

# Opinion

## Your dreams tell you who you are

Where your brain goes when you're asleep helps you when you're awake.

**Alice Robb**

One muggy Saturday last summer, I went on a date with a man who seemed entirely fine. We drank two beers and went for a walk, and he explained why he liked certain buildings that we passed. We kissed, and his breath tasted like cigarettes. We parted ways, and I couldn't muster the energy to answer his emoji-laden follow-up texts about my weekend activities.

The date was mediocre at best — but in the days that followed, I second-guessed my decision not to see him again. Maybe I had written him off too soon; maybe I should have given things a chance to develop. After all, he had some good qualities. He was handsome, tall, employed — and not, refreshingly, as a writer.

It was only after a painfully on-the-nose dream a few weeks later that I stopped doubting my intuition. In the dream, I had agreed to a second date, and I had brought along two friends to observe our interactions and help me assess him. At the end of the group outing, my friends pulled me away and offered a unanimous decision: He wasn't for me. I had made the right call.

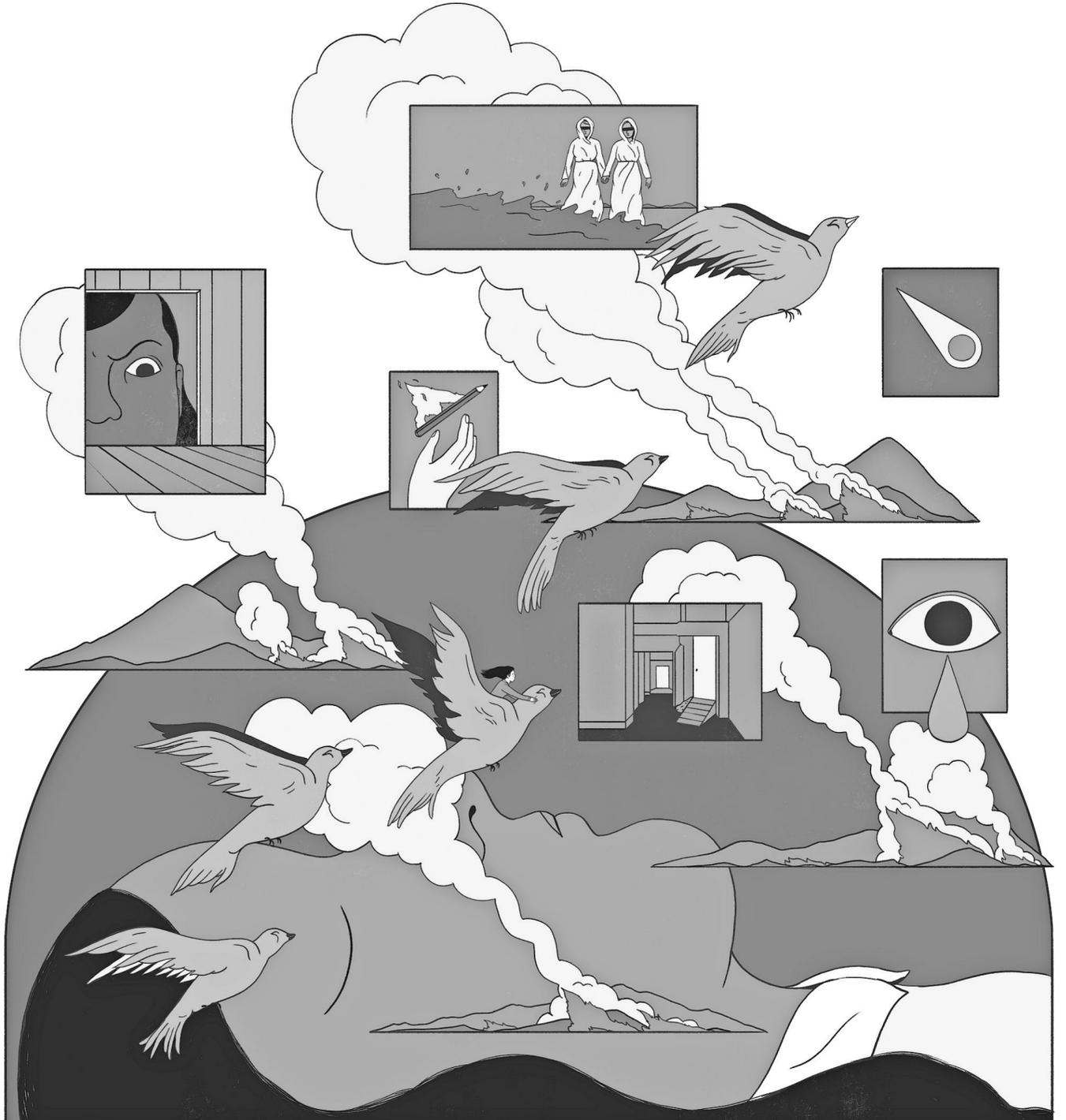
By the time we reach adulthood, most of us have accepted the conventional wisdom: We shouldn't dwell on our dreams. Even though research suggests that REM sleep — when most dreaming takes place — is crucial for mental and physical health, we think of dreams as silly little stories, the dandruff of the brain. We're taught that talking about our dreams is juvenile, self-indulgent, and that we should shake off their traces and get on with our day.

It doesn't have to be that way. For the past two years, a group of my friends has been gathering every month to talk about dreams; we do it for fun. Even if we resist, dreams have a way of sneaking into conscious territory and influencing our daytime mood. In three years of reporting on the science behind dreams, I've heard strangers describe flying, tooth loss, reunions with the dead — all the classics. I've seen that a dream can be a fascinating window into another person's private life, and I've learned that paying attention to dreams can help us understand ourselves.

Because dreams rarely make literal sense, it can be easier to dismiss them than to try to interpret them. But a growing body of scientific work indicates that it's likely to be worth the effort. Dreams might help us consolidate new memories and prune extraneous pieces of information. They might be a breeding ground for ideas — a time for the brain to experiment in a wider network of associations. Some argue they're an accident of biology and mean nothing at all.

According to one popular hypothesis, dreams evolved to serve an important psychological function: They let us work through our anxieties in a low-risk

ROBB, PAGE 12



CRISTINA DAURA

## It isn't an easy time to be a British Muslim. Cricket helps.

The career of Moeen Ali shows us how Britain thrives when institutions accommodate the religious and cultural needs of minorities.

**Sameer Rahim**

The threat of anti-Muslim bigotry in Britain has been growing, and some politicians from the governing Conservative Party have been encouraging it.

In a newspaper column in August, Boris Johnson, the former Conservative foreign secretary — who is chummy with Steve Bannon and fancies himself an upper-class English version of President Trump — compared Muslim women who wear face veils to “bank robbers” and “letter boxes.”

Shaun Bailey, a politician from the Conservative Party, who has been chosen as its candidate for London's mayoral election, took 13 years to offer a conditional apology for writing in a 2005 pamphlet that the effect of celebrating Muslim and Hindu festivals is to “rob Britain of its community” without which “we slip into a crime-riddled cesspool.”

In September, in what police are investigating as a hate crime, a car ran over pedestrians outside an Islamic center in Cricklewood, a northwest London neighborhood, injuring two people. A report in July by Tell MAMA, a group that monitors anti-Muslim activity, revealed a 26 percent increase in Islamophobic attacks in 2017. The victims were mostly Muslim women. A recent survey by the think tank British Future found that whenever Islam was mentioned by those interviewed, it was “almost always in a negative context.”

Except, that is, on the cricket field. Perhaps surprisingly, the England cricket team, that most traditional of national institutions, has been leading the way in creating a more inclusive environment for its Muslim players.

Team sports are all about creating a cohesive identity. But instead of expecting every player to conform to the cultural codes of the team, the England and Wales Cricket Board acknowledges that every player is different and needs to be treated individually. In doing so it has made the team stronger.

The Conservative Party, and indeed Britain as a whole, could learn a lot from the cricket team's approach. The life and career of Moeen Ali, a visibly Muslim player on the England cricket team, illustrates how both the country and its minorities thrive when British institutions accommodate the religious and cultural needs of minorities.

Mr. Ali, who is a religious Muslim, wears a luxurious beard, prays in the dressing room and fasts during five-day Test cricket matches, symbolizes something bigger than the game. Every time Mr. Ali plays for England, British Muslims like me are willing him to succeed.

When someone as devout as Mr. Ali thrives in the pressure cooker of professional sport, it lends hope for a better future to 2.8 million British Muslims. Mr. Ali was born in the city of Birmingham, in 1987 to British-Pakistani parents.

His grandfather Shafayat Ali was part of a wave of South Asian migrants who moved to Birmingham and cities in the north of England like Bradford and Manchester to work in the manufacturing sector. His grandmother was an Englishwoman named Betty Cox who met Shafayat Ali at a factory in Birmingham in the late 1940s. His family tree, Mr. Ali says, “is a bridge between England and Pakistan.”

Mr. Ali made his debut for the England Test team in 2014. He established himself as a cricketer force by winning a dramatic victory for England in

a match against South Africa in July 2017. Mr. Ali took three wickets in five balls — the first England spinner to take a hat trick in 79 years.

After his match-winning performance, the players gathered on the grass for the traditional group photograph and Champagne-spraying celebrations. Mr. Ali, who doesn't touch alcohol, stood apart. Alastair Cook, the great batsman and former captain of the team, noticed his isolation. “Make sure Moeen gets in the picture first and then we can spray afterward,” Mr. Cook insisted. And Mr. Ali was welcomed into the frame, he recalled in his recently published memoir, “Moeen.”

Not everyone in the game had been so considerate. When Mr. Ali was first selected for the national team, the veteran sports columnist Michael Henderson took issue with his long

beard, remarking that he was “opting to stand out” and queried why he said he felt like he was representing Muslims when he played.

Mr. Henderson was reframing an old debate about national identity set off by the Conservative politician Norman Tebbit, who in 1990 said that British South Asians and Afro-Caribbeans should support the England cricket team — not India, Pakistan or the West Indies. “Are you still harking back to where you came from?” Mr. Tebbit asked dismissively.

Mr. Tebbit's intervention was especially fraught because cricket is played almost exclusively by countries that were once part of the British Empire. Cheering on the great West Indies or Pakistan teams of the 1980s was a way for ethnic-minority Britons to express their resentment of an England that they felt did not welcome them. It was

also a way of retaining emotional ties to their parents' countries.

Mr. Ali's dual inheritances do not fit the simplicity of the Tebbit identity test. Adil Rashid, another Pakistani-origin cricketer who recently became a regular on the England Test match squad, speaks in a broad Yorkshire accent, while Mr. Ali has a Midlands accent. Yet in the dressing room, they chat about tactics in the Kashmiri language of their ancestors.

English cricket realized that it can only be strengthened by an open-minded attitude to minorities. Nasser Hussain, the son of an Indian father and English mother, captained the team from 1999 to 2003.

Mr. Ali himself is not expected to keep quiet over issues he feels strongly about. When he was censured by the International Cricket Board for wearing “Save Gaza” and “Free Palestine” wristbands during a 2014 test cricket match, the England and Wales Cricket Board supported his right to free expression.

Mr. Ali's easygoing demeanor has made him a favorite in the dressing room and with the fans. After a bad run earlier this year, he was dropped from the team. But he worked hard and fought back to earn a spot and won the title of Man of the Match, for his outstanding performance in a match against India in September.

He was motivated to put in his best for the team by that moment in 2016 when Mr. Cook ensured that he was included in the celebrations and the group photograph. “I felt this was a team I could give anything for,” he remarked. The Conservative Party and the country at large could learn from Mr. Cook's and Mr. Ali's example.

**SAMEER RAHIM**, the managing editor of *Prospect* magazine, is working on his first novel.



Britain's Moeen Ali, who is a religious Muslim and wears a beard, celebrating taking the wicket of Australia's D'Arcy Short with teammates in June in Cardiff, Wales.

ANDREW BOYERS/REUTERS