

Dreams and religious conversions: A study of Malaysian Muslim converts

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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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glad tidings from God (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Al-Akili, 1991) or premonitions (Salem et al. 2013), and thus, are regarded as a part of the revelations as mentioned in a *Hadith* narrated by Anas bin Malik r.a. that the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. said, "A good dream (that comes true) of a righteous man is one of forty-six parts of *An-Nubuwa* (Prophethood) (*Sahih Bukhari*, 2176). True dreams visions have signs that indicate their truthfulness and the dream vision remains with all its detail in the memory (Ibn Khaldun, 1967).

Truthful dreams can also be an effective way to provide Divine guidance (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Bulkeley, 2002) thereby leading human beings towards religionism (Zarkasi, 2010). For instance, Prophet Joseph when he was asked to interpret dreams, he started by introducing religious guidance to the prisoners as stated in *Surah Yusuf* [12], verse 39: O my two companions of the prison! (I ask you): Are many lords differing among themselves better, or the One God, Supreme and Irresistable? ('Ali, 2005, p. 234).

Consequently, truthful dreams are also able to strengthen the believers' faith (Hoffman, 1997), particularly dreams of seeing Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. In a *Hadith* narrated by Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri, Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. said, "Whoever sees me (in a dream) then he indeed has seen the truth, as Satan cannot appear in my shape (*Sahih Bukhari*, 2180). Mohd Nizam, Fathullah Al Haq, and Siti Aishah (2017) studied the authenticity of dreams of seeing Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. based on *Hadiths* as recalled by the selected respondents, and they discovered that the respondents' dreams of seeing Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. were true, leading the respondents to become more faithful believers. Hence, Edgar (2007) claims that true dreams can also likely be experienced by one who is perhaps going to become more pious on account of the dream.

Moreover, according to Islamic teachings, truthful dreams are a human faculty that occur to believers and non-believers alike (Al-Akili, 1991; Salem, 2010). For instance, Pharaoh once saw in his dream a fire that had ignited in Syria, and this fire kept on expanding until it reached Egypt, where it burned and destroyed every house and farm of the land. It is interpreted that a descendent from the family of Jacob will be born, who will bring about his destruction and that of Egypt. Consequently, Pharaoh ordered his soldiers to kill all male newborn children of Israel in the land. Despite all of Pharaoh's precautions, Moses was born in God's protection and fulfilled God's Will. God commanded the mother of Moses by inspiration as stated in *Surah Ta Ha* [20], verse 39: "Throw (the child) into the chest, and throw (the chest) into the river: the river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to him': but I cast (the garment of) love over you from Me: and (this) in order that you may be reared under Mine eye." ('Ali, 2005, p. 314).

Meanwhile, there are seven types of false dreams, that is, 1) confused dreams which are caused by distress, exaggerated hopes, and personal thoughts (Al-Akili, 1991; Zarkasi, 2010; Salem et al., 2013; Ayoub, 2017), 2) sexual, "wet" dreams that require one to take a ritual ablution (*ghusl*) (Al-Akili, 1991; Zarkasi, 2010; Ayoub, 2017), 3) warnings by Satan or scary dreams where they end in a no-win situation (Ayoub, 2017), 4) dreams that are driven by the sorcery of jinn spirits, or their illusions (Ayoub, 2017), 5) dreams which are shown by Satan (Ayoub, 2017), 6) dreams driven by one's own mind and desire when they are confused or under stress (Salem et al., 2013; Ayoub, 2017), and 7) dreams which are caused by pain and suffering from physical ail-

ment (Ayoub, 2017). In brief, false dreams comprise of muddled and jumbled dreams (*hulm*) which is also known as the meaningless everyday dream, and thus, has no significance (Salem et al., 2013; Edgar, 2015; Ibn al-Manzur, 2000). Ibn Khaldun referred this type of dream as a "confused dreams" which is prone to forgetfulness of the brain power to perceive its detail (Ibn Khaldun, 1967).

Henceforth, according to the principles of *Ta'bir* (Muslim science of dream interpretation), the dream should be recounted accurately and truthfully (Ibn Khaldun, 1967; Salem et al., 2013). The process starts with the recalling of a dream which involves a reconstructive process during the waking state. As dreams tend to be forgotten quickly, dreamers could write them down in detail upon waking or recount them to someone (Salem, 2010).

Notwithstanding the facts, in Islam, there are ethics and manners of dreamers (Baltah Jay, 2010; Zarkasi, 2010) whereby dreamers should only share their dreams to another person on account of: 1) they have had good dreams (*Sahih Bukhari*, 2177), 2) the other person is someone who can be trusted (in *Surah Yusuf* [12], verse 5 it is stated that Prophet Jacob had forbid his son, Prophet Joseph from telling his dream to his brothers who were envious of Joseph and had bad intentions toward him), and 3) the other person is their loved one (*Sahih Bukhari*, 7044) or someone who is knowledgeable (*Jami at-Tirmidhi*, 2280).

Muslims and non-Muslims alike experience imagery-like dreams, and even though not all dream imagery is explicit, and often the meaning of the dream is opaque or metaphorical (Al-Akili, 1991; Edgar, 2015), there are sources of guidance that can be referred to. In Islam, choices and decisions are made based on four major sources of guidance such as 1) the holy book of Qur'an which is considered the words of God, 2) the sayings of Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. accumulated in the form of *Hadith*, 3) the *aql* (intellect) that includes inferences reached through justification, reason, and logic, and 4) the *ijtihad* (diligence) which are the commonly agreed understandings of Islamic teachings by Muslim scholars.

Solid references to dream interpretation with firm wisdom, parables, and clear meanings can be obtained from the Qur'an (Al-Akili, 1991), whereby dreams are discussed in five *Surahs* (i.e. *Yusuf*, *Yunus*, *Al-Anfal*, *Al-Saffat*, and *Al-Fath*) and 24 verses of the Qur'an (Bulkeley, 2001; BaHamam, 2011; Salem et al., 2013). Besides that, *Hadiths* which contain the Prophet Muhammad's p.b.u.h. statements can also be referred to (i.e. *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, *Jami at-Tirmidhi*, and *Muwatta Malik*). Moreover, dreams can be interpreted by referring to works of Muslim scholars (Al-Akili, 1991), whereby in the Muslim history, Muhammad Ibn Sirin (653-728 C.E.) is the most prominent scholar in the field of dream interpretation.

Therefore, dream interpretation in Islam requires the dreamer to map his/her dream and to identify the elements in his/her dream (Al-Akili, 1991) as narrated by Anas bin Malik that the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. said, "Interpret them (dreams) in accordance with the names of the things you see, and understand what is hinted at, and the dream is for the first interpreter (*Sunan Ibn Majah*, 3915). Thus, the Islamic dream culture applies symbolic regime to define its meaning and to act as a mode of interpretation (Edgar, 2004; Sirriyeh, 2015; Neil, 2016). In relation to that, the researchers of this study aim to implement the Islamic mode of interpretation as well as assess its significance in religious

conversion by examining the dreamers' form of dreams. The research questions for this study are thus formulated as the following:

- 1) What are the religious dream imageries of the participants?
- 2) What are the dream elements recounted by the participants?
- 3) What are the impacts of dream imageries and dream elements to the participants?

2. Method

Qualitative analysis was employed in this study to measure and access the participants' form of dreams, with regards to the knowledge of dreams based on the Islamic sources of guidance (i.e. the Qur'an, *Hadith*, *aql*, and *ijtihad*). The qualitative method was used to identify the common phrases or themes representing the religious dream imagery and to identify the keywords representing the dream elements.

A semi-structured interviews were conducted by the same person, whereby open-ended questions were asked of all the seven participants who are of Malaysian Muslim converts (*muallafs*). Semi-structured interview was employed in this study to allow prompt discussion with the participant. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 88), semi-structured interview "allows depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to expand the interviewee's responses", and thus, enable the interviewee to elaborate on various issues (Dörnyei, 2007). Besides that, anonymity of the participants was exercised to address confidentiality of the information provided, in order to respect their privacy and encourage more open and honest responses.

Table 1 provides some background information of the participants that is believed to be vital in religious conversion. Although some of the dreams date back between 40 to 50 years ago, the dreams were still clearly remembered by the participants because the dreams were initially the factor that led to their conversion to Islam, and most of the participants had repeated, sequential dreams or religious-like

dreams for more than once which strengthened their confidence that the dreams are real. Nevertheless, most of the participants had decided on getting further advice for the dreams upon gaining the meaning of the dreams. Likewise, Schredl, Stumbry, and Erlacher (2016) claim that dreaming plays a role in all major world religions because dreams can provide spiritual inspiration.

The thematic analysis method was employed in this study, and thus, the data collected from the interviews in this study were subjected to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). Hence, thematic analysis provides a purely qualitative, detailed, and nuanced account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The same set of analytical interventions used in content analysis is applied in thematic analysis under the classifications of generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. In the final stage of data analysis in thematic analysis approach, the researcher is to report the result of the previous stages (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, pp. 401-402). These processes were adapted in this study in order to guide the coder in analyzing the data.

Meanwhile, QSR NVivo 11 was utilized by a coder to ease the analysis of qualitative data since it has clear advantages in which it removes the tremendous amount of manual tasks and allows more time for researchers to explore trends, identify themes, and make conclusions (Wong, 2008, pp. 18-19). Nevertheless, it must be remembered that the software is incapable of understanding text and cannot replace the analytical skills of the researcher (Houghton et al., 2016).

The thematic analysis plan of this study consists of seven phases, that is, assembling the data (Phase 1), getting an intuitive feel for data (Phase 2), generating initial codes (open coding) (Phase 3), defining and naming themes (Phase 4), reviewing themes (Phase 5), searching for themes (Phase 6),

Table 1. Participants' background information

Participant	Gender	Age	Previous Religion	Frequency of Dream	Time/Year of Dream	Year of Conversion	Reaction
Participant 1	Female	55	Buddhism	2	1977	1980	Seek for the meaning of the dream; asked a friend and an <i>ustaz</i> (a religious teacher) to provide explanation
Participant 2	Male	38	Hinduism	5	Dawn time, 1994, 1995	1996	Searched for the person hinted at in the dream
Participant 3	Male	45	Hinduism	3	Month of Ramadhan, 1990s	1990s	Became restless and decided to immediately embrace Islam
Participant 4	Male	55	Hinduism	3	Night time, 1970s	1980s	Felt adrenaline rush to embrace Islam
Participant 5	Male	59	Hinduism	1	1991	1993	Seek for the meaning of the dream; asked a friend
Participant 6	Male	33	Hinduism	1	2008	2008	Seek for the meaning of the dream; asked members of tabligh (ideological movement group)
Participant 7	Female	45	Hinduism	1	Month of Ramadhan, 2010	2010	Recalled the dream to a neighbour and seek for the meaning of the dream by asking a friend

and producing the report (Phase 7). These seven phases are compiled in the following chronological order:

- 1) Assembling the data: The voice recording from the interview sessions were all transcribed. For coding purposes, transcripts in the Malay language were translated into English language.
- 2) Getting an intuitive feel for data: The transcripts were then imported into the project created in NVivo 11, and the transcripts were also printed out (manuscripts). The researcher obtained the sense of the whole ideas, patterns in the content, and direction in relation to the Research Questions of this study by reading the manuscript (a written verbatim (word-for-word) account of verbal interaction such as interview) several times (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gale et al., 2013, p. 2; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 401). The coder considered latent (developing themes) content in data analysis, whereby latent content represents the emergent themes. Subsequently, the coder began working with nodes in NVivo 11, particularly free nodes (free standing and not associated with a structured framework of themes or concepts) (Wong, 2008; AlYahmady Hamid & Saleh Said, 2013).
- 3) Generating initial codes (open coding): This process was carried out by referring to the nodes that were worked on by the coder earlier to code the transcripts. The function of nodes is to store a place in the NVivo 11 for references; to code text (AlYahmady Hamid & Saleh Said, 2013).
- 4) Searching for themes (selective coding): The different codes were sorted out into potential themes, whereby the emerged coding's clusters (axial coding) were compared together and in relation to the entire data set. Themes are the interpretive analysis of the data to which arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gale et al., 2013). Subsequently, the data was analyzed by looking at the concepts, categories, themes, and narrative and discourse to enable the coder to draw figures (AlYahmady Hamid & Saleh Said, 2013). Thus, the NVivo 11 was utilized to create visual representations such as mind-maps (see Figure 1) in order to sort the different codes into themes.
- 5) Reviewing themes: A connection between developing themes and current knowledge was made by the researcher in order to refine the themes, as well as apply creativity in the process of theme development. This method is able to reduce ambiguities, improve quality, and rigor of data analysis, as well as bring some agreement between researchers on how to judge the quality of the process of theme development (Vaismoradi et al., 2016, p. 108).
- 6) Defining and naming themes: At this point, the themes were defined and refined further by the researcher. The themes were organized in a way that respond either directly or indirectly to the Research Questions of this study. Then, the themes were given working titles or names that are concise and immediately give a sense of what the theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). 6). As part of the refinement, the themes were identified whether or not they contain subthemes.
- 7) Producing the report: At this point, the entire coding processes (identifying and grouping the themes from the raw data) are completed (Mohd Hairi, 2016, p. 90), and it is time for the coder to write a report. Thus, the coder of this study prepared a write-up of the report, providing an analytic narrative that illustrates information about the data

(description of the data) and made a discussion in relation to the Research Questions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Religious Dream Imageries of the Participants

The participants' religious dream imageries can be equally categorized as explicit dreams and implicit dreams (7 references, respectively) (see Table 2).

3.1.1 Explicit Dreams

The participants' dream(s) contain(s) explicit message(s) whereby the participants were directly informed by a servant of God who appeared in their dream(s). The following are some of the excerpts of the interviews:

"He (a servant of God) said, "O friend! Fear not. I have come here to deliver a message." He continued, "A message that had been delivered to me from God to be delivered to you." He taught me to recite the two kalimah shahadah (testimonials) by saying it in my right ear. He said, "Ashadu an la ilaha illa'llah wa ashadu anna Muhammadan Rasulu'llah (I testify that there is none worthy of worship besides Allah and I testify that Muhammad p.b.u.h. is Allah's worshipper and messenger)." (Participant 2, fourth dream)

"An elderly man woke me up, saying, "Hey! Wake up! Wake up! Wake up! Go and pray. Hey! It is dawn time. It is already time." (Participant 3, third dream)

"I had a dream where someone wearing a purdah (veil concealing the face) gave me a sajadah (prayer mat) and asked me to pray." (Participant 5)

"A man said, "You have no other way to go, so recite this kalimah (recitation): 'ashadu an la ilaha illa'llah wa ashadu anna Muhammadan Rasulu'llah'. I heard it vaguely. Finally, I heard a loud, powerful voice in the background reciting the kalimah shahadah." (Participant 1, first dream)

In brief, these dreams contain direct messages that the participants came to immediately understand that they were actually being told to choose the Islamic pathway, which can obviously be seen through the two *kalimah shahadah* and *fajr salah* (dawn time prayer) mentioned in their dreams. The *shahadah* and *salah* are two of the five pillars of Islamic faith, whereby the three other being the *zakat* (charity), fasting, and *hajj* (pilgrimage). Meanwhile, *sajadah* is a prayer

Table 2. The category of the dreamers' dream(s)

Participant	Category of Dream (N=14)	
	Explicit (N=7)	Implicit (N=7)
Participant 1	2	0
Participant 2	2	3
Participant 3	1	2
Participant 4	1	0
Participant 5	1	0
Participant 6	0	1
Participant 7	0	1

mat or a common piece of fabric used by Muslims during their prayers.

3.1.2 Implicit Dreams

The participants' dream(s) were considered implicit because they contain merely actions without any words uttered or that words were spoken in an unfamiliar language to the participants. The following are some of the excerpts of the interviews:

"I dreamt of an elderly long-bearded man in white robe and turban; his face was luminous, but not visible. He was holding a wooden stick in his left hand. He approached me when I was sitting at a very dark corner. He brought me to a very beautiful mosque. At the mosque, he became the imam. I did not understand a word he said because he spoke in Arabic, so I just kept quiet. He opened a very big book and after reading it, he closed it and put it in my hand. He said something I did not understand. I went home, and then I woke up finding myself drenched in sweat like I was bathing and there was a sweet-smelling scent - the smell of black musk." (Participant 6)

"In my dream, I gave a sajadah (prayer mat) to an imam (religious leader) whom I did not even know. He was wearing a white garment. Then, he gave a sajadah and a holy Qur'an to me in return." (Participant 7)

These dreams may be implicit, but they can easily be projected by the participants through the Islamic elements detected by them. For instance, the element of sajadah, the holy Qur'an, mosque, imam (through the robes they wore), and Arabic language.

Apart from explicit and implicit messages embedded in the participants' dream(s), emerging themes can also be identified, whereby the explicit and implicit dream(s) of the participants may also contain other specific forms of messages such as paradise and hell revealed through dream, reminder dreams, contemplate-like dreams, and 'saviour' dreams.

3.1.3 Paradise and Hell revealed through Dream

The second dream that Participant 1 had experienced before her conversion to Islam was clearly depicted of paradise and hell which can be observed in the following quotation:

"(In the dream) I was walking and then I stopped when I reached a junction of two at the end - a right and a left junction. On my right, I saw a bright, sharp, clear road at its end where there was a light that continues to illuminate the other end. It seemed like it leads to some place nice, and looking at it made me feel very comfortable and excited that I wanted to go there. When I looked on my left, I saw a fiery smoke rose in which there were many people bellowing in agony and crying out for help and so on. I heard people cried out, "Allahu Akhbar!" (God is the greatest). It made me wonder of these two far different places. At that very moment, I heard a man bellowed, 'La ilaha illallah!' (there is no God except Allah) from a place that was covered in smoke and fire. It made me feel so hot, and moving added up the heat that I can barely stand. Finally, I ran away, and then I woke up finding myself drenched in sweat." (Participant 1, second dream)

Essentially, the dream reflects paradise through the bright road recalled by Participant 1 and hell through the fiery fire

and smoke recalled by the participant, whereby Participant 1 wished to enter paradise and amidst of that she had also seen unpleasant scenery, heard loud piercing cries of the people who were being punished in hell, and experienced a slight taste of hell herself. This kind of dream apparently indicates that humans have the choice and every choice they make has an effect.

3.1.4 Reminder Dreams

The dreams that Participant 2 have had can be mainly seen as sequential religious dream imageries, whereby he had experienced several dreams which relate to each other before his conversion to Islam, as quoted below:

The first dream of Participant 2: "... a servant of God with thick, long beard and worn a white robe appeared. He put on a black turban on his head with thick circumference and two tips - one at shoulder level and another one at neck level. He did not say anything. He merely looked at me with a smile on his face for about two minutes. Then, he disappeared."

The second and third dream of Participant 2: "...when I was 17 years old, I had dreams. I dreamed that I died. I died and became alive twice. The first time I dreamed that I died, my body was conducted through my own religion, Hinduism - I was cremated. Then, in the second dream, I died too, and my body was conducted through Islam with Islamic burial."

Fourth dream of Participant 2: "Then, a few months after that, I had another dream. I saw a clear, fine light coming down from the sky and when it shone the earth, a very loud sound can be heard and the world fell into darkness. A few seconds later, the earth became bright and a blue light emerged like a blue smoke. Suddenly, a servant of God appeared (mentioned earlier in the first dream). The servant of God said, "O friend! Fear not. I have come here to deliver a message." He continued, "A message that had been delivered to me from God to be delivered to you." He taught me to recite the two kalimah shahadah by saying it in my right ear. He said, "Ashadu an la ilaha illa'llah wa ashadu anna Muhammadan Rasulu'llah." "He blew in my ear and asked me to open my eyes. When I did as I was told, he was gone."

The fifth dream of Participant 2: "Then, again I dreamt of the same servant of God. He said, "O friend! Remember my words. You will meet another servant of God. Search for the servant of God. Inshallah, you will be safe in this world and the Hereafter. Follow the message that I have delivered to you, inshallah, you will be safe in this world and the Hereafter." He showed me the face of the other servant of God whom he meant."

These dreams functioned as a step-by-step guidance which eventually brought Participant 2 to religious conversion, whereby the servant of God seemed to appear repeatedly in his dreams (first, fourth, and fifth dream) as mentioned by Participant 2 and conveyed messages claimed to be from God. Meanwhile, the second and the third dreams were some sort of a comparison that were pictured in the form of funeral tradition between Hinduism and Islam.

3.1.5 Contemplate-like Dreams

Two of the participants were questioned in their dreams, whereby the sources of voices were unidentifiable;

“... I heard one voice, asking only one thing, “Ma rab-buka?” I did not know... I cannot answer the question. I did not know what to say. The next thing I knew, an extraordinary creature swung its long tail at the back of my body that its large triangle-shaped thorns penetrated into my skin and blood splashed out.” (Participant 2, third dream)

“A voice sounded from the sky. The voice repeated twice, asking, “Why didn’t you pray?” I was startled, but I kept on walking until I reached a mosque. At the door of the mosque, I saw one person was praying, one was reading the Qur’an, and one was doing dhikr (devotional act in which short phrases or prayers are repeatedly recited silently within the mind or aloud).” (Participant 4)

The questions posed by the unidentified sources can be considered puzzling for the then two non-Muslims because the first question was asked in Arabic language which is an unlearned language by Participant 2, whereas the second question was sudden for Participant 4 as it was the first and only dream he had experienced before his conversion to Islam. However, the significant difference between Participant 2’s and Participant 4’s dream can be seen where the situation was harsher on Participant 2 that he was instantly punished upon his failure to give a reply, whilst Participant 4, despite his attitude of disregarding the question, he was seemingly shown the way towards the answer.

3.1.6 ‘Savior’ Dreams

The religious dream imageries of the participants also contain heart-pounding, dramatic scenes, which can be observed in the following quotations:

“When I was in Form 3, I had a dream. In the dream, I saw a man, but did not see his face, and at the same time, I was being chased by a group of wood-armed gang until the end of a mountain, where I could no longer run

anywhere. At that moment, a man came and said, “You have no other way to go, so recite this kalimah (recitation): ‘ashadu an la ilaha illa’llah wa ashadu anna Muham-madan Rasulu’llah’. I heard it vaguely. Finally, I heard a loud, powerful voice in the background reciting the ka-limah shahadah.” But, upon hearing it, I still refused to recite it until the group of wood-armed gang was near-ing to kill me that I blurted out the two kalimah shahadah without knowing their meaning. Then, amidst of the tense situation I saw a gathering of people on my right standing (i’tidal), bowing (ruku’), and prostrating (sujood).” (Partici-pant 1, first dream)

“In my second dream, I dreamt of a bigfoot that was furry. It wanted to devour me. Then, I heard someone recit-ing the Qur’an. The recitation was like a torchlight which brightens the darkness when we are walking. It chased the creature away.” (Participant 3, second dream)

These dreams depict the dangers lurking around the corner in the participants’ lives and show a glimpse of how simple actions, such as reciting the two testimonials and reciting the Qur’an can be of great significance to humans.

3.2. The Participants’ Elements of Dream

Figure 1 shows the 10 most frequent dream elements re-counted by the seven participants, which have been ar-ranged in alphabetical order. The three top-most mentioned dream elements amongst the 10 dream elements were gar-ment (robe), servant of God, and turban (3 coding referenc-es, respectively), followed by seven other dream elements such as elderly person, an imam (a religious leader), lights, mosque, prayer mat, Qur’an, and sky (2 coding references, respectively).

Based on the Ibn Sirin’s ‘Dictionary of Dreams’ (1991, p. 183 & 380), wearing a white garment (i.e. robe) means glad tidings, and servants in a dream also represent glad tidings. Meanwhile, in a dream, turban represents one’s crown, strength, integrity, state, or wife. A black turban means hap-piness and unity (p. 451). An unknown elderly person in a dream represents one’s good luck, happiness and one’s as-siduity and diligence. If the unknown elderly person looks

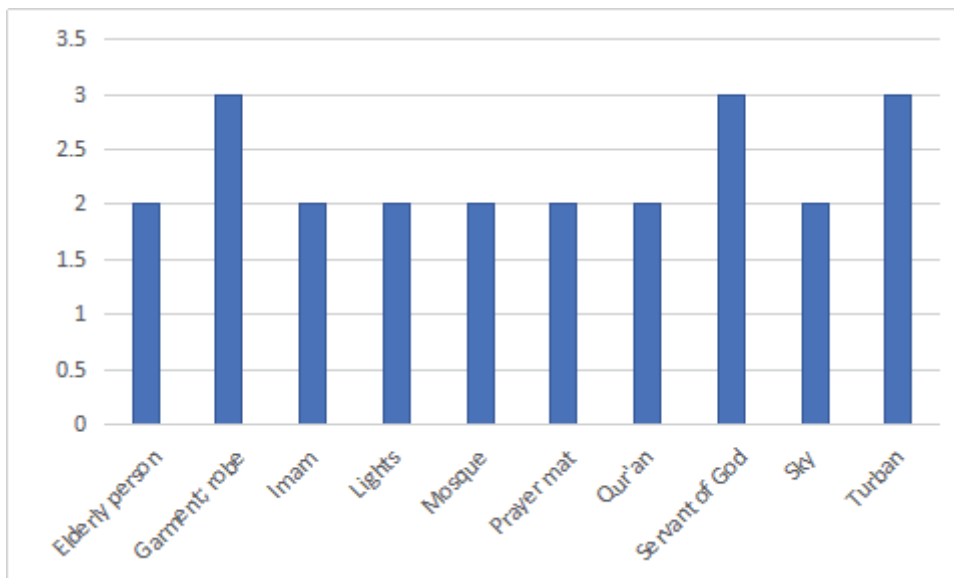


Figure 1. The number of elements in the participants’ dream(s) by coding references

strong in the dream, he represents one's strength. Whatever physical conditions an elderly person is seen with in the dream, such condition will reflect in one's own state. If an elderly person comes toward the person seeing the dream, it means that someone will help him attain a praiseworthy rank. If one follows an elderly person in a dream, it means that he follows a good path (p. 139). Meanwhile, an *imam* in a dream is the person who leads prayers in a mosque and also represents the spiritual leader of all Muslims (p. 221). Light in a dream means guidance. Light in a dream also means Islam, or submission to God. Seeing light in a dream denotes good deeds, knowledge, the holy Qur'an, or a righteous son. Light in a dream also represents a messenger, knowledge, or it could mean accomplishing one's needs in the light (p. 254). The manifestation of Divine Light is stated in *Surah al-Nur* [24], verse 35:

Translation: God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass; the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touch it: Light upon Light! God does guide whom He will to His light: God does set forth Parables for men: and God does know all things ('Ali, 2005, p. 353).

In Arabic, the word *masjid* (mosque) means a place of prostration. A *masjid* or a mosque in a dream represents a scholar and its gates represent men of knowledge and the guardians, or the attendants of God's House. A *masjid* filled with people in a dream represents a gnostic, a man of knowledge and wisdom, or a preacher who invites people to his house, advises them, brings their hearts together, teaches them the precepts of their religion and explains the wisdom behind the divine revelations (p. 268). A prayer mat in a dream represents a pious woman, or it could mean receiving a religious duty, or a spiritual appointment (p. 338). In a dream, the holy Qur'an represents a garden because when one looks at it, it looks like a beautiful garden and its verses are the fruit of knowledge and wisdom the reader can pluck. Hearing the verses of the holy Qur'an in a dream means the strengthening of one's power, reaching a praiseworthy end to his life, and that one will be protected from the envy and jealousy of evildoing people (p. 348). Meanwhile, seeing the Holy Book in a dream means growing in wisdom (p. 211). The recitation of the holy Qur'an is also associated with the descent of *al-sakinah* (peace, reassurance, and tranquility) and angels:

Narrated by Usaid bin Hudair that while he was reciting Surah al-Baqarah (The Cow) at night, and his horse was tied beside him, the horse was suddenly startled and troubled. When he stopped reciting, the horse became quiet, and when he started again, the horse was startled again. Then he stopped reciting and the horse became quiet too. He started reciting again and the horse was startled and troubled once again. Then he stopped reciting and his son, Yahya was beside the horse. He was afraid that the horse might trample on him. When he took the boy away and looked towards the sky, he could not see it. The next morning he informed the Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. who said, "Recite, O Ibn Hudair! Recite, O Ibn Hudair!" Ibn Hudair replied, "O Allah's Messenger! My son Yahya was near the horse and I was afraid that it might trample on him, so I raised my head, and went to

him. When I raised my head, and looked towards the sky, I saw something like a cloud containing what looked like lamps, so I went out in order not to see it." The Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. said, "Do you know what that was?" Ibn Hudair replied, "No". The Prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h. said, "Those were angels who came near to you for your voice, and if you had kept on reciting till dawn, it would have remained there till morning when people would have seen it as it would not have disappeared." (Sahih Bukhari, 1815)

In a dream, the sky represents itself. Whatever descends from it or comes from that direction in a dream will materialize. If one sees radiance, or scintillating rays of light coming through the sky in a dream, it means guidance (pp. 391 & 393). The skies can also be referred to as the seven heavens (p. 206) which signify the truth of revelation, as stated in *Surah al-Ra'd* [13], verse 2:

Translation: God is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see; is firmly established on the Throne (of Authority); He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His Law)! Each one runs (its course) for a term appointed. He does regulate all affairs, explaining the Signs in detail that you may believe with certainty in the meeting with your Lord ('Ali, 2005, p. 243).

The definitive meanings behind these dream elements are various. However, for the purpose of this study, the meanings or resemblances of the dream elements extracted from reference materials were based on their relevance to the participants' dream imageries. In short, the participants' elements of dreams comprise of objects, ethereal elements, people, and building.

3.3. The Impacts of Dream Imageries and Dream Elements to the Participants

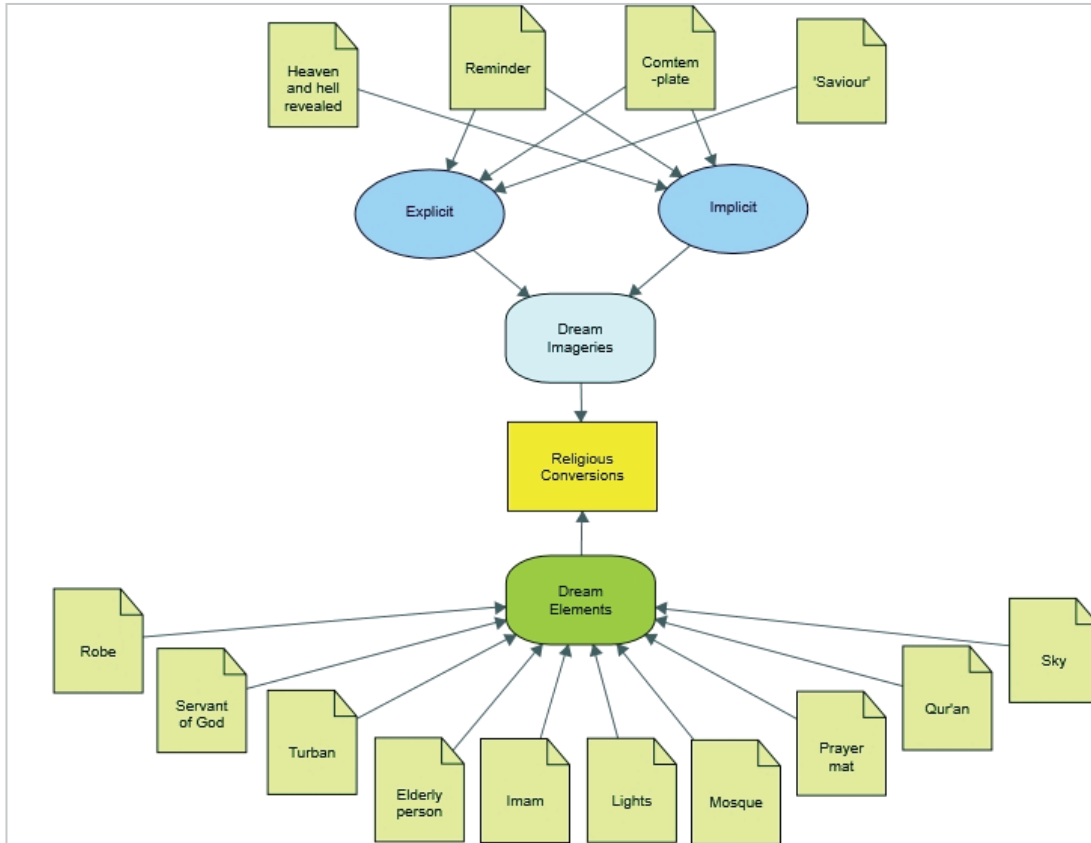
The consequences of the participants' dream(s) obviously show that the participants had either seek for an answer, followed the instructions or hints given in the dreams, or straight away made the decisions to embrace Islam.

3.3.1 Seek for the Answer

Some of the participants took a step forward by looking for the meanings of their dreams, telling their friends of the dreams they had experienced and asked their friends to explain the meanings of their dreams, as can be observed in the following quotations:

"(After the first dream) I searched for the meaning of kalimah shahadah. At that time, I was still schooling at the secondary level. I asked a Malay friend of mine about kalimah shahadah. Unfortunately, she was afraid to share her knowledge as I am a Chinese." (Participant 1)

"(After the second dream) Preceding from failure of gaining any knowledge of the kalimah shahadah, and then, getting another dream, I asked an ustaz (title used for qualified Islamic scholars) of the meanings of my dreams during class. He said, "These dreams mean that you will have to study." In the end, I decided to study about Islam even though the ustaz disallowed me to join his class, putting the conditions that I will have to first wear a hijab (veil) and baju kurung (traditional Malay costume for



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Figure 2. The map of the Muslim converts' form of dreams developed with Nvivo

women) before I can join the class.” (Participant 1, second dream)

“After the dream, I asked a friend of mine of the meaning of my dream. He said, “The servant of God has sent you a ‘letter’.” (Participant 5).

“After the same dreams that my husband and I had experienced, we shared our dreams to our neighbour who is now one of the imams at Sungai Nibong Mosque. Then, we met another friend to find the meaning of our dreams before finally reciting the two testimonials.” (Participant 7).

3.3.2 Followed the Instruction or Hint

Participant 2 and Participant 3 had followed the instructions or hints given to them in several dreams of theirs before they embraced Islam:

“What should I do? Where do I find the servant of God? I wanted to know what the message was. So, I searched for him... and found him at Kampung Ulu Mosque.” (Participant 2, fifth dream)

“After several dreams) It dawned on me that probably God had meant to show me... I cannot concentrate on watching the television as I felt emotional. I rose and did not sleep until sunrise when I should have gone off to work. But, I headed to the other way. I went to the Pejabat Agama (Religious Office) in Butterworth.” (Participant 3, third dream)

3.3.3 Quick Decisions to Embrace Islam

Some of the participants waited no longer, whereby after their first time of experiencing such dreams, they immediately reacted:

“When I looked at the situation, I knew it was Islam, and my heart was racing. I could not wait any longer. I felt the urgency to embrace Islam, and I did so the very next day.” (Participant 4).

“After the dream) The smell (black musk) lasted for three days (Dreamer 6 only uses black and white musk scents till this day), and just three days ago after I recited the two kalimah shahadah, I followed the tabligh (ideological movement) assembly to Sri Petaling. I asked them the meaning of my dream.” (Participant 6)

In brief, the participants' dream imageries and dream elements played significant roles in the religious conversions of the participants, which also indicate the importance of these aspects in the Islamic mode of dream interpretation. Figure 2 shows an overview of the participants' form of dreams which can be divided into two aspects, that is, dream imageries and dream elements. The participants' dream imageries can be divided into explicit dreams (i.e. reminder, contemplate-like, and 'saviour' dreams) and implicit dreams (i.e. heaven and hell revealed, reminder, and contemplate-like dreams). Meanwhile, the participants' dream elements comprise of garment (robe), servant of God, turban, elderly person, imam (religious leader), lights, mosque, prayer mat, Qur'an, and sky. These two aspects of the participants' form

of dreams, that is, dream imageries and dream elements are related to religious conversion which led to their conversion to Islam.

4. Conclusion

Apart from the explicit and implicit dream imageries of the participants' dreams, the elements embedded in the participants' dreams also contain expressed or implied messages that come from supernatural power. Such dreams were reflected in the form of image in the human minds as humans are generally more optimistic on elements which can be seen. Consequently, dream imageries and dream elements are two aspects that rely on one another in the course of interpreting dreams. Hence, in brief, the participants' dreams show that dreams facilitated the reception of religious beliefs by providing personal experiential confirmation of incoming information or events to dreamers.

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