

Feeling Without Sense Organs

Man imagines that while awake he perceives his surroundings through his sense organs; that he needs eyes to see, ears to hear and skin to touch. However, dreams seen during sleep show that sensory stimuli coming from the outside world are not always necessary for a conscious sensory experience to arise.

Imagine that you are asleep at night. In your dream, you are on a street. Rain is falling on your face, you hear someone's voice and answer him. You descend a staircase whistling and try to reach somewhere in a hurry, passing through the crowd...



Yet the room in which you are sleeping is silent and pitch-dark... While you perceive nothing from outside with your sense organs, you are in an entirely different world in your dream. When you wake up, you say, **“So it was a dream.”** Yet while dreaming, you cannot know that the scenes you experience are not real.

This is the point that must be considered: It is not essential for there to be an external sensory stimulus in order to have a conscious experience. Even when no light or sound reaches it from outside, the brain can create a complete and realistic experience. Dreams are one of the best-known examples of this.

Experimental studies conducted on this subject have also revealed striking results. In a study conducted in a sleep laboratory, subjects capable of lucid dreaming were asked to perform a predetermined sequence of eye movements the moment they realized they had entered a dream. These signals, created by the subjects moving their eyes right and left in a specific sequence, were evaluated together with the brain activity recorded simultaneously. In the study, brain activity was recorded from 19 separate points.

As a result of the study, a significant proportion of the sleeping subjects were able to signal that they were dreaming by means of the predetermined eye movements. It was thus shown that during sleep, when no external sensory signal is consciously received, a vivid and conscious experience of which the individual is aware continues. (1)

In another study, it was revealed through high-resolution recordings that the conscious dream experience occurring during sleep without any distinct external sensory stimulus was associated with activity in the posterior regions of the brain. (2)

A similar situation is observed not only during sleep, but also in people who are awake. One of the best-known examples of this is the phantom limb experience. Accordingly, some patients whose limb has been surgically removed can still feel the limb that is no longer physically present. For example, a person may feel the fingers or palm of his nonexistent arm and may even feel pain in that limb.

In explaining the phantom limb experience, neuroscientist Vilayanur S. Ramachandran states that these sensations are exceedingly vivid and realistic and that the sensory experience continues even though the patient is aware that his arm is no longer present. Ramachandran says: **“These are very compelling, vivid sensations. The patient is not delusional. He knows the arm is not there, but, nevertheless, it’s a compelling sensory experience for the patient.”** (3)



The striking point here is this: Although no sensory signal comes from a limb that is not physically present, a real sensation relating to that limb can arise in the person. This shows that sensory experience cannot be explained solely by the existence of the physical object in the outside world.

Now let us consider: The world we see in a dream and the world we see at this moment have an important feature in common in terms of the way they reach us. In both cases, the image we see, the sound we hear and the touch we feel arise as an experience in consciousness.

If all these sensations can arise completely in a dream even though there is no object or event outside, then it is clear that in the experience we have while awake, we do not directly experience the objects themselves in the outside world either. Sensory information coming from the outside world is processed in our brains and transformed into experiences such as images, sounds and touch. In other words, what we experience is not the external object itself, but the image and sensations relating to it that form in our brains.

Therefore, we cannot prove that the experience we are in at this moment is not a dream. That is because both in dreams and in wakefulness, what we see, hear and feel arises as an experience

in consciousness. In both, we exist within the sensory world presented to us.

So what use is this knowledge to us? This knowledge is a very important scientific fact that will change one's outlook on life. It eliminates the basis for pursuing the life of this world. Property, possessions and status for which people harbor ambition consist solely of images in the brain. No one can ever see the original of what he pursues, nor take it in his hand and feel it.

The Qur'an draws attention to the transience of the life of this world as follows:

"The life of this world is nothing but a game and a diversion. The Hereafter is better for those who fear [and respect] God. So will you not use your intellect?" (Surat al-An'am, 32)

It is God Who shows us these images and Who has control over our states of sleep and wakefulness. He is the only Being to Whom attention must be directed. Your responsibility is to Him alone. God reveals in the Qur'an:

"God takes back people's selves when their death arrives and those who have not yet died, while they are asleep. He keeps hold of those whose death has been decreed and sends the others back for a specified term. There are certainly Signs in that for people who reflect." (Surat az-Zumar, 42)



References

- (1) Voss et al. — Signaling consciousness through eye signals in lucid dreaming, 19-channel EEG, Sleep Journal. DOI: 10.1093/sleep/32.9.1191
- (2) The relationship between conscious dream experience generated during sleep without external stimuli and activity in the posterior regions of the brain, high-density EEG (14 healthy subjects). DOI: 10.1523/jneurosci.0855-18.2018
- (3) Vilayanur S. Ramachandran — Neuroscientist, University of California, San Diego. “3 Clues to Understanding Your Brain”, TED2007 (on phantom limbs)

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