

# Dreaming and Reality: The Concept of Dayeɛ/ɛlaleɛ Dreams in the Akan Worldview

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**Summary.** Dreams embody a collective understanding across cultures, reflecting both individual and shared archetypes and desires (Heneise, 2017). This communal view connects to broader cultural narratives. While some see dreams as insights into human psychology, others view them as illusions or aspects of reality. In the Ghanaian social context, dreams reflect concerns about identity and relationships. Whether it is a deceased relative revealing the location of buried gold or an unknown figure impacting the dreamer, the Akan actively interpret these experiences. Dreams can both empower individuals and evoke anxieties about social disconnection. For the Akan, the conceptualization of dreams stems from a belief system that dualizes the human person as both a spiritual and physical entity, as does the world itself. The narrations and experiences of the interviewees highlight the significance of dreams among the Nzema and Asante Akan. The discussion centres on the argument that the Akan conceptualization of dreams acknowledges the sociality of the dream object situated within the matrix of Indigenous social relationships. Using qualitative methods in data collection, I examine the significance and interpretation of dreams in Ghanaian culture, as well as their role in shaping beliefs and decision-making within Ghanaian society.

**Keywords:** Dream, Akan worldview, Indigenous Religious traditions, Pentecostal Charismatic Churches, Personhood

## 1. Introduction

Dreams have captured our imagination and curiosity, leading to fascinating explorations from various angles. The notion represents a collective understanding that goes beyond different cultures and societies. They are not just individual experiences; they also reflect a shared reality among all human beings. Dreams capture both personal and collective archetypes and desires (Heneise, 2017).

The phenomenon has been examined from different perspectives. Schredl states three scientific approaches to the study of dreams: psychoanalysis, the insights of academic psychology, and the discoveries of neuroscience (Schredl, 2010, p. 135). He goes on, based on his research to define a dream or a "dream report," as "the recollection of mental activity that has occurred during sleep" (Schredl, 2010, p. 137). For Schredl, dreaming, as a mental activity during sleep, is not directly measurable" (Schredl, 2010, p. 137). This is based on the different stages a person passes through when dreaming before waking up, which raises the question of the validity of dreams.

Li et al are also of the opinion that "dreams presented the full picture of the current state of mental consciousness, including the unconscious aspects... dreams also compensated for self-conscious attitudes" (Li et al., 2023, p. 1). Dennett perceives that dreams "are experiences that occur during sleep" (Dennett, 1976, p. 152). In Hall's thinking, however, dreams even though are symbolic nature, they are also

purely personal one. He propounded a thesis that "dreams are the embodiment of the person's whole personality and that they deal with inner problems that the person is facing. Dreams are creative and can serve as starting points for exploring and addressing inner problems" (Hall, 1953, p. 1), meaning that dreams provide a platform to exhibit one's inner fears. By dreaming about them, an individual can act on those fears. Each perspective unveils a unique layer of understanding about the mysterious world of our dreams.

Narratives on the reality of dreams have been an unsolicited topic that has emerged unconsciously in various qualitative studies conducted among the Akans over the years. I had never considered it, despite the phenomenon emerging from several interlocutors' stories, which often connected a dream they had to their situation. What piqued my interest in delving deeper into the dream phenomenon and collecting specific data on it was a handwritten book that my father had, which I stumbled upon after his death.

My father, the late Alexander Alex Kwasi Nrenzah, was born on August 25, 1939, and died on August 20, 2011. He was a man of deep faith as a Christian, although later in his life, he combined his Christian faith with Eckankar. My father was a Nzema Akan man, and he died intestate; his estate automatically going to his extended family unless contested in court. However, his children agreed that the family could take his possessions, with the exception of his books. The inherited books spanned diverse disciplines; however, English, Nzema, and religion were the major ones. A recent vacation with my mum allowed me to scan through these books and I found several personally written books that chronicled my father's activities he engaged in in his dreams. The books were dubbed "Lessons from the Infinite Father." Each story in the books had written on it the date it occurred. Sometimes, the story is straightforward, and other times, it was winding and added another layer to the same dream. The book reminded me of my childhood when my father sometimes asked us in the morning about what we had dreamt about. I remember telling him about my dreams

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Submitted for publication: March 2025

Accepted for publication: June 2025

DOI: 10.11588/ijodr.2025.2.110227

all the time, and my siblings did, too, but not as often. My family eventually nicknamed me “Joseph the Dreamer” due to the regularity of my dreams, but it took going through my father’s handwritten dream book to remind me of my childhood experiences and the many casual stories shared by interviewees in previous research that I had overlooked. This reflection catalyzed my inquiry. From this background, I aimed to investigate the deep meaning and interpretation of dreams from the Akan cultural point of view, emphasizing how important they are in forming opinions and influencing choices in Ghanaian society.

## 2. Method

The research was conducted in the Ashanti regional town of Agona and its surrounding area, as well as in the Western regions, specifically at Bonyire in the Jomoro District and its surrounding area. The data was gathered using qualitative techniques. The execution mode involved in-depth, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews with key informants and individual participants, who shared their personal life experiences related to the theme. The inquiries focused on the significance and interpretation of beliefs, attitudes, and practices related to dreams among a carefully selected group of participants, specifically the Nzema and Asante Akan. The data collection period was from January 2024 to June 2024. The narratives selected from thirty participants comprise a relatively equal gender distribution of males and females. Only six narratives have been cited directly in this work. The selection of the six stories was based on the perceived reality of the dreams, culture, indigenous belief systems, Christianity, and Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches (PCC), rather than gender, as it was derived from all the data collected. The study explored the concept of dreams among the Akans, specifically the Nzema and Asante, while also referencing other ethnic groups in Ghana and across Africa.

The Akan people are one of the principal ethnic groups in West Africa, inhabiting Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and other parts of West Africa that speak the Twi/Akan language. The term ‘Akan’ refers to a group of societies sharing cultural features and a common linguistic phylum. They are located between Comoë in Ivory Coast and Volta in Ghana (Antwi, 2017, p.93; Pavanello, 2019, p.69). In Ghana, they constitute 49.1% of the entire population and inhabit approximately two-thirds of Ghana’s land area (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 77). The Nzema are part of the Akan ethnic group, which occupies the southwestern part of Ghana, bordering the Ivory Coast (Nrenzah 2015, 182), while the Asante people are predominantly located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, an administrative region situated in the central part of the country, usually called the middle belt. The Ashanti Region shares its borders with Brong-Ahafo to the north, the Eastern Region to the east, the Central Region to the south, and the Western Region to the southwest.

The Asante call it “dream *dayeɛ*,” and the Nzema *ɛlaleɛ*. *dayeɛ* or *ɛlaleɛ* has two meanings among these two ethnic groups. The first and most important emphasizes what happens during sleep. *ɛlalowɛlɛ/sumsum* is a person’s shadow. The idea is intricately woven into the definition of a person, which will be discussed later in this paper. The second meaning represents hope, yearning to be or do something in the future. My concern in this paper is to explore the meaning ascribed to the first by these Akan ethnic groups. For the Akan, activities in our sleep and dreams

are not just dreams but relatively accurate, spiritual ways of communication with oneself, the supernatural, and/or other spirit beings. According to Pavanello, the dreaming state is clearly defined within the specific Akan “dream culture,” which firmly upholds the belief in the reality of dreams (Pavanello, M., 2016). Akesson accentuates this fact by stating that in dream life, the Akan dialogues with his dead relatives. He explains this with a person’s shadow, stressing that “the shadow is not a reflection of the human frame but is *Sunsum*, a spirit, and therefore has the senses and is susceptible to pain. The *Sunsum*, the duplicate of the body of the Akan...” (Akesson, 1965, p.288). This explains why an Akan child or elder walking in the sun with another person will not allow the other to step on their shadow.

The Akans are not alone in their ideas of dream activities. Mbiti, a Christian minister and scholar, in his examination of the Yansi people, was forceful in arguing that the “coming of Christianity has not erased this African dream culture” (Mbiti, 1997, p. 511). He argues further that “from a stroll around a village in the early morning, as people are arising from sleep and recounting and discussing the night’s dreams; before some undertaking, such as going on a hunt in the forest or going to the farms, people recall their dreams to assess their chances of success” (Mbiti, 1997, p.511). In Nigeria, Turner reports on “the idea of learning to dream differently and properly as a Christian ‘spiritist’” (Turner, 1967, pp. 122-123); but also about the “praying Battalions” of Christ Apostolic Church in Nigeria who gather “to pray and sleep to have dreams to recount and to be interpreted in a specialized service” (Peel, 2018, p. 168).

Analyzing the meaning of dreams that link the physical to the spiritual among the Akans and Africans differs somewhat from that of other ethnicities. However, Ullman’s metaphor of dreams provides a theoretical framework for interpreting the data collected on these two Akan groups (Asante and Nzema). Ullman makes an interesting point in his book that “the images of our dreams turn out to be metaphorically crafted references to feelings and concerns that surface while we are asleep. If their metaphorical message could be unraveled, their connection to life experiences, present and past, would become apparent. Asleep and dreaming, we are, in effect, creating visual metaphors of a highly personal and intriguing nature” (Ullman, 2006, p. 2).

This paper asserts that the Akan understanding of dreams acknowledges the social nature of the dream object, embedded within the framework of Indigenous social relationships that flow between the physical and spiritual realms, encompassing not only humans but also the natural world. This paper will investigate the composition of a person in Akan, the narratives of the dreamer, the significance and interpretation of dreams in the Akan Culture, and the role of dreams in shaping beliefs and decision-making.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Composition of a Person in Akan

The understanding of a person in the Akan worldview encompasses the beliefs and perceptions that the Akan hold regarding individuals. In the ultimate perspective, a person is the foundation, centre, and ultimate purpose of everything. Other elements of life gain significance only for individuals. Regardless of social status, gender, or race, all people are recognized, accepted, valued, and respected for

who they are. The worth of a person is of great importance to the Akan people, as well as to Africans in general, to the extent that it is a central theme in African philosophy (Antwi, 2017, p. 93).

According to Akan Indigenous Religious Traditions (IRTs), reality has two dimensions: the material or physical, which is what we see and can touch, and the immaterial, spiritual, or metaphysical, which is what we do not see. This means that the seen and unseen are as much a part of reality in Akan cosmology. Humans thus have material and immaterial portions, which must function in concert with each other for humans to have meaningful experiences while living in the world.

The Akan also conceive of a person as being made up of an intangible or spiritual component and a tangible physical component. The spiritual and intangible have two components that differ only in terms of their functions, as they contribute to both human experience and the physical world. The Akan philosopher Kwame Appiah, perhaps, offers a more straightforward summary of the Akan concept of a person in his tripartite analysis of body, spirit, and soul. A person comprises a body, known as *nipadua*, created from the mother's blood (the *mogya*), an entity called the *okra*, and an individual spirit called the *Sunsum*, which is the principal bearer of one's personality (Appiah, 2004, p. 28).

The *nipadua/mogya* (blood) is one component of personhood – the portion that is physical or material, or, metaphorically, the *mogya* (blood). The body is inherited from the mother, but shaped by *Nyame*, the creator of forms. Thus, all children are connected because they share their mothers' blood. This underscores Akan matriliney as a matrilineal inheritance system. Interestingly, this aspect of human conception *nipadua/onipa/nipa* is ambiguous in meaning. Two prominent contemporary Ghanaian philosophers, Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, address this same concept differently. The Akan word "onipa" can mean both a member of a species and a human with a specific social status (Wiredu, 1992a). Wiredu suggests this distinction highlights the difference between a human as a biological entity and a person as one with special moral and metaphysical qualities. Gyekye, however, posits that a person/individual is a byproduct of the commune, in other words, the society or community, stressing that "Akan community is a communalistic type but not individualistic" (Gyekye, 1996, pp. 35-37). These two assertions do not rule out the *nipadua/mogya* blood as a component of what the Akan perceive. The body serves as an envelope for the spiritual elements of *sunsum* and *okra*.

The Akan refer to one as the *okra* (often translated as soul in English). The *okra*, a sort of life force that departs from the body only at the person's last breath, is sometimes as with the Greeks and the Hebrews, identified with breath and is often said to be sent to a person at birth, as the bearer of one's *nkrabea*, or destiny, from *Nyame* (Antwi, 2017, p. 95). The *Okra* is the innermost self, the essence of an individual. *Okra* is the source of life, identified with a person's breath – the manifestation of life. It is divine and is donated by *Onyame*, God, as a small part of Him in a person, and it does not die. The "sparkle of God" within a person is also the bearer of a person's destiny. *Okra* is responsible for consciousness or awareness of one's environment. The *Okra*'s departure from a person means death. When a person dies, it is said in Akan, "his/her *kra* (soul) has left him/her." The "okra" makes humans unique among God's crea-

tures – other creatures do not have *okra*. Animals and some plants possess a spiritual element known as *sasa*. The *Okra* is the seat of human conscience or the "voice of God within" (Nana Gyapa Ameyaw, March 7, 2024). This explains the saying "*all humans are the children of God; no one is a child of the earth*". It reflects a belief in the divine-human connection, as represented by the *Okra*. As the seat of conscience, it is responsible for guiding behaviour. It offers sound advice in moments of decision-making. For instance, one who makes wrong moral choices is said to have refused to listen to their *conscience*. It is believed that the *Okra* guards a person, so if one listens to their inner voice during decision-making, they will make a good moral decision.

For the Akan, God make no mistakes in his creation because He predestines it. Every person's *okra* was created on a specific day. –and it is the day of the week on which one would be born –and that person is given a name to denote that day. These names are referred to as "kradin" or "day names". The name of the day on which God created the *okra* of the person.

The third and final element of the person is the *Sumsum* (or the personality spirit), which is the most important for this discussion, as it is not of divine origin but is believed to be inherited as a substance called *ntoro* from the father through the seminal fluid during conception. All children inherit the *sunsum* of their father in the form of *ntoro*. *Sunsum* is the individual manifestation of a father's *ntoro* (Herskovits, 1937, pp. 2870-2880; McCaskie, 2015, p. 162). The *Sunsum*, unlike the *okra*, may leave the body during life and does so; for example, in sleep, dreams are thought to be the perceptions of a person's *Sunsum* based on its nightly peregrinations (Antwi 2017 p. 95). *Sumsum* determines a person's unique personality traits, including character, voice, manner of speaking, weaknesses, boldness, jealous disposition, imposing personality, shyness, quarrelsomeness, kindness, and so on.

Another role of the *sumsum* is spiritual protection. It is the aspect of humans that participates in the spiritual universe, engaging with other spiritual beings. Dreams are important contexts for these spiritual engagements (Appiah-Sekyere, 2018, p. 24; Antwi, 2017). The Akan notion is that during sleep, the *Sumsum* can leave the body to enter the spirit world, where it engages other spiritual entities. Dreams, then, are escapades involving a person's *sunsum*. A weak *sumsum* renders its owner vulnerable to spiritual attack, especially from witches. Whereas a strong *Sumsum* physically protects a person in dreamland. If a person is a witch or a wizard, it is in the context of dreams that they encounter the *sumsum* of their victims. As the dream narratives I recount reveal, such spiritual happenings have consequences for a person's mundane activities. Dreaming and the dreamland is an extension of the physical. If everything goes well in a dream, it guarantees success for the Akan; however, when events do not go well in the dream, they must find a solution to it before havoc is wreaked. So, the background in the spiritual world and a person's composition inform their attitude to dreams.

### 3.2. Narratives from the 'Dreamer'

Dreams occur during sleep and are a personal experience that only the dreamer can fully benefit or lose. The dreams discussed here serve as the foundation for our analysis. The narratives reflect the dreamers' cultural perspectives on reality, the place of the *Nananom* (ancestors), society, be-

iefs, reincarnation, and other themes. I narrate dreams as told by participants or dreamers. The point of doing so is to provide readers with firsthand information on the dreamer's raw views and thoughts, as an Akan first and a Christian, but most importantly, how the Indigenous belief system functions in their lives. The stories that follow will pique the reader's interest in understanding the analysis of the dreams presented in the subsequent section.

**Mame Adjoba, a fifty-year-old university professor, tells her story.** I recall a dream I had when I was about twelve years old, in Form Two of secondary school. I had dreamt about a bunch of people holding knives and clubs coming my way while walking on the street. When I saw them, I started walking faster than usual, but as I got closer, I doubled my pace and took another direction. However, they also pursued me in that direction. Just then, I saw another coming from the opposite direction towards me. I stretched my hands like a bird, spreading its feathers to fly; I breathed deeply and took off into the air, landing safely on a roof. The people ran towards that roof; they could not fly with me. As they drew nearer, I hopped to another roof and then took off, flying far away and landing in a market square full of people. Just as I was about to enter our house, I saw a small number of the group at the gate of the house swearing to catch me and cut me into pieces. I took off again in the sky and landed on a field. I woke up physically tired. I was so frightened as the dream felt so real; after pondering what might have happened to me if I left the house that day, I went to inform my parents.

Both of my parents took action to delve into my dream. My mother, a Pentecostal-Charismatic Christian (PCC), took me to her pastor, who offered an explanation and an antidote: a ten-day spiritual direction of fasting. My father, being an orthodox Christian, an Anglican, and a firm adherent of IRTs, despite his church activities, took me to the shrine, where the priestess offered an explanation, an antidote of herbs, and a sacrifice of a fowl for fortification. The priest said, I had a strong *sumsum* (spirit) and that I would never be overpowered in my dream. I will always triumph over enemies who try to pursue me in my dreams. I am now fifty years old, but ever since I had that first flying dream and went through the ritual in the shrine, I have had several dreams of people pursuing me while engaging in various activities, such as walking, canoeing, and teaching. However, I have never been caught; I always manage to fly off whenever the going gets tough (Mame Adjoba, March 2024). A further talk with Mame Adjoba revealed her stand on religion. It seems she inherited her father's faith and footsteps; she was a Christian, and although she does not practice it, she remains an adherent of indigenous religious traditions.

**Akosua Serwaa is a forty-two-year-old teacher.** She related her story thus: When I was about 23 years old, I had a dream in which my Daddy's sister, my paternal auntie, demanded I give her two eggs I was holding in my hand. When I refused to honour the request, she was so infuriated, and I saw the anger on her face. There was a little distance between us, so I started walking away from her, but she pursued me until the eggs fell and broke. When the egg fell, I became sad and started crying. Excitement lit up my auntie's face, and she laughed happily, clapping her hands. Then, as if the teasing was not enough, she blurted out, "*eno ne wo awie!*" (that is the end of you). When I woke up from my sleep, I was so scared. The tears in the dream still showed on my face. I sat for a while to recollect precisely

what had happened; I prayed to God to protect me from any impending danger and then ran to my mother's room to tell her about my dream. As I was telling my mother, I saw the fear in her eyes, and her facial and bodily gestures showed that she was also scared. After the narration, she said, this is a lie from the pit of hell; what I went through will not be repeated in Jesus' name. I said amen. She then said we need spiritual help because this is not just an ordinary dream. I said, 'I guess so; that is why I have prayed to God.' She said it was not enough. We need to visit the wise priestess in my hometown as soon as possible. My mother explained that eggs symbolize fertility, so seeing eggs in a dream means that something about a woman's glory—especially her inability to marry and have children—is being communicated. For days, she persuaded me to go with her, but I refused and ignored her advice, especially after speaking to my Methodist church reverend, who said it was just a dream and that I should not worry about it. My mother was persistent, and one day, she told me why she was so afraid that the dream I had was not just ordinary.

My mother explained that she had a similar dream before she gave birth to me, except hers was that her maternal dead grandmother gave her two eggs, and she picked one. She urged her to take the two eggs, but she insisted on taking only one. When she woke up, she did not tell anyone. Years later, when she tried everything to get another child and still could not get pregnant, she consulted an IRTs priestess who said after divination that the dream she had some time ago was her decisive destiny. She was told that she would never have another child because, by picking one egg in a dream, she had decided she wanted only one child, and that is what she would have. My mother wanted to avert the same mistake she made, but unfortunately, I was too headstrong to take the route she wanted us to use—the shrine. I was a member of the Scripture Union, and I believed that nothing would happen to me as a child of God.

Several years down the line, "I am neither married nor do I have a child." I know I am beautiful and educated, but any man who gets close backs out in a few months. A prophet said it was the dream I had. My aunt took two things from me by cracking those two eggs: the first is my pride as a woman, and the other is the gift of motherhood. He gave me spiritual direction to break that burden, which I did, but I still have not broken through. I have also observed that over ten men who have come into my life will leave me for no reason. I have been given different *akwankyere* from different pastors and prophets, but none seems to be working. I have reached a point in my life where I am incredibly frustrated and tired of attending church, so I pleaded with my mother to take me to her solution centre, and that is why we are here. I am just hoping that this shrine will be my last stop. I want a solution anyhow (Akosua Serwaa April 6, 2024).

**Obaa Grace is a sixty-three-year-old businesswoman.** She narrated a consistent dream in which she saw her dead grandmother sitting in one corner of their house, smiling. When she wakes up, she will think about it throughout the day and ignore it, but one day, after having several of the same dream, she decided to inform her family elders of this. One of them, my uncle, the *Abusuakpanyinli* head of the family, after listening attentively and asking questions, inquired about the many times I had dreamed about the older woman. I said I had lost count of it because it is almost like what I dream of every day. He sat for a while and said, 'Our ancestors want to tell you something, and the one who

can help us understand what they want to communicate through your dream is the indigenous priest.' My uncle then left to consult the priest, and he gave time for all the family to gather in the house. When we all gathered, the priest was invited to come and interpret the dream for us. After pouring libation to gather the deity and spirits, he divined and informed us that an older woman who had passed away earlier had buried gold that her ancestors had given her to distribute to the family somewhere on the family compound. Without inquiring about the corner where the old lady sat to laugh and smile in the dream, he slaughtered a sheep that he had asked my uncle to prepare earlier. The sheep, half-dead and half-alive, struggled and rolled around, finally settling in the corner; the old lady sat in her dream, laughing and giving up her last breath. The priest hit the animal three times and the ground three times, and asked the dreamer, 'Is this the spot where the old woman in your dream sits?' I said yes. He then instructed my uncle to bring people to dig the exact spot where she had seen the woman in her dream, and there, the sheep breathed its last. They dug and found a pot of gold after further rituals. I was asked to administer the sharing of the gold proceeds because the ancestors wanted me to be the recipient of the bigger share; that is why they chose me. The long and short story is that finding gold changed our lives. We moved from poverty to wealth, all thanks to our ancestors, who ensured that we inherited their knowledge from the land of the dead through dreams. If you asked, I believe everything I dream about as if it happened in real life; I do not take dreams for granted (Obaa Grace, March 1, 2024).

**Kojo Pee is a twenty-five-year-old footballer.** He narrated that he was in the prime of his career when he had a dream in which a snake bit him. I woke up and saw two snake fangs at the exact spot on my body where I was bitten in the dream. I was in camp, so I informed my teammate, with whom I shared a room, who quickly informed my football club manager. He looked at my leg and screamed, 'Ah, this is a snake bite, but how?' I retold the dream to him, and he was shocked, saying it could be that there was a snake in the room. So, we will take you to the hospital immediately and then go to the hotel to fumigate the place. In the hospitals, the doctors too were shocked and said the fangs looked like a real snake bite, but then if it was a snake bite, his condition would have deteriorated, or he might have died by now because the blood on the skin looked old. I spent weeks in the hospital in pain and with no direction, as the doctors did not know what to do again. The manager then suggested that my mother take me home to a church or shrine to find out what was happening. It has been four years, and I have still not recovered from the dream snake bite. My leg is swollen, and I cannot walk without a stick or stand upright, let alone think of playing football, and this has ended his career prematurely.

My family have sought help from different spiritualists—Indigenous priests, pastors, prophets, masters and hospitals, but I never went back to my former self. From all the consultations, it became clear that the dream snake was orchestrated by one of my teammates with the help of a family member, who was unhappy about my growing popularity and likely concerned about my future prosperity if I continued at this pace. Hence, they have cut it short spiritually. All my teammates used to visit me except one person. As to whether he did this to me, I do not know because no name was mentioned. However, I believe someone may

have done it to sabotage my career before I even started playing football. Here I am, wasted, sitting all day in pain with a never-ending wound and hawking on the street to help my mother take care of the house when my mates are all now playing in Europe. If dreams are not real, why do I find myself in this state? (Kojo Pee, February 16, 2024).

**Baah Kojo is a thirty-two-year-old driver.** He recounted his dream: I am a professional driver. I dreamt I went to work as usual, and instead of being the driver, I was a mate. A mate is a driver's assistant who collects transport fares from passengers and takes care of their luggage. It was a persistent dream, but I cannot recall how many times I have had it. Over the last one or so years, every car I have been allowed to drive by a car owner has been involved in a serious accident or has broken down. In most cases, when the vehicle owner takes the car from me and gives it to another driver, the car will not have any more problems. It is not easy to obtain a car immediately, so I often assist my colleagues as a driver's mate, sometimes for as long as three to six months, before I can drive my car.

We usually gather at the station where we load passengers to converse when passengers slow down off-peak. The persistent dream of being a mate was always on my mind, so in one of those meetings, I shared with them what I had been dreaming about. One of them suggested that I act by consulting a powerful prophet, a mallam, or a shrine. I am a Muslim, but I decided to visit the shrine because I needed quick answers to the problem. I went to a shrine, and the priestess told me after divination that a woman I hurt so many years ago was punishing me. My life will remain stagnant unless I comply with her wishes. I was surprised because I do not remember hurting any woman; the women have been hurting me by leaving me with no excuse, and I had thought I was probably unable to satisfy them in kind and cash. The priestess asked if I ever knew a woman who died through abortion. That was when I remembered my deceased girlfriend. She was a Christian, and I was a Muslim; there was no way our families would allow us to marry, so when she was pregnant, I told her to abort it in the hospital, but she decided to use herbs and unfortunately died in the process. She has appeared to me in dreams on about five occasions, very angry, but I never connected that to my job as a driver. The priestess performed sacrifice for me, and I also followed up with the wish of the girl by going to their home to apologize to her whole family and going to her tomb as well; I also compensated her parent with money and a bag of rice and sheep. Ever since I did that, I have never had a dream where I see her or become a mate again.

**Badu Baale is a thirty-five-year-old woman.** She also narrates her story: When I was in secondary school, which was a girl's school, I was introduced to lesbianism. I had not planned to participate in it. However, I was forced into it by my school mother, who advised that the senior girls are often cruel to juniors, so for me to be safe, I must be connected to the seniors, and that is mainly through being their lesbian partner. My school principal connected me with a senior, who approached me one evening after evening studies to express interest. I willingly accepted to be her girl. She taught me lots of how lesbians do, and she said that as a girl, lesbianism is better than a heterosexual relationship in that you will not get pregnant and disgrace your parents.

When I completed secondary school, while waiting for my acceptance into the university, I decided to stay away from lesbianism. When I did, I started dreaming about having sex

with someone in my dream. The dream sex was so intense that when I woke up, I felt fluid in my pants as well as pain in my body. Every single night, I dreamt about having sex, and in the morning, I saw the fluid in my pants. At the university, three of my roommates were Pentecostals, so they would often take me to church every Sunday and midweek. One day, during a deliverance service, it became apparent that I had a spiritual marriage. So, the one who is having sex with me in my dreams is indeed my spiritual husband. I know I am gorgeous, but no one approaches me. I have joined groups in churches to get to meet men, but no one looks in my direction. I have gone to so many deliverance services to be delivered from this spiritual husband, but the next night, it will be rough with me during sex to punish me for trying to sack him from me. I am still hoping to regain control of my life and be delivered from my current situation so that I can get into a relationship and start a family; because I am ageing. I do not have any intention of seeing an indigenous priest because I know God will deliver me in his time (Badu Baale, February 2, 2024).

#### 4. Discussion

These six examples I sampled as cases speak directly to the respectful attention the Akan people— and all ethnicities in Ghana — give to dream encounters as happenings or escapades that have the potential to alter their mundane life experiences and histories. The stories connect the dreams to the lives of the dreamer's activities in the intangible dreamland or spiritual space to the tangible world, pointing out that in Akan IRTs, there are happenings in the spiritual and physical realms that dovetail or influence each other. The dreamer could be a Christian or Muslim and might initially abhor the IRT's solution, but at some point, they will go there to get liberated. The key point to note is that IRTs are aware of their clients' religious affiliations, as they now record clients' names, religious denominations, and other relevant details (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 117). They are also aware of badmouthing and demonizing them, yet they go ahead to help them because one important characteristic of religion is finding solutions for clients (Nrenzah, 2015, p.193).

#### Significance/Interpretation: The Role of Dreams in Shaping Beliefs and Decision-Making in Akan Culture

In Akan religious thinking, dreams are not only psychological and somatic processes; they are essentially spiritual. Dreams are realms into which the individual's spirit (*sunsum*) escapes the body to participate in events and processes with other spiritual entities in the Akan cosmology. What unfolds in these escapades has meaning for the person's mundane experiences? This is because the *sumsum* is part of the *honam* (body), so whatever happens in dreamland also affects the physical body.

Dreams function as revelations that help people answer mundane questions. They function as a context within which persons could be empowered or be made vulnerable spiritually, --a dream encounter --could show how weak or strong a person's *Sumsum* is as it engages agents of supernatural harm in the spirit filled dream world such as witches---such dreams offer models for ritual agents who are often consulted to protect vulnerable dreamers --from

attacks, this is why recounting details of dreams is often a sine qua non of healing processes. In this context, dreams function as crucial revelations of what is happening in the spiritual realm. Dreams serve as avenues for substantiating the Akan complex belief system, which encompasses hierarchical spiritual bodies in Akan cosmology. God (*Onyame*) is the first, followed by the deities (*Abosom*), ancestors (*Nananom*), other spirits (*ahonhom, who can be benevolent or malevolent*), and man (*nipa*). The hierarchy is exhibited through the Akan prayer of pouring libation (Akesson, 1965, pp. 284-285; Nrenzah, 2015, p.77)

The Akan believe that dreams form a link of communication between the spiritual world of *Nananom* or *Asamando* and the physical world. Dreams solidify the concept of human immortality. Akesson states this strongly in his submission that:

*Dream life may be said to be a contribution to the concept of immortality that the Akan hold. Dead friends and relatives reappear to the Akan in dreams. In his dream life, the Akan holds conversation with his dead relative, but "this conception of a posthumous life to the experiences of dreams " is only additional fact to make the primary factor, the "goodbye " concept-the pre-existence concept--more positive, more accurate and meaningful (Akesson, 1965, p.282)*

The dream I recounted earlier was about Obaa Grace, a businesswoman whose ancestors revealed to her through dreams that they had buried gold in their family home. Two important things we note here are, first and foremost, the Akan belief in ancestors and the immortality of the soul. The ancestors see and look over their own from the land of *Asamando to come and visit them, revealing hidden treasures of gold to transform their state of poverty into one of richness* (Ephirim-Donkor, 2021). Secondly, there is the consistency of the dream and the identity of the bearer of the message or messenger. The dreamer who carried the message to his kin is chosen because the ancestors know she will act. This is a subjective experience of a dreamer whose dreams become beneficial to the whole family or community; therefore, the vessel to disseminate the dream message is crucial. What comes out is what the dreamer believes in; for Obaa Grace and her family, dreams are real.

Dreamland becomes one avenue that the deities use to call IRTs priests and priestesses and sustain their vocation by communicating with them, showing them a remedy for a disease or an answer to a physical puzzle they encounter. A celebrated IRTs priest, Nana Kwaku Bonsam, told me that "he taps into the powers of the deities through dreams, falling into trances or getting possessed. He claims he has been given the "third eye" which allows him to "see things" in the spiritual realm" (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 157). Another IRT priestess, Komfo Oforiwaah, explained how "dreams changed the course of her call to priesthood. She saw visions, fell into a trance and would often dream about weeds, herbs, leaves and the bark of trees used for healing diseases" (Nrenzah, 2015, p. 176).

Dreams, as a phenomenon, demonstrate faith in the Indigenous system to offer solutions, even in a highly Christianized Ghanaian society. They demonstrate the belief in the reality of a dream, the *sumsum* or spirit as a part of the physical self that continues to act in dreamland, and the decisions they make affect the physical state. Take, for example, Akosua Serwaa's mother, who, in a dream, took one

egg and had one child physically; the belief that she opted for one in a dream, and so one will she have for her whole life, links the concept of dreams to one's destiny as well.

Nevertheless, the significance of dreams as portals into the spiritual realm and as sources of revelation about a person's condition can only be clearly understood when we first grasp the indigenous Akan understanding of the human being's nature.

### Role of Dreamer

In the dream world, the person is the leading actor as they reveal or share their dream with others. At the same time, the people or objects seen in the dream or those who act in the dream become targets in the real world. Good people and evil people act in the dream; if the actor in the dream does something good, like the older woman who reveals a gold deposit to her relative, the actor is celebrated as a good ancestor or ancestress. However, if they did evil, such as the aunt who chased her niece despite knowing the consequences of breaking eggs, they were immediately labelled as witches or wizards, and evil, due to their actions in a dream.

In all that, without a dreamer recounting their experiences, others are unable to understand what truly happened. The only exception to the rule is when the dreamer is speaking with an Indigenous religious specialist, such as a priest, priestess, or diviner, to diagnose what is happening to a person. In this instance, the spiritual specialist can delve into the spiritual realm to gain insight into a person's spiritual nature. If none of these agents are available or tasked to do so, then it is incumbent on the dreamer to tell their subjective stories. The position of the dreamer, whether they are a Christian, IRT, atheist, or otherwise, determines the gravity of attention and value accorded to dreams, whether they are perceived as real happenings or illusions.

An interesting piece of information I gathered from the field of narratives that are not captured here is that, in dreamland, some evil people with strong sumsum can hijack the spirit of those with weak sumsum, using the faces of those with weak sumsum in their evil activities. This way, the dreamer will think that the one they saw in the dream is the evil one, when, in fact, it is their face that an evil person used; thus, an innocent person is identified as the actor of evil instead of the perpetrator. Another school of Akan thinking holds that some people who execute evil in dreams may not be aware of their actions or the havoc they wreak in dreamland. They are unaware that they are evil, even though they are. They lead good lives physically, but in dreamland, they harm people. It was said that those people have their witchcraft at the back of their heads, so they do not see it when they act or are unaware of what they do in dreamland. It is incumbent, therefore, on the dreamer to seek spiritual help in interpreting the dreams, as only a spiritualist can pinpoint the accurate culprit in the dream world.

Notably, the participants are Akan, and their worldview is an integral part of the socialization process. In this worldview, physical and spiritual are intertwined; there is no way either could function without the other. So, if people do all the right things physically and yet everything seems terrible, they are automatically prompted to seek out why they are in their current condition by exploring spiritual answers. Dreamers who are suspicious of the details of their dreams typically seek help from pastors, prophets, Indigenous reli-

gious priests or priestesses, Mallams, and others to help interpret their dreams. These spiritual agents are said to possess supernatural grace, enabling them to diagnose their clients' or adherents' predicaments and prescribe solutions to address the problems, thereby aligning the spirit with the body and soul.

### Interpretation of the dream narrative

I previously narrated actual dreams experienced by real people. These dreams had occurred to the dreamers before, and they had significantly impacted their current circumstances, prompting them to seek interpretation from a religious specialist to find closure. The interpretation of dreams is essential as it reflects the larger cultural realities of the Akan. In this section, an analysis of the narrations is presented in light of themes that revolve around ancestral communication, spiritual warfare, fertility symbolism, divine intervention, destiny manipulation, and others as depicted in the stories.

### Fertility Symbolism

The Akan are a matrilineal group that depends on their bloodline for survival; therefore, bearing offspring by the female lineage is of great importance to them. According to Akosua Serwah, the earlier story was that the prophet interpreted her current sterile and unmarried condition as the two eggs she broke in her dream. The next question to naturally ask is, what would have happened if her auntie had seized the eggs? She would still have crashed them anyway, probably yes or no, but the point to note here is that eggs are a tangible material that have socio-religious connotations. In Akan culture, an egg is not only a food item but also a mystical symbol of fertility, new life, fragility, a potential for growth and development, as well as rebirth and rejuvenation within the cycle of life (Platvoet, 2012; Opokuwaa, 2005). For instance, in the Bragoro ritual, a puberty rite ceremony that marks the transition to adulthood among the Akan Asante, a whole boiled egg is swallowed as part of the ceremony. It is believed that biting or chewing the egg while swallowing it can prevent a girl from conceiving in the future (Boateng, 2018). Women are revered in the Akan ethnic group due to the egg they carry in their womb to continue the creation of humans. In initiating the cycle of fetal development, a healthy ovum (egg) and a healthy sperm fuse to start the development, implying that an egg or a sperm that is not healthy cannot fertilize an ovum.

The Akan belief makes sense when viewed scientifically. Therefore, for the Akan, keeping a whole egg in the ritual is important as it depicts victory over fertility and/or the symbolic ritual being enacted. So, Akosua Serwah crashing the egg in the dreamland was a misfortune, as the prophet revealed that she would crash her future children, the egg, and her glory as a woman in her dream. Since this happened in the nonphysical world of Dreamland, where those with strong sunsum or spirit survive without harm, she could not protect her future because she had a weaker sunsum. Rituals must be performed to strengthen her sunsum and avert further disaster in her current and future situations. She was given a spiritual directive intended to fortify her sunsum and protect her.

### Ancestral Communication

In the dream narrations, some narrators have mentioned dreaming about their deceased relatives, who warned them of an impending danger or revealed hidden information. I took one story out of the many, that of Obaa Grace and her family, who became rich when an indigenous priest was able to interpret her persistent dream, which led them to uncover a pot of gold. Obaa Grace's dream conveys two important pieces of information. The first pertains to ancestral revelation or communication, and the second pertains to the value of gold.

The first point to note is the concept of ancestral revelation. In the Akan spiritual hierarchy, the ancestors rank third. The ancestors are deified heroes and heroines of ethnic groups. They are humans who have elevated themselves to the level of spiritual bodies through a life well-lived. They also act as intermediaries between humans and God. They are guardians of morality, punishing and rewarding, and are believed to head meetings in settling disputes. To qualify as an ancestor, one must have died at an advanced age, having lived a long and natural life. Must have had many children and served as a role model. The importance of the belief in ancestors is based on the belief in life after death—the ancestors are the living dead—the unending responsibility of personhood, Reincarnation, and morality. The ancestor has the affairs of their kin at heart and looks after them, sending them messages through their dreams. Obaa Grace's dream and the subsequent revelation show the belief and, if you like, the existence of the Ancestors.

The second has to do with the dream, the gold. Gold in Akan culture is not just a physical resource but a symbol of divine blessing and ancestral favour. The Akan's use of gold is due to its rarity, aesthetic appeal, and permanence. Gold signifies the highest social and political rank among metals. Nonetheless, "it is gold's intrinsic spiritual quality that perhaps accounts for its strong appeal to the Akan" (Quarcoopome, 2017, p. 34). The Akan view gold as a kind of spirit that, like precious beads, embodies both living and life-giving forces, whose generative powers hold the promise of wealth and abundance. The Akan's beliefs about gold as a spiritual entity explain why it is a crucial component of every Akan family's ancestral legacy. As a locus of sacred ancestral power, gold is believed to embody the force of a family's ancestors; hence, ritual is performed over gold after the death of the custodian of the family's gold. In the narration of Obaa Gladys and her family, an indigenous priest was invited to perform a sacrificial ritual over the place where the older adult sits in the dream, because they believe that God is a spirit and must be pacified by touching the gold.

Gold "channels a spiritual force...because of its glitter and permanence. Gold, for the Asante, radiates the divine authority of the king and reinforces the latter's spiritual affinity with the sun. Besides endowing the leader with supernormal or magical qualities, it is also believed to signify strength, temperament, and inner character" (Quarcoopome, 2017, p. 34). Rattray notes that Akan people generally associate gold with the sun and masculinity, and that silver symbolizes the moon and femininity. By wearing gold, an Akan king reaffirms his spiritual connection to the sun, from which his divinity is believed to originate. (Rattray 1927).

### Spiritual Warfare

The Akan and most Africans share the belief that the world is both physical and spiritual. The spiritual world is believed to

be inhabited by benevolent and malevolent spirits. While the benevolent spirits aid humans, the malevolent ones, such as witches, torment them. Most of the time, a witch's purpose is to destroy their victim and make them miserable because they derive their joy from a victim's fall. Nrenzah has pointed out that there are "two varieties of *witches in their domain* – *ayene kpale* or *fofole* (white) and *ayene etane* or *bile* (black). *Ayene etane* or black witches are evil and dangerous, and *ayene fofole* or white witches are good". (Nrenzah, 2023 p, 339). In the context of the 25-year-old footballer, his predicament was linked to the dream encounter. The snake bite was the result of spiritual teamwork between some family members and a jealous football team member who wanted to curtail his career before it could take off. What must be understood here is that the Akan believe that before an outsider witch can attack and destroy a victim, the victim's family witch must collaborate and assist the outsider. This plays out in the case of Kojo Pee. Witches are said not to be happy with progress, so when they anticipated the fortunes that the footballer's exploits could accrue to his becoming a big soccer star, the family witch and team witch join forces to curtail his career. Through witchcraft, they used the guise of a snake, a typical vector, in Akan's discourse on witchcraft to end his career physically. The fanglike –or fang-shaped incision on his body was a sign of the complicity of witchcraft in his predicament.

### Divine Intervention and Destiny Manipulation

The story of Mame Adjoba represents the debate between two powers: God and Satan, the Pentecostal Christian God and the IRT's God. Adjoba explained that when she woke up, she was exhausted and worried as she thought about the dream. Her parents saw the tiredness visibly and inquired about why she looked tired and somewhat worried. She then recounted the dream she had with her parents. Adjoba's parents took different actions to fortify their child after she narrated her dream to them. The mother, being a strong Pentecostal Charismatic Christian, asked her to get ready so they could head to the mission house to tell the pastor. When they went, the pastor explained that, indeed, flying in the night while sleeping is considered possessing witchcraft. The antidote to it was deliverance from the witchcraft spirit to set her free. The pastor provided spiritual guidance for them to fast from 6 am to 6 pm for ten days, and on the tenth day, they gathered to celebrate her deliverance, which they did. Her father is a Presbyterian but a firm adherent of IRTs; he took her to the shrine. The priestess at the shrine told them straightaway after the narration that there was nothing wrong with her, but she was good. She has a strong aura surrounding her spirit, which protects her from harm, both in her dreams and in reality. She then offers a sacrificial ritual to fortify herself and says, "Pursuers will never catch me in dreams" (Mame Adjoba, March 2024).

Two important points to note in these stories are the thrust of the contemporary Ghanaian religious landscape and its adherents—the first is: there is the demonization of everything by the PCC, which preaches evil in the world and Africa because of their belief system for which an adherent must be delivered to break away from the past completely (Meyer, 1998). The second point is the paradox of double allegiance of people who profess Christianity and yet adhere to IRTs. What must be understood here is that the Akan person, in seeking a solution to a problem, will gravitate to where the solution lies, even if it is in the 'mouth of a lion.'

As Nrenzah has noted elsewhere, “unlike Christianity, Islam and some other religious faiths that are strict and dominated by rules, Akan indigenous religions demonstrate an uncanny openness and tolerance to incoming innovative elements or forms of spirituality. They can borrow practices from other forms of religion and can accumulate as many gods as can be utilized. Akan gods are not jealous gods...” (2015, 82). The practitioners are also open and will, therefore, find solutions for people of all faiths.

The decision of the two parents to seek a spiritual solution for their daughter’s distress in her dreams, rather than consulting a psychologist or medical doctor, highlights the over-reliance on religion in almost every situation in Ghana. This “makes sense in a country where everything is ‘spiritualized’” (Nrenzah, 2024, p. 170). Dreams are not just psychological or physical processes to the Akan, but signs of what a person’s *sunsum* is experiencing in the spiritual realm. What happens in dreams can affect the physical self, and this is because of the interconnectedness of *honam*, *okra*, and *sumsum* in the Akan belief system. It is interesting to note that Pentecostals have incorporated these cultural meanings into their theologies and practices. However, there could be variations in the interpretations of dreams. I cite the case of Adjoba, who flew in her dream, which the IRT priestesses interpreted as having a strong spiritual and physical aura around her. In contrast, the PCC pastor interpreted it as witchcraft. These variations exist, but they all still reflect the dream culture of the Akan and Africa as a whole.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper highlights the significance of dreams as a notable phenomenon among the Akan people, particularly among the Nzema and Asante. Analyzing personal dream narratives reveals the complex relationship between activities in the dream world and reality. This belief is derived from the Akan worldview, which views a person as comprising body, blood, soul, and spirit.

The significance and interpretation of the dream, as well as the role of the dreamer and/or actors in the dream, were noted. Nevertheless, an important point we must consider is evaluating Schredl’s arguments about the validity of dreams, precisely due to the two boundaries a dreamer must cross before reporting the subjective experience that occurred during sleep (2010, p. 137). How do we measure the dreams of a dreamer if the dreamer is the protagonist? These are the questions that come to mind when accessing dreams in general.

One observation among the participants was their strong belief in the power of dreams. Regardless of whether an Akan individual was highly educated or illiterate, they all shared the conviction that dreams could shape or influence their lives, as defined by their worldview.

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