



Between Correspondence and Utility; (Q. 8:43) and the Criteria of Prophetic Dreams' Truthfulness in the Qur'an¹

Seyyed Ruhollah Shafi'ei²

Abstract

This paper argues that the prophetic dream described in Q. 8:43 should be evaluated through a pragmatic lens, what works in practice, rather than through the usual correspondence standard (does it match reality?) applied to most prophetic dreams in the Qur'an and other Abrahamic scriptures. Drawing on philosophical theories of truth developed in the 19th and 20th centuries, the study shows that religious traditions have historically judged prophetic dreams by how well they correspond to external facts. But the dream about enemy troop numbers in Q. 8:43 turns out to be a special case. Here, the truth of the dream seems tied less to numerical accuracy and more to its function within the specific psychological, historical, and revelatory context of the event. In other words, what makes this dream "true" is what it accomplishes. The paper also traces shifts in classical Qur'anic exegesis. Some early interpretations allowed for more flexible, non-correspondence-based understandings of truth in dreams. But over time, mainstream theological and exegetical traditions increasingly insisted on correspondence as the only valid standard. Q. 8:43 thus reveals a lesser-known epistemological layer of the Qur'an, one where multiple models of truth coexist within the fabric of revelation and prophetic experience. This finding, in turn, opens space for rethinking how Islamic thought might engage with pragmatic theories of truth today.

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² . Assistant Professor of Quranic and Hadith Studies, Kharazmi University, Karaj, Iran,
(seyyedruhollahshafii@khu.ac.ir).



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1. Introduction

At first glance, the idea of "truth" seems straightforward. Across cultures and throughout history, people have generally shared a basic understanding of what the word means (Streng, 1987, p 63). Common dictionaries define "truth" as "the quality or state of being true" (Webster, 1983, 'truth', p 1964; Longman, 2009, 'truth', p 1085). But this simply shifts the question: what does "true" mean? According to the same sources, something is true when it is "in accordance with fact; that agrees with reality; not false" (Webster, 1983, 'true', p 1961) or "based on facts and not imagined or invented" (Longman, 2009, 'true', p 1084). Following this line, we can say that truth is the state or quality of being grounded in facts rather than in imagination or invention. Interestingly, Webster lists "true" and "truthful" as synonyms, defining "truthful" as "telling the truth; presenting the facts," and "truthfulness" as "the state of being truthful" (Webster, 1983, 'true', 'truthful', 'truthfulness', p 1961). In Western philosophical tradition, moreover, truth has typically involved three components: objectivity, universality, and eternity (Vanhoozer, 2005, p 820).

One of the clearest examples of something "true" is the so-called "true dream." Without delving too deeply into the nature of dreams themselves, we can start with Aristotle's simple definition: a dream is "one form of mental images, which occurs in sleep" (Aristotle, 1995a, p 369). But what makes a dream *true*? That, of course, is precisely the question this paper explores. For now, a working definition will suffice: as the Longman Dictionary of American English puts it, "If dreams... come true, they happen" (Longman, 2009, 'true', p 1084).

As we will see, the true dream holds significant religious importance within the Abrahamic traditions, especially in relation to prophecy and revelation. Yet there is a subtle but crucial point that has largely been overlooked in these traditions. Usually, discussions focus on the *fulfillment* of a prophetic dream, whether what was dreamed actually comes to pass, rather than on its *truthfulness* in a strict logical or epistemological sense. Fulfillment and truthfulness tend to be treated as if they were the same thing. This conflation may stem from an unexamined assumption: that the correspondence criterion (i.e., matching reality) is the only valid standard for evaluating truth within the intellectual framework of Abrahamic religions.

In this paper, I aim to disentangle these two concepts, fulfillment and truthfulness, by drawing on the classifications developed within analytical philosophy, particularly in the area of truth theories from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This approach may seem unusual at first, but my goal is to use it to rethink the implications of Q. 8:43¹ and to bring out the subtle point mentioned above. Ultimately, I hope to offer a fresh reading of this verse, one that takes its context more fully into account and that may differ from conventional exegesis. In addition, I want to demonstrate how engaging with contemporary philosophy, especially epistemology and analytic philosophy, can enrich the process of Qur'anic exegesis. My aim is to highlight the value of analytic philosophy as an academic discipline within interdisciplinary Qur'anic studies.

A note on scope: I will focus strictly on the literal language of Q. 8:43, deliberately setting aside symbolic interpretations of the kind favored by some commentators, such as Ibn 'Āshūr (Ibn 'Āshūr, vol. 9, p 116). My position is simply that the literal reading of this verse does not support the symbolic argument, though I do not claim to refute that argument entirely. Furthermore, I will restrict my analysis to Q. 8:43 itself, without invoking its immediate context. This is based on the view that the events described in the following verse occurred outside the realm of vision. Instead, I will draw on other Qur'anic verses that address the same subject in order to provide a broader contextual framework. This approach is essential to my argument, but it is not meant as a rejection of established principles of interpretation. Finally, a word on structure. This paper is divided into two main parts. The first is philosophical and preliminary: here I briefly discuss the concept of truth and the criteria of truthfulness from a philosophical perspective. The second part is exegetical and more extensive: here I turn to prophetic dreams themselves and address the central question of the paper using the philosophical framework laid out in the first part. Finally, I will apply the pragmatic theory of truth to Q. 8:43 and analyze how Muslim exegetes have understood this verse.

¹ . When Allah showed them unto thee (O Muhammad) in thy dream as few in number, and if He had shown them to thee as many, ye (Muslims) would have faltered and would have quarreled over the affair. But Allah Saved (you). Lo! He knows what is in the breasts (of men).

2. Theoretical Framework: Theories of Truth

Perhaps the points I have outlined in the previous part suggest that I intend to enter into a long and specialized discussion about the concept of truth from its logical and philosophical perspective. Nevertheless, in fact, I have no such an intention. I don't intend to elaborate on these theories in the present paper or criticize them, except as needed. Obviously, each of these theories has its own history and speculative challenges (For a complete explanation, see: Kirkham, 1992, pp 73-118; Candlish and Damnjanovic, 2006, esp. pp 228-51). I suppose it is enough to show here that the implication of (Q. 8:43) is more consistent and coordinated with the pragmatic theory, without having to explain the details and backgrounds of each of them carefully. However, I have no choice but to get a little involved in philosophical sources, to have a glance at the conception of truthfulness and the theories presented about it. For the reasons concerning the duty of this paper and will be elucidated, however, my preliminary explanation of the pragmatist theory and the criterion based on it is slightly longer and more detailed than the others.

Moreover, I would like to add here that I am assuming the ultimate goal of the truth theories is to gain and present proper criteria for it (see: Lacey, 1998, p 360). So, I allow myself to use the term 'criteria of truthfulness' in the following parts. I feel that the mentioned term is more expressive for the very purpose that I am pursuing here. Although this wordage is usually employed to refer to its moral aspects (see: Bok, 1998, pp 8705-6), surely I focus on its philosophical and epistemological directions.

Philosophers have been usually concerned rather with general and almost abstract criteria by which one can discover the nature of truth or decide on the truthfulness or falsity per se, not of a certain statement or proposition (Horwich, 1999, p 930; Urmson, 2005b, p 380). In this way, according to philosophical dictionaries, 'truth' is the quality of a propositional meaning that is in accordance with reality (Horwich, 1999, p 929; Baylis, 1942, p 321). But by which order, this quality and its nature can be recognized? Traditionally, philosophers, especially in the 'analytic philosophy' school (For a good description of both history and main issues of the 'analytic philosophy' school, for example, see: Glock, 2008, whole book), distinguish three main theories for the nature of truth: (1) Correspondence theory, (2) Coherence theory, and (3) Pragmatic theory (For example, see: Baylis, 1942, pp 321-2). Unlike most philosophical sources, first of all, I address the coherence theory here; not due to its relatively importance, but because I intend to cross it quickly. I think this theory is not consonant with the

principal purpose of this paper, so I don't have to deal with it much. Of course, it can be an attractive theory in those regions of science that the verification is impossible or unnecessary (Lacey, 1998, p 359), but it is clearly out of the present paper's scope, which dedicated to discussing the truthfulness of an account from a certain prophetic dream and its historical verification. According to the coherence theory, which is usually attributed to the nineteenth-century philosopher F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) and twentieth-century philosopher B. Blanshard (1892-1987), truth is an absolute systematic state, which belongs to a coherent whole (Kirkham, 1998a, p 8693; Baylis, 1942, p 322). In other words, something is true if it coheres or is logically consistent with a wider system than any of its rivals cohere with (Lacey, 1998, p 359).

The philosophical criticism that usually faces the coherence theory and weakens it is that it hardly gives a frankly meaning or conception of 'true' (Urmson, 2005b, p 380). Furthermore, sometimes the conditions, which placed in this manner on truth are too weak, as far as it should be supposed that some well-written novels are true ones, literally not figuratively (Kirkham, 1998a, p 8694). From the very perspective, it must be added that some types of skepticism usually aroused by the coherence theory (Kirkham, 1992, pp 112-4; Kirkham, 1998a, p 8694-5). However, from the viewpoint that followed by this paper there is a more substantial criticism against this theory. In fact, such a theory has an obvious idealistic aspect (Glock, 2008, pp 31-4; Lacey, 1998, p 359), and by accepting it, the boundary between dreaming visions and waking realities, which is a crucial presupposition for the analysis of the historical event mentioned in (Q. 8:43), disappear (see: Berkeley, p. 178).

Now let me move on to the second theory. Simply out, according to the correspondence theory, a sample proposition, as "It is raining here now" is true, if it is the case that it is raining here now in the external world (see: Baylis, 1942, p 321). This theory has a relatively certain Platonic-Aristotelian genealogy (Plato, 1997, §§ 241a & 263b; Aristotle, 1952b, §1011b25; Aristotle, 1952a, §§ 12b & 14b), but set forth and formulated accurately in the form of 'correspondence-as-correlation theory' (Kirkham, 1998b, p 8696) at the twentieth century, mainly by B. Russell (1872-1970) and the early L. Wittgenstein (1889-1951) (Candlish and Damnjanovic, 2006, pp 241-6; Lacey, 1998, p 358), as well as J. L. Austin (1911-1960) (Kirkham, 1998b, p 8696), though G. E. Moore (1873-1958) has also contributed to its preparation (Candlish and Damnjanovic, 2006, pp 228-33).

The correspondence theory, however, has also encountered some criticisms, probably the most important of which is that whatever is identified by the theory as the correspondent of the truth bearer (facts, situations, states of affairs, and so on), it can't serve as a correspondent (Kirkham, 1998b, p 8697). Anyway, perhaps the correspondence theory, which can ultimately be formulated, as "a truth bearer is true, if and only if it corresponds to a state of affairs, and that state of affairs obtains" (Kirkham, 1998b, p 8697), is the commonest theory of truth (Lacey, 1998, p 358). Indeed, the story is clear enough. Therefore, it is better to avoid further explanation. Just let me add that the main portion of analytic philosophers in the theories of truth has been to propose this theory, as well as to formulate and to classify of the other theories and to criticize them.

However, what is pragmatic theory? According to this theory, as some have said, a proposition or a belief is true if it works or satisfies (see: Baylis, 1942, p 322). In this way, the criterion of truthfulness is utility (Urmson, 2005b, p 380). Hence, it is clear that because of pragmatic theory of truth, everything, including thoughts, believes, sentences etc., must be understood in the light of human purposes, and because they are but means for obtaining specific aims, hence must be assessed as such (Urmson, 2005a, p 307). It seems that such expositions of this theory is more in line with the 'instrumentalism' suggested by W. James (1842-1910), as well as J. Dewey (1859-1952), F.C.S. Schiller (1864-1937) and (James, 1922, pp. 57 ff. & 233 ff.), because in another reading of the pragmatic theory which suggested by C.S. Peirce (1839-1914) - and called by himself as '*pragmaticism*', the consensus as the main component is very much involved (Kirkham, 1998c, p. 8702). Perhaps James' references to the German term '*denkmittel*' in the fifth lecture of *Pragmatism* may be an evidence, which takes place in this instrumentalist direction too (James, 1922, pp 171 & 179). These statements of James in his *Pragmatism* can be regarded as the slogans for declaring such an opinion: "You can say... that 'it is useful because it is true' or that 'it is true because it is useful'. Both these phrases mean exactly the same thing, namely that here is an idea that gets fulfilled and can be verified. The true... is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as the right is only the expedient in the way of our behaving. (I)f these theories work satisfactorily they will be true" (James, 1922, pp 204, 222 & 250).

Nevertheless, there is a little point here. Some describe instrumentalism as if it ignores the subject of truth (see: Lacey, 1998, p. 163). That is not really the case. The fact that Peirce's pragmaticism was not originally a theory of

truth should not lead them to assume that it is in common with the instrumentalism, from the epistemological point of view. The fact is that James's attempts at the lectures known as '*Pragmatism*' are epistemological ones. So, such an opinion is to disregard this aspect of it.

However, the pragmatic theory focus on this characteristic of truthfulness that a true proposition or belief usually is a reliable basis for action, so one can take it as the very nature of it (Horwich, 1999, p 930). As J. O. Urmson (1915-2012) writes: "(T)he pragmatists... emphasize that systems of human beliefs and the concepts employed in them are interpretations of the world designed to help us cope with it. If we thus think of statements as interpretations, we cannot divorce the question of their satisfactoriness from the question whether they do the job that they are intended to do" (Urmson, 2005b, p 381).

But James hasn't confined his comments merely to these points. He has also humiliated the correspondence theory by describing it as 'absolutely empty notion of a static relation... between our minds and reality', instead of pragmatic theory, which he has admired as 'a rich and active commerce... between particular thoughts of ours, and the great universe of other experiences' (James, 1922, p 69, 227).

It should be add that James, who was aware of the theological connotations of the pragmatic theory of truth, has emphasized in a part of his lectures that: "If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much" (James, 1922, p 73). He was been able to bridge between philosophical and theological issues, linking them well together. It can also be helpful his notes in the eighth lecture of *Pragmatism* in this regard. His recent quotation includes proper notions for the analysis of (Q. 8:43), which has followed in the present paper. Finally, it is also necessary to note that the theory of pragmatism or instrumentalism also faces this philosophical criticism that it doesn't give an appropriate meaning for the concept of 'truth' (Urmson, 2005a, p 307). In addition, it is unclear how both pragmatism and instrumentalism can adhere to the concept of truth in some situations where a useful belief doesn't joint with reality, while not fall into the chasm of idealism (Kirkham, 1998c, p 8704).

Based on the above materials and following each of the theories of truth, there can be considered three separate criteria of truthfulness: (1) correspondence criterion, (2) coherence criterion, (3) pragmatic criterion. Now let's see which one is the main criterion of prophetic dreams'

truthfulness, to determine then why I emphasize on (Q. 8:43) as a specific and different case.

3. Abrahamic Religions and the Criteria of Prophetic Dreams' Truthfulness

Based on the definition suggested for truth, talking about truthfulness of a phenomenon such as a prophetic dream and its criteria needs to at least one proposition, which contains a linguistic report of its content. In the framework of Abrahamic religions, there are numerous such propositions, both in the Bible and Qur'an, as well as traditions are based on them. But before addressing these propositions, it should be remarked that the main criterion of truthfulness which has traditionally accepted for justification in all three Abrahamic religions, and specifically in their philosophical aspects, to the extent that it can be seen as a logical and epistemological paradigm, is the correspondence one (Ochs, 2015, p 563). This fact can be pursued, both in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions and their traditions (see: Schwarzschild, 2007, p 162; Vanhoozer, 2005, pp. 818-22; Khudāvirdiān, 2013, pp 159-60; Burrell, 2006, p 386). The descriptions of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in *Summa Theologica* on the nature of truth, and his references to the viewpoints of some notable theologians like St. Augustine (354-430), St. Hilary (310-368), Isaac Israeli the Elder (832-932), St. Anselm (1033-1109), and Ibn Sīnā (370/980-427/1037), which all have delivered the very criterion, of course in different words, as well as his own concluding remarks (Aquinas, 1952, p 16, §§ 1 & 2), can be seen altogether as sufficient evidence here. As J. C. Lambert (1857-1917) has considered, the 'correspondence between speech and fact' is 'the common meaning of the word *truth*' in the biblical framework (Lambert, 1909, p 950). Although K. J. Vanhoozer opines in the *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* that the alternative theories not only doesn't suffer by any shortage, but also preferred by those that he called them '*nonfoundationalists*', nevertheless the correspondence one has the advantage of carrying 'the intuitive meaning of truth' to him (Vanhoozer, 2005, p 819). The account of A. K. Reinhart from the Arabic root 'ṣ-d-q' and its Qur'anic usages' meaning as 'correspondence between reality and speech' (Reinhart, 2002, p 70) is in the same direction; howsoever, he has intended its ethical aspects. Indeed, if one were to consider the field of ethics, he would see a perfect agreement between the Bible and Qur'an in defining truthfulness as correspondence between speech and reality, which perhaps the most important example of it is the case of witness-bearing (cf.: Ex. 20:16, Mat. 19:18, Q. 25:72).

After this necessary explanation, let me now turn to the criteria of prophetic dreams' truthfulness. There are many accounts of the Abrahamic religions' sacred texts, which can be considered as the propositions looking for evaluation of truthfulness (see: Pīrhādī and Karīmī-Wālā, 2015), as well as its criteria. As Vanhoozer writes: "In biblical usage", and it is acceptable for Qur'an in my sight, "promises as well as propositions are privileged truth-bearers" (Vanhoozer, 2005, p 819). Likewise, other propositions can be encountered too. Furthermore, he seems to ignore the separation made by J. L. Austin in his *How To Do Things With Words* between so-called 'constative' and 'performative' sentences (Austin, 1962, p 3 ff.), especially in the case of 'promising' (Ibid, pp. 9-11). So, without entering into a debate in the field of philosophy of language, I want just to point out that the Scriptures' contents can be evaluated as the divine words said by an Omnipotent God, in both constative and performative cases, from the perspective of their truthfulness or fulfillment. Fortunately, (Q. 8:43) that I examine here is a constative sentence which reveals of showing and presenting something to someone, and this fact is the main reason for avoiding that issue.

Dreams as significant and intricate human phenomena can be assessed in various ways. Regarding the scope of this paper, I restrict my study to the religious aspects of them, as far as it relates to the prophets and accounts presented by the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions about their revelations. Nonetheless, this approach doesn't mean that some parts of what follows can't be found in other areas. For example, in the case of correspondence criterion, one can see a parallel situation, at least as far as it can be assessed based on the Aristotelian heritage. Aristotle, in his other relevant epistle, namely *On Prophecy in Sleep*, asserts in this regard that: "The most skillful judge of dreams is the man who possesses the ability to detect likenesses... By likeness, I mean that the mental pictures are like reflections in water... if there is much movement, the reflection is not like the original, nor the images like the real object" (Aristotle, 1995b, p 385).

Clearly, such an expression correlates to dreams' correspondence criteria of truthfulness, although in a philosophical framework, without considering the identity of dreamers or something like that.

The Abrahamic religions, however, are shared in a cultural attitude toward dreams rooted in classical antiquity (Cox Miller, 1999, p 350), in the which, dreams were usually seen as divine means for the revelations inspired by God and generally received by men and especially by the prophets (Blau, 1901, p

655; Dulaey, 2006, pp 751-2; Cox Miller, 1999, p 350). There is a perfect textual connection in the Hebrew Bible between dreams and prophecy (Blau, 1901, p 655), and the two terms ‘prophet’ and ‘dreamer’ are related and very close in it (Gaster, 2007, p 8).¹ As Maimonides, Moses b. Maimon (d. 601/1204) in his famous book *The Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dilāla al-Ḥā’irīn*) writes: “The difference being one of quantity, not of quality” and then cites (Num. 12:6) to reaffirm this view (Maimonides, pp. 225 & 235 ff.). Albeit, there is no dispute that this divine gift, either be a spoken sentence or a shown image, sometimes needs to be interpreted. Maybe for this reason, dreams can be phenomenologically divided into two types of ‘royal messages’ and ‘apocalyptic dreams’ (Kilborne, 1987, p 482). But beyond these facts, it should be noted that in this context too, the main criterion of truthfulness which plays the central role is the correspondence one. In fact, the interpretive component helps and meddles to identify the correspondence between reality and dream, which in such cases is most likely to be symbolic and ambiguous, but doesn’t change the type of the criterion of truthfulness. For example, the Hebrew Bible’s account of Jacob’s dream in Bethel has two parts, the first of which (the rattle angels of God ascending and descending on it) (Gen. 28:12) is symbolic and requires interpretation, while the second (God’s promise to Jacob for giving the holy land to him and his seed, multiplying their number, and bringing him again into it) (Gen. 28:13-5) is non-symbolic and thus doesn’t necessarily so. The criterion of truthfulness for the latter non-symbolic part is correspondence one, because Jacob really returned to Bethel in the external world after a while, as narrated by the Bible (Gen. 35:1-7). It is precisely based on such a presupposition and using such a mechanism that faithful followers of Abrahamic religions allow themselves to evaluate such a prophetic-predictive dream and justify it with the quality of truthfulness, as well as other cases.

Although I may become a little far from my main order, because (Q. 8:43) is not a symbolic verse, let me briefly touch on the former type of dreams, i.e. symbolic ones, to illustrate better the importance of correspondence criterion. In fact, the same is valid for this type, however, the point is that understanding correspondences requires more interpretive efforts.

¹ . However, this rule has also some exceptions in the Bible. For more information, see: Collins, 1996, pp 246-7.

Following on the example mentioned above, in the case of Jacob's ladder, it can be pointed out the referential feature of each word used in the Biblical narrative of this dream, which suggested by Maimonides in the introduction of *Dilāla al-Ḥā'irīn*. When, for instance, he asserts there that: "the word *ladder* refers to one idea" (Maimonides, p 7), he is recounting the interpretive need to find a correspondence between this word and a probably unknown thing other than it in the external world, which referred to by it. Just in the same direction, the Slavonic *Tolkovaya Paleya*, however, from the mouth of an angel, allegorically explains that the ladder is the age, and its twelve steps are the periods of the age (cf.: Kugel, 1995, p 226), and the twenty-four faces on the steps are the foreign kings of the lawless nations of the age (Kugel, 1995, pp 209 ff.). Nevertheless, let me add here that there is another explanation in the rabbinic literature too, attributed to Samuel b. Naḥman (d. 4th CE) (Kugel, 1995, pp 212 ff. & 226). Anyway, in such difficult situations, interpreters seek to arrange their products to reflect better the correspondence of the prophetic dreams with the historical facts reported by the text, or something like that. So, their rivalry is not over something but matching with the correspondence criterion. It doesn't matter that such interpretations are not found in the Bible, or there is a kind of over-interpretation in them. What matters is the mechanism of achieving them and their presupposition, which based on the correspondence criterion of the truthfulness of this symbolic and ambiguous dream, with all its details, both in qualities and quantities. It is based on this method too, that one can interpret intertextually the other vague details of this dream (Kugel, 1995, pp 212-6).

The same criterion can also be seen even in those dreams narrated by the Hebrew Bible that are not dreamt by the prophets. For example, when the Bible reports both dreams of Nebuchadnezzar and then Daniel's interpretation of them, it uses the correspondence criterion and makes a matching relation between him in one hand and the golden head and tall tree in the other (Dan. 2:38 & 4:22). Thus, in this case and others like that, the interpretive component not only matches with the correspondence criterion of a dream's truthfulness, but also completes it and helps to make it intelligible. That is why the Bible emphasizes later: "All this came upon the king Nebuchadnezzar" (Dan. 4:28).¹ Actually, the expression means that Nebuchadnezzar's dream has corresponded to the historical events occurred

¹ . KJV translation

in the external world for him, and therefore it can be considered as a truthful dream.

Indeed, in these examples, and most probably in every other example, there is no evidence for both pragmatic and coherence criteria. The criterion of coherence aside, indeed, what kind of the pragmatic benefits and utilities could the ladder dream have for Jacob and a Biblical scholar, except than scaring the former (Gen. 28:17) and putting complicated problems before the latter? (see: Kugel, 1995, whole paper).

4. Qur'an, Islamic Traditions and the Criteria of Prophetic Dreams' Truthfulness

There are similar literature and attitude towards truth and prophetic dreams in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions as well, and the mentioned Biblical views can be found in them too (Kinberg, 2001, pp 546-53; Nilsāz, 2011, pp 215-7). Prophetic dreams' reports are not low in number both in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions. That is why discussing them has also partly led to the works of some Muslim scholars. I refer to these materials briefly and then pursue the main subject of this paper, which concerns the criterion of prophetic dreams' truthfulness in the Qur'an and especially in the case of (Q. 8:43), to have a better understanding of its unique situation. Let me, however, start with those that recorded in the Islamic traditions. As well as Biblical literature (Blau, 1901, p 656), dreams in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions divided into two types, i.e. good/true and evil/false, the first is etymologically from 'r'-y' and the second from 'ḥ-l-m' (Daiber, 1995, p 645; Kinberg, 2001, p 546; Fahd, 2002, pp 241-2). For example, Bukhārī (d. 256/870) reports a famous prophetic tradition in his *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaḥīḥ* that maintains: "A true good dream (*al-ru'yā al-ṣādiqa*) is from Allah, and a bad dream (*al-ḥulm*) is from Satan" (Bukhārī, v. 4, p 310; v. 7, p 353; v. 9, p 86). Of course, there are some other words and lexical roots in the Qur'an to refer to dreams (Nilsāz, 2011, p 215), but the verb referring to the dream (from the root 'n-w-m') itself is from 'r'-y' too.¹ Meanwhile, it is narrated that the prophets' dreams are divine revelations (Bukhārī, v. 1, pp 137 & 473), and it has reported by 'Ā'isha (d. 58/678) that the commencement of the revelation to Prophet Muhammad was in the form of '*al-ru'yā al-ṣādiqa*', which translated as 'good righteous (true) dreams' (Bukhārī, v. 1, p 46). In the same order, the truthful dream of other people considered as one of the forty-six parts of the prophecy (Bukhārī, v. 9, p 86 & v. 9, p 87. cf.: Maimonides, p

¹ . In addition to the verse in question, see: (Q. 37:102).

225); a tradition that is somewhat observable in the earlier Shi'ite sources (Ṣadūq, v. 2, p 585). These are more or less similar to those beliefs that also can be found in other Abrahamic religions, as mentioned above. But this traditional classification concerning dreams, i.e. good/true and evil/false, is much broader than what I am looking for in this paper, because it divides dreams only into two types of true and false. Such a classification tells us nothing more than that the prophetic dreams were all true ones. Therefore, if one takes his question one further step and asks of the dreams that what criterion of the truthfulness did they match with, this classification can no longer provide a proper explanation. For example, according to Islamic traditions, both Muhammad's initial non-revelatory experiences and his dream in the night journey to heaven which mentioned in (Q. 17:1 & 60) and known as *isrā'* or *mi'rāj* depicted respectively by 'Ā'isha and Mu'āwīa b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680) as truthful dreams had come from Allah (Ibn Ishāq, pp 105 & 183).¹ But by what criterion it can be justified?

It should be noted that, as far as one can understand from the Islamic traditions, the criterion of prophetic dreams' truthfulness is correspondence one, even in the symbolic and quasi-symbolic cases that need to be interpreted. For example, as reported by 'Ā'isha (Bukhārī, v. 7, p 26; v. 7, p 51), Muhammad said to her that she has been shown to him twice in his dreams, in the form that a man carrying her in a silk cloth and saying to him that it is your wife. Then, he uncovered it and behold it is 'Ā'isha. So: "I said to myself, if this dream is from Allah", and therefore is a truthful dream - "He will cause it to come true" (Bukhārī, v. 7, p 26) or "it will surely be accomplished" (Bukhārī, v. 7, p 51). Obviously, this prophetic dreams' accomplishment or fulfillment is entirely based on the same correspondence criterion. Indeed, in such cases, one can see that the fulfillment of prophetic dreams assumed to be its very truthfulness. Sometimes, the necessity of the very correspondence criterion had also demanded causing even some miraculous occasions which narrated by prophet's companions. Bukhārī attributes to Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī that once when Muhammad said in a part of his khutba that he dreamt him prostrating in mud and water, suddenly a cloud came into the clear sky and rained. Then he led his companions to prayer, so they saw the traces of mud on his forehead and nose. Finally, Khudrī asserts that: "so it was the confirmation of that dream" (Bukhārī, v.

¹ . In the case of (Q. 17:60), see: Bukhārī, 1997, v. 5, p 137; v. 6, p 192; v. 8, p 325. Moreover, consider the important note pointed out in: Kinberg, 2001, p 552.

1, p 452; v. 3, p 139). This sentence clarifies that the criterion of prophetic dreams' truthfulness for him, and most probably for other people, was nothing but the correspondence between Muhammad's account of his dream and the external world's events.

Let me now turn to the Qur'anic accounts of dreams, to see how the criterion of truthfulness in all of them is correspondence, of course, with the exception of (Q. 8:43). Fortunately, my remarks in this part will not be so long, since I illustrate here these Qur'anic accounts and their criterion of truthfulness in a table. In setting this table, I apply a classification concerning prophetic dreams and their criterion of truthfulness, which suggested by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), however, without confirming its methodology. Throughout this essay, obviously, my preferred methodology, as well as theoretical framework, will be the same that outlined in the beginning part. As Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī points out in his *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, prophetic dreams can be classified into three types: (1) corresponding to reality, (2) corresponding to reality in another way, (3) needy to interpretation (*ta'wīl*). He refers to the dreams of Muhammad, Abraham, and Joseph, respectively, to prove the reliability of such classification (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, v. 26, pp 349-50). I think that his classification is important, as it can be seen, particularly in the case of the distinction between positive and negative correspondence, as I will point out below, as a prelude to the separation of the prophetic dreams' 'truthfulness' from their 'fulfillment'. But, as Kinberg points out (Kinberg, 2001, p 547), this classification has two different and separate bases, i.e. fulfillment and clarity. In better words, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has mixed up these two issues, which one relates to truthfulness and the other to what can be called 'symbolicity'. In addition, it is unclear why he restricted his classification only to the prophetic dreams mentioned in the Qur'an, while its accounts concerning other people's dreams can be classified on the same base too. However, in addition to giving a better understanding of the Muslim scholars' usual attitude toward the criteria of prophetic dreams' truthfulness, this classification has the advantage of bringing order to this essay. In this way, all the Qur'anic accounts concerning dreams and the criterion of their truthfulness, with the exception of (Q. 8:43), can be illustrated in the table below:

	dreamer	chapter:verse	correspondence criterion	need to be interpreted
1	Joseph	12:4	+	+

2	Joseph's fellow prisoners	12:36-41		
3	The king of Egypt	12:43-9		
4	Abraham	37:102-7	-	×
5	Muhammad	48:27	+	×

As the table shows, in all three dreams belong to Joseph's Qur'anic accounts (rows 1-3), the criterion of truthfulness is correspondence one, and all of them are symbolic dreams, which need to be interpreted. Therefore, I have put a '+' in their cells. But Abraham's dream (row 4) doesn't require any interpretation, so I have set '×' for its cell. Moreover, the criterion of truthfulness of Abraham's dream is 'corresponding in the opposite way' as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī opines, so I have dedicated '-' for it. This mark can be called 'negative correspondence'. In the case of Muhammad's dream concerning the conquest of Mecca (row 5), the first cell should be marked as '+' and the second as '×', because its criterion of truthfulness is positive correspondence, not negative, as in the case of Abraham, and it is also not a symbolic dream that needs to be interpreted.

Now let me review some important points about the contents of the table above.

1. All rows of the table above apply that sort of statements which has called by Austin as 'constative', and I have mentioned it already. For example, Joseph reports his dream like this:¹ "I saw in a dream eleven planets and the sun and the moon, I saw them prostrating themselves unto me" (Q. 12:4). In this case, we deal with a constative sentence which informs us of dreaming somethings, using the verb 'I saw' (*ra'aytu*) derived from the root 'r-'-y' - which is found in all similar reports, and therefore its truthfulness and other relevant issues can be evaluated by any criterion. This objection cannot be accepted, then, that the propositions referring to prophetic dreams are of the performative sort, and therefore the criterion of their truthfulness should not be examined.

2. In all rows 1 to 3, the interpretation required in both prophetic and non-prophetic cases just belongs to qualities, not quantities. Joseph dreams that sun, moon, and eleven stars or planets prostrating onto him (Q. 12:4). At the end of the story, it becomes clear that the sun was a symbol for Jacob and must be interpreted in this way, the moon as Leah, and the stars or planets as Joseph's eleven brothers (Q. 12:99 & 100). However, there is no indication

¹ . Translated by M.M. Pickthall (1875-1936). See: Pickthall, 1930, p 236.

that these celestial objects have changed in number, but a complete correspondence can be seen here. The same thing applies to the king's two parallel dreams (Q. 12:43 & 46), so Joseph interprets seven kine and seven green as seven years (Q. 12:47-8). Even in the case of Abraham's dream, one ram is sacrificed instead of one son (Q. 37:107).

3. Muhammad's prophetic dream concerning the conquest of Mecca, which takes place in row 5, is probably the simplest and clearest example of these cases, which reported in the Qur'an. This dream corresponds to the historical reality that happened later in the external world, without requiring any interpretation, either qualitative or quantitative.

4. Finally, what matters in this table is the absence of 'x' in the cells assigned to the 'corresponding type' column; a fact that illustrates the correspondence as the main criterion of prophetic dreams' truthfulness in Qur'an.

Now and following these long preparations, it seems that we are in a proper position to understand the problem of this paper. So let's go to the assessment of (Q. 8:43) and explore what type is its criterion of truthfulness.

5. A Delayed Problem Statement

In addition to that dream of Muhammad mentioned in row 5, the Qur'an points directly to another prophetic dream for him, which referred in (Q. 8:43). This verse uses another form of the root 'r-'y', namely '*yurī*' (means 'shows' or 'showed') to report Muhammad's prophetic dream. The translation of this verse is:¹ "When Allah Showed them unto thee (O Muhammad) in thy dream as few in number, and if He had Shown them to thee as many, ye (Muslims) would have faltered and would have quarreled over the affair. But Allah Saved (you). Lo! He knows what is in the breasts (of men)".

The occasion of this verse's revelation, according to the major sources of Islamic history, belongs to the battle of Badr (Ramādān 2/March 624) (see: Ibn Ishāq, p 325; Wāqidi, v. 1, p 130). The Qur'an itself has mentioned this historical event twice, once indirectly in (Q. 8:41) as 'the Day of Discrimination, the day when the two armies met'² (*yawm al furqān yawm altaqa aljam āni*), and once again directly in (Q. 3:123). As Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) reports in his *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr*, 'Abdullāh b. al-Abbās (d. 68/686-8) has referred to Sura '*al-Anfāl*' (the spoils of war), the same chapter that (Q. 8:43) exists in it, as sura '*al-Badr*' (Suyūṭī, v. 3, p

¹ . See: Pickthall, 1930, p 186.

² . See: *ibid*.

187). This quote reaffirms the mentioned relation between at least some parts of Sura *al-Anfāl*, including verse 43, and the battle of Badr.

Of course, it should be noted that this verse followed immediately by another one that reveals:¹ “And when He Made you (Muslims), when ye met (them), see them with your eyes as few, and lessened you in their eyes (it was) that Allah might Conclude a thing that must be done. Unto Allah all things are brought back”.

But this second verse isn't about the prophetic dream, and just concerns the Muslim soldiers and also those Meccan unbeliever troops who were present at the battlefield. Furthermore, (Q. 3:13) implies to Muslim and their enemies too, not to Muhammad himself and his last night prophetic dream at all.² It seems that I have the right, hence, to restrict my study in this paper only to (Q. 8:43).

One of the crucial points of (Q. 8:43), that even may be considered as its most crucial point, is the number of Muhammad's unbeliever enemy troops. Sources of Islamic history have reported that this matter was very significant for Muhammad, so he inquired captured water carriers of Quraysh tribe on it. During this conversation, which dated a few days before the battle, he estimated that there were up to one thousand people in the Quraysh army (Ibn Ishāq, 2004, p 295; Wāqidī, 1856, v. 1, pp 52-3). Meanwhile, the number of Muslim troops seems to have been slightly more than three hundred (see: Wāqidī, 1856, v. 1, p 23).

There seems to be a contradiction between the text of historical sources and the connotation of exegetical ones. On the one hand, the historical sources report that Muhammad had known the large number of enemies, exactly or approximately. On the other hand, the text of Qur'an and its exegesis indicate that Allah showed to him subsequently that they are small in number. In such circumstances, and at least during the short time from receiving the revelation of (Q. 8:43) to encountering with the enemies, it can be imagined that an epistemological dilemma has been raised for Muhammad to choose between human testimonies and divine revelation. I don't have enough chance here, to deal with different aspects of this issue, especially its revelatory implications, and only hope that I can deal with it in the future and other opportunities. However, it can be supposed that it is not a very complex problem in itself, because one may accept that Muhammad, as a genuine

¹ . See: Pickthall, 1930, pp 186-7.

² . Translation of the initial part of (Q. 3:13): “There was a token for you in two hosts which met: one army fighting in the way of Allah, and another disbelieving, whom they saw as twice their number, clearly, with their very eyes...” See: Pickthall, 1930, p 68.

prophet, has trusted to and relied on the epistemological power of divine revelation, and then has thought that the enemies were really small in number. Finally, he has shared this experience with his companions and has been able to encourage them to fight bravely and win. All this happened while they saw a large number of enemies at the battlefield; the number most matched with the same military report that already received by Muhammad. His prophetic dream fulfilled anyway, but a significant part of its content, which was related to the enemies' number, was not matched with the requirements of the correspondence criterion.

Now, if I maintain that order set up for the table above, this prophetic dream should take place in the sixth row, with a '×' mark in both cells:

	dreamer	chapter:verse	correspondence criterion	need to be interpreted
6	Muhammad	8:43	×	×

Such a marking means that this dream neither requires any interpretation, nor matches the correspondence criterion. So, it illustrates a substantial difference between the previous dreams and the dream that (Q. 8:43) reports it. But with the explanations I have given so far, it should be clear that this substantial difference relates to its mismatching with the correspondence criterion; a quality which as if makes this dream the most complicated one. However, this complication has no reason other than its truthfulness is depends on the fulfillment of its purpose. In other words, this dream is true due to its utility and achievement of the purpose it intended to. If one wants to present this issue with James' special terms, he can say that this dream has worked satisfactorily, so it is true. This, in my opinion, is the much forgotten connotation that the unwritten words of (Q. 8:43) contain. Now it looks like I'm able to formulate and identify my main questions. It seems, however, there are two main questions about this verse; one is theological, and the other is philosophical:

1. As an Omniscient and Omnipotent God, Allah, despite knowing the exact quantity of Muhammad's enemies, showed them to him in his dream less than they really were. Does it deserve for Him to obtain a purpose such as the triumph of Muhammad in the battle of Badr by showing a prophetic

dream to him that doesn't necessarily correspond with the coming truth in its all states and conditions, i.e. quantities as well as qualities? Why didn't He kept another way to strengthen His Prophet's heart? This question can be important from a theological point of view, especially when it connect with the morality of divine virtues and vices.

2. Can this prophetic dream of Muhammad be regarded as a true one? It appears from the context of the verse that, at least during a short time, Muhammad had considered this special dream as a corresponding one, with all its details, including the number of unbeliever enemies. Nevertheless, was his belief epistemologically true? If so, what criterion of truthfulness can be applied for such a justification?

Although both of the above questions are very important, and sometimes are interconnected, so far as some Muslim exegetes have confused them, as we shall see, the present paper deals only with the second, postponing exploration of the answer to the first for a suitable opportunity.

Now, that the main question of this paper is stated, let me see how Muslim exegetes have been thinking about it, throughout history. But first, I ought to point out that there is no independent work in the history of Islamic thought that has discussed the criteria of prophetic dreams' truthfulness. Perhaps Muslim scholars would have forgotten this point and never paid attention to it independently, if (Q. 8:43) was not in the Qur'an. While it exists now in the Qur'an, still there is very little literature relating to it and its implication. I think, however, the preliminary explanations of this paper have provided a valuable tool to help us classify and review this not so extensive literature.

6. Subjective vs. Objective Criterion: Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Muqātil, Māturīdī and (Q. 8:43)

The first sign of emerging a subjective attitude concerning the criteria of prophetic dreams' truthfulness can be pursued probably in the exegetical heritages of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). This viewpoint, which is probably the first exegetical attempts of Muslim scholars concerning (Q. 8:43), is of the interpretive type, and deal with the Qur'anic word used for 'dream' (*manām*). According to this interpretive view, which attributed to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and has widely reported by Muslim exegetes (see: Māturīdī, 2005, v. 5, p 227; Ṭabarī, 1992, v. 10, p 10), this word must comprehend as 'eye' not 'dream', because it morphologically is a place noun, and therefore doesn't refer to the dream itself, but refer to the place or organ by which it is seen. Thus, it is as if Allah has reduced the number of enemies in Muhammad's eyes, during his awakening. Consequently, (Q. 8:43) only refers to a kind of

non-revelatory divine intervention that is to humiliate the enemies in the sight of Muhammad, without necessarily saying anything about the content of the revelation received by him in a prophetic dream. Although the motive of such interpretation is not clear at all, it is difficult to accept that it would have affected by something like the philosophical problems raised afterward for Muslim exegetes. Whatever the case was, some later intellectual Muslim exegetes qualified this interpretive view as contrary to the text's literal meaning and rejected it (see: Ṭūsī, v. 5, p. 129). Probably what they have in mind is the definite indication of the word 'dream', when it collocated with another word from the root 'r-'-y'. Maybe that is why Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) in his *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl* came to a point where he essentially doubted this attribution to Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who had great knowledge in Arabic and was very eloquent (Zamakhsharī, 1987, v. 2, p. 225). However, this interpretive view became a pretext for some Muslim exegetes to tend to evaluate the truthfulness of this prophetic dream with a subjective criterion, rather than an objective one. For example, one of the most leading exegetes of the Qur'an, Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) in his *Tafsīr* opines about the criterion of this prophetic dream's truthfulness in a way that seems he regarded it as a subjective one. He writes: "And before they encounter, the Prophet saw in the dream that the enemies are few. Therefore, He told his companions what he saw in the dream, that the enemies are few. Thus, they said that the Prophet's dream is just right, and people will be few. Hence, when they encountered at the battlefield, Allah reduced the number of unbeliever troops *in the eyes of the believer*, to verify the Prophet's dream" (Muqātil b. Sulaymān, 2002, v. 2, p. 117).¹ As the italicized part of his writing shows, Muqātil speaks of reducing the number of enemies subjectively in the eyes of the believer, not objectively and necessarily about what happened in the external world. Thus, it seems that he does not necessarily accept the requirements of the external world as one of the most important and fundamental conditions of the concept of truth, in its philosophical sense (On the important role of the external world in the concept of truth, for example, see: Horwich, 1999, p 930), as accepted generally by the Western philosophers and their followers among Muslim scholars.

Another Muslim exegete who associates with Muqātil in the subjective criterion of prophetic dreams' truthfulness is Māturīdī (d. 333/944). Māturīdī, in his *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna* repeats Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Muqātil's

¹ .Author's translation everywhere.

exegetical viewpoints on (Q. 8:43) word for word, and then brings a tradition from Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/650), which reports that the number of enemies was very small at the sight of the Muslims who were present at the battlefield: "They reduced in our eyes on the day of Badr, even I asked my attendants that do you see them seventy in number? He said I see them one hundred. So we arrested one of them and asked him, and he said we were one thousand (Māturīdī, 2005, v. 5, p 227). Yet Māturīdī does not do enough. He also points to the challenging question of those who ask that if what this verse speaks of has been revealed in a prophetic dream to Muhammad, then how can it be considered true? Māturīdī has two answers to such a question, however, his cautious tone indicates that the first doesn't satisfy him. His first answer is: "It is said that probably Allah showed some of them to Muhammad, not all. Therefore, the number of those people who Allah showed them to Muhammad was right. And so it is said, however, Allah Knows better" (Māturīdī, 2005, v. 5, p 227). Presumably, this is a case of the powerful influence of theological presuppositions on the exegetical products. Otherwise, it remains unclear how he has written in this way about (Q. 8:43), while the text itself explicitly attributes the act of reducing the number of enemies in the eyes of Muhammad to Allah, by using the word '*yurī*' (showed).

After this not so convincing answer, Māturīdī makes her final interpretive attempt. He writes that although Allah has addressed Muhammad here, in fact, may His main audiences are his companions. To reasoning this view, he cites the plural pronoun in the phrase '*yurīkumūhm*' (showed you) in (Q. 8:44), and then, through citing (Q. 17:23), points to this literary note that, in some cases, the main audiences of the Qur'an are people other than Muhammad, but ultimately he is the literal audience (Māturīdī, 2005, v. 5, p 227-8). However, the subjective attitude toward the criterion of prophetic dreams' truthfulness mentioned in (Q. 8:43) is no longer welcomed by Muslim exegetes, and henceforth they seek to examine it objectively. But this doesn't mean that their only choice has been the correspondence criterion.

7. Rising the Pragmatic Criterion: Mujāhid, Ṭabarī and (Q. 8:43)

As it can be judged based on the reports of later exegetical works, rising the pragmatic criterion belongs to the heritage attributed to Mujāhid b. Jabr al-Makkī (d. 100-104/718-22) (, see: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1999, v. 15, p 487; Suyūṭī, 1984, v. 3, p 188). According to this exegetical viewpoint:¹"Allah

¹ . Author's translation.

reduced the number of Quraysh unbelievers to Muhammad in his dream. So he informed his companions. So they said that because the Prophet's dream is true, they really must be few in number. *So this belief encouraged them and strengthened their hearts*". The first thing that matters in this viewpoint is to highlight the companion's role in (Q. 8:43). In fact, from the outset, Mujāhid adjusts his viewpoint so that the companion's contribution to the unwritten context of (Q. 8:43) is more than that the text itself shows. Meanwhile, he almost ignores Muhammad's contribution, which is probably to be found in the two Qur'anic phrases '*la-fashiltum*' (you would have faltered) and '*la-tanāza 'tum*' (you would have quarreled). It seems, however, an exegetical preparation for his main purpose; a purpose which is, in my opinion, nothing but accepting the pragmatic criterion for this prophetic dream's truthfulness. The italicized part of the above quote shows that Mujāhid is trying to emphasize and focus on the utility and function of such a prophetic dream, of course, for the companions. This is the application of pragmatic criterion. Hence, the pragmatic criterion can be well attributed to Mujāhid's viewpoint, at least in the case of this prophetic dream's truthfulness. The exegesis attributed to Mujāhid is repeated by Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his *Jamī' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*. He begins his writing as:¹ "He, His remembrance be great, Says: O Muhammad! Surely Allah was Hearer of what your companions said, Aware of what they had in mind, when He Showed your enemy and their enemy to you in your dream as few in number" (Ṭabarī, 1992, v. 10, pp 9-10). Then he continues that the verse says: "He Showed them in your dream as small in number, since you informed them it, so their hearts became strong and dared to fight their enemy" (ibid). Ṭabarī's exegesis on (Q. 8:43) up to here is taken from the text's connotations, as well as its exegete's hypertextual information. The verse itself doesn't say anything about Muslim's courage, at least directly and explicitly. Then he goes back to the text, and counts the losses incurred by showing the large number of enemies to the companions: "Your companion would be faltered, so they would be feared and trembled, and would not be able to fight those people, and would be quarreled in it, however, Allah saved them by what showed to you in your sleeping dream" (Ṭabarī, 1992, v. 10, p 10). So Ṭabarī, too, has nothing here to do with the correspondence of Muhammad's prophetic dream to the reality of the external world. It may even be possible that during the compilation of this part of his exegesis, Ṭabarī has associated his detailed information about the history of early Islam, which, in this case, relates to the Prophet's awareness of the enemies' number, and he has mentioned it in his *Tā'rikh al-*

¹ . Author's translation everywhere.

Umam wa al-Mulūk (Ṭabarī, 1967, v. 2, pp 423 & 437). Anyway, following the Mujahid, he also adopts a pragmatic criterion to evaluate the content of (Q. 8:43). What matters for them is the utility of Muhammad's prophetic dream, namely Muslim's victory in the battle of Badr, and this is what eventually fulfilled.

8. Mu'tazilite vs. Ash'arite Exegetes: Rummānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and (Q. 8:43)

Rummānī (d. 384/994) is probably the first Muslim exegete who has find out the significance of (Q. 8:43) from the perspective of the main question of this paper, and tried to provide a rational justification for it. While he focuses on the first main question mentioned above and reflects his Mu'tazilite tendencies (see: Flanagan, 1995, p. 614 ff.), that part of his quote which refers to the mirage (italicized sentence below) may have a role to approach the second. As Ṭūsī (d. 459-60/1066-7) in his *al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* reports, Rummānī has said about this verse:¹ "And it is permitted for Allah showing to Muhammad in his dream something that is unlike what really it is. Because even if a kind of awareness comes with the dreams that fall asleep, one imagines an uncertain sense for it. *And surely it would be like imagining mirage as water, without realizing that it is water.* And it is permitted for Allah doing so. However, it is not permitted for Him revealing the belief of something to Muhammad, which is unlike what really it is. Since this is a kind of ignorance, which is not permitted for Almighty Allah committing it" (Ṭūsī, v. 5, p 139).

Simply put, at the sight of Rummānī, it is like to someone who walks in a desert and sees some water, but he imagines that that water is a mirage, without knowing that it is water. According to this analogy, Allah Has Shown the true number of enemies to Muhammad in his dream, but he himself has imagined their number less than that was shown to him. Having a better conception of the analogy made by Rummānī, it should be noted that what he says is opposite to what usually happens. Because most people see in the deserts something seems water, while that is a mirage and they know this fact. But he depicts a different situation, where one imagines some real water like a mirage. Of course, according to this explanation, there is no longer any way to attribute ignorance to Allah. Nevertheless, the first main question still remains: was this prophetic dream of Muhammad a true, not a fulfilled, one, with all its details, including the number of enemies? His words do not seem to be able to answer this question. However, his remarks

¹ . Author's translation.

can indicate that it is an important question, which reflecting on it may lead to some problematic issues.

Unlike Rummānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī skips this question and disregards it when he interprets (Q. 8:43). For him, as an Ash‘arite exegete (see: Anawati, 1991, p 751 ff.), as if there is no problem at all, neither theological nor philosophical, for trying to solve it. He writes:¹ “And if it said that: Seeing few in number the things that are really large, is an error. So, how it may be permitted for Allah to commit such an error? We say that: Our belief is that He Almighty Does what He Will and Ordain what He Please (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 1999, v. 15, p 488). Thus, it can be said that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, while referring to three Qur’anic verses, i.e. (Q. 3:40), (Q. 5:1) and (Q. 22:18), confirms and applies the same thought had been outlined already by al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936) in the 3rd and 7th chapters of his famous theological book *al-Lūma‘* (Ash‘arī, pp. 48-60 & 114-21) as well as his other works.

As a final analysis of Rummānī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on (Q. 8:43), it can be said that both of them, despite much disagreements on their theological attitudes, share in an unsaid but an obvious logical and epistemological presupposition, namely holding the correspondence theory as the principal criterion for the truth in general, and the truthfulness of prophetic dreams in particular. Of course, the first try to solve the problem by applying an almost strange analogy, and the second try to skip or project it. One might even want to say that this can also be understood from parts of Māturīdī’s mentioned exegetical viewpoints. I do not object. Nevertheless, it is clear that both Rummānī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī neglect and forget the pragmatic criterion, which already maintained by Mujāhid and then followed by Ṭabarī. If I want to present this analysis using James’ special terms, I can say that as if we encounter an intellectual phenomenon in the history of Islamic thought, that can be called ‘shifting from *tender-minding* to *tough-minding*’ (see: James, 1922, pp 12 & 262 ff.).

9. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I have to say that, according to this paper, the truthfulness of that prophetic dream, which reported in (Q. 8:43), should be evaluated and justified by the pragmatic criterion. However, other prophetic dreams reported in the Qur’an, as well as other sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions, are all evaluated and justified by the correspondence criterion. Therefore, (Q. 8:43) represents one of the many less well-known

¹ . Author’s translation.

epistemological aspects of Qur'an, and most probably, in a broader sense, Islam itself among the other Abrahamic religions. By comparative surveying and analyzing the historical evolutionary course of the Muslim exegesis' viewpoints on (Q. 8:43), a remarkable transitional state appears in their contents. In the age of tābi'īn, two distinct viewpoints can be identified about the truthfulness criterion of the prophetic dreams mentioned in the Qur'an, one is subjective, but the other, while being objective, prepares the ground for acceptance of the pragmatic criterion. The first one represented by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and the second by Mujaḥid. Both views continue for at least three centuries, respectively, by Muqātil and to some extent Māturīdī on the one hand, and Ṭabarī on the other. Then, the viewpoints of Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite exegetes, which can be represented respectively by Rummānī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, tend to a direction as if their epistemological presupposition is the necessity of correspondence criterion for prophetic dreams' truthfulness, and forgetting the pragmatic one at all. Such a presupposition has continued to this day and can be found among the exegetical viewpoints of Muslim scholars on (Q. 8:43), however, I did not find a proper opportunity to present their necessary evidence in this paper. Now I want to finish this paper by pointing out one of its implications that might be important in some ways, of course, if I have been able to make a precise argument for it. To be fair, some of the most important problems that Muslims face today in the modern world are pragmatically true, not correspondingly. That's why today there are many efforts made to show the connection between Islam and pragmatism and the need of the former to the latter in the modern world, and emphasize the necessity of adopting such an approach. These admirable efforts, however, often suffer from the significant flaw that they rely more on social and legal causes rather than religious reasons. I think this is precisely why they have been less able to seem convincing for Muslims. In this paper, I have attempted to establish a connection between pragmatism and the unique revelatory experience, which reflected in the Qur'an as the heart of Islam. The point is that the Qur'an contains two accounts of Muhammad's prophetic dreams, one of which should be evaluated and justified with the correspondence criterion, and the other with the pragmatic one. Therefore, it can be concluded that if the ultimate goal of being a Muslim is the reproduction of the same experience for the Muslim individual, the utility and benefit of the affairs are considered as valuable in it as the match with the religious realities.

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