Arabic dream-books is that almost anything can mean nearly everything, a result partly of the compilatory nature of these books and also of the inventiveness of the contributors who exploited the interpretive potential of metonymy, metaphor and paronomasia or false etymology, which are their favorite tools, together, of course, with Qur’anic and other allusions.[69]

For example, in Dan Tafa’s treatise, he writes that black (*al-sawād*) in a dream is typically a sign of worldly leadership or rule (*al-suʾdud*),[70] and he cites a case in which a man dreamed he was sold for a bushel of barley (*shaʿīr*) and the interpreter told him, “You are a man who has exchanged the Qur’an for poetry

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[68] Likely referring to ʿAttāb b. Asīd b. Abī al-ʿĪṣ b. Umayya b. ʿAbd Shams, the early governor of Mecca.

[69] van Gelder, “Dream towns of Islam,” p. 509.

[70] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Muqaddima fī l-ʿilm al-marāʾī wa-taʿbīr*, p. 7.

(*al-shʿir*)."[71] Following Ibn Sīrīn's method, Dan Tafa recommends interpreting dreams in this way using the Qur'an, hadith, and established Arabic sayings and their symbols. Elizabeth Sirriyeh points out that this kind of "punning" linguistic dream interpretation has a long history stretching back to Ancient Egyptian, Assyrian, and Greek traditions of interpretation,[72] but what is particularly fascinating here are the profound similarities between this kind of dream interpretation and classical Arabo-Islamic poetic composition and interpretation. The "favorite tools" of dream interpreters, "metonymy, metaphor, and paronomasia or false etymology,… with Qur'anic and other allusions," are also the favorite tools of Islamicate poets and literary critics. While Claude Addas and Denis McAuley have explored this close relationship between poetry and dreams in the work of Ibn al-ʿArabī[73] and Amira Mittermaier has an excellent study on the connections between poetry and dreams in a contemporary Egyptian Sufi community,[74] this area is ripe for further research. In this context, in both poetry and dreams, *khayāl* (imagination), reigns supreme, with pure meanings taking on imaginalized forms and forms taking on meanings, shaped by linguistic conventions and connections. Authors in the Akbarī tradition to which Dan Tafa belongs often liken the cosmos to Divine speech, and since poetry is ordered speech, some like Ibn al-ʿArabī, even describe the cosmos as a kind of existential poem;[75] and as we have seen above, the description of the world as shadow or dream of the Real is even more common in this tradition. Poetry seems to speak in the language of dreams, and dreams (and the imaginal faculty) seem to be where poetry springs to vivid life.[76]

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions*, 69 and Mavroudi, *A Byzantine book on dream interpretation*, 129.

[73] Addas, "The Ship of Stone" and McAuley, *Ibn Arabī's Mystical Poetics*. McAuley records a relevant statement by the Andalusian poet Ibn Ezra (d. 1138), "The composition of poetry is not a practical trade, but a spiritual one: the poet uses his imaginative faculty to a great extent, and works assiduously to produce results. That process is like the working of the common sense [ which puts together the components of dreams]." qtd. McAuley, *Ibn Arabī's Mystical Poetics*, p. 49.

[74] Mittermaier, "The Book of Visions." Dragani's "The Past of Dreams" discusses the dream inspiration of contemporary Tuareg poets. Also see Green, "A Brief World History of Muslim Dreams," pp. 154–158 for a brief discussion of dreams and literature in Muslim societies and Jacobi's "The 'Khayāl' Motif in Early Arabic Poetry." and "Al-Khayālāni" for a discussion of the meaning of *khayāl* as the ghost or apparition of the beloved in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and its development and evolution in later Arabic love poetry.

[75] McAuley, *Ibn Arabī's Mystical Poetics*, p. 45.

[76] For example, see two-volume compendium, *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*.

In any event, this relatively short treatise of Dan Tafa's brings together diverse sources on dreams and their interpretation (Qur'an, hadith, early Islamic dream manuals, the Avicennan/Galenic medical accounts found in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*, the philosophical Sufism of Ibn al-ʿArabī, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī and ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Shaʿrānī) as well as his own experiences and insights to develop a concise theory of and guide to dreaming and dream interpretation. Whereas Lamoreaux divided early Islamic dream manuals into those that were "sharīʿa-minded" and focused on Qur'an, hadith, and described dreams as signs of God revealed by an angel, and those that were more philosophical or Hellenized, in which veridical dreams were reflections of emanations from the higher aspects of the rational soul or higher realities appearing to the inward faculties of the dreamer's soul,[77] Dan Tafa's treatise, like so much else in later Islamic history, synthesizes these two approaches into a single theory.

To briefly summarize his account: during sleep, the focus of a person's animating spirit is directed away from the body towards the imaginal world (*al-ʿālam al-khayāl*) or the imaginal faculty (*al-quwwat al-khayāl*)[78] in and through which meanings and events descend from the spiritual world and are clothed with sensible forms (from the soul's knowledge) that are perceived by the dreamer. The more spiritually pure a person is, the stronger their imaginal faculty, and the keener their perception of these realities during both sleep and waking states. Because everything that exists in the world of senses also exists in the imaginal world (but not vice-versa), a person can perceive the imaginal realities of everything that will happen to him or her in dreams, but this perception of the imaginal faculty can also be muddled by the soul's "self-talk" and the grief-causing meddling of malicious jinn and Satan. Dreams and their interpretations can also be the bridges by which spiritual realities and events cross over into the world of senses. That is, dreams are not only predictive or diagnostic, but can also bring things into physical existence in time and space.

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[77] See Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation*, pp. 46–76.

[78] While Dan Tafa does not discuss the relationship between the imaginal faculty and imaginal world, Ibn al-ʿArabī, al-Jīlī, and the later Akbarī tradition generally distinguish between *al-khayāl al-muttaṣil* (continuous imagination), which is the imaginal faculty and reality of the human microcosm, *al-khayāl al-munfaṣil* (discontinuous imagination) which is a distinct, autonomous, intermediate realm of the macrocosm (which people can perceive through their imaginal faculties), often identified with the Qur'anic *malakūt* or the *ʿālam al-mithāl* (the imaginal world), where spiritual meanings take on sensory forms and sensory forms take on meanings, and *khayāl al-Ḥaqq* (the Real's imagination) or *al-khayāl al-muṭlaq* (non-delimited imagination), which is everything other than God. For example, see Mukhtar Ali, *The Horizons of Being,* pp. 59, 147–151.

In fact, due to this cascading emanationist cosmology, everything in this lower world, even a person's physical body, can be understood as a kind of imaginalized form of higher realities, like a kind of shadow play. The rest of the treatise reiterates standard advice and "best practices" for receiving and interpreting true dreams found in most other Islamic dream manuals.

## Conclusion

In her study of Islamic writings about dreams, Elizabeth Sirriyeh concludes:

> It is remarkable that, despite some differences of opinion on certain aspects of dreaming, the methodology of Muslim dream interpretation altered very little over many centuries. Guides to enigmatic dreams highlight the essentially conservative nature of the tradition from the ninth-century work of Ibn Qutayba to the seventeenth-century key to dreams of ʿAbd al-Ghani al-Nabulusi.[79]

While Dan Tafa's 13th/19th-century writings on dreams illustrate the same remarkable continuity with this tradition (particularly that of Ibn al-ʿArabī and al-Jīlī) the often strikingly original ways in which he categorizes and deploys the materials of this tradition provide a uniquely detailed understanding of the theories of dreaming and dream interpretation circulating in Muslim West Africa, complementing the widely-documented importance and practices of dreaming and dream in interpretation in the region. While Dan Tafa does not recount in detail any of his own dreams in these works, he does make striking personal claims about his dream life, such as "nothing has occurred in these times except that I have seen it effortlessly in my dream before it occurred," that he perceives imaginal forms while waking due to the power of his imaginal faculty, and that he received "the sciences of the greatest unveiling," unique to him (and potentially his family) and the Mahdi "in a true dream during sleep, effortlessly," and in other works, he provides accounts of his uncle's sojourns and teaching activities in the imaginal world.

Moreover, like other Islamic traditions of dreaming and interpretation,[80] Dan Tafa's tradition of "dream science" is still very much alive in the 15th/21st-century among his intellectual, spiritual, and physical descendants. To give but one example, in 2013, Shaykh Muhammad Shareef, who studied Dan Tafa's works with his descendants in Sudan and Nigeria, published a voluminous, 296-page commentary on Dan Tafa's poem, *Shukr al-Wāhib,* in which Shareef recounts applying some of the techniques of dreaming and interpretation described in the texts of the Fodiawa to his own dreams.[81] For the Fodiawa, dreams were and are an important and integral part of the Islamic tradition, as attested to by the Qur'an and hadith and accounts and practices of saints and scholars, all of which were and are used to interpret and understand dreams. As Amira Mittermaier concludes one of her studies on a contemporary Egyptian Sufi community, "Just as dreams are understood through the [Islamic] tradition, the tradition is understood, by some, through dreams."[82]

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[79] Sirriyeh, *Dreams and Visions*, p. 88.

[80] See Hermansen, "Dreams and Dreaming in Islam," pp. 83–86 and the works of Mittermaier for accounts of other contemporary Islamic traditions of dreaming and interpretation.

Located at the crossroads of the spiritual and the sensory, the individual and society, the mundane and the momentous, the microcosm and the macrocosm, epistemology and ontology, dreams and their interpretation are a particularly rich *barzakh*, a liminal reality that both unites and separates opposites, and are thus a profound source of understanding of various aspects of reality. Dan Tafa's works on the subject are no exception, combining discussions from several different disciplines to illustrate not only the profound importance of dreams for the Fodiawa, West African Sufism, and Muslim societies and Islamic intellectual traditions in general, but in developing arguments as to why dreaming was so central to his epistemology and that of his intellectual/spiritual milieu, Dan Tafa's works provide a rich description of the spiritual and social practices, cosmologies, forms of knowledge, and conceptions of humanity transmitted and developed in the Sokoto Caliphate. In Dan Tafa's writings, human beings are not hermetically-sealed Cartesian or Kantian subjects unable to get out of their own heads, but are rather "open" to other people, forces, spirits, and God, especially in dreams, when their focus is lifted from the body and the external, physical senses to the imaginal and spiritual worlds. While contemporary psychoanalytic or neurobiological theories of dreaming undoubtedly bear some resemblance to Dan Tafa's,[83] his are based upon radically different metaphysical, epistemological, and ontological perspectives on the nature of reality and human beings and cannot be reduced to the former. While contemporary academic theories of dreaming (and history) tend to be "bottom-up," e.g. dreams, social movements, and intellectual works are caused by biological, social, and mental processes and interactions,

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[81] Shareef, *ʿIlāwat al-muṭālib*, pp. 7, 162–164, 203, 287–292.

[82] Mittermaier, "The Book of Visions," p. 244.

[83] In fact, via the figure of Henri Corbin, certain Sufi and Islamic philosophical approaches to dreaming seem to have had some influence upon Jung and Lacan (see Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion*) and many contemporary Muslims have been influenced by and sought to combine psychoanalytic and Sufi approaches to dreams (see El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud* and Pandolfo, *The Knot of the Soul*).

Dan Tafa's and many other Akbarī theories of dreaming are more "top-down": while not denying the apparent causative links between biological, social, and psychological/intellectual phenomena, these are all understood as shadows or imaginings or dreams of the Real. In Dan Tafa's works, dreams may be caused by a vapor rising to the anterior part of the brain and dream images may come from the memories of sensory experiences stored in another part of the brain, but this vapor and its brain are themselves depicted or imaginalized forms (*ṣuwwar mutakhayyala or mutamaththala*), like the forms one sees in dreams, being shadows of higher realities.

Thus, for Dan Tafa and the heirs to his and similar spiritual and intellectual legacies, dreams are a particularly important opening onto the realm of the unseen and the non-delimited reality of being itself, accessible through spiritual practice. As illustrated above, Dan Tafa, like other writers in the Akbarī tradition, likens the relationship of the world of the spirit to the imaginal world and that of the imaginal world to the sensible world to that of an object to its shadow. Because we and the rest of the cosmos are understood to have emerged as a kind of shadow or "dream of the Real," dreams can also play an important role in overcoming our limitations and returning us to the Real, as al-Ghazālī wrote,

> Do you not see how when you are asleep you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring, and, so long as you were in the dream condition, have no doubts about them? Is it not the case that when you awakened you knew that all you had imagined and believed was unfounded and ineffectual? When then are you confident that all your waking beliefs are genuine? Perhaps in another state, such as the ecstasy of the Sufis, you will go beyond the intellect. Perhaps the life of this world is like a dream in comparison to the world to come.[84]

Like a play within a play, dreams can be the site where the world of forms turns against its own confines, waking us up to the nature and limitations of everyday life and opening up onto what lies beyond, as Dan Tafa recounts in the following account of his conversation with his maternal uncle and master, Muḥammad Sambo:

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[84] Al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance From Error,* p. 23. In the same vein, Ibn al-ʿArabī writes, "The only reason God placed sleep in the animate world was so that everyone might witness the Presence of Imagination and know that there is another world similar to the [everyday] sensory world." (Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p. 119).

> I asked him about the knowledge of realities and he said to me: “Remove the form and release being (*inzaʿ al-ṣūra wa-aṭliq al-wujūd*)!” This statement contains all of the knowledge of realities with the utmost transcendence. He told me one time, when I asked him from where the cosmos originates, “Recite His saying, *Have you not seen your Lord, how he extends the shadow, had He willed he would have made it still,* [*then we made the sun its driver and then we withdraw it to us with a gentle withdrawal*] (Q. 25:45). That sufficed me and I was contented.[85]

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[85] Ibn Muṣṭafā, *Salwat al-Aḥzān*, p. 19.

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