

December 3, 2009

Thursday



Title: Tangible and Intangible Imagination

DVD title: Perceiving Different Forms of Imagination through Insight  
Insight Develops through the Practices and Submission

Musa sent me an article the other day on religion, a figment of human imagination. I'm going to talk on *firāsa* tonight, but let me begin with this. One of the best lines in here is, "*Humans alone practice religion because they are the only creatures who have evolved imagination.*" They're right; absolutely correct. "*What the transcendental social requires is the ability to live largely in imagination.*" *Alhamdulillah.* "*One can be a member of a transcendental group or nation.*" A very interesting comment. They're not going to bother to define "transcendental group." Maybe "transcendental nation" defines it. "*Even though one never comes into contact with other members of it.*" That would be hard to imagine...! Let's say I am a Christian, but I never came into contact with other Christians or Christ or anything like that.

I don't want to pick this apart... but the way it is so unreasonable and illogical makes it even better that it's right. "*Moreover, the composition of such groups, whether they are clans or nations, may equally include the living and the dead.*" Before you laugh, think about it. Don't fall into the trap of laughing because you think I'm making fun of this. I'm not. It's incredible how right they are. "*Modern day religion still embraces the idea of communities bound with the living and the dead.*" It's true. "*Such is the Christian notion of followers being one body with Christ.*" Or, the Islamic Ummah uniting Muslims, though that does not follow with the "living and the dead." "*No animals, not even our nearest living relatives*

*the chimpanzees, can do this,”* argues Block. Then it becomes very anthropological, but also human.

Block believes “*our ancestors developed the necessary neural architecture to imagine about 40 – 50,000 years ago, sometimes called the upper Paleological revolution in the final subdivision of the Stone age.*” At least it wasn’t 20,000 years ago when the Christians think the world began. He’s off by a number of millennia, and we are forced into a limited understanding of evolution on that one. “*The transcendental network can, without any problems, include the dead ancestors and gods as well as living role-holders and members of a centralized group. Ancestors and gods are compatible with living elders or members of nations because they are all equally mysterious and visible – in other words, transcendental.*” I like this point: “*As soon as you have theory of mind, you have the possibility of deceiving others or being deceived. In turn, this generates a sense of fairness or unfairness, which could lead to moral codes and possibly of an unseen enforcer (God) who can see and punish all wrongdoers.*” Before I get too far into this, I guess I should make my point.

*Alhamdulillah*, here you have a good example of someone tripping across the truth, and having no idea of another way of looking at *khayāl*. When you think about the depth to which Arabic linguistics, let alone the Sufic understanding of imagination, it’s pretty impressive. It’s nice to see people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century discovering something that is, linguistically, pre-Islamic, and has become foundational in understanding human existence and consciousness from at least the time of the Prophet (sal), but certainly long before that. This to me is extremely amazing. I guess, it is a hopeful thing, though I don’t know how many people pay attention to something like this. It’s good that people are thinking about it, but too bad they are thinking about it in this way. So we should try to edit

a few things I've said and send it to this man, something he can chew on from another point of view.

Let's take a minute before I go back into *firāsa* and look at *khayāl* again, just to make sure we grasp it. By definition, *khayāl* is a description or an indices of reality. It is not indicating something mythic or just transcendental. We also have to remember that *khayāl* talks about a reality that manifests in three specific ways. One: [it is manifest] in the cosmos, where existence as we apparently experience it is the same as imagination. There is no distinction between existence and imagination. Secondly, *khayāl* is manifest in the microcosm as that *barzakh*, the isthmus between the spiritual world and the physical world. Third, the *khayāl* is manifest within the microcosm where the human *nafs* is the reality between the body and the soul or spirit.

Also, *khayāl* is synonymous with *mithal*, images. I have spoken to you about Allah creating humans in His Image, meaning in His Imagination. To the Muslim, this quality of imagination is a quality that does not belong to human being; but to Allah. It is the means through which this whole creation is created, which is the antithesis of what he is saying [in the article]. In a strange way, it is also analogical. It's a typical situation of ipso facto: you accept one situation or you don't. If you accept it, then you can expand to this understanding. If you don't, you have to attribute imagination to something corporeal as opposed to transcendental or a cosmological phenomenon.

People like this have no problem with other cosmological phenomena. He probably doesn't have any problem with other things that can't be explained, like black holes or quantum tunneling, things like that, where de facto he accepts certain phenomenological realities, except the phenomenological reality of imagination in the human being, of having its existence somewhere other than in

the human being. It is like I spoke last night about hydrogen and oxygen atoms having their origin in space, not on this earth. It is acceptable, scientifically.

This realm of *khayāl*, to a Sufi is a quality of an understanding Sufi, but not necessarily of a practicing Muslim, just to be clear. This realm of imagination, *khayāl*, is a *barzakh* between the world of the seen and the world of the unseen, between the visible world and the unseen world. It's called a reality because in Sufic terminology, or in definitional terms, it's within this *khayāl*. It's a framework. If we can say it's within something, it must have some boundaries, right? It's within this *khayāl* that a human being is given the clearest expression of "*huwa la huwa*, he not he." Opposition: "*lā ilāha illa-Llāh*, not Allah, Allah." It's in this imagination/*khayāl* that there is a clear distinction between what is Allah and what is projected and manifest as not Allah; albeit, everything is Allah—*tawhid*.

There is in this quality of *khayāl* a reality that is Allah / not Allah. Example: historically, and not well defined by most religions, but pretty well explained in Islam from a mystical point of view, is that evil is not Allah, but it all takes place within Allah's construction. He / not he. So what [the author of the article] said is true, in a sense. "*As soon as you have a theory of mind, you have the possibility of deceiving others or being deceived.*" These opposites, these opposing concepts or forces, are set up within the reality of Allah. The human capability of imagination/*khayāl* is, in a sense, passive with regard to the active capability of the human being to project or conceptualize illusion, *wahm*. With regard to the *rūh*, the essential spirit (of which we are an extension), the human being has a capability of conjecture or projecting, if you want to say, different concepts or ideas or visions (*mubashira*) of reality.

In other words, Allah creates out of this imagination, this image, this creation. We have, in every instance, some quality of that within our own self. We have a creative ability in our own selves: we make babies. Allah makes humans, we make babies. We have the capability of making something. Allah makes human beings out of clay we make images out of clay. Allah makes the construction of the universe; we can construct things out of the same materials. There is this living reality which is both a metaphor and a reality. This *khayāl*, this imagination that is given form, human beings have that. In addition to that, we have the capability of creating visions, illusions. Why?

My daughter Samah, last night, had a dream that she had a bloody nose. This morning, she had a bloody nose. You could make an argument, a weak one, that she had a bloody nose and it made up her upset; therefore, somehow she got a bloody nose. That's not what happened. Look at it this way. We have the capability as part of our creative imagination to create illusions and visions, as we know. I'm not putting a negative value on illusion, like a magician makes an illusion and makes something look real that isn't real. We have not only this capability of imagination that is parallel, similar to or an extension of Allah's ability to create, but we have (as Allah has) the ability within this construct for self-deception and illusion, or [the capability of] visions that have no basis in what is apparent reality. Illusory. (This would be a normal place to go back to *majāz* and talk about metaphor, but I'm not going to do that.)

We have these illusory episodes continuously. I remember that someone in this room, whose name I won't mention, many years ago, played out a total illusory thing about driving and having an accident, based on an apparent reality called driving. "If I do this, that might happen. If that happens, this might also happen, and God knows I might be dead if I drive today!" We have this capacity to take apparent facts and possibilities and put them together to create an illusion. Not

only that, we get attached to that belief and believe it is real. This is an Iphone. (It could be called Thou-phone, but it isn't.) Choose a number between 10 and 99. Add those two digits together. Then subtract the total from your original number. You have it? Now, look up that number on the chart, and remember the symbol that fits that number. Now watch the crystal ball. Is that the symbol? It's totally an illusion. But our inclination is to believe it and be overwhelmed by it, which is one of the points [the author of that article] is trying to make. That's a capacity for illusion, but it follows certain laws and rules, and it's a trick.

The Sufis, the thinkers, talked about a different kind of *khayāl*. [The author in this article] says, imagination. We all know what that is, right? No, we don't. We only think we do, and that's an illusion. We do that all the time. We trick ourselves into believing what we already want to believe, which is exactly one of the points he was trying to make: human beings have the capacity to convince themselves of what they want to believe. And it's exactly what he is doing, with his own theory. But we (Sufis) don't do that. For example, you may remember *khayāl al-haqqi*, true imagination. The *ru'ya*, the dream visions seen by the Sufis, the *malamatiyya*, the blameworthy, are true precisely because the human being who has overcome their individual distractions, distortions, and limitations. The person who is *insani kamil*—who is no longer self-deceived, whose visions aren't tainted by their own *nafs* or by their circumstances—are called “colorless,” transparent. They are aware of what is True/Haqq.

That is not enough for the Sufis. They go even deeper. It would be interesting to send him that and see what he does with this one. *Al-khayāl munfasil* means imagination that is not continuous. It is discontinuous, discontiguous. This is the intermediate world of *khayāl*, imagination. This is unexplainable, but if you go back to something simple like how Allah created the Universe, it is actually one of the most simple ways of thinking about it. You have no trouble thinking that

Allah created this Universe in His Image and in His Imagination, from His Imagination, and projected the image outward into a reality that makes it, in a sense, tangible like adding cornstarch and it makes it a pudding. It makes thought tangible, and makes imagination tangible and conceivable.

You would think of a *al-khayāl munfasil* as being separate from the viewer, discontinuous. This is the world of imagination that exists independent of the one who is doing it. Maybe what we ought to do is get a stone and tap on Heisenberg's tomb. Could there be something that would not in anyway be discontinuous and not be affected by the perception of it? I don't know. Obviously we feel there is. What is the point of that? We go back to the universe being created in the image of Allah. Islam presents it in two ways. One, there is this image that Allah project and says, "**Kun faya kun.**" He creates it and somehow this creation exists within Allah, by Allah, *sair illah, sair ma'illah, sair fi illah, sair adaniya*. But there is something else transpiring that is totally independent of this. It cannot be viewed by anyone except Allah. In that sense, it is non-linear, but it exists.

I believe, I believe in my own ignorance, that this is the kind of thing that played in the mind of Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī (ra) when he was thinking *wahadat shuhūd*. Simultaneously, there is a projected reality (and Ibn Araby talked about manifestation), but there is something else that cannot be approached by the viewer of that tangible projection of that intention, of that imagination. That should be enough, but it isn't. These ignorant people from the deserts of Arabia and mountains of Persia, in their construction of language and concepts, come up with yet more.

There is more, if I can even attempt it: *khayāl al-muqayyad*. We [see how we] have discontinuous imagination, and now with *khayāl al-muqayyad* we [see how

we] have delimited imagination. Here, again, we have this world of imagination, this *barzakh* between the seen and the unseen world. We have established that, but it has two levels. The first is the *al-khayāl al-muqayyad* and that is the limited imagination that is closer to the visible world, to the seen world. It is imagination that is nearer to the seen world. Remember imagination means the ability to create images also. We talked about that, creating gods and images. We are manifesting some of the same qualities as the Creator. We are creating images also, as I said earlier, *al-khayāl al-muqayyad*.

The second level is the level of non-delimited imagination, *al-khayāl mutlaq*, absolute, non-delimited, which stands closer to the world of the unseen. So you see, you have now have these further iterations: *khayāl al-muqayyad* and *khayāl mutlaq*. Now *khayāl mutlaq*, again, we start in the same place: the world of imagining is the isthmus, that *barzakh* between the seen and unseen world and it has these two levels *khayāl muqayyad* and *khayāl mutlaq*. *Khayāl mutlaq* is one of the names that is given to that *al-barzakh al-Allah*, the supreme *barzakh*. It is a name for it. Wow! What do you need an isthmus for? Remember the isthmus is the *‘ālam al-mithal*. This is the way you move from the conscious world, from the world of the seen to the unseen. This is the way we go from the state of awakensness of this world to the state of meditation, from the *dhāhir* to the *bātin*. It is also called the *khayāl mutlaq*, *al-barzakh al-Allah*, the supreme *barzakh*.

Whenever you hear “*barzakh*,” the implication is that you have movement in both directions, like the Suez and Panama Canals. They move in both directions. That is an interesting analogy, because the way they are built, the water has to rise and lower because the seas are at different heights. To pass through, they have locks, like on the Panama Canal.

Lastly, on the one hand, there is the *khayāl an mutāsīl*. We had the *al-khayāl al munfāsīl* and then there is the *khayāl muntāsīl*, which is the contiguous imagination. This is a quality, a capability, a faculty, if you want to call it, of imagination, which is connected to the one who is viewing. There is a quality of imagination on the ability of the viewer that has a certain capability of creating a reality, but actually it is created out of that reality.

While we are on that subject, my point in talking about this (other than the fact that I find it fun) is that it gives us a deeper respect for the process that we are participating in. [It is a process] of awareness, consciousness and personal development and traveling/*suluk*, and awakening a desire to understand who we are and where we came from and where we are going. Hopefully, it gives confidence and sense that this is more than just philosophical. These are realizations that come from a process of introspection and self-reflection. They are, in themselves, analogous to the Prophet (sal), in the sense that for 23 he years receives revelation from Allah through Jibreel (as). We have analogously the same capability. We are creators with our imagination also. We are receiving revelation also.

We are not just receiving revelation in the form of words that come from Allah to the Prophet (sal) through Jibreel (as). We are capable of receiving revelation about our own consciousness, which is supported by the revelation, upon the foundation of the revelation of Qur'an, and also upon the insights of those who came before us. Attested to. You might want to say, "Revealed to us through our personal experiences." These are ways of understanding that there is a link between our capability to perceive, embrace, learn how to utilize and accept... Through our *firāsa*/discernment and our *basīra*/insight, we are able to move from the contiguous to the discontinuous, from the seen world to the unseen world,

through these different [capabilities]; and [we are able to] understand these positions of imagining and imagination or image making, if you want to call it.

When we create images on the most gross level of ourselves (I'm not insulting my children or anyone else's children, or ourselves which are part of this creative process that our parents created), on a very physical level or intellectual level, we can find our place in this continuum and we can find where we are not. We can see where we are not. [We can see] over the horizon, *per sair a'faq*. We can see that there is something beyond our sight, but it all fits in the same reality. In this case we refer to it in terms of the imagination or the Image of Allah (swt).

This is what happens when Musa sends me articles. But this is *khayr*; this is all good, and all goodness derives from Allah (swt). You can say that Allah is not goodness, because He wills to be goodness. But rather He wills goodness because goodness is what Allah is in His Essence. In other words, goodness does not create Allah, but in essence, Allah is goodness. So anything Allah wills is of the quality of goodness. So when we say, "*khayr*" [in response to someone asking,] "Is everything okay?" [and we answer,] "Yes, everything is good," it has a deeper meaning in Arabic and Farsi. It means that everything is positive, everything is useful. Something good has happened. "I got a good business deal." "*Khayr*." It means that it is profitable. It also means beautiful. Everything that is *khayr*, you can imagine that that is a manifestation of Allah. It is what leads a human being, eventually, to felicity, to that sweetness, to that return home, to that state of goodness.

We come from that state of felicity. So rahmat is *khayr*; raheem is *khayr*; hubb is *khayr*; mahabat is *khayr*. Got it? This is all *khayr*. *Uns/intimacy* is *khayr*. What is *hasouna* is *hasana*. What is beautiful is *khayr*. The very best of creation, *khayr al-khalq*, is Prophet Mohammed (sal). *Khayr al-khalq*. Why Allah says, "**If not**

*for you, if not for you, O My Mohammed, I would have not created this creation.”* He says it twice. *“If not for you, if not for you, O My Mohammed, I would not have created this creation.”* Again, you have the *fayyād*, the outflowing of *khayr* from this personality. Allah imbues a human being, as He has imbued other human beings at other times, with this beauty and this love, and all good things are brought to humanity. One could say that all good things are brought to humanity by Prophet Mohammed, (sal). What you are talking about is the light of Allah as it projected as the light of Prophet Mohammed (sal). This light of goodness is now spread out to humanity, not as a spotlight in the sky, but from a personality like Prophet ‘Isa (as), like Prophet Mohammed (sal). It is the same light, the same *khayrat*. So, all this is good, *inshā’a-Llāh*.

Now I will talk about *firāsa*. Maybe I will tell you a story before I end. I hope you got some spiritual insight, some *firāsa* from this—so we *are* talking about *firāsa*. Remember that Allah says, **“Surely, in that are signs for those who can see,”** those who have the marks of insight. I will tell you a story. Al-Hussein an Mansur said,

*The person with insight hits his target with the first shot. He is not diverted from it by a far fetched interpretation, tawil, guessing or pre-supposition. It is said that the insight of the beginners/murīdūn (everybody who is a beginner, raise their hand) is a guess that requires verification. Whereas the insight of the knower/‘arifūn is the verification that requires the true reality, haqiqah.*

[One Sufi elder] said, *“If you attend the gathering of the truthful, be truthful with them for they are the spies of the heart. They enter your hearts and leave them without you taking notice.”*

*I heard Mohammed bin Hussein (may Allah have mercy upon him), say, “I heard Mansur bin Abdallah say, I heard Jaffar Akhalūdi say, I heard Abdul Jaffar Wadud say, ‘Insight/basīra is that something occurs to you without any opposition. However, when your occurrence encounters an opposing thought, it is just a transient idea and self-suggestion.’”*

In other words, we like to say, “Act on your first intuition, because your second thought will lead you astray.” Follow your first inclination.

*It is said that Abul Abdallah al-Razi, who was a great scholar, said that Ibn Abari presented to me a woolen garment. Later on, I noticed that Abu Bakr ash-Shibli (another great Sufi) rose to leave the gathering. He turned to me and I followed him for this was his habit. Whenever he wanted me to follow him, he turned to me as an invitation. When we encountered his house, he told me to take off the woolen garment. So I took it off. He folded it and threw his cap on top of it and then he called out for the fire and burned them both.*

He noticed that *he* noticed the woolen garment of the other person, with his insight. He watched.

Abul Hafsen Nayas-Sabūri said that “One should not claim to possess insight. At the same time, one should be beware of other people’s insight for the Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, ‘Beware the insight of the faithful person.’”

He did not say, ‘practice insight.’

So you can contemplate that in light of what happens as you traverse [these realms]. I will tie it together for you. You have these different forms of imaging,

imagination, which derive from the original and perfect Imagination of Allah (swt) and are implanted in us, which can be distorted as they come into the seen world and less distorted as you move towards the *barzakh* and the unseen world. The ability to perceive that is *firāsa*, to be able to discern the real from the unreal; and that is developed through *basīra*.

To develop your insight takes place automatically through the practices and through the submissions to Allah (swt), the trust of the *shaykh*, and the understanding that you are in an unbroken, contiguous line to the Prophet Mohammed (sal). Where now that line does not exist contiguously, it now exists discontinuously directly from Allah (swt) and the Prophet (sal). You cannot traverse that line person by person by person: Shaykh Rashid, Shaykh Hazrat Rasool, Shaykh Sayed Mohammad Khan, etc. It is a discontinuous projection of light from Allah (swt) through Prophet Mohammed (sal). To travel on that, through that stargate, you have to leave your corporality behind. You cannot be distracted anymore by the physical world; and as a result of that incorporality, only the *rūh* returns in that dimension, but now with awareness and consciousness of its own origin. *Amin*. Did I tie it together?