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Saturday



Title: [The ‘Ālam al-Mithāl](#)

DVD title: The Alam al-Mithāl
The World of Imagination - The Barzakh between the Seen and Unseen

Dinner blessing: Ya Allah, thank You for the blessing of the food that comes from our gardens, and the good work and the good labor that is shared, and the *rizq* that comes from it. You give us the *rizq*, and we are risk-takers. *Rizq* is a great thing, because you provide us with everything, not just food, but the ability to breathe the air and drink the water and traverse this world. If people would just remember that O Allah, they wouldn't do anything but worship You. Help us to remember. *Amin.*

Suhbat: *Bismillah ir Rahman ir Raheem.* I was speaking to you the other night about Tasawwuf. It's always good to review. It might be nice if human beings decided to review every once in a while what it means to be a human being. But since that doesn't happen, we will just review what it means to be a Sufi. This process we are involved in is one of *tarbiya*. To study, to be a *tālib*, has a lot of implications. When we look around or go to large conferences, we find multiple flavors of Sufis. [There are] some people to whom Sufism is more of a family line than a practicable reality. [There are] other people who are scholars, and derive their lineage from scholarly pursuits. Some are just sort of goofy Soofis.

We do know that Tasawwuf is not primarily concerned with power or even scholarliness,

though many Sufis are scholars and many Islamic scholars are Sufis. Indeed, it challenges some of the cultural contexts and methodologies. It does make us more effective human beings. It makes us more capable, and gives us certain abilities, one of which is to see clearly. Another one is to heal ourselves, and maybe even others. It gives us insights. But it's not about either mystifying students or starting institutions. It's also not just a practice that serves an umbrella organization for interfaith dialogue. Sufis are very capable of that kind of dialogue, because Sufis focus on universal values, the attributes of Allah. Certainly the practices, if done sincerely and regularly can diminish prejudices and intolerance, extremism and bias, and reduce or prevent conflict. But these are all secondary aspects of Tasawwuf. While we understand that, we need to affirm our foundation.

We need to understand what it is we are understanding. We know it promotes *mīzān*/balance and harmony between the inner life and outer life. We know that balance is all the more important because as our life demands more of us, we need more and more means to balance ourselves. We certainly know it educates the heart. We can read all the Sufi poetry. We know it is profoundly based in *akhlaq*/virtue. We know that only an awakened heart can develop the kind of consciousness that the mind cannot develop. We have discussed that many times. Allah said, "***The earth and the heavens cannot contain me. Only the heart of a faithful believer (mu'min) can.***"

Before I get more into the *latā'if*, I want to help you become more grounded in terminology. You hear the terminology, but maybe you hear one definition of it when I'm speaking. But these terms have deep, profound concepts that also need to be explained. Hopefully, we will address these in the students' meetings, too. You have heard me talk about the '*ālam al-amr*' and the '*ālam al-khalq*', and the '*ālam al-mithāl*'. You know '*ālam*' means world, or universe. That by itself could be a long discussion. The

‘ālam al amr is the spiritual world or the universe of command. It is a realm without time and without matter. It also is that which takes its existence from Allah directly, without any secondary cause. It is the command of Allah.

You heard me say that the ‘ālam al mithal is the world between the ‘ālam al amr and the ‘ālam al khalq. The ‘ālam al mithāl is also called the ‘ālam al khayāl. It is the world of analogies, of images. Maybe that helps explain why we use so many analogies and metaphors. It’s a way of understanding. Some call it the world of imagination, the *barzakh*, the isthmus between two worlds in which the mysteries coming from the ambiguous and undefined cosmic reality (*the ‘ālam al amr*) can be unlocked as it passes through the ‘ālam al mithāl. Analogies can be made to describe what is in the *ghaib*, like the analogy I make of systems. Metaphors are used as this knowledge or this reality passes out of the ‘ālam al amr. As things pass from the invisible world, they take some kind of form. Only it’s not exactly form. In the ‘ālam al mithāl, it takes the form of analogies.

I speak to you with a lot of metaphors, analogies. You actually get a sense of the unseen world, the *ghaib*, through these analogies. If I speak of systems, or about things you don’t see but you know exist (like love), you can conceive of these things because of the ‘ālam al-mithal. Some say it’s the place of “*huwa la huwa/He not He.*” There are many different worlds. There is the ‘ālam al-anfas, ‘ālam al-*ghaib*, the ‘ālam al-*ghaib al-mukhaq*, the ‘ālam al-izah. Many different worlds we will not discuss. But the ‘ālam al -*khayal*, this world of imagination, this isthmus / *barzakh*, is the place where the *awliyā* encounter or meet one another. In that realm of analogy, the realm of imagination, the encounter exists between not only the *awliyā* – I’ll explain why soon – but also between the *murshīd* and the *muriṭd*. They may meet one another within this world.

When and how does that happen? It actually happens, hopefully, when the hearts become in resonance, and the *latā’if* are in resonance. It’s in those moments when that powerful, very clear transmission or lesson is transmitted. It’s in this place, if you want to call it a place, that you receive the instructions, the guidance, the direction from the *shaykh*, from the *awliyā*, from the *silsila*, all the way back to the Holy Prophet (sal). In the moment of transmission, you are hopefully in the ‘*ālam al-mithāl*.

Again, there are many of these worlds, and sometimes one calls them worlds or universes. For example, the ‘*ālam al-shahadah*, the realm of what is visible, what the senses experience. This imagination/*khayāl* points to a reality that manifests in three different places. In the first, the *khayāl* is manifest in the universe or cosmos where existence is exactly the same as imagination. What you imagine is what exists. You can have that experience in a dream. What you imagine meets existence in your dream. I had very vivid dreams last night, some not too pleasant. We talked about how brief that moment is in a dream—that is a world in itself. We call it the dream world. It’s where existence is the same as imagination: what is imagined appears to exist. In the second, the *khayāl* is manifest in the macrocosm in that *barzakh* between the spiritual and physical world, where the *barzakh* is part of your imagination or fantasy.

Third, the *khayāl* is manifest in the microcosm, where the self (*nafs*) is the reality between the body and the spirit. This thing I call my self seems to have an independent existence. It’s not the spirit, and it’s not the body; it’s in this isthmus. The ego, one could easily say, is this imagined self. People who are extremely narcissistic imagine things about themselves that are not true. *Khayāl* is synonymous with images/*mithāl*. In the realm of imagination, this *barzakh* between the world of the unseen and the world of what is seen or visible is within this ‘*ālam al-khayāl*. It is given the clearest expression by saying, like the Hindus say, “Not this, not this. *Neti, neti.*” We say, “He, not he. That, not that. This,

not this.” “*Lā ilāha illa-Llāh*. No god, but God.” It is that place where you say and realize that is this ‘ālam al mithāl, this *barzakh*.

If you think about it, your imagination is not value-laden; it’s neutral. What you are imagining may not be neutral, but imagination itself is neutral, a vehicle. But it is extremely powerful. It is sometimes said that this *mithāl* or *barzakh* is the most powerful gift by Allah. This is what Allah has created for us. We know if we feed the imagination something negative or positive, it builds on it tremendously. With regard to the faculty that we have of illusion (in Arabic, *wahm*), and with regard to what is not seen that we know is *rūh*/spirit, what we put in our imagination puts an imprint on us, and has a result. For example, what you put into your imagination during the day comes out at night as a dream. It made an imprint in your consciousness. But it can also, through your meditation, put an imprint on you that allows you to have a vision/*ru’ya*. When it is a dream vision, it’s called the *khayāl al haqiqah*. It’s seen and practiced by certain types of people. The subject can become very, very deep.

You will remember that in the retreat, one of the most important things I began with was to try and convince you (through proofs that you, yourself, have seen your whole life) that *bāraka* is real. Even though it is a subtle spiritual energy, that energy flows through everything. The place where that *bāraka* is the strongest is in human beings. The more purified, the more refined, the more *saf* the human being, the greater the flow of that *bāraka* into that human being. It’s like opening up the flood gates to let the water in. Sometimes, even the most simple person can feel it. I told the story of the man who went into ecstasy just at the sight of the *shaykh*. You can go into a great mosque, like the Blue Mosque in Istanbul, or to Mecca to the Ka’ba, and the *bāraka* is overwhelming in these places. In sacred places, one can feel the *bāraka*. Among sacred individuals who have been sanctified, you feel the *bāraka*. What is that?

Bāraka is a subtle energy that, when amplified in the human being as the human being purifies him or herself, flows more and more into that person and amplifies their good character. It amplifies their faith, their love until it overflows from them. The person becomes someone who is manifesting that light, that transmission, that Divine Presence, if you will—some shadow, some reflection of the Divine Presence, because they, themselves, are empty now.

This spiritual isthmus, this partition between the inner and outer world is also, in and of itself, a symbol of something. It's not just a barrier, or a wall. It's dynamic and real.

Bāraka is real. Because this is the isthmus between the all and the nothing, the existing and non-existing, the real and the unreal, it's also the line between the less than perfect being and the *insani kamil*, the perfected being. As a result of *muraqabah*, as a result of *dhikr*, *muhasabat*, and *tafakkur* (reflecting on one's own self), the illusion, the fantasy becomes something that the Sufi learns how to use. The Sufi knows how to use *wahm*/fantasy, illusion. This power, this *bāraka*, this active imagination with the power of illusion/*wahm* is the most tremendous power which Allah has given to the human being. It's this faculty that acts direction upon that passive *khayāl*/imagination. Something acts on the imagination to move it from its passivity into an active state. It is this active imagination that has the power of illusion, *al-wham*.

In a beautiful *hadith*, Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, “**Perfection (*ihsan*) is to worship Allah like you see Him.**” We are very familiar with that. How do you look at Allah as if you see Him? Everybody has that question. Now you know: through your imagination. Not imagination like I imagine I'm lying on a beach somewhere—not that kind. From this consciousness that accepts illusion as real [a form is given]. Something doesn't have form yet doesn't mean it's not real. Someone calls you on the phone and says, “I'm

sorry I spoke against you. I repent of that, please forgive me.” It is something you didn’t even know. It didn’t affect you because you didn’t know it. But all of a sudden someone apologizes for it. They treat you as if you saw their prejudice, as if you heard what they said. You don’t know what’s been said. Yet, at the same time, we have to realize that what is said has a lasting effect.

One uses this imagination, this fantasy, this well-disciplined force of energy as a catalyst for a transcendental, trans-*dunya* event. When your imagination and intention are working clearly, you understand that an illusion is not something negative, but something that gives form to something that doesn’t have form, appearance to something that has no appearance. They call magicians illusionists sometimes. You see something that’s not really there, like that magician who floats in the air, or walks across between two buildings in mid-air. For you or I to use this capability of illusion properly, we have to be free, literally free, to do that. Things that would normally obsess us or take over our minds won’t allow us to be free. So we are sitting at this line between the inner and the outer in this *barzakh*.

The Prophet Mohammed (sal) also said, “***Allah (swt) is the Qibla of one who prays.***” Both of these *hadith* are asking us to stimulate ourselves, revivify ourselves, to contemplate certain things, to activate this capacity of imagination, of what appears to be fantasy. As long as we practice, and follow the guidelines I’ve been trying to give you, and accept and embrace the idea that *bāraka* is real, [we will realize] there are other organs of perception that are not limited by the physical body (which is limited by these organs of perception).

That is an amazing thing to contemplate: that you are here and also there. Isn’t that what the Internet is about? You’re here, but you are also there. If you are into a group Skype,

you are here and in 5 different locations. Isn't that true? If a human being can invent it, we are only inventing it because it comes from a template that already exists. That template is *al-wahm*. Even though these terms are not familiar in detail to you, and even though you have to think in terms of imagination in a different way than you normally think of it, as sort of a negative or only a creative act, imagination is a creative act. It takes something from the *ghaib*. It's like storing all your data in cyberspace instead of on your computer, and then being able to draw from it immediately. You purchase a service to upload as much as you want, and it's always there. If your computer crashes, it will not be ruined. It is always backed up. You don't have to back it up physically, you just press a key and it goes there automatically. It's like that. We have access because we have imagination, and because we have experienced lack of access. Because we have experienced loneliness and separation, it makes us appreciate even more the company, the *suhbat*.

You can also see, from just talking about these few terms, it is supported by what I told you in the retreat about *barzakh*, and the '*ālam al-amr*', '*ālam al-khalq*', and '*ālam al-mithāl*'. Think about it this way: while you are alive, what you are imagining – and not in a negative sense of fantasizing – but what you are imagining can be something that is coming to you from the '*ālam al-amr*' into you and gets its form by you. Then you turn your face and see that manifest physically in the physical universe. Something that has no form comes to you. It takes form in imagination. From its *bāraka*, it has life, a message attached to it. It has that message. You turn to the world and see that message being reflected back at you in the fruit in the trees, in the relationships of people, in the nature that has been created. Before that, it was all in your imagination, and now you turn and there you see it manifest.

People, realizing that, have looked in the other direction. There is a story that yoga was

learned by watching cats stretch, or a flamingo standing on one leg. They learned from the animals. I've learned from the animals. The idea is, if you can take what you are seeing in the physical world, do it yourself, does it take you past the physical world, back into the '*ālam al-amr*? Can you work you way back? The answer is, of course, yes. Allah says, "**Wheresoever you look, there is the face of Allah.**" (2:115) What is face? (*Wajh*) A trail goes in both directions. As things come from the '*ālam al-amr* into you and me, like things coming into our dream, it is very real inside of us in this *barzakh*. In the reality of Jannah there is no time or space. Only human beings assign time and space. In that *waqt*/moment, there is Jannah that comes through you. It comes like in a dream. Like a dream comes to you and takes form inside of you. You play all the roles. You experience all the things that are experienced, but it's within you. There are different characters in that dream. While you are in that state, it appears to be real.

It comes into you. It takes its form in your imagination, in your *ru 'ya*/vision. Things happen in that, and it's real. Think about that, how Allah created that. The concept of Jannah comes into you and takes a kind of form, and it is now described. How is it described? By the perfection of everything you see: the most perfect fruit, the most perfect people, the most perfect river, the most delicious things, the most beautiful landscapes. Allah says, *tawajjuh*/turn, pay attention to my heart, and my heart turns toward the Divine Essence. Now this *tajalli* comes through the *shaykh* to you and this transmission that comes enlightens you, uplifts you, and you can look and see that reality reflected in the physical world. It's not that Jannah looks like the earth; it's that the earth or the created things attest to, reflect what's happened in the '*ālam al-mithāl*', which has received non-form, unitary, singular without any assistance, transmissions/*tajalli* to you: the universal receiver.

We get a glimpse of the universal truth, the Divine Presence, the universal reality

whatever you want to call it, the All Merciful in the *barzakh*. A person therefore who is in the *barzakh*, it is as if they are in Jannah. Don't let this slip through your fingers. You have these things becoming real inside your imagination, the '*ālam al-mithāl*', attested to in the physical world symbolically or metaphorically—and really, like in your dreams; things are real based on what you know in the physical world. It's real - you are actually viewing the Jannah, because there is no time and no space. You are in the *barzakh* because you are a human being. When you die, all that is left is the *barzakh*, nothing else. The physical world is gone; the unseen world is still unseen. You are in the *barzakh*. What are you looking at? You are looking at the level of your purity, your education, your understanding, your ability to translate what is in the physical world as an analogy for what is the energy coming from the unseen world, the '*ālam al-amr*/world of command.

Are you in Jannah? Well – is the dream real? It sure is when you are dreaming it. What is it made out of? The things you know, the things you have experienced. If you have experienced good things, what you will see in the *barzakh* are good things. As you move from the *barzakh* back to the '*ālam al-amr*' and the unseen world, to the world of your *rūh*, then it becomes your reality. It's your reality. That supreme *barzakh*, *Barzakh al-‘ala*, is this great isthmus between Allah and nothingness. It's called *al khayāl mutlaq*, the non-delimited imagination. It's called the *al-ama*, the cloud. It's called the *nafas ar-rahmat*, the breath of the merciful. It's called *al haqq makhluq bihi*, the real from whom creation takes place. It's called *al haqiqat a-kulliyā*, the universal reality. We call it also the nature of things, a person's nature. What is a person's nature? What's the nature of or quality of something? It's called the *insan al kamil*, the perfect human being.

When one is in that state and aware of that state, we call it *baqa*. That's arrived at through the practices above the *latā’if*. When this imagination comes, analogy after analogy, they seem to be linked together, a string of things. There is one thing, then another, then

another. As it comes closer to us and more often, it seems like it is one thing. We call that life. When it is discontinued, then it has a whole other effect on us. We call that the soul of the human being. If you can imagine that person, share their insight, come into resonance with that person's character and personality, then you can visit them even if they are in the tomb, even if they are in the *barzakh*. When you go deep into meditation and come into resonance with their soul, the soul doesn't know any time or place. In your deep mediation, you don't know any time or place. These parallel worlds are meeting, because that soul leaves its impression.

These are some small tidbits on the '*ālam al mithāl*'. I hope that is helpful. I would like to get into the practices at some point. When you sit with me and I give you a transmission, you should know where it is coming from, how it's coming to you, and what's coming with it, what knowledge is coming along side of it, what energy is coming with it—not just physical energy but spiritual energy. When you open up your heart, your *latā'if* to that transmission, it's like turning on the speaker. Things are amplified.

I don't know if I accomplished half of what I wanted to accomplish. Did you find that interesting? Yes, good. You can be sure it will slip through your fingers like the rainwater outside. *Asalaamu aleikum.*

Student: I was wondering how *niyyat* plays into all of that, and also affirmation.

Shaykh: This is a big thing to put together. You have to go back to the time of Hazrat Adam (as) and Hawa (as), and what happened, and what it symbolized and what it is an analogy for. Go back to the many talks I have given on consciousness. *Niyyat* comes out of consciousness, awareness of self. You are aware of yourself and you make an intention. All the time we are spending in the physical word, we should be aware of our

self, remembering Allah, remembering what life's purpose is, remembering what the values are, remembering what you want to accomplish, and why you want to accomplish it as an '*abd*. And you make *niyyat* after *niyyat*—that kind of *niyyat*, not the meditation *niyyat*. That forms the foundation of what happens in the '*ālam al mithāl*, as you move from the physical world to the unseen world, back and forth, off the horizon.

The *niyyat* we make in meditation is exceptionally important. That gives direction to us, and opens up our ability to look around and see, and to conceptualize things we don't see based on what we do see, and to understand beyond philosophical into the realm of experience. That *niyyat* allows our *latā'if* to open, and we can proceed through these *latīfa*. We see into the world of command, and into the physical world, from the place where we stand. *Main apne Qalb ko zat pak kiteraf, mutawwajeh kartahoom, mere per quwwata qahar*, for example. '*Ālam al-amr. Main apne nafs ko zat pak kiteraf* – now I, from my *nafs*, am meditating on this. If I can meditate from my *nafs* on these spiritual subtleties, then I will leave that lower state of my *nafs* and be absorbed into the upper state. But if you just say, "Ah, that sounds like affirmations. Thank you Shaykh, I am reminded of all the things you taught me about affirmations." You're welcome, but that's not the point. The point is the process, not the end in itself. The greatest affirmation is your faith. Greater than that is your submission. Greater than that is the humbling experience of change that you never, ever want to lose. *Asalaam aleikum.*