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Wednesday



Title: [The Truth of Dreams and the ‘Ālam al-Khayāl](#)

DVD title: Imagination, the Key to Seeing into the ‘Ālam al-Khayāl
A Conscious Journey between Worlds

William Blake said, “*The world of imagination is the world of eternity.*” Remember what he was high on – I just want to remind you that he was an opium addict. “*It is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the vegetative body. This world of imagination is infinite and eternal, whereas the world of generation or vegetation is finite and temporal. There exists in that eternal world the permanent realities of everything we see reflected in this vegetable glass of nature.*” This leads me to believe that William Blake had some very close relationships with Sufis, which of course is possible.

This is one of the clearest statements I’ve heard on the ‘*ālam al-khayāl* or the ‘*ālam al-mithal*. It’s a very hopeful statement, a very positive statement. I was reading an excerpt on something that referred back to the movie, “What Dreams May Come.” It tells what happened to a husband and wife after they both die. The place where they first met became the place of their happiest memories, and a place they wanted to return to. After death, the husband visits this place of his dreams, and in the afterlife his former thoughts and ideals have become what his actual surroundings are. The *akhirat* shows a reversal. His inner processes when he was still alive have become his outside surroundings. This is what, of course, many Sufis say about the ‘*ālam al-khayāl* and the ‘*ālam al-mithal*, the world we will be in after our death. Not only Sufis, the Hindus say your last thought determines the loca in which you will be reborn.

Shaykh al-Akbar Ibn Araby (qss) quoted a *hadith* where the Prophet (sal) says, “*Allah (swt) created a hundred thousand Adams.*” Ibn Araby (ra) wrote a few things which he had seen in the ‘*ālam al-mithal*. He said:

As I was making my tawaf around the Ka’ba, there were some persons at my side. I didn’t know them at all, but while performing tawaf they recited two Arabic couplets. The meaning was this: As you do now, we for years all visited this residence. Upon hearing this couplet, it occurred to me that these people might be from ‘ālam al-mithal. While thinking so, one of them looked at me and said, “I am one of your grandfathers.” I said, “How long has it been since you died?” He said, “More than 40,000 years.” Being astonished at these words of his, I said, “Historians say that not even 7,000 years have passed since Adam, the first father of human beings.” He said, “Which Adam are you talking about? I am one of the sons of Adam who lived long before that 7,000 years ago.” Upon hearing this, I remembered what the Hadith Shareef had mentioned.

Ancient astronomers said the age of this planet, the duration of time from its creation until its end was equal to the number of planets around the sun in terms of thousands. They believed the earth was 7,000 years old, as they thought the number of planets was seven. That was transferred into religious texts. Some of them said the age of the earth was equal to the number of constellations, which they counted to be 12,000. Some said it was equal to 360, the number of meridians, in terms of thousands, so 360,000 years. These were just their theories. Hazrat Idries (as) said, “*We did not know the world’s age though we were prophets.*” The earths’ age is written as 360,000 times 360,000 which is 129 billion 600 million years in the book entitled “Mukhtasar,” which Abdul Wahab ash-Sha’rānī (qss) outlined from “Taskhir” by Abu Abdillah al-Qurtubi, the Andalusian ‘*alim*. We know that today’s scientists estimate the earth’s age to be not less than 4 billion 500 million years.

Imam Rabbani Ahmad Farūqī Sirhindī (ra) said, *“The Adams who lived before Hazrat Adam who was the first man and the first prophet, were all in the ‘ālam al-mithal. They were not in the ‘ālam ash-shahadat. There was only one Adam in this ‘ālam ash-shahadat, and that is the world of matter, which we see. He was a prophet; angels prostrated in front of him. Allah (swt) made a man’s statue from sticky mud and changed it to flesh and bones.”* We know that this process of creating beings is now a very fine science, out of sticky elements. It raises again this whole issue of the *‘ālam al-mithal* and *‘ālam al-khayāl*, which I think is important. It also raises the issue of the transformative process human being go through, where earth substances are turned into the body, into organs, and into life. These elements are gathered and, we are told in many texts, they will be re-gathered on the Day of Resurrection. Maybe I’ll go into a little more about that tomorrow, but I want to bring in another aspect. This is another story of Ibn Araby (ra):

At the time of Ibn Araby, a painter painted a picture of a partridge. People admired the fine quality of the painting. But the painting was so realistic, that a cat tried to attack the partridge. Then Ibn Araby entered and saw the painting. The artist asked him what he thought about it. He said he thought it was very beautiful, but... “But what?” the artist asked. Then Ibn Araby pointed out a mistake regarding proportion in the painting. The painter kissed his hand and said that he had made the mistake on purpose to see if anyone would notice it.

What’s important about representation, which is a term used in other disciplines, is that it is a reference to Allah, to the Divine Attributes of Allah. In this case, Allah is the Fashioner. It also shows us something that the artist and the Sufi have in common, which is the fault of *khayāl*/imagination. The imagination of the Sufi takes aspects of this world and... like we are listening to this music... translates the Attributes of Allah (swt) through imagination into the different forms of expression. Or, one could say, [the Sufi] takes the expressions of certain Attributes of Allah, which Allah has projected, like the capability of an artist to see and translate that into a near-perfect representation, to the

degree the cat thinks it is real in the same way that we human beings think this world to be real, but the Sufi sees the reality behind it.

With *basīra*, the Sufi sees what is not quite right—in this case, proportionate, what is not quite accurate. Because having seen the reflection itself, we are able to see the representation of that reflection, if there is anything incorrect in it. That’s really a way of talking about the process of Tasawwuf. The key here is imagination/*khayāl*. It is the key to the world of the ‘*ālam al-khayāl*, the world created by Allah as the intermediary world between the *rūh* (world of the spirit) and *dunya*. The power, the force that governs our body, what we call our life energy or spirit, and the essence of all that spirit and bodies is completely different. The essence, which we know is Allah, controls everything; and the life force that gives us life, though it is a projection from the essence (Allah), is not the essence. Just like the partridge is not the partridge, but it is clearly a partridge. This life force is not the essence, but it is a reflection of the essence. It is an imagined projection of the essence.

That’s why many Sufis come to the conclusion that all this is a projection, like a dream. The Hindus call it *maya*/illusion. It’s an illusion. What Ibn Araby did was to cut through it. How? He is living, existing in this world of *dunya*, but he sees through the *majāz* or the corridor, into the world of the ‘*ālam al-khayāl*. He is able to pierce the veil that separates these worlds to see the reality against the projection. Just like you and I could tell the difference between the painting of a partridge and a real partridge. We can praise how beautiful it is, and how realistic it is. We have all seen paintings that look just like a photograph, but you know they are a painting. You know the characteristics of a painting. If you look very closely, you see the brush strokes.

In the world and not of the world, in this case, means to be able to see into the world of the *mithāl*, or the ‘*ālam al-khayāl* (world of imagination) and be able to distinguish while walking in this world and operating in this world. That is the meaning of that story. To

do that, you have to have the capability of imagining. You have to have the capacity to create an image yourself, to imagine. If you have that capability, then you can operate in this world and in the world of imagination. What has happened? He has pierced through the barrier, the *barzakh*, between these two worlds. He is in this world, piercing through the *barzakh*, comparing what has been seen in the world of projected image. Or I should say, from the world of projected image in the *barzakh*, he sees into the world of origination, which is similar to what we do in a dream.

This journey we make is a descent and an ascent. We descend before birth. The soul travels through the world of the spirit into the world of imagination. In other words, there are two stops on the journey. There is no direct flight. The soul comes into the world of imagination, and it is projected into this world of *dunya*. Then ascending, it returns to Allah through the world of imagination through the *barzakh* to the world of spirit. Returning doesn't only take place after death; it happens every night in dreams perhaps. It is part of our spiritual growth and development. When you sit in meditation and you actually enter into, for example, a *halakah*, you are not imagining it but you enter into it.

We are journeying a lot between these worlds, but when we sit in *muraqabah*, it becomes a conscious purposeful journey. It is a journey where not only do you travel and see things, but information or knowledge flows to you from sources that are existing in another dimension. This world of imagination/*khayāl* sort of borrows from the attributes of both worlds that adjoin it: the world of spirit and the world of *dunya*—the world of the *ghaib* and *dunya*. That's why in dreams, we can have access to that world of spiritual realities, which can't be perceived easily from this world because they are not created of the same matter. That's why of course we see things in this world, and we mix the two together.

In the *'ālam al-khayāl*, there are dimensions also. One of those levels is closer to the world of spirit, and the other is closer to this world, the world of matter. The imagination

on the highest level is very clear. It is so subtle that it is as if one is peering in the *barzakh* into Jannah: you get a clear view of the truth, of that Divine Presence. Whereas the lower level of the '*ālam al-khayāl*' are just moments of clarity, moments of insights. The lower level is sort of tainted by the imagination (I'll use the word now in the physical sense) of the perceiver. You get moments of insight, but it is colored by your own personality, like your dreams are. "I dreamt of Indonesia, because I talked to my parents in Indonesia last night. But it wasn't really Indonesia; it was here in Bedford. And it wasn't really my parents, it was Abul Hasan and Salma." It's colored by our physical reality. But sitting in *muraqabah*, when you reach the higher levels of the '*ālam al-khayāl*', it's like being in the highest levels of the *barzakh*.

We are given this taste automatically: dreams, momentary insights. Some people make a living being on that borderline of that world. They read the tarot cards or they are psychics or whatever. They train themselves for this kind of *karamat*. But at the highest level, which comes from *muraqabah* and meditation, you get a very, very pure picture. You see what is true. It tells you that it is representation as opposed to reality. You are seeing reality, and then you can look back to this world and see what is a representation of it, as in the story of Ibn Araby. That should be motivation enough for someone to want to meditate, to make *dhikrullah*, to study the texts that are the guidebooks to the Qur'an, to look at the examples of people like Ibn Araby and others who have that sight. But of course that's not enough. Actually, it IS enough, but it doesn't happen. Why? Because people become distracted. By what? Their *nafs ammāra*, their ego.

As we use this imagination we have, most people see images that are delimited by their own self, their own nature and circumstances. It's not surprising you have a dream about cars after you went car shopping. It's not surprising if you are planning a trip, you have a dream about flying. None of this is surprising because it's being mixed with your apparent reality. But those people who have refined themselves, who are able to understand the limitations of this world, who spend ample time in *muraqabah* and *dhikr*

and surrounding themselves with the guidelines, having a faithful and humble love for Allah and his prophets [have a certain insight]. And seeing the Prophet Mohammed (sal) for example as *masūm*, seeing that he speaks with insight, or that one's *shaykh* speaks with insight (for example, "Why did he bring up that topic today?"), because there is a transparency, the person learns to trust that transparency. We say, "The eyes are a window of the soul." They are able to look into the eyes of a person and see their soul, see what is at their essence, or even see what is on their mind. It is not to say they are reading the person's mind, but you trust the *basīra*, the insight.

Most people are limited by their selves. The people who have achieved the higher levels are *insani kamil*, and have overcome their individual limitations. What they contemplate at the lower level corresponds exactly to what is happening on the higher level. It means what a person is seeing and talking about at this borderline that we are always at... We are conscious, talking, in *dunya*, right now. Sleep is only a few minutes away. We are always at this borderline. The average person who is on this borderline is only seeing the lower aspects and limitations of their own self. A person like Ibn Araby or the great *shuyukh* are also walking through this earth and doing what they do. What they are seeing and responding to is at the highest level of the *'ālam al-khayāl*.

When Ibn Araby walks in and sees the partridge painting, immediately he sees that it is disproportionate to the reality. He's not saying, "Oh, it's beautiful, what a great artist you are." He sees. He doesn't say it right away, he hesitates. The artist says, "But?" You know that feeling. What they see is true. Even though if they say it and it doesn't seem true, it's true. If we have a dream, for example, where it's made clear to us what we should do, for example, "Sacrifice your son." You know the story. We have to be very careful with the interpretation of it. Hazrat Ibrahim was, "Oho. What?" But Ismail was not. He said, "Okay, father, that's it. If this is a *ru'ya*, and you are seeing from the place of transmission, you have to do what you are told to do." Maybe it's not such a

good example, because when Sidna Ibrahim had that dream, its meaning was a little different.

The Prophet (sal) got a visit from a man who was dressed in white clothes who asked him about *islam*, *iman*, and *ihsan*. The question was, how could his robes be so white, having traveled such a long distance in the desert? Someone noticed that. It was hot; and there was no perspiration on his robes or on him. Who was it? The Angel Jibreel. His body is what? Imaginary. If you see the Angel Jibreel in a dream, his body is imaginary. If you see the Prophet (sal) in a dream, his body is imaginary. In fact, every night you dream all those imaginary things. Did you ever dream of a sweaty person in a dream? Probably not, unless you happen to have a dream about racing and you felt hot and sweaty. It doesn't have the qualities of this world, so you know it is not of this world. When he asked about *ihsan*, you know what the Prophet said. This is the Hadith of Jibreel.

What's also interesting about the Prophet's (as) answer is that he used the phrase "as if." *Ihsan* is to worship Allah "as if" you see Him; and if you do not see Him, He sees you. This is to make clear to us that imagination or *khayāl* is the instrument that is used in this contemplation, *fiqh*, of Allah. Again, he said, "as if you are seeing Him," not as if you are hearing Him, or feeling Him. But he uses the word *basara*, as if you are seeing. Seeing is the key to understanding and contemplation in this case, just like the faculty of imagination is the key to the 'ālam al-khayāl. It's important that we don't think of *khayāl* as some kind of imaginary fantasy. There is much more beyond the world of imagination. The experiences of the 'ālam al-khayāl in a way are the opposite of those of the ordinary world.

In every day life, we have a fixed exterior and changing states. When you dream, the exterior is not fixed at all. You can be one place, another place, and it takes on characteristics of other things. In the world of imagination, you experience exactly the reverse. Your changing states create an ever-changing outward surrounding. The

outward surrounding reflects your state. If your state is peaceful, the outward surrounding takes on the quality of that. It is said that after you die, you experience this. The truth can also be known through your dreams. If you are afraid in your dream, you can find yourself in a situation where you will be attacked. The most quickly changing situations you have to face in your dreams originate from your state when you are dreaming, which is the reverse of what happens for most people in this world. However, we are very careful at a certain point in our spiritual life to say, “Don’t say that, or say, ‘*Auudhu billahe min ash-Shaytan ir-rajīm.*’ Don’t put it out there. You might make it happen.” That’s like a residue memory of what happens in the *akhirah* or in the *ghaib*.

Your state of mind creates the apparency of the reality. The Hindus say, your last thought determines the place you will be. The Sufis say, you recite Ya Seen when a person is dying, and remind them of the good things they did in life, because in the imagination when things reverse, if they are in a lustful state, an angry state, a fearful state, that will determine the experience they have in the other world. Why? Most of us are not so developed that in this world we have achieved a state so that at the higher level of the ‘*ālam al-khayāl* we are defaulting to the highest thoughts, purposes, and level. Most of us are not *insani kamil* in this world, or near it. But the more you practice your *muraqabah* and sit in meditation, the more the attributes you are acting in the outer world are going to be as in the inner world.

We are going to call that the inner worlds, the *bātin*. If you have a positive attitude and are very happy all the time, and are thinking in a positive way, you are on the HOV lane in the ‘*ālam al-mithāl*. You are. If you have certainty, love, compassion; if that’s the way you run your life; if you have confidence and trust and submission, you are literally going to be building your experience in the *akhirah*. Now you may say, “It’s not true. It’s just as false as anything else.” But that’s not true, because those qualities are the qualities of our *fitrah*. It’s another discussion: coming back to your natural state.

One Sufi said, when talking about music, that a musical note could be seen as something that has the same properties as the images of the world of the *barzakh*, the world of imagination. It means when we listen for example, to the Ensemble Ibn Araby, you don't have to know the words. You don't have to know how to play it. You just listen to it. It has a quality to it that is very refined and very perfect. It takes you some where to a place of peacefulness, piety, quiescence, a place of beauty. I think for most people it does. It has the quality of that perfection or near perfection that is representational of something in the *ghaib*. It takes you in a sense of the higher level of the '*ālam al-mithāl*. You sit there and imagine things.

It may not be visual, but you are uplifted. You feel nearer to that Divine Presence. Your worries fall away. You feel transported. You have been moved by these notes to a high state. You may say, "I wish I could be like this all the time. I could listen to this music forever." Of course, you could not in this world. You can listen to it a lot... the same thing is true of beautiful *du'ā*. Many people sit and make beautiful *du'ā*. Know that you can visit these higher places in your dreams and in your *muraqabah*. This is what is most important in the '*ālam al-khalāl*.

I missed talking about something.. that Muslims and Christians and Jews are forbidden to worship graven images, because this is the human being trying to be the God who creates out of clay and elements something to worship, as opposed to Allah creating something that worships out of clay. Got it? I don't have to go into detail. *Asalaam aleikum*.