



**Editor in Chief**

Seyed G. Safavi  
London Academy of Iranian Studies, UK

**Assistant Editor in Chief**

Seyed Sadreddin Safavi  
London Academy of Iranian Studies

**Book Review Editor**

Sajjad H. Rizvi  
Exeter University, UK

**Editorial Board**

G. A'awani, Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Iran  
A. Acikgenc, Fatih University, Turkey  
M. Araki, Islamic Centre England, UK  
S. Chan, SOAS University of London, UK  
W. Chittick, State University of New York, USA  
R. Davari, Tehran University, Iran  
G. Dinani, Tehran University, Iran  
P.S. Fosl, Transylvania University, USA  
M. Khamenei, SIPRI, Iran  
B. Kuspinar, McGill University, Canada  
H. Landolt, McGill University, Canada  
O. Leaman, University of Kentucky, USA  
Y. Michot, Hartford Seminary,  
Macdonald Center, USA  
M. Mohaghegh-Damad, Beheshti University,  
Iran  
J. Morris, Boston College, USA  
S.H. Nasr, The George Washington University,  
USA  
S. Pazouki, Iranian Institute of Philosophy, Iran  
Hasti Safavi, Exeter University, UK  
C. Turner, University of Durham, UK  
H. Ziai, UCLA, USA

**Editor**

Shahideh Safavi, University of Nottingham

**Layout & Design**

Mohamad A. Alavi, [www.mediatics.net](http://www.mediatics.net)

*Transcendent Philosophy Journal* is an academic peer-reviewed journal published by the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) and aims to create a dialogue between Eastern, Western and Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism is published in December. Contributions to *Transcendent Philosophy* do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or the London Academy of Iranian Studies.

Contributors are invited to submit papers on the following topics: Comparative studies on Islamic, Eastern and Western schools of Philosophy, Philosophical issues in history of Philosophy, Issues in contemporary Philosophy, Epistemology, Philosophy of mind and cognitive science, Philosophy of science (physics, mathematics, biology, psychology, etc), Logic and philosophical logic, Philosophy of language, Ethics and moral philosophy, Theology and philosophy of religion, Sufism and mysticism, Eschatology, Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Art and Metaphysics.

The mailing address of the *Transcendent Philosophy* is:

Dr S.G. Safavi  
Journal of Transcendent Philosophy  
121 Royal Langford  
2 Greville Road  
London NW6 5HT  
UK  
Tel: (+44) 020 7879 8613  
Email: [philosophy@iranainstudies.org](mailto:philosophy@iranainstudies.org)

Submissions should be sent to the Editor. Books for review and completed reviews should be sent to the Book Review Editor. All other communication should be directed to the coordinator.

*Transcendent Philosophy* is published in December. Annual subscription rates are: Institutions, £60.00; individuals, £30.00. Please add £15.00 for addresses outside the UK. The Journal is also accessible online at: [www.iranainstudies.org](http://www.iranainstudies.org).

© London Academy of Iranian Studies  
ISSN 1471-3217

**Volume 20. December 2019**  
**Transcendent Philosophy**  
An International Journal for  
Comparative Philosophy  
and Mysticism



## **Articles**

### **Farabi vis-à-vis Avicenna on Inner Perception**

Ghasemali Kouchnani, Nadia Maftouni

[7-24]

### **The Stages of Certainty; Analysis and Interpretation of the Poetic Introduction of The Second Book of The Rumi's Mathnawī**

Mahvash al-Sadat Alavi

[25-46]

### **Mir Emād on Beauty and Wisdom in Islamic Calligraphy**

Said Binayemotlagh

[47-58]

### **The Role of Sufism in the formation of Islamic culture and civilization**

Seyed Salman Safavi

[59-94]

### **An Analysis of Parallelism and Chiasmus of Rumi's Mathnawi based on the Synoptic structuralism of Professor Salman Safavi**

Saeid Khanabadi

[95-103]



# **Farabi vis-à-vis Avicenna on Inner Perception**

Ghasemali Kouchnani  
University of Tehran

Nadia Maftouni  
Yale Law School, USA

## **Abstract**

Examining the issue of Inner perception, we are keying on Farabi vs. Avicenna. Although both of Farabi and Avicenna show some features of Aristotelian theory of perception, they have expanded it thus actually new phases are added to it. Conceptualizing imaginary perception with its functions, Farabi deals with three primary activities: storing sensory forms, composing and decomposing sensory forms, and imagery. Avicenna defines what Farabi calls the imaginary faculties as three inner perception, i.e., imagination, estimative and memory faculties.

**Keywords:** Farabi, Avicenna, inner perception, imaginary faculties.

## **Introduction**

Inner perception theory plays a key role in issues of epistemological mindset. Any ambiguity in inner perception theory results in various

sophisms and destroys its role from efficiency. Here we study the problem of inner perception with comparative historical approaches of Farabi (339-258) and Avicenna (373-428). Farabi in terms of innovative theories about various roles of perception and Avicenna in terms of expansion in concepts of perception faculties are important for the purpose of the field.

Some features of Aristotle's theory of perception are included in Farabi as well as Avicenna's theory of inner perception. Most of Aristotle's views on inner perception theory could be seen in his book about human soul called *De Anima* [Aristotle, 1995, 427a18-429a4]. Explaining the nature inner perception, Aristotle first gives a negative account about what imaginary perception does not include. He emphasizes on the difference of imagination with thinking, judgment, opinion, belief, conviction, reason, perceiving, knowledge and intelligence. He thinks that imagination is different from thinking and judgment. Although imagination can't be created without perceiving, judgment is not found without imagination. Therefore the difference between thinking and judgment is obvious, because imaginary perception is in our control when we want and we can imagine a picture [Aristotle, 1995, 427b14-19].

The idea that imaginary perception under human power and desire do not merely mean being devoid of imaginary perception because thinking is arbitrary too. Therefore, thinking is bound to logical criteria that we can obtain by following them whereas imaginary perception is not bound to logical criteria and barriers. The other point is that imaginary perception can rely on practical wisdom due to its characteristics, under human power and desire. Because the affairs belonging to practical wisdom are under human power and free will, whatever belonging to practical wisdom is worthy to be judged. We have dealt in detail this issue in problems of imaginary perception topics.



Aristotle differs between imaginary perception and opinion. His argument is that we are not free in forming opinions and cannot avoid error or correct alternation.

In addition, when we think that something is horrible or threatening, immediately interests and emotions are produced inside our body as well as for something reliable. But when we just imagine, we won't have those regrets and are like those who are watching a nice or horrible scene painting [Aristotle, 1995, 427b20-24].

Besides, opinion goes together with belief. Because without belief in what we have opinion power, we cannot have opinion whereas most animals have imaginary perception not belief. Moreover each opinion is with belief, each belief is with conviction and each conviction is with reason. But some animals have imaginary perception without reason [Aristotle, 1995, 428a18-23].

Aristotle separates imaginary perception from perceiving by the reasoning that the perceiving is potential or actual. For example, visual potential and act of seeing and imaginary perception occur in both absences as in dreams. The second reasoning is that perceiving is always available unlike the imaginary perception. The third cause is that if the actual imaginary perception and perceiving were the same, all animals should have imaginary perception. But it is not so. For example, there is no imaginary perception in ants, bees and worms. The forth cause is that perceiving is always true unlike imaginary perceptions. The fifth cause, when our sensory feelings pay attention to the objects carefully, we don't say that we imagine this object is for example a human. But when our sense perception is vague about that object, we say that sentence that maybe it is true or not. The sixth and the last Aristotelian cause is that visual imaginary perception appears even while our eyes remain closed [Aristotle, 1995, 428a5-16]. He separates imaginary perception from the affairs which are always impressive like knowledge or

intelligence, because imaginary perception can be an error [Aristotle, 1995, 428a17-18].

Studying the differentiation of imaginary perception from perceiving and opinion, Aristotle shows that imaginary perception cannot be opinion in addition to perceiving, or opinion resulted from perceiving or combination of both. This is impossible, both due the things we have mentioned and the causes that objective opinion cannot differ from objective perception [Aristotle, 1995, 428a24-29].

Aristotle describes what imaginary perception *is not*. But what *is* the imaginary perception? He reckons imaginary perception as a movement that cannot be created without perception. It means that it will occur just in sensitive creatures and in to objects belonging to them. And since movement can be produced from actual perception and has a similar characteristic to the perception itself, then this movement cannot be separated from the perception or in the creature without perception. Therefore, a person having imaginary perception is the agent of many things and receptive to them [Aristotle, 1995, 428b11-17].

The characteristic of imaginary perception is that it is similar to perception except that perception has to do material objects and imaginary perception does not have one [Aristotle, 1995, 432a9].

Aristotle concludes that if the imaginary perception does not have other features except above mentioned ones, then it should be a movement that results an actual reaction from a perceptive origin [Aristotle, 1995, 429a1-2].

Mentioning in appellation of imaginary perception to a Greek name *phantasia* from *phaos*, Aristotle stresses that imaginary perception belongs to the perceiving act and the most important sense is vision being impossible without light [Aristotle, 1995, 429a1-4].

A word of warning is in order. Farabi has not used the term *phantasia* and Avicenna has used *phantasia* and *bantasia* as meaning *sensus communis*.

*Motekhayelah* and *khiyal* are not considered as two faculties in Aristotle's works as we could see later in conceptualization of Muslim philosophers especially in Avicenna that formed under than the five senses. Therefore, *takhayol* and *khiyal* are used as synonyms in the literal translation as imaginary perception.

### **Farabi's Theory on Inner Perception**

Unlike what we have understood about Aristotle, Farabi does not point out *what is imaginary perception* as a problem. He does not follow its essential analysis or its conceptual analysis. In such situations as in planning, one can obtain what is imaginary perception from his view by an indirect approach. Therefore, we will address his opinion about different perceptions, i.e., sensory perception, imaginary perception and intellectual perception and self intellectual faculties including the faculties of sensation, *motekhayelah*, and rational.

Farabi conceptualizes intellectual faculties from both theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom whereas sages after him paid attention to intellectual faculties through theoretical wisdom like Avicenna.

Farabi does not consider any difference between imaginary perception faculty and *motekhayelah*. He mentions one faculty doing both activities and often calls it *motekhayelah* faculty and some times imaginary perception faculty [Farabi, 1992, pp. 51-58].

Avicenna explains these distinctions. Basically we cannot see Avicenna's explanation about fifth inner senses as we found in Farabi's works.

Farabi does not express separately about nature of perception. But he points to the kinds of perceptions in his other discussions. For example, he expresses in his talking about the first lover and pleasure that he enjoys in it. Because of feeling or imaginary perception or rational science [Farabi, 2003, p. 85; 1997, p. 71] and says in his analysis of psychical faculties that the science will be realized by rational, *motekhayelah* or sensory faculties [Farabi, 2003, p. 156].

In his opinion, rational faculty is responsible for intellectual perception, *motekhayelah* faculty for imaginary perception and appearance senses for the sensory perception.

Avicenna completed this theory. He conceptualizes illusion as a kind of perception. We cannot see this term in Farabi's works. Farabi has defined illusion as an imaginary perception for something that is not existent. [Farabi, 1987, p. 162].

Farabi has not defined faculty in his discussions about self faculties. Avicenna believes that faculty means both doing origin and acceptance origin. Because the affairs out of self includes movement and perception and faculty about perception means acceptance of origin and stimulation means action from origin. There is no preference to refer faculty to one of these two cases and if one use the term of faculty for both perception and stimulation faculties, namely both acceptance and doing origins; it will be due to sharing of terminology [Avicenna, 1983. P. 7].

Farabi explains self faculties according to its existing order and expresses their activities [Farabi, 2004, p. 10; 2003, pp. 151-155]. Among these faculties is sensitive faculty including touch, sight, auditory, taste and smell senses. There is a dominant sense over appearance sense that is the focus of all sensory perceptions, and

senses act like its spies and each is responsible for a special case from information and a special area of the body estate whereas the *motekhayelah* faculty does not have several servants and agents in the body and will act lonely [Farabi, 2003, pp. 153-154].

*Motekhayelah* faculty preserves the tangible images that are stamped in the self and also it combines some images with others or divides an image to some parts and therefore creates a new image. After *motekhayelah* faculty, rational faculty will be created that the human can think by it.

Farabi has emphasized conceptualization of perception faculties from practical wisdom in various situations [Farabi, 2003, p. 152; 2004, p. 11; 1997, p. 33]. He knows rational faculty as a faculty that human can differ between beautiful and ugly ethics and acts through it and thinks that which action should be left or continued and in addition finds that beneficial and harmful and enjoyable and ornery, whereas *motekhayelah* can just perceive the beneficial and harmful and enjoyable and ornery, and sensitive can perceive just enjoyable and ornery [Farabi, 1997, p. 33].

One of the definitions obtained through collection of an object's definitions and works that is called compound particular. Therefore, regarding the activities of *motekhayelah* faculty, important thing is to reach what it is.

Farabi has defined three important activities for *motekhayelah*. First, it preserves sensory perceptions after cutting sensory relation. Second, it combines or decomposes them. These combinations and decompositions are various and *motekhayelah* faculty governs them desirably. Their results are sometimes relevant and sometimes irrelevant [Farabi, 2003, p. 154]. For example, it will combine bird wing with the horse body or invent a Pegasus. The third activity is imitation and illustration. Only *motekhayelah* faculty can illustrate through sensibles and intelligibles. Even *motekhayelah* can imitate the intelligibles in the ultimate perfection like the first principle and

the non materials. Of course it is illustrated by the most complete and highest objects such as beautiful objects and in contrast, it imitates incomplete intelligibles by incomplete and posts and ugly sensibles.

Since Farabi does not analyze what imaginary perception is, we focus on his other views like of human faculties, Utopia ranks, stage of universe and body members.

He begins description of this similarity with the stages of universe. Creatures are continued from the most completed one to the most incomplete one. The last stage is that the creature's doings are just for service and other things are not realized after him and never does actions as headship. The first creature that is superior never performs service and the middle creatures perform headship rather than their lower creatures to serve the first creature.

So there will be an order and relationship and cooperation and community among stage of universal and the stage of society are the same. The status of the first header is like God in the universal system. The same relation can be found in body members and also in self faculties [Farabi, 1991, pp. 63-66]. This similarity means *motekhayelah* faculty is under the service of rational faculty and sensitive faculty is under the service of *motekhayelah* faculty. In terms of stage and headship and design, the rational faculty is the first and *motekhayelah* and sensation are next in status of headship.

### **Avicenna's Theory on Inner Perception**

*What is imaginary perception* can be conceptualized from two positions in Avicenna's discussion: the first is where he explains kinds of perceptions and the second is where he divides internal faculties.

Imaginary perception theory has been ordered and developed consequent to perception theory and perception faculties. Avicenna first studied kinds and essences of perceptions in *al-Isharat va al-Tanbihat* and then analyzed internal perception faculties and rational soul [Avicenna, 1997, pp. 308-404]. He studied internal and external perception faculties, rational soul and kinds of perceptions in *al-Shifa* and argued in detail about each internal and external senses [See: Avicenna, 1983, pp. 33-171].

Avicenna has divided perceptions into four kinds: feeling, imaginary perception, illusion and intellection in most of his works [Avicenna, 1983, pp. 51-53; 1986, pp. 344-346; 1995, pp. 277-278; 1985, pp. 102-103; 1984, p. 23; 1953, pp. 30-33).

Until there is a relation between external senses and external object, sensory perception is resulted, if not, it is imagined and its idea is exemplified inside. Like Zayd who we saw him and then we imagined him while he is absent.

Perception of particular meanings and belonging to sensibles are called illusion. Like Zayd's kindness or hostility. Intellection is resulted when Zayd is imagined as a human, meaning that this meaning has been realized in others too.

Avicenna has tripartite divisions of perception and does not mention the illusion [Avicenna, 1997, pp. 322-323]. In *Sharh al-Isharat*, Tusi has all four divisions and tells the reason why the Avicenna did not mention illusion that sensory and imaginary conceptions are created alone and illusory perception is not possible without participation of imaginary perception and imaginary perception makes it particular and individualized. Because illusion is the perception of intangible meanings like the qualities and relations specific to a material object [Tusi, 1997, p. 324].

After analyzing kinds of perceptions, Avicenna studied internal intellectual faculties. In his opinion, internal perception faculties

include *sensus communis* or *bantasia*, imaginary perception or illustrated, illusion, *motekhayelah* or thought. He discussed these faculties with examples which we will discuss later [Avicenna, 1997, pp. 331-346].

We see rain drops in straight line and a point which is turning quickly as a circle; these apprehensions are through sense, not imaginary perception or recollection. On the other hand, only the opposite idea will be stamped in the eye and the opposite idea of the rain drop or the point turning is a point not a straight line or circle. Therefore, the first painted idea will remain in one of human faculties and the current idea will join it and all sensory apprehensions will be gathered in that faculty. This faculty is called *sensus communis* or *bantasia*.

The second faculty is imaginary perception that will remain all paradigm of sensibles after getting hidden against external senses. Having these two faculties of *sensus communis* and imaginary perception, human can rule about the color and taste. For example, this black date is sweet and this yellow lemon is sour.

The third faculty is illusion that understood intangible detailed meaning in detailed tangibles like sheep that knows the intangible meaning of horror in the wolf and the lamb that knows the intangible meaning of kindness in his mother.

The fourth faculty is memory to remain detailed meanings. This faculty is except imaginary perception which remains particular forms. One of the other human faculties can separate and combine the forms that sense would conceptualize and the particular meanings that illusion has them and also it can separate and combine between forms and meanings. If this faculty will be worked with wisdom is called thought and if with illusion, will be called *motekhayelah*.



Tusi has called this faculty representation because it occupies in perceptions. Avicenna has determined a position for each kind of these five faculties in brain.

## Comparing and Contrasting Farabi and Avicenna

Historical study of the views of the Farabi and Avicenna concerning inner perception theory, explains the evolution of this theory and the persistent effect on posterity and innovations and inventions of each of them. Aristotle has done researches on the nature of the inner perception which are accepted by Farabi and Avicenna as the basis-material hence they were not elaborated. He analyzed imaginary perception as distinct from feeling, thought, belief, opinion, science and intellect, in addition to the imaginary perception and feeling being similar and its relationship with the judgment. These insights were kept in the later philosophy.

Aristotle used the word *phantasia* for imaginary perception. Farabi has not used this word to imaginary perception and nor to any other thing. Avicenna applied the words *bantasia* and *phantasia* based on common sense. While Aristotle called the common sense as *sensus communis* [Aristotle, 1995, 425b27, 450a1, 686a31]

Farabi does not consider the conceptualization of imaginary perception or its distinctiveness from dubious and similar concepts as a problem. He received the teachings of Aristotle via tacit means and deals with activities and capabilities of imaginary perception and its civil status. As Aristotle considered imaginary perception and *takhayol* with a word *phantasia*, Farabi too does not consider duality between imaginary perception and *takhayol* in the infinitive and between imaginary perception and *motekhayelah* in the meaning of faculty.

He stated three tasks for *mote khayelah* based on three imaginary forms that can be distinguished : imaginary form that is sensible and is obtained from common sense, imaginary form that *mote khayelah* makes with possession in the first imaginary forms and their analysis and synthesis, and imaginary form that *mote khayelah* is invented by the representation of intelligibles and sensibles.

This tri-partite division is used in the conceptualization of the creativity of imaginary perception. Especially the performance of imaginary perception in imagining from intelligibles makes possible the power and specific capacity in order to form ideas and works of art. All three types are common in clear and distinctive features of substantive that Aristotle has expressed.

Farabi has also considered the ability of *mote khayelah* in understanding helpful and harmful, pleasurable and painful affairs.

Avicenna conceptualizes inner perceptive faculties. The faculties are based on a branch called *mote khayelah* and thought is considered as representation in five types and if they are considered as two faculties they are six types.

Are there any relation between faculties of imaginary perception and *mote khayelah* in Avicenna with *mote khayelah* faculty in Farabi? Avicenna knows the imaginary perception as a treasury of common sense which is responsible for maintaining sensibles forms, namely the first task of *mote khayelah* Farabi is independently for Avicenna imaginary perception. Avicenna's *mote khayelah* is responsible for analyzing forms and their composition. It means to carry out the second activity of Farabi's *mote khayelah*. Avicenna considers perception as passion category and takes from dominion in forms to act of *mote khayelah* [Avicenna, 1983, p. 35]. He does not consider the third activity of Farabi's *mote khayeleah*, namely the representation. It should not be mentioned in addition to the perceptions and interactions of faculties.

In summary, the same interaction which Farabi considers for *mote khayelah*, Avicenna considers for two faculties, namely imaginary perception and *mote khayelah* and does not consider the representation. It can be said that Farabi's *mote khayelah* includes Avicenna's estimative faculty because Farabi considers *mote khayelah* faculty capable of understanding pleasure, pain, benefite and detrimental affairs. It means Farabi's *mote khayelah* can find meanings in all these.

While Avicenna considers estimative faculty responsible for perceiving the sensibles, as Farabi has not differentiated the estimative faculty, it is not necessary to separate the memory—that is, the treasury of partial meanings. It seems that Avicenna considers Farabi's *mote khayelah* faculty as one of the four faculties of imaginary perception, *mote khayelah*, estimative and memory. It is basically impossible to separate sensible affairs in particular meaning from sensible forms. So Avicenna in his book of *Isharat va Tanbihat* divides the perception in three kinds of feeling, imaginary perception and intellection and put illusion in his other works.

Another point that needs mentioning is that in some works of Farabi we can see inner cognitive faculties. In *Fusus al-Hikam* the faculties of representation, imaginary perception, memory, thought and *mote khayelah* are defined using the same terms as Avicenna's works [Shanab Ghazani, 2003, p. 67]. Also, the common limit phrase is mentioned between the outward and the inward that exponents are stated for it equivalent of common sense. [See: Shanab Ghazani, 2003, p. 164; Astarabadi, 1980, p. 320] In addition, in *Uyun al-Masayel* we have *mote khayelah*, imaginary perception, recollection and thought without a definition for them. [See: Farabi, 1930a; 1930b, pp. 9-10]

Various methods can be used to clarify this issue. One is that Farabi uses different phrases in different places, for the validities of cognitive faculties and he expresses their differences are in terms of

brevity and detail. This probability is altered, because Farabi in *mote khayelah* activities has not named detailed names of faculties.

In addition, Farabi defined illusion as follows: ‘the illusion is that we have something in imaginary perception while it does not exist’ [Farabi, 1987, p. 162]. This definition is equivalent to lexical meaning of illusion and does not resemble Avicenna’s conceptualization.

Another possibility is that Farabi changes his opinion. This possibility is not very notable. In other words, the path is not clear for such a change in the works of Farabi. Another difference is that some works do not belong to Farabi, as some Arab and European researchers denied belonging *Fusus al-Hikam* to Farabi while some have attributed it to Avicenna and also there are serious doubts in the document of *Uyun al-Masayel* and *al-Daavy al-Qalbiyeh*. [See: Georr, 1946, pp. 31-39; Pines, 1951, pp. 121-126; Strauss, 1934, pp. 99-139; Michot, 1982, pp. 50-231; Cruz, 1950-51, pp. 23-303; Rahman, 1979] Their approach is mainly referring to the terms, concepts and theories contained in these books and have deduced most of the arguments from topics of the soul.

## Conclusion

Maintaining strong flavor of Aristotelian theory of perception, Farabi as well as Avicenna have appended new phases to the theory. Depicting imaginary perception with its crucial jobs, Farabi explains these three activities: storing sensory forms, composing and decomposing sensory forms, as well as imagery.

What Farabi names the imaginary faculties is conceptualized as three inner perception, i.e., imagination, estimative and memory faculties in Avicenna’s works.

In other words, Farabi conceptualizes *motekhayelah* faculty as a faculty responsible for keeping sensibles forms, their possessorship and representation of the intelligible and sensible by them. However, Avicenna conceptualizes faculties of imaginary perception, *motekhayelah*, estimative and memory rather than Farabian *motekhayelah* faculty.

## References

- Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. Princeton: University of Princeton, 1995.
- Astarabadi, Muhammad Taqi. *Sharh Fusus al-Hikam*. Edited by M. Daneshpajuh, Tehran: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies, 1980.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Isharat va Tanbihat*. In: Tusi. *Sharh Isharat va Tanbihat*. vol. 2, Qom: Nashr al-Balaqah, 1997.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Mabda va Maad*. Edited by A. Nurani, Tehran: McGill University Institute of Islamic Studies, 1985.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Al-Nejat*. Tehran: University of Tehran, 1986.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Resaleh al-Nafs*. Edited by Musa Amid, Tehran: Anjoman Asar Meli, 1953.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Al-Shifa (Tabiiat, Nafs)*. Edited by Ibrahim Madkur, Qom: Marashi Library, 1983.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Taliqat*. Edited by A. Badavi, Qom: Maktab Ilam Islami, 1984.
- Avicenna, Abu Ali. *Uyun al-Hikmah*. Edited by Ahmad Hejazi, Tehran: Assadeq, 1995.
- Cruz, Hernandez. "El Fontes Quaestionum (Uyun al-Masa'il) de Abu Nasr al-Farabi". *Archives d' Histoire Doctriale et Litteraire du Moyen Age*, 1950-51, vol. 18, pp. 303-323.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Ara' Ahl al-Madinah al-Fazilah wa Muzddatiha*. Edited by Ali Bumelham, Beirut: Dar wa Maktaba al-Hilal, 2003.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Daavy al-Qalbiyeh*. Heydarabad: Dayeratolmaaref, 1930a.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Fusul al-Muntaza'ah*. Edited by H. Malikshahi, Tehran: Soroush, 2004.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Mantiqiyat*. vol. 2, Edited by M. Daneshpajuh, Qom: Marashi Library, 1987.
- Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Millah wa Nusus Ukhra*. Edited by M. Mahdi, Beirut : Dar al-Mashriq, 1991.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Siyasah al-Madaniyah*. Edited by H. Malekshahi, Tehran: Soroush, 1997.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Al-Ta'liqat*. In : Farabi, *al-Tanbih 'alá Sabil al-Sa'adah wa al-Ta'liqat wa Risalatan Phalsaphiyatan*. Edited by J. Al Yasin, Tehran: Hikmat, 1992.

Farabi, Abu Nasr. *Uyun al-Masayel*. Heydarabad: Dayeratolmaaref, 1930b.

Georr, K. "Farabi est-il l'auteur de Fusus al-Hikam?". *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1946, vol. 15, pp. 31-39.

Michot, J. "Tables de Correspondance des Ta'liqat d'al-Farabi, de Ta'liqat d'Avicenne et du Liber Aphorismorum d'Andrea Alpag". *Melanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire*, 1982, vol. 15, pp. 50-231.

Pines, S. "Ibn Sina et l'Auteur de la Risalat al-Fusus fi'l-Hikma, quelques donnees du Probleme". *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1951, vol. 19, pp. 121-126.

Rahman, F. *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Shanab Ghazani, Ismail. *Sharh Fusus al-Hikmah*. Tehran: Anjoman Mafakher Farhangi, 2003.

Strauss, Leo. "Maimunis Lehre von der Prophetie und ihre Quellen". *Le Monde Oriental*, 1934, vol. 28, pp. 99-139.

Tusi, Nasir. *Sharh Isharat wa Tanbihat*. vol. 2, Qom: Nashr al-Balaqah, 1997.





# **The Stages of Certainty; Analysis and Interpretation of the Poetic Introduction of The Second Book of The Rumi's Mathnawī**

Mahvash al-Sadat Alavi

London Academy of Iranian Studies, UK

## **Abstract**

The Mathnawī of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī Khurāsānī (1207-1273) is the masterpiece of The Mystical Literature. In this article, the Poetic Introduction of The Second Book of The Rumi's Mathnawī has been analysed, based on The Synoptic Approach. The Second Book of the Mathnawī speaks of the “different types and stages of Certainty (Yaqīn)”, and the “different types and stages of Friendship.” In the Islamic mystical tradition, certitude has three stages, called: 1. “The Knowledge of Certainty” (*‘Ilm al-Yaqīn*); 2. “The Eye of Certainty” (*‘Ayn al-Yaqīn*); and 3. “The Truth of Certainty” (*Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*).

During spiritual wayfaring, at the stage of *‘Ilm al-Yaqīn*, the mystic discovers the known (*ma'lūm*) through intellectual reasoning; at the stage of *‘Ayn al-Yaqīn* the mystic witnesses the known directly, and at the stage of *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*, the mystic achieves union with the known, in this case, *Allāh*. The final two degrees of certainty are the result of unveiling and spiritual vision, and this certainty is described as a “Light” which enters the heart of the mystic.

**Keywords:** Rumi's Mathnawi, Certainty, Friendship, Haqq, Truth, Perfect human, Light.

## Introduction

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī Khurāsānī, the Great Poet and the Muslem Sūfī, known simply as Rūmī or Mawlānā, lived and wrote the *Mathnawī Ma'anawī* during the 7<sup>th</sup> century AH (13<sup>th</sup> century CE). One of the most celebrated works of mystical literature in the world, Rūmī's *Mathnawī*; is considered one of the highest peaks of Rūmī's mother tongue of Persian. *The Mathnawī* is divided into Six Books and contains nearly 26 thousand Verses. Rūmī divided each Book into different sections with varying numbers of verses and gave each section a title.

Mawlānā Jalāl al-Din Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī Khurāsānī, the Great Poet and the Muslem Sūfī, known simply as Rūmī or Mawlānā, lived and wrote the *Mathnawī Ma'anawī* during the 7<sup>th</sup> century AH (13<sup>th</sup> century CE). One of the most celebrated works of mystical literature in the world, Rūmī's *Mathnawī*; is considered one of the highest peaks of Rūmī's mother tongue of Persian. *The Mathnawī* is divided into Six Books and contains nearly 26 thousand Verses. Rūmī divided each Book into different sections with varying numbers of verses and gave each section a title.

The works of Rūmī, and in particular *Mathnawī-i Ma'anawī* (henceforth referred to as the *Mathnawī*), reflect his spiritual character. The *Mathnawī* tells the story of the journeys of mystics ('*ārifān*'), and is a commentary on the spiritual states and ranks of saints. The *Mathnawī* is a didactic work, the product of Rūmī's period of maturity and soberness. In this way the text differs from his *Dīwān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, which was the product of his ecstasy and annihilation (*fanā*'). The *Mathnawī* is a commentary on Rūmī's spiritual experiences and journeys. Mystics believe that the seeker

(*murīd*) and the object that is sought for (*murād*) reflect one another, like twin mirrors.

The themes of tolerance, friendship, faithfulness, peace, and purity are reflected in the works of Rūmī, and particularly in the *Mathnawī*, in such a way that they can be understood by all people, regardless of differences of language or culture. In this way, the works of Rūmī transcend illusory differences, becoming bestsellers even in the West. Rūmī describes the *Mathnawī* as “the Root of the Root of the Root of the Religion”, “the Greater Jurisprudence”, “the Illuminated Path”, and “the Manifest Proof.”

Rūmī’s poetry has inspired an impressive commentarial tradition. The number of commentaries on the *Mathnawī* alone is vast, and can be categorized in several ways:

1. Based on methodology: mystical (*‘irfānī*), literary, philosophical and comparative
2. Based on geography: Iran, Turkey, the Indian Subcontinent and the West.
3. Based on quantity: commentaries on the prologue, selected commentaries, verse-by-verse commentaries, thematic commentaries and complete commentaries.
4. Based on theme.
5. Based on form: poetic commentaries and prose commentaries.

While among those who have written commentaries on the *Mathnawī* with different approaches, not to mention the 700-year-old tradition of scholarship in Persian and Turkish, have done much to elucidate the profound spiritual lessons of the *Mathnawī*, and its formal structure remained something of a mystery. However, in 2003, Seyed Ghahreman Safavi presented a new theory which sought to explain the mysterious structure of Rūmī’s masterpiece in his Doctoral thesis entitled, “*The Structure of The First Book of*

*Rūmī's Mathnawī*". This theory was welcomed in Iran and the West by prominent scholars of *Mathnawī* such as Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Prof. William Chittick, Prof. Isti'lami, Prof. James Morris, Prof. Tawfiq Subhanī, Prof. Yaḥyaqqī, Dr. Mūsavī Garmārūdī, Kabīr Helminkī and others.

By stressing Rūmī's creativity, his esoteric vision, and the principles of theoretical *'irfān*, this work has, after 700 years, provided a critique of the prevalent view amongst the scholars of the *Mathnawī*. That is, in both the East and West, scholars have been of the opinion that the *Mathnawī* is without structure. By taking a synoptic approach to the text, using a unique hermeneutic and structuralist methodology, and through employing the principles of parallelism and chiasmus, this work demonstrates innovative, connected and organised structure of the *Mathnawī* in the form of sixteen diagrams.

The present work (*Decrypting Rūmī's Mathnawī: Book Two*) is an attempt to explain and clarify the structure of Book Two of the *Mathnawī* through a synoptic approach. The 3810 verses, 111 sections and 61 stories of Book Two of the *Mathnawī* will be analysed in detail for the first time in the field of Rūmī studies. Each of the 111 sections will be analysed and related to other sections, and identifying the thematic or narrative nature of each section, and the paragraphs; to form larger units of analysis, called "discourses".

Based on this synoptic approach, the Book Two of the *Mathnawī* can be divided into twelve large discourses in three blocks. Each of these discourses contains a strong thematic unity; however, in contrast to Book One of the *Mathnawī*, each discourse in Book Two has a much weaker narrativ unity. After specifying the larger units (discourses), the relationship between the sections of each discourse and their thematic connection have analysed. Finally, the rhetorical and hidden structure of the Second Book of the *Mathnawī* is discovered in this research.

Although the sections of each discourse are consecutive, they do not follow a simple linear structure. Rather, the sections of a given discourse are organised synoptically through the techniques of “parallelism”, “chiasmus” and “hermeneutic cycle”. If the *Mathnawī* is read linearly, it can appear confusing, and even chaotic and non-related; but when read through the synoptic approach outlined in this Book, and regarding to the structure and the form; the beautiful, subtle and organized structure running throughout the whole Work becomes apparent. The discovery of the structure of the *Mathnawī* paves the way for better understandings of the text, and the profound ideas and lessons contained therein.

After analysing Book Two as a “Whole”, we will clarify and analyse the relationship between stories and discourses. This analysis uncovers the organizing themes of the stages of “certainty” and their transcendence (*‘Ilm al-yaqīn*, *‘Ayn al-yaqīn*, *Ḥaqq al-yaqīn*) and “friendship” (friendship with Satan, friendship with the Saints and friendship with *Allāh*) on the spiritual path, which in turn reveals the reason for the sequential organization of the stories.

Though this approach, Rūmī’s description of his *Mathnawī* in the Arabic introduction of the First Book as an “expounder of the Qur’ān” is influenced by Qur’ānic form, and validated on a formal level, since the Qur’ān itself displays many of the same structural features. When studied in this way, we can see how Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* was designed and structured in a complex and systematic manner, wherein the dual sequential and synoptic structure has been amalgamated with the universal message of the Qur’ān (i.e. the world is comprised of an outer and inner aspect, and an esoteric and exoteric dimension).

This relationship between form and content is clearly seen when we apply Dr. Safavi’s methodology to interpret and explain the structure of Book Two of the *Mathnawī*. The significance of this research is in addition to discovering the structure of the Second Book of the *Mathnawī* based on methodology; providing a new

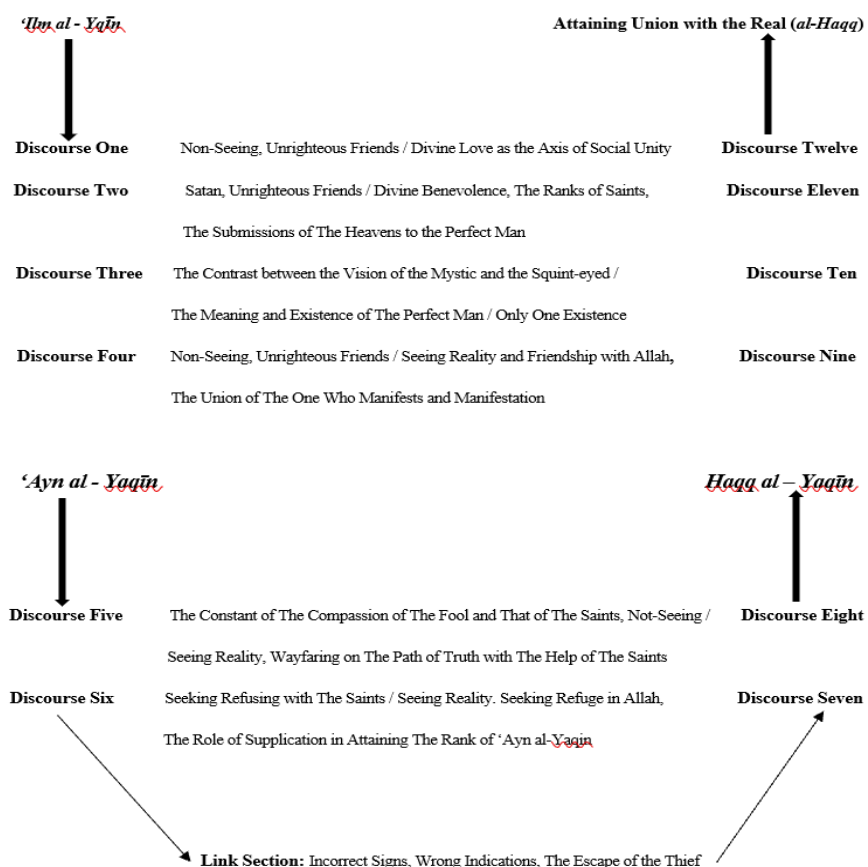
method in the interpretation of the *Mathnawī* and its systematic and continuous use in the interpretation and analysis of the texts is important. The main points of the methodology of this research are: attention to the content, the structure of the anecdotes, the semiotics, the application of Hermeneutic cycle techniques, the universal interpretation and the creation of a dialogue between structure and content.

### A Synoptic View of Book Two

(verses numbers given in parentheses, numbers of sections per discourse given in brackets)

Discourse One	On Not Seeing Reality (112 - 584) [12]	Block 1: <i>Ilm al-Yaqin</i>
Discourse Two	The Insolvent Iblis and the King's Choice of Slave (585 - 1046) [7]	
Discourse Three	The Topsy-Turvy World and Dhu'l-Nun's Madness (1047-1600) [9]	
Discourse Four	Different Blindnesses and Moses and the Shepherd (1601-1931) [7]	
Discourse Five	The Fool who trusted the Bear (1932 - 2140) [8]	Block 2: <i>'Ayn al-Yaqin</i>
Discourse Six	Mohammed and the sick Companion (2141 - 2603) [14]	
Discourse Seven	Iblis and Mu'awiya (2604 - 2792) [14]	
Link Section	Misdirection and the Escape of the Thief (2793 - 2824) [1]	Block 3: <i>Haqq al-Yaqin</i>
Discourse Eight	The Mosque of Opposition (2825 - 3026) [8]	
Discourse Nine	Fear, Appearance and Reality (3027 - 3209) [7]	
Discourse Ten	On Ibrahim son of Adham and Others (3210 - 3423) [7]	
Discourse Eleven	The Dervish who was accused of Theft and Others (3424 0 3572) [5]	
Discourse Twelve	On Seeing Reality (3573 - 3810) [12]	

*The Diagram of the Synoptic & Sequential Structure of Book II*



## **An Introduction to The Second Book of The Mathnawī**

The Second Book of the *Mathnawī* speaks of the “different types and stages of Certainty (*Yaqīn*)”, and the “different types and stages of Friendship.” In the Islāmic mystical tradition, certitude has three stages, called: 1. “The Knowledge of Certainty” (*‘Ilm al-Yaqīn*); 2. “The Eye of Certainty” (*‘Ayn al-Yaqīn*); and 3. “The Truth of Certainty” (*Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*).

During spiritual wayfaring, at the stage of *‘Ilm al-Yaqīn*, the mystic discovers the known (*ma‘lūm*) through intellectual reasoning; at the stage of *‘Ayn al-Yaqīn* the mystic witnesses the known directly, and at the stage of *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn*, the mystic achieves union with the known, in this case, *Allāh*. The final two degrees of certainty are the result of unveiling and spiritual vision, and this certainty is described as a light which enters the heart of the mystic.

According to a saying of Imām Riḍā, *‘Ayn al-Yaqīn* and *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn* are above *Allāh*-consciousness (*taqwā*), “*Imān* (belief) is a stage higher than *Islām* (submission), *Taqwā* (*Allāh*-consciousness) is a stage higher than *Imān* and *Yaqīn* (Certitude) is higher than *Taqwā*, and nothing less than *Yaqīn* has been appointed amongst people.”<sup>1</sup>

The term *Yaqīn* (Certainty) and its stages have been derived from the Qur’ān: *‘Ilm al-Yaqīn* is mentioned in verse 5 of *Sūrah al-Takāthur*, *‘Ayn al-Yaqīn* is mentioned in verse 7 of *Surah al-Takāthur*, and *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn* is mentioned in verses 95-96 of *Surah al-Wāqī‘ah* and verses 50 - 51 of *Surah al-Hāqah*.

“Verily this is the certain truth.”<sup>2</sup>

“Hallow therefore the name of your Lord, the Great.”<sup>3</sup>

“And verily it is a great grief to the disbelievers,”<sup>4</sup>

“And it is the very truth, fully assured;”<sup>5</sup>



## The Poetic Introduction of the Second Book of the Mathnawī

### Summary

(A) [1 - 7] The delay in the writing of the Mathnawī was necessary to allow for the “transformation of blood to milk,” which is only occurs with the birth of a new child. With the return of Ḥusām al-Din from his mi‘rāj (spiritual ascent), the verses of the Mathnawī began to flow again. This writing began in the year 662 (A.H.).

(B) [8 - 9] Like a nightingale he migrated from the world of form (‘Ālam-i šūrat), and like a falcon he returned from the world of ideas (‘Ālam-i ma‘nā) in order to hunt for precious meanings. May the doors of the world of ideas always be open to human beings.

(C) [10 - 14] Lust and desires of the soul (nafs) are the barriers of this gate, and if one is neglectful, these barriers will prevent the perception of the truths of the world of ideas. Eternal and subsistent light is next to the material world, like a stream of milk next to a stream of blood. Take care that your spiritual milk never transforms into blood from mixing with the blood of the soul.

(D) [15 - 19] By only one step upon the path of the desires of the soul, Ādam was exiled from Heaven, and because of a small bite of bread, the angels ran away from him as though he were a monster. Even though Ādam’s sin was like an eyelash caught in the eye, because he had seen the Eternal Light (*Allāh*), this eyelash was like a great mountain. If Ādam had taken advice, he would not have had to apologise.

(E) [20 - 25] The intellects aiding each other prevents evil from being spoken or thought, similarly, by the unity of two souls, the partial intellect will transcend both good and evil. Even if you’ve become hopeless because of loneliness, in the shadow of the Perfect Human, you will become like the sun; seek a Divine Companion so

that *Allāh* becomes your companion. Sitting in solitude must be learnt from the *Pīr* of the path (Ṭarīqah), for one should be distant from strangers and not the beloved.

(F) [26 - 35] The companionship of the intellects results in the increase of light and reveals the path of wayfaring (*sulūk*). However, the companionship of the souls (nafs pl. anfās) although happy and laughing, increase the darkness and result in the path of truth Ḥaqq) being hidden. The companion is your sight; do not torment him. The believers are mirrors for each other; thus, the visage of the righteous companion is devoid of any form of defilement. The companion is the mirror of your spirit and is sorrowful for your sadness; do not torment him with worthless speech, so that he does not hide his face from you. The dust is illuminated by the companionship of spring; the trees blossom through companionship with this companion and the gentle spring air. But in Autumn, they lower their heads and hide their faces.

(G) [36 - 46] A bad companion is like a calamity; in order to be safe from its evil, like the Companions of the Cave (Aṣḥāb al-Kahf), one must go to sleep. Sleep which is accompanied by knowledge (maʿrifat) is exactly like wakefulness. Alas for the one who is awake and is the companion of the ignorant. In Winter, which is the ravens' time of wakefulness and activity, the nightingales hide and choose silence. The absence of the sun is accompanied by the death of wakefulness. However, the sun of knowledge never sets and constantly rises from the horizon of the spirit and the intellect, especially the sun of the Perfect Human, which is eternal and without sunset. When you become the place of the sun's rising, which is the world of the intellect and the heart, then whichever direction you turn to will be the East.

(H) [47 - 55] Your bat-like sense is turned towards the West, but your inner sense is turned towards the direction of the sunrise of Truth. The inner senses are like red gold, whereas exoteric senses are like copper, worthless. In the bazaar of the world of spirit, the

people of spiritual knowledge never buy copper instead of gold. The bodily senses are nourished by darkness, while the spiritual senses are nourished by the shining sun. O, Perfect Human, you have taken the material senses to the world of ideas and have adorned yourself with the Divine Attributes, whereas the sun only possesses one of the Divine Attributes. At times you become the sun and at times the sea, at times the Mount Qāf and at times the phoenix. Yet, in your essence, you are none of these things: you are better than imaginations and hallucinations, and you are more than more.

(I) [56 - 60] The spirit is the aid and companion of the intellect and has no compatibility with the world of chaos. O, my Lord, the people of tawhīd and the people of doubt are in wonder and amazement at your epiphanies. O, *Allāh*, your countless manifestations sometimes turns those in doubt into the people of tawhīd, and sometimes makes the people of tawhīd lost in wonderment. The mystic who is in rapture while in a state of drunkenness and intoxication, sometimes considers Ḥaqq (*Allāh*) a youthful beloved with a beautiful body, and sometimes, freed from his virtual existence, sees the incomparable Divine Beauty and reaches union.

(J) [61 - 72] Those who see with the senses deny Divine Intuition. However, the possessors of intellect accept Divine Intuition. The *Mu'tazilite* is the prisoner of the trap of senses, while the people of intuition have escaped this trap. If, like animals, human beings possessed only outward senses, how could they have become exalted and become the keeper of the Divine Secrets? So long as human beings have not escaped from the prison of form and multiplicity, they consider *Allāh* as form and image. Only those who have escaped the domination of the outward senses have reached the Truth and can see *Allāh*. The blind have no obligation, but if you can see, be a wayfarer of the path of Truth (Ḥaqq) and be patient in the face of hardships, for patience is the key to success and salvation. Patience removes the dark veils of ignorance, purifies the heart from ignorance and forgetfulness, and opens the breast.

(K) [73 - 83] By purifying the mirror of the heart, the mystic sees both the form and the painter, both the rug and the rug-layer. A companion like Abraham appears like an idol in the world of imagination, even though he is the idol-breaker (by imagining this companion, the mystic is able to escape lust). Thanks to *Allāh*, for by this companion's appearance in the world of imagination, my being saw its own imaginal form in the mirror of that companion's being. The dust of your court has sent me into ecstasy. If I am worthy, I accept the asceticism of union with all my being, and if I am unworthy and egoistic, the companion mocks and laughs at me. The solution is for me to observe my own state and ask whether I am deserving of compassion and grace, or whether I am worthy of mockery. *Allāh* is beautiful and He loves beauty, as every good thing attracts good. Everything attracts that which is of its own type. The people of falsity (*bāṭil*) are attracted to the false and the people of the Truth are attracted to the seekers and believers of Ḥaqq (the Truth). The people of fire attract the people of Hell and the people of light and guidance attract the seekers of light and guidance.

(L) [84-98] With the closing of your eyes you become sorrowful, for the light of the eye cannot bear separation from the light of day. If you become sorrowful with open eyes, know that your heart is closed; open your heart without any hesitation so that you gain peace, for the heart wants the incomparable Divine Light. Separation from the light of the eye of the heart and the light of *Allāh* will make you restless; be grateful for their companionship. Since He calls me, I look at myself: am I deserving of the companion or does the companion laugh at me? When can I look at my real face to see whether I am like the bright day or the dark night? I have searched the form of my spirit and being countless times, yet I have not found one who could reveal me to myself and show me in the mirror of his being. The mirror shows us what and who, but it does not reflect more than appearance. Yet the mirror of being is none other than the face of the companion; a companion from the land of love and Divine Truth. O, Heart, seeks a universal mirror and move towards the sea, for the particular can do nothing.

(M) [99-102] Because of this need, the servant reaches the city of the Truth (*Ḥaqq*), and when the eye of Truth (*Ḥaqq*) becomes the eye of his heart, he drowns in it and is no longer in need of the unseen. I found the universal and eternal mirror and see my form in His eyes and find my own reality, and in the eyes of the companion I find the illuminated path of the Truth (*Ḥaqq*). An illusory sound told me this is no more than imagination; this form is not your true self. However, at the level of unity, You are me and I am You, for in my illuminating eye, the realities are imperishable and not imaginary.

(N) [103-111] The companion told me that if you saw my image in the eyes of another, you should consider that form imaginary and void. Those who allow lust to enter their heart follow the devil's path and their eye is the abode of imagination and non-existence, and as such, they consider non-existence as existence. My eye has been adorned by the majesty of the court of *Allāh*, and as such, it is the abode of existence and not false imagination. Nothing, not even a strand of hair, can be falsely imagined by the eye of the heart. In your imagination, you see a gem as a simple stone, but if you leave the world of imagination, you will be able to tell the gem from the stone. Now, listen to this story so that you can tell reality from imagination, and not just through analogy and theoretical reasoning.

## Analysis of the Poetic Introduction

The poetic introduction of the Second Book of the *Mathnawī* consists of 111 verses, which are divided into 14 paragraphs and three primary sections. The number of paragraphs parallels that of Discourses Six and Seven, each of which has 14 sections. The three primary sections of the poetic introduction parallel the general structure of the Second Book, which contains 12 discourses and is comprised of three sections.

Verses 1 to 9, which from the introduction of the prologue, make up the first paragraph and contain the two primary themes of the

introduction and the whole of Book Two. The first theme is intuitive knowledge, which is a degree of *yaqīn* (certainty). The second theme is the friendship of the holy, which is exemplified by the relationship between Rūmī and Ḥusām al-Dīn.

Verses 10 to 19 comprise paragraphs three and four, and contain the discourse of friendship with Satan and the *nafs* (soul), the grave consequences of which are portrayed in the historical and symbolic fall of Ādam from Heaven. Verses 20 to 55 comprise paragraphs four to seven and discuss the Perfect Human, particularly, the necessity of friendship with and learning from the Perfect Human, and his exalted station.

Verses 56 to 111 comprise paragraphs eight to fourteen and discuss the issues related to friendship with *Allāh* and its rewards. The loving (*muḥibbī*) and beautiful (*jamālī*) relation between the Beloved and the mystic (*Allāh* is beautiful and loves beauty; verse 79), described in paragraph 11, which is the central paragraph of Section Three, mirroring the central role this relationship plays in the interactions between *Allāh* and the mystic. As verse 79 says,

“He is beautiful and a lover of beauty: how should a fresh young man choose a decrepit old woman?”

Thus the first and third sections are, in a sense, opposites. The first section tells the story of the Ādam’s fall as a result of his forgetfulness of *Allāh* and friendship with Satan, while the third section, describes the man’s ascent and return to his exalted origin (*mabda’ al-‘alā*) and union with the Beloved. Section Two, which is the central section, discusses the Perfect Human’s central role and position in relation to humanity and *Allāh*, and the return towards the beautiful Beloved.

### */A Synoptic View of Poetic Introduction*

**Sec.1:** The story of the Ādam's fall as a result of his forgetfulness of Allāh and friendship with Satan. (1-19) ["The Knowledge of Certainty" / 'Ilm al-Yaqīn].

**Sec. 2 (Central Section):** The Perfect Human's central role and position in relation to humanity and Allāh, and the return towards the beautiful Beloved. (20-55) ["The Eye of Certainty" / 'Ayn al-Yaqīn].

**Sec. 3:** The man's ascent and return to his exalted origin (mabda' al-'alā) and union with the Beloved. (56-111) ["The Truth of Certainty" / Haqq al-Yaqīn].

## **Interpretation of the Poetic Introduction**

By Divine Will, the comprehension of truths and revelation of secrets and knowledge becomes possible at only its appointed time. Thus the composition of the second book of the *Mathnawī* was delayed, even as the Qur'ānic revelation was delayed for a period of time. The writing of the second book of the *Mathnawī* began on the day Ḥusām al-Dīn returned from "the sea of immersion to the shore of horizons" (year 662 of the *Hijrah*), and the doors of Divine Mercy opened, returning the blossoms of ideas and truths to the garden of the heart. Having embarked on the spiritual ascent as a lover, after passing through different stages and advancing to the degree of guidance and perfection, returned like the Divine Falcon in order to hunt for meanings.

Lust and the desires of the soul (*nafs*) are two of the plagues that hinder the comprehension of hidden knowledge and meanings. By ridding themselves of bodily desires, the spiritual wayfarers are able to witness the world of ideas. This world, like the intermediate world (*'Ālam-i Barzakh*), passes away, but it can be a path to Hell. In this intermediate world, true knowledge sits side by side with material distractions, and as long as the spirit is imprisoned in the

world of the body, it is in danger of being contaminated by carnal desires.

The example of our Ādam proves this: if he had consulted the Universal Intellect, he would not have been expelled from Heaven. The unity of the intellects leads to good, while the nearness of souls results in the confusion and distress of the partial intellect. “The cure of this illness in esoteric matters is being educated and companionship with a *Allāhly* companion. By ‘*Allāhly* companion,’ [Rūmī] means putting one’s hand in the hand of a guiding Shaykh and following the *Pīr* who is enlightened”<sup>6</sup>.

If the spiritual wayfarer becomes hopeless and lonely, he can find solace in serving and attending to the Perfect Guide, who will lead him into Divine Grace. For solitude must be sought from those things which are other than *Allāh*, and experience the presence of the Perfect Human, that is the Presence of *Allāh*. Through the nearness of *Allāh*-seeking intellects, the path of wayfaring towards *Allāh* (*sulūk ilā Allāh*) becomes clear to the spiritual wayfarer; while companionship with ordinary souls conceals the path of spiritual wayfaring.

The Perfect Human is the spiritual sight of the spiritual wayfarer, thus, the Perfect Human should not be tormented or hurt so that he does not turn his away from the spiritual wayfarer. “Rūmī said: “[The name] *al-Mu’min* (the believer) is attributed to both *Allāh* and his servants. The believer is the mirror of the believer, in which his Lord is manifested. *Allāh* becomes manifest in the mirror of the believing servant; if you desire to see *Allāh*, become that mirror so that you see.”<sup>7</sup>

The dust comes alive from the spring wind; are you lowlier than soil that you should not respond to the lights of Divine Emanation? The trees reveal their secrets in spring and show themselves to be green and joyful, yet in autumn, the period of unkind winds, they hide their face. Since the spiritual wayfarer is not helped by the companionship of a bad companion, it is only right for him to avoid



them. For example, the Companions of the Cave in the autumn of the rule of Daqyanus (Decianus), hid in a cave in order to protect their religion, tradition and honour; they closed their eyes to the sensible world and slept for almost three centuries.

The sleep of mystics, which is accompanied by the knowledge of secrets, is like wakefulness, and companionship with the lovers of the material world is devastation and corruption. Sleep with knowledge is better than prayer with ignorance. Like nightingales that choose silence when the ravens gather in winter, the seekers of Truth and *Allāh* choose solitude when the ignorant and the unaware are dominant. “Wherever the seeker of true perfection, who has a talent for knowledge and understanding and can distinguish between the mystic and the layman and Truth and falsity, does not exist, the era falls into the hands of impure crooks and reckless ignorant people, and the pure, the educators and the leaders who are mystics hide their faces from the people and leave the world in the darkness of ignorance and deviance.”<sup>8</sup>

The people of knowledge are the sun of Truth; their spirit and reality remains after death and is constantly shining from the east of the intellect and spirit. This is especially true of the *Pīr*, who is the sun of perfection and belongs to the unseen world. Through his spiritual striving, the *Pīr* becomes the place of the rising of the sun, and his existence will be the centre of the manifested lights of *Allāh*. The exoteric sense is akin to a bat and is incapable of seeing the Truth, while the esoteric sense seeks the light of the Sun of Truth.

The Perfect Human is the confidant of the unseen secrets, knows the Beautiful Names of *Allāh* and His Attributes, and is the Sun of Divine Knowledge. The Perfect Human’s spirit is as great as the sun, as infinite as the sea and as firm and dominant as the Mount Qāf, for the Perfect Human is the symbol of the manifestation of the Divine Identity. Although, “you are neither this nor that, for the essence of the spirit is above all determinations... the spirit of the

Perfect Human is the great Divine Sign, and is His greatest manifestation. The Perfect Human reflects all of the Divine Names denoting incomparability and similarity.”<sup>9</sup>

The *Mu‘tazilites*, who are prisoners of the exoteric senses and deny witnessing (*shuhūd*), call themselves believers; however, the mystics who have attained union with the Divine Believe in this Divine Intuition in both abodes (this world and the hereafter). Until spiritual wayfarers have freed themselves from the dominance of the senses and their illusions, they cannot obtain knowledge of the reality of the Divine Transcendence.

There is no obligation upon the prisoner of the senses, who is deprived of seeing the Truth; however, when a spiritual wayfarer who possesses the inner sight has patience on the path of wayfaring towards *Allāh*, he is freed for “patience is the key of deliverance”. Patience removes the veils from the eye of the heart and expands the breast. As the mirror of the heart is freed from the rust of material temptations, the spiritual wayfarer sees with the heart’s eye both the painting and the painter (the world of forms and *Allāh*), and the rug and the rug-maker (the imaginal world and *Allāh*).

Rūmī says: “The form which was formed from the companion (Husām al-Din) was an idol in my imagination; but, in reality it was the idol-breaker, for my being saw its image and beauty in the mirror of his imagination. My heart is charmed by the dust of his court. If I am worthy of his love, he will accept me with love, and if there is no love in my being, he will mock me and laugh at my ugliness. ‘*Allāh* is the possessor of beauty; He loves beauty for it is the heart of the Perfect, because they are the mirror of the beauty which possesses majesty. In reality He is in love with His own beauty, which is in that mirror.”<sup>10</sup>

Like attracts like: the people of falsity are attracted to each other, and the people of light and guidance attract one another. Separation from the light of the eye and the light of the day causes anxiety; the anxiety of the heart, even when the outward eye is open, is a sign of

the heart's eye being closed. Open the heart's eye, for distance from these two eternal and firm lights - "knowledge of the Divine Essence, attributes and acts, and knowledge which is related to actions"<sup>11</sup> - causes restlessness.

When the companion calls me towards himself, I examine myself to see whether I am worthy or not, for the invitation of the Perfect Human calls the heart of the righteous towards himself. That mirror of life which shows my ugliness and beauty is naught but the visage of a companion from the world of Divinity, even though that companion appears to be a resident of the world of humanity. "The greatest of strivings is companionship with those who have turned towards *Allāh* and have disregarded this world... for their vision melts and annihilates that soul."<sup>12</sup>

Initially, servants turn towards His court because of their wants, and then again, in order to see the ugliness and beauty of their own spirit, for the Perfect Human is "the Universal Mirror" which, like the sea, shows the "Visage of Life". "When the vision of your (Ḥusām al-Dīn's) certainty reached my heart, my heart drowned in the truth that it saw. I saw you as the Universal and Eternal Mirror (the Reality of *Muḥammadan* Spirit), and saw my real form in your eyes and found the illuminated path. "This is an indication of the intuition of the essence of *Allāh* in the mirror of the Shaykh, which is attained after annihilation in the Shaykh.... I found myself as exactly you, and you as exactly myself; I found one essence manifested in two forms"<sup>13</sup>

"The mirror of the heart of the people of *Allāh* is *Allāh*, for they have nothing of themselves. Being and the perfections of being are all from *Allāh*. They are annihilated in *Allāh* and subsistent within Him, and it must be known that from one perspective, things are the mirror of *Allāh*... and from another perspective, *Allāh* is the mirror of things."<sup>14</sup> Imagination does not cloud the eye which is perpetually illuminated by the Divine Realities.

Thus, when you see your form in another's eye, do not consider it as anything more than imagination, for seeing the non-existences which appear as existence is a product of the demonic forms. While even a strand of hair of phantom existence remains in your sight, you will not be able to distinguish the essence of Truth from imagination. Only by erasing your transient existence and moving away from the realm of imagination can you distinguish Truth from falsehood. "O my servants erase imaginations [from your heart?], for it is my place and station."<sup>15</sup>

## ***Bibliography***

Holy Qur'an.

Alavi, Mahvash al-sadat. *Decrypting Rumi's Mathnawi*. (London Academy of Iranian Studies Press. London). First Edition. 2015.

Akbar Ābādī, Walī Muḥammad Ibn Shaykh Raḥm Allāh, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī Mawlāwī (Makhzan al-Asrār)*, Māyil Hirawī Najīb (ed.), (Tehrān, Qatreh) 2005.

Humā'ī, Jalāl al-Din, *Tafsīr-i Mathnawī Mawlāwī*, (Tehrān, Humā), 1995.

Kulaynī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb, *Uṣūl-i Kāfī*, 4 volumes, (Tehrān, Osveh), 2001.

Pārsā Lāhūrī, Khawja Ayyūb, *Asrār al-Ghuyūb (Sharḥ-i Mathnawī Ma'nawī)*, 2 Volumes, edited by Muḥammad Jawād Sharī'at, (Tehrān, Asātīr), 1998.

Rūmī, *Fīhi mā Fīhi*, translated by Arthur J. Arberry; *Discourses of Rūmī*, (Richmond, Curzon Press), 2004.

Rūmī, *Mathnawī Ma'nawī Jalāl al-Din Muḥammad Balkhī*, Nasr Allah Pūrjavādī (ed.), 4 volumes, (Teherān, Amīr Kabīr), 1985.

Sabziwārī, Mullā Hādī, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī*, Burūjirdī Muṣṭafā (ed.), 2 Volumes, (Tehran,

Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang wa Irshād-i Islāmī), 1992.

Safavi, Seyed Ghahremān. *The Structure of Rūmī's Mathnawī: New Interpretation of Rūmī's Mathnawī as a Book for Love and Peace; Book One*. (London, London Academy of Iranian Studies Press). 2006.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>. Kulaynī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb, "*Uṣūl-i Kāfī*", (Tehrān, Osveh) 2001, volume 2, p. 51
- <sup>2</sup>. Holy Qu'rān, verse 56 : 9.
- <sup>3</sup>. Holy Qu'rān, verse 56:96.
- <sup>4</sup>. Holy Qu'rān, verse 69 : 50.
- <sup>5</sup>. Holy Qu'rān, verse 69 : 51.
- <sup>6</sup>. Humā'ī, Jalāl al-Din , *Tafsīr-i Mathnawī-i Mawlawī*, (Tehrān, Humā) 1995,p. 33.
- <sup>7</sup> Pārsā Lāhūrī, Khawja Ayyūb, *Asrār al-Ghuyūb*, Muḥammad Jawād Sharī'at, (Tehrān, Asātīr)1999,vol. 1, p. 297.
- <sup>8</sup>. Humā'ī, Jalāl al-Din , *Tafsīr-i Mathnawī Mawlawī*, (Tehrān, Humā), 1995, p. 34.
- <sup>9</sup>. Sabziwārī, Mullā Hādī, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī*, Burūjirdī Muṣṭafā (ed.), (Tehrān, Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang wa Irshād-i Islāmī), 1992, vol. 1, p. 229.
- <sup>10</sup>. Sabziwārī, Mullā Hādī, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī*, Burūjirdī Muṣṭafā (ed.), (Tehrān, Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang wa Ershad-i Islāmī), 1992, vol. 1 p. 232.
- <sup>11</sup>. Sabziwārī, Mullā Hādī, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī*, Burūjirdī Muṣṭafā (ed.), (Tehrān, Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang wa Irshād-i Islāmī), 1992, vol. 1 p. 232.
- <sup>12</sup>. Arberry, Arthur J., *Discourses of Rūmī*, (Richmond, Curzon Press), 2004, p. 241.
- <sup>13</sup>. Akbar Ābādī, Walī Muḥammad Ibn Shaykh Raḥm Allāh, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī Mawlawī (Makhzan al-Asrār)*, Māyil Hirawī Najīb (ed.), (Tehrān, Qatri) 2005, vol. 2, pp. 576-577.
- <sup>14</sup>. Sabziwārī, Mullā Hādī, *Sharḥ-i Mathnawī*, Burūjirdī Muṣṭafā (ed.), (Tehrān, Intishārāt-i Vizārat-i Farhang wa Irshād-i Islāmī), 1992, vol. 1, p. 233.
- <sup>15</sup>. Arberry, Arthur J., *Discourses of Rūmī*, (Richmond, Curzon Press), 2004, p. 61.

# Mir Emād<sup>1</sup> on Beauty and Wisdom in Islamic Calligraphy

Said Binayemotlagh  
Isfahan University, Iran

## Abstract

Islam is centered upon the word, and that being so, calligraphy is to be regarded as a genuine Islamic art. If God in Christianity is made man, in Islam He is made word (*kalamah/kalām*). That is why calligraphy is the art of writing in a beautiful way. But what does beauty mean here? Beauty is the splendour of God. Now, how can beauty manifest itself through letters and words? Beauty in art emanates from a beautiful soul: “grace of writing comes from purity of heart.” So, the scribe should become inwardly beautiful himself. To do so, he must first of all purify his soul and acquire wisdom.

The aim of this paper is to study the relationship between calligraphy, beauty and wisdom, as Mir Emād describes it in his *Canon of Writing* (*ādābol-mashq*).

**Keywords:** beauty, the word, wisdom, calligraphy.

## Introduction

As a traditional art, calligraphy has its origin in “God made word”, so to speak, just as iconography in Christianity has its root in “God made man” or “God made flesh”, whence the “abstract” character of Islamic art, vis-à-vis the “concrete” character of art in Christianity.

Surely, we do not mean the term “abstract” as it is used to qualify modern “abstract art”.

Then, one could say, without fear of exaggeration, that calligraphy is “beauty made word”. For this very reason, the scribe, as Mir Emād holds, should develop his sense of beauty, whose manifestation in the sensible world is the aim of all traditional arts. Moreover, the art of writing or calligraphy begins not by learning some practical rules but by purification of soul: “the grace of writing comes from purity of soul,” says Mir Emād quoting his master (*Canon of Writing*: p.5)<sup>2</sup>. The purity of soul amounts to its beauty. The beginning of calligraphy is then the beauty of the soul. That is why the art of writing, as Mir Emād explains it in his treatise, consists of three stages:

1. Spiritual preparation, or purification of soul.
2. Practical preparation, or training.
3. Criteria to observe as regards the form, or foundations of the form.

Following the same model, this paper too comprises three parts.

## **1. Spiritual Preparation**

First of all, the scribe should beware of vices, because the existence of vices in the soul indicates lack of moderation, and “never does a soul lacking equilibrium produce anything moderate: from a jar pours out whatever it contains” (ibid., 3). Then, the scribe should keep himself away from vices and, on the contrary, cultivate good qualities, until “the impact of these qualities discloses itself in his writing and thereby be appreciated by wise spirits” (ibid., 3).



As a result, inward perfection or beauty of soul is the necessary condition of outward beauty, that is, the beauty of art. The beauty of writing is not only the result of a correct combination of letters and words; it is essentially a quality that flows from the spirit and enters into the words. There is no art possible without beauty and wisdom.

## 2. Practical Preparation

Though the inward perfection is necessary, it is far from being sufficient. Training, for its part, is as necessary an instrument as is inward beauty. “Not that inward perfection could guarantee an outward calligraphic perfection, since for this there would have to be an addition of special gifts and special training” (Martin Lings, 2005: 39). In fact, the importance of training implies the importance of the form in traditional art: “Art,” says Titus Burckhardt, “is essentially form” (1975:5).

To be made word, beauty demands a form proportioned to its essence. So, the scribe should study the beautiful forms of writing so that he becomes able to produce the beautiful ones himself.

Of training, or outward perfection, Mir Emād speaks in the third chapter of his treatise. In summary, he distinguishes three different, but complementary, forms of writing: theoretical writing, practical writing and imaginal writing. The benefit of the first one is that the trainee can familiarize himself with “spiritual qualities” of writing. This training allows him to avoid “incorrectness in quoting his master’s style” (*C.W*:7). In fact, the contemplation of beauty in his master’s writing demands the inward perfection of the disciple. “Not everybody” declares Mir Emād, “is capable of such a contemplation, just as everybody met Leila, but nobody could see in her what Majnoun was able to” (*ibid.*, 6). Thus, after having realized the inward beauty, the scribe should contemplate its reflections, so to speak, in genuine works of art, here, the writings of his master. Thereby, he acquires facility to write, too. That is

why Mir Emād advises the beginners to practice theoretical writing for some time so that the spiritual pleasure of writing penetrates their nature.

The second kind of writing is the practical one. If the aim of theoretical writing is to familiarize the scribe with the content, or the beauty of his master's writing, the practical writing allows him to focus on its form so that he appreciates the correct form of letters. To do so, he should copy out the best samples of his master, without neglecting theoretical writing. The practical writing, says Mir Emād, "is very useful", so much so that "without practical writing, calligraphy<sup>3</sup> is impossible" (ibid., 8).

The point to be noted is how the beginner should first develop his sense of beauty by studying his master's works; then, he learns how beauty is to be enshrined in letters and words. That is why the second step in the art of writing, i.e. practical writing, which concerns more particularly the technical ability, is as important as the first one.

Until now, the scribe does nothing but imitating his master's works for their beauty and for their technical aspects. What is, then, properly his? What does he accomplish on his own "initiative"? This question leads us to speak about the third kind of writing or the last stage in the art of calligraphy: the imaginal writing.<sup>4</sup>

Contrary to practical writing, imaginal writing does not consist in copying out the models of a master. Writing is called imaginal when the scribe relies upon "his own aptitude", or else he will never acquire authority in his art. From Mir Emād's point of view, the best thing to do is to find a middle state between practical writing and the imaginal one, because if imaginal writing overwhelms, the writing will be doomed to be unworthy, and if practical writing prevails imaginal writing –otherwise expressed, if someone falls into the habit of not doing anything but practical writing– he will then be deprived of mastership. Such a person resembles a singer who chants only others' songs, being incapable of composing his

own songs (ibid., 9). Thus, a genuine work of art is far from being an imitation pure and simple. One could even say that imaginal writing is the aim of all the preceding preparations. Then, contrary to a modern prejudice, the traditional artist (*artifex*) is far from being a pure imitator, a copyist.

But, what does Mir Emād mean when he declares that the scribe should sing his own song? This, a priori sounds too modern because in modern times a work of art is supposed to reflect its author's desires or life; it is his own work. For example, Gustave Flaubert says "Madame Bovary is me" (Pierre Hadot, 1997: 14). This romance incarnates the person of Flaubert, it is all his own. As a result, the modern artist sings "his own song", as well. But what is the difference between these two kinds of ownership? The difference is that of the modern world and the traditional world, otherwise said, that of the "ego" or the psychological plane and the "self" or the metaphysical plane. This latter point needs more explanation.

As it has been said, the beginning of the art of writing is the beauty of the soul or wisdom. So, the beginner should purify his soul, thereby making divine beauty his own, so to speak; he takes possession of it. The beauty that glimmers through words or in writing, in other words, the *kalos-graphhein*, is a radiance of this inward or interiorized beauty. Moreover, this beauty, to the extent that the scribe has succeeded in realizing it inwardly, is all his own. In a certain way, this inward beauty coincides with his inner or profound being, his "self".

All too different is the modern view on artistic production. A work of art is said to be its author's own production because it unveils his desires, his passions, in brief, his individual life. That is why the biography, in the modern acceptance of this word, plays an important role in understanding the meaning of a work whereas Mir Emād takes no interest in his individual life. What matters for him is the beauty of soul or virtues which have nothing to do with his

individual desires or frustrations. The purification of soul is just to transcend the individual or psychological plane, to get rid of what Mir Emād calls bad qualities (*akhlāq-e zamimeh*) and to acquire good qualities (*akhlāq-e hamideh*). That is why imaginal writing is by no means to be identified with imagination as this term is employed in modern times, or even by Aristotle (*Poetics*, see especially Aristotle's analysis of tragedy; *De Anima*, 1, 1, 403a 11-14).

### 3. Criteria or Foundations of the Form

Art, as we have mentioned before, is essentially form. Now, the point is to know which kind of form can meet the exigencies of beauty and wisdom, or can materialize inward beauty; because inward beauty, to manifest itself, demands a form of lettering proportioned to its nature. So, the correctness of the form is as determinant as is inward beauty. How does Mir Emād qualify these foundations or criteria governing the form? As a whole, they are of two kinds: principles (*osoul*) and grace (*safā*), the former concerning essentially the shape of letters and words or their order, and the latter concerning the content or the beauty that writing is supposed to incarnate.

As for "principles", they are "a certain quality which results from a moderate combination of nine elements" (*ibid.*, 5)<sup>5</sup>. Generally speaking, these elements represent a technical interest; they relate, as we have already said, to the way of forming the letters or the order of the words.

But, "grace" has something to do with the content: it is what shines through the form. Mir Emād describes "grace" as follows: "grace is a certain state in which the soul<sup>6</sup> rejoices and which illuminates the eyes. It is not obtainable without purification of heart. As our Master declares, 'grace of writing comes from purity of heart'" (*ibid.*, 5)<sup>7</sup>. To emphasize the importance of "grace" in the art of

writing, Mir Emād compares a script technically perfect but lacking grace to a visage harmonious but not graceful. Such a visage is not desirable.

Apart from “grace”, Mir Emād mentions another state, similar to it, named “*shan*”. If “*shan*” is present in a script, the scribe who contemplates it “will be thrown into ecstasies”. Moreover, if a scribe acquires the capacity of realizing “*shan*” in writing, “he will be needless of worldly joys” because “the sheen of the real Beloved’s beauty will unfold before him” (ibid., 6)<sup>8</sup>.

Then, there is the double foundation of writing: “principles” on the one hand, “grace” and “*shan*” on the other. These two criteria are complementary to one another, “principles” preparing the form through which divine beauty and grace come to shine. Indeed, they are universal, but differently expressed, criteria typical of nearly all forms of ancient art and aesthetics, found as much in the works of Plato and Plotinus as in the works of traditionalists, such as those of Frithjof Schuon.

Speaking of beauty and art, Plato essentially mentions two principles: *kalos-agathos* (Rep., 407e), *kalos-eu* (ibid., 400e), *kalos-cosmion* (ibid., 403a), or *kalos-agathos* (Pol., 284b)<sup>9</sup>. Assuredly, these two factors are not synonymous but complementary to each other<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding sensible beauty and arts, Plotinus too distinguishes two criteria: *kalos-agathos* (Enn. 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> treatise, 1, 22-24), *kalos-symmetria* (ibid., and Enn. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> treatise, chap. 1 and 2). The beautiful thing is not symmetrical, but a symmetrical or harmonious thing is necessary so that beauty enthrones itself on it (Enn. 1, 6<sup>th</sup> treatise, 2, 18-24)<sup>11</sup>.

From Frithjof Schuon’s point of view, beauty is “order” and “mystery”, “order” being the necessary constituent of the form, while “mystery” being that which shines through the well-ordered form. The same applies to sacred and traditional arts.<sup>12</sup> Thus, to

“principles” of Mir Emād correspond respectively Plato’s “*cosmion*”, Plotinus’ “symmetry” and Schuon’s “order”, while Mir Emād’s “grace” and “divine beauty” are equivalent to Plotinus and Plato’s “beauty” and Schuon’s “mystery”<sup>13</sup>.

## Conclusion

Mir Emād’s calligraphy, as a traditional art, represents something more than mere technical ability, so, apart from practical knowledge, it demands inward beauty and wisdom, that is to say, spiritual qualification. Accordingly, Mir Emād admits two foundations of writing: “principles” on the one hand, “grace” and “*shan*” on the other. One can say that “principles”, as the first criterion, are mostly relevant to the practical knowledge, but “grace” or “*shan*” is essentially in accordance with inward beauty and wisdom. Indeed, practical knowledge is useless without the sense of beauty.

The technical perfection is nothing but an instrument to give shape and form to the inward beauty. This exigency of beauty and wisdom characterises also Plato’s view on art: “He who without the inspired frenzy of Muses comes to the doors of poetry, confident that the technical ability alone suffices to make a poet of him, will be an unsuccessful poet and stranger to mysteries (*atelos*)” (*phaed.*, 245a).

The three kinds of writing too bear witness to this fact: the first two ones are rather practical, they amount to outward perfection, while imaginal writing is related to wisdom and inward perfection because it manifests the degree to which the scribe has realized the purification of soul.

For all of these reasons, Mir Emād's conception of writing is representative not only of genuine Islamic art, but also of traditional or primordial art in general. By primordial art, we mean a mode of artistic creation which aims at incarnating divine beauty in sensible forms. Moreover, Mir Emād is among the last representatives of traditional art in Iran, before the entry of modernity and subsequent transformation of forms of art.

### ***Bibliography***

1. Aristotle (2001), *Poétique*, trad. B. Gerenz, Paris, les Belles Lettres.
2. Burckhardt, Titus (1976), *Principes et methods de l'art sacré*, Paris, Dervy.
3. Binayemotlagh, Said, and Others (2009), *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art in Dialogue* (in Persian), Academy of Arts Press, Tehran.
4. Hadot, Pierre (1997), *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, Paris, Folio.
5. Lings, Martin (2005), *Splendours of Quran Calligraphy and Illumination*, Liechtenstein, Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation.
6. Mir Emād (1994-1373), *Canon of Writing* (in Persian), in *Treatises on Calligraphy*, edited by H. R. Qilitchkhani, Tehran, Rozaneh Press.
7. Plato (1964), *Republic*, trans. F. H. Cornford, London, Oxford University Press.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (1960), *Phaedrus*, trans. H. N. Fowler, London, Harvard University Press.
9. Plotinus (1969), *Enneads*, trans. S. McKenna, London, Faber and Faber Limited.
10. Saeed Farqani, Saeedoddin(?), Masharegh-oddarari, a Commentary to the Taeeyeh of Ibn-e Fariz, ?, Institute of Islamic Philosophy and Gnosis.
11. Schuon, Frithjof (1978), *L'esotérisme comme principe et comme voie*, Paris, Dervy.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Around 961-1024 A.H., during the reign of Shah Abbas the First and executed by his order.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter referred to as C.W. Note that the original text comprises no pagination.

<sup>3</sup> Literally: writing in an agreeable manner.

<sup>4</sup> . We prefer “imaginal” to “imaginative” to qualify this third kind of writing, “imaginative” being so much related to the psychological plane. See, H. Corbin’s usage of “imaginal”, from whom we have borrowed the term.

<sup>5</sup> These elements are: 1. combination (*tarkib*), 2. throne (*korsi*), 3. relation (*nesbat*), 4. weakness (*za’f*), 5. force (*qowwat*), 6. level (*sath*), 7. cycle (*dor*), 8. metaphorical crescendo (*so’oud-e majāzi*), 9. real decrescendo (*nozoul-e haqiqi*) (ibid., 3).

<sup>6</sup> Literally: temperament

<sup>7</sup> In his translation of a tenth / sixteenth century Persian treatise on calligraphers and painters, written by Qādi Ahmad, Prof. Zakhoder translates this saying in this way: “purity of writing is purity of soul” quoted by Martin Lings (ibid., p.39). Purity, here, stands for “*saḡā*”. But, given that the word “*saḡā*” means both “grace” and “purity” in Persian, it seems to us more precise to translate it as “grace” in reference to writing and as “purity” in reference to the heart.

<sup>8</sup> As a matter of fact, the difference between “*shan*” and “grace” is not so clear to us.

<sup>9</sup> The goodness (excellence) and beauty of every work of art is due to the observance of measure (metron) (ibid.).

<sup>10</sup> See S. Binayemotlagh, et al., *Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art in Dialogue* (in Persian), pp.23-25.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Binayemotlagh and Y. Bouzarinejad, *Plotinus on Art and Beauty* (in Persian), preface (to appear).

<sup>12</sup> For the notions of “order” and “mystery” as well as their metaphysical foundations, see: Frithjof Schuon, “Fondements d’une esthétique intégrale” in *L’esotérisme comme principe et comme voie*, pp.171-177.

<sup>13</sup> - To underline the universal character of these two complementary principles of traditional art, we could also quote Saeed Farqani in his Commentary to *Taeeyeh* of Ibn-e Fariz titled *Mashareqh-oddarari*. Beauty, says he, is “the perfection of manifestation according to proportion and grace”(Persian ed.,131).



# **The Role of Sufism in the formation of Islamic culture and civilization**

Seyed Salman Safavi  
London Academy of Iranian Studies

## **Abstract**

This article discusses the constructive role of Sufism in the formation of Islamic culture and civilization in the art (poetry, architecture, calligraphy and music), social and political fields. And it's positive role in countering religious extremism and the fight against Western colonialism is also discussed. This article argues that not only has Sufism played a social-cultural role in the past, but it is still alive and influencing the spiritual and social life of Muslims in the Muslim world and in the West.

**Keywords:** Sufism, Islam, Spirituality, Human, Iran.

## **The definition of 'Irfan and Sufism**

Sufism is the knowledge that discusses Absolut Being (God) and the relationship between human and God in a spiritual way. Sufi describes God as different from theologian and philosopher.

The theologian describes God as the Creator. And the philosopher describes God as the Primary mover, principle of principles, the

cause of causes, and the Necessary Being. But Sufi describes God as:

هو العشق، هو الحي، هو الهو  
هو النور، هو الخير، هو الهو  
هو الاول، هو الاخر، هو الهو  
هو الظاهر، هو الباطن، هو الهو

“He is Love, He is Alive, He is His  
He is Light, He is Good, He is His  
He is the First, He is the Last, He is His  
He is the Manifest, He is the Hidden, He is His”.

Sufism is a spiritual lifestyle, which is based on love and social generosity.

*‘Irfan* (Islamic mysticism) has both a theoretical and a practical aspect. The theoretical aspect undertakes the elaboration and interpretation of God, the world and the human from a mystical viewpoint. It provides mystical answers to the three essential questions of life, namely the **whence, wherefore and whither**.

Practical mysticism is also called wayfaring and sets forth the realisations and duties of the human being towards himself, the world and God. It denotes what a *Salik* or wayfarer, or mystic’s initial conduct and its terminal points must be in order to become a Perfect human (*insan-i kamil*) and successor of God on earth and reach the highest position that is possible for human to attain. That exalted human status is the dissolution (*fana*) of his being in God and his subsistence (*baqa*) by His will in eternal life. It describes an *‘arif*’s duties of conduct, his means, his states and the experience he goes through on his way to join with the Lord. Ways to purge the self, to combat the ego and purify the soul are also included among these practices.<sup>1</sup>

Thus *'irfan* is described as an intuitive knowledge of God that leads human to His presence and to the ultimate which is to witness and be in the presence of God (*liqa Allah*).

The sources of Islamic mysticism are the Qur'an, the Prophetic and Alawi tradition, and the spiritual experience of the Sufis.

Love is the most important part of theoretical and practical mysticism. *Dhikr*<sup>2</sup>(remembrance), *Fikr*(thought), *Muraqabah* (meditation) and *Sakhawat*(generosity) are very important in practical mysticism.

Ibn Sina the great Iranian philosopher said: "The one that prevents his conscious from paying attention to the others but God and directed it to the transcendent world to be enlightened by God's light is known as "arif/"mystic".<sup>3</sup> And Joneid said: "Sufi is one whose heart, like Abraham's, has been freed from the friendship of the material world. His submission is like that of Ismail. His grief is like David's. His poverty like the poverty of Jesus. His patience is like that of Job. His zeal like that of Moses. And his sincerity is like that of Muhammad."<sup>4</sup>

The most famous Sufis in the world are Attar<sup>5</sup>, Rumi, Muhyiddin Andulusi<sup>6</sup> (ibn Arabi) and Hafiz Shirazi.

The most influential Sufis are: Sheikh Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, Sheikh Abdulqadir Gilani, Baha-ud-Din Naqshband Bukhari, Jalal al-din Rumi, Sheikh Safi al-din Ardabili and Shah Nematollah Wali.

Some of the Sufi traditions are: Shazeliyah, Mawlawyeh, Naqshbandi, Qadariya, Zahabiyeh, Khaksari, Safaviyeh, Nematollahyeh and Tijaniyah.<sup>7</sup>

**The role of Sufism in the propagation and formation of Islamic art such as: poetry, calligraphy and music:**

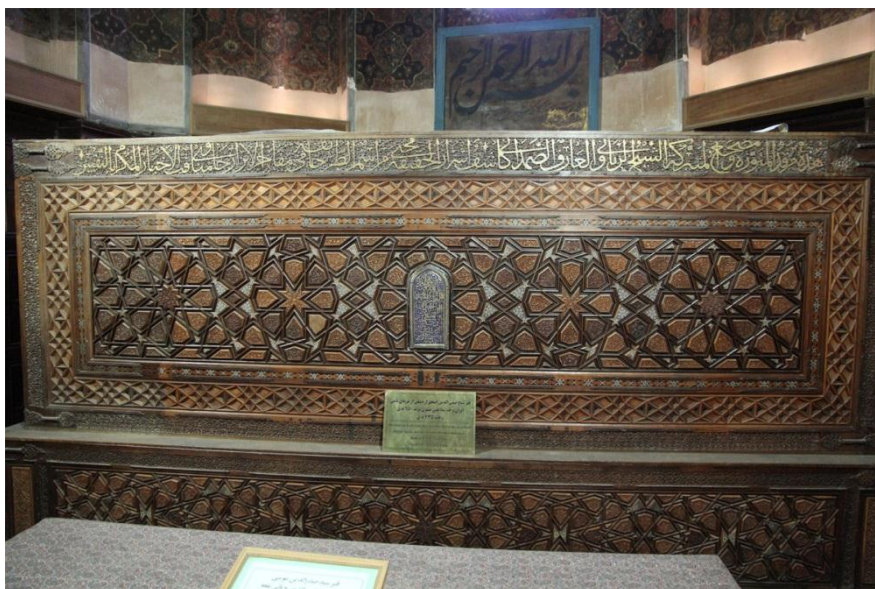
The greatest works of poetry of Iran and the Islamic world have been written by Sufis; such as the Mantiq al-Tayr of ‘Attar Neishabouri, the Mathnawi of Rumi<sup>8</sup> and Divan-e Hafiz Shirazi. These works have had an important role in the formation of the human and spiritual culture of the Muslim world. The primary message of all these works are: **Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds, loving humankind, forgiveness, tolerance, patience, social cooperation, seeking knowledge, attention to the origin and final destination and the philosophy of life.**

All the major works of Islamic architecture have been influenced by Sufi teachings. Lighting, the use of sacred geometry, the use of colour and calligraphy have been employed by attention to Sufi doctrines. The majority of the architects were themselves Sufis.

One of the most useful books to understand the value of Sufism heritage is the "Arzeshe Miras-e Soofieh" (ارزش میراث صوفیه) by Abdulhossein Zarinkoob<sup>9</sup>, as well as " The Heritage of Sufism " edited by Leonard Lewisohn.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 1.** Pictures of the Shrine of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili



**Figure 2, tomb casket of Sheikh Safi al-din Ardabili**

Calligraphy and Sufism are deeply connected. The majority of calligraphers were Sufis. And Sufis in order to practice concentration and attention and propagate Sufi wisdom used calligraphy. In all khaniqahs and Sufi shrines calligraphy has been used to deliver the Sufi message.





**Figure 3: Safavid Stamp**

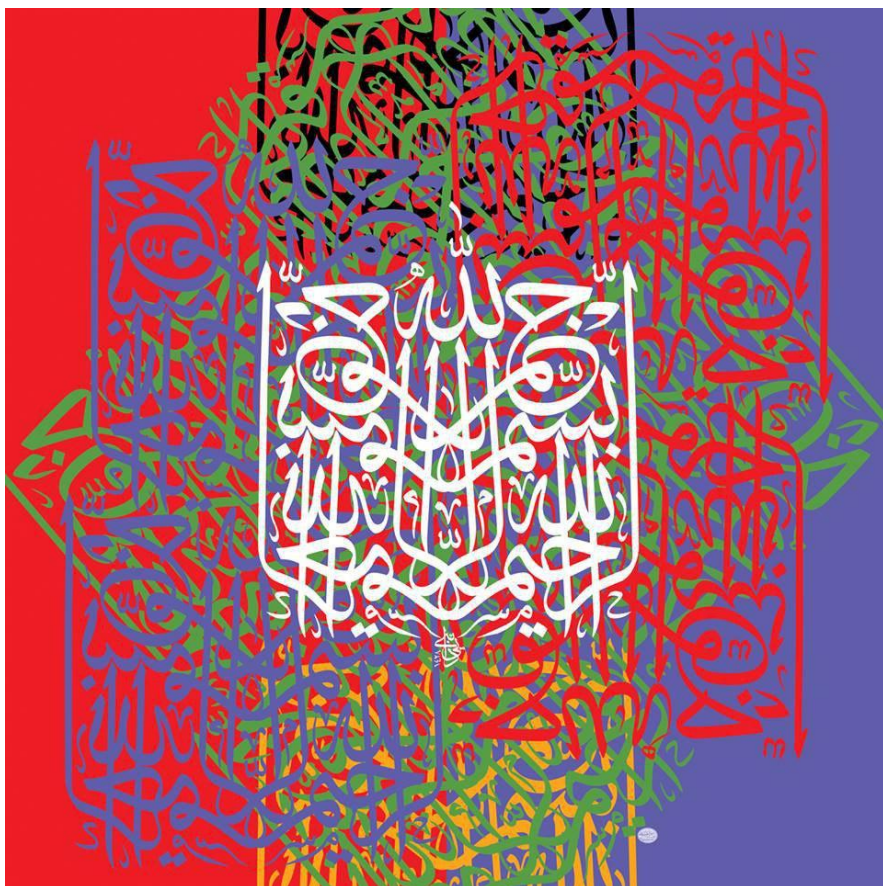


Figure4<sup>11</sup>, modern calligraphy of Iran

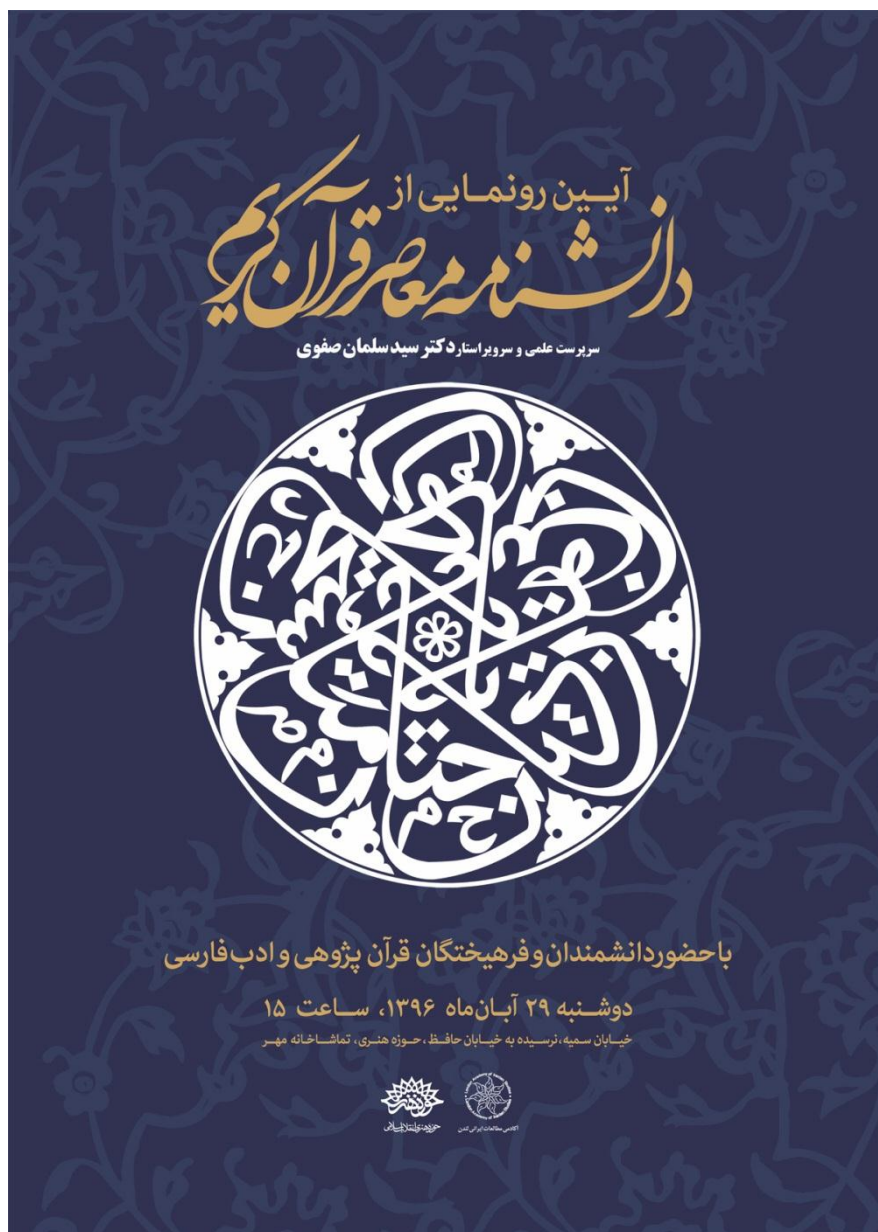


Figure 5<sup>12</sup>: combination of ancient and contemporary calligraphy

The greatest master of calligraphy of the style of Shekast-e naste 'Aliq is Darwish Taleqani. Drawish Abdul Majid Taleqani (1150-1185 AH) was a famous Iranian master calligrapher, poet and Sufi.

He is considered to be the most important and greatest calligrapher *Shekast-e naste 'aliq* calligraphy in Iranian calligraphy history. He was a master at the broken line like Mirimad in *Naste'aliq* and brought it to a height that no one has ever been able to reach.

He wrote Sa'di's book in calligraphic form.

Contemporary Sufi graphic and painting-calligraphy:





Figure 6<sup>13</sup>



Figure 7<sup>14</sup>: Contemporary cover design

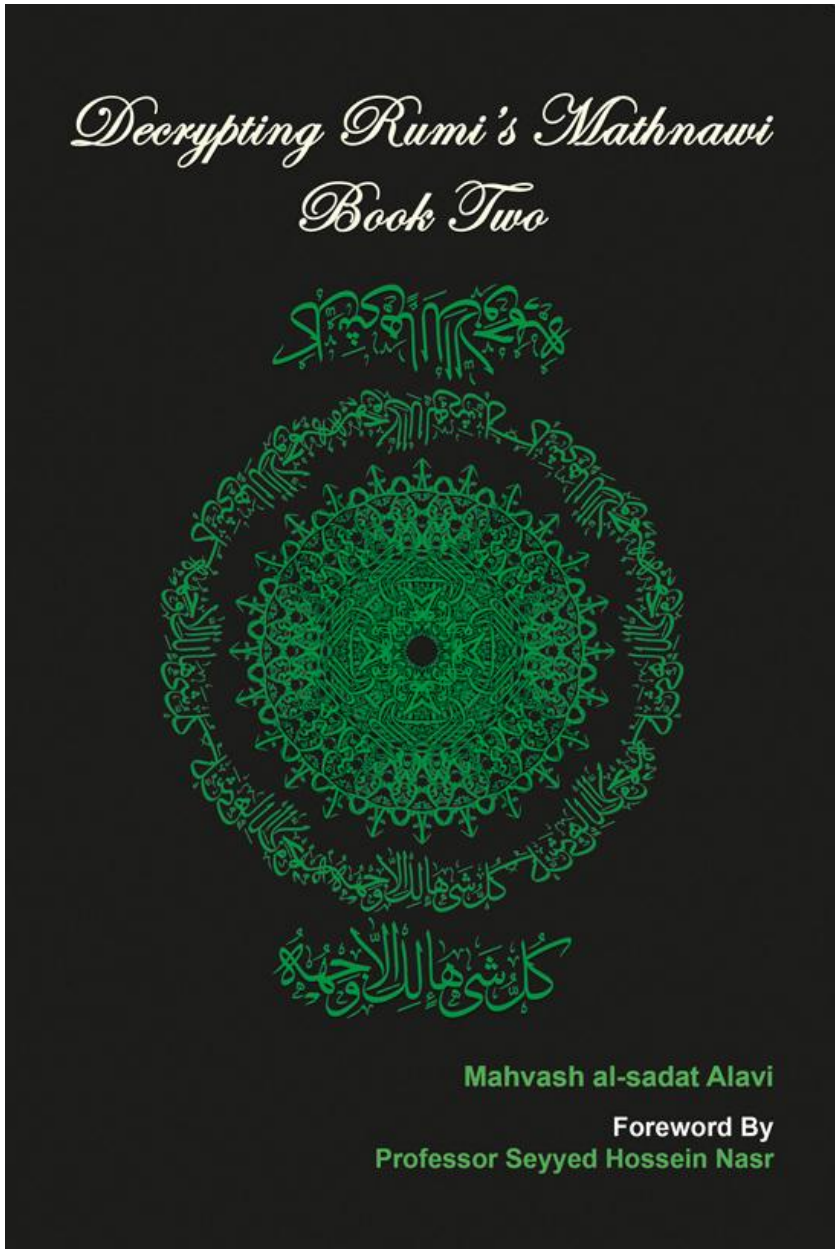


Figure 8<sup>15</sup> Contemporary cover design

## Sufism and Music

The history of human culture is testimony that music has been a part of communication with the divine and has been utilised in worship of the Divine in all religions from the beginning of human history. This includes the Abrahamic religions and religions such as Shintoism, Daoism and Buddhism. In general, there has been no human society without music. Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei the Supreme Leader of Iran has the following opinion about original music, “the art of music, is an integration of science, thought and God given nature. The manifestation of God given nature in the first instance is human vocal cords and in the second instance musical instruments invented by humans. So you can see that the foundation is a Divine foundation. If in this regards we examine the poems of Rumi and say that music is the reflection of the sounds of heaven and connect it to the ‘Irfanic world that he refers to, we have bored from realities to the imaginary [world]. Because his sayings in this regards, are similar imagination, and naturally have a different meaning.” For example, the fifth symphony of Beethoven and the sixth symphony of Tchaikovsky are enjoyed and respected by most seekers of the Divine across human societies.

‘Irfanic music is a deep and spiritual genre of music which is amalgamated with Divine Wisdom and Beauty and eases the path of worship and spiritual wayfaring towards God.

As Professor Nasr has written music is considered as the voice of the Beloved. In Islamic Sufism, even scholars such as Ghazali and Kashani have issued religious rulings for sama’. The majority of Muslim sects, including Shi’a, Sunni and Sufis such as the Mevlawiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Qaderiyya, Khaksariyya and Safaviyya and others consider Sama’ as part of religious spiritual wayfaring and see *‘Irfanic* music as an integral part and tradition of spiritual wayfaring and as one of the techniques for attaining union with the Beloved. Roozbahan Baqli Shirizai in his treatise titled al-



Quds has offered an explanation of the different types of Sama' and the meaning of 'Irfanic music'.<sup>16</sup>

The renowned figures of Iranian and Islamic literature and 'Irfan have practiced Sama' or 'Irfanic music; these include prominent figures such as Junaid Baqdadi, Abu Sa'id Abu al-Khair, Ghazali, 'ayn al-Quzat Hamadani, Sheikh Najm al-Din Kubra, 'Attar Naishaburi, Roozbahan Baqli, Shams Tabrizi, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi Dehlawi, Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili, Mahmoud Shabestari, Lahiji and Shah Ni'matallah Wali.

### **Social Chivalry(*Futuwat*)**

The Sufis are the front runners of Chivalry in the Islamic world. They have learnt Chivalry from Imam Ali, about whom the Prophet of Islam said "There is no hero but Ali". Bravery, generosity, sacrifice, love and modesty are the 5 pillars of chivalry.

Chivalry is a form of social service with a specific type of tradition and behaviour. Chivalry emphasises on the moral and spiritual aspects of Islam. From a social perspective it is a method for supporting the poor, the innocent, the weak, the one's without support, the minorities and the migrants. The people of Chivalry or *ahl-e futuwat* have had many uprising against unjust and oppressive rulers. Their first uprising was against the rule of Hajjaj bin Yusuf (095 AH). 'Ayyaran who are famed for bravery and generosity are a type of social organisations of Chivalry. One of the most famous 'Ayyaran of Iran is Ya'qub laith Saffari who revolted against the rule of the Abbasid dynasty and was able to liberate eastern of Iran from the oppressive rule of the Abbasids. He is the founder of The Saffarid dynasty in Iran (861 to 1003).

Traditional Zoorkhanehs are a part of the social structure of Gallantry. In these places the training of the body, *dhikr* of God and practical ethics is practiced. Many books have been written about the people of Gallantry or *Ahl-e Futuwat*.<sup>17</sup>

## **Culture of tolerance**

### **The definition of tolerance**

The ability or willingness to tolerate the existence of opinions or behaviour that one dislikes or disagrees with.

An example of tolerance is Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Athiests being friends.

In the cultural sphere tolerance towards individuals, society, nature and animals are examples of tolerance that can found in classical Iranian literature.

### **Tolerance as social dialogue**

Tolerance is not simply and individual act rather it has been transformed into an individual and social virtue that Iranian society has manifested as a one most important social virtues. Hospitality and religious tolerance during the rule of Shah Abbas the great is attested to in the written works of all European travellers of that era. Such as the travelogue of the Shirley brothers, the travelogue of Sharden, the travelogue of Peter Delavale and that of Kampfer

### **The role of public figures and important organisations in promoting the culture of tolerance**

Sages, Sufis and some of the kings such as Shah Abbas Safavi are important examples of tolerance in both prose and poetic, historical and narrative literature.

Mulla Sadra Shirazi a prominent Iranian philosopher during the Safavid era is the most important example of the culture of tolerance in the philosophical literature of Iran and Muslim world. He narrates the opinion of all of the philosophers and mystics that

came before him such as the Greeks and the Persians both before and after Islam with respect, and as far as it is possible he tries to stay true to their intended meaning and then critiques their work with respect.<sup>18</sup>

### **Sufi literature as the engine of the discourse of tolerance**

After Islam, Ferdowsi and Kharfani are the pioneers of culture and literature of tolerance in Iran, and after them 'Attar, Rumi, Sa'di and Hafiz were the most important figures.

Sheikh Abu al-Hassan Kharqani born in the village of Kharqan in Shahrood during the dogmatic rule of Ghaznavian has written: feed whoever is born in this world and ask not of his faith, for whoever is worth life in front of Allah, certainly should also be worth bread in front of Khan Bu Al-Hassan.

They asked Kharqani what is chivalry(futuwat), he said it is three things, first generosity, second compassion towards people and third independence from people.

Hafiz Shirazi has an important verses in regards to Chivalry:

The welfare of the world is the interpretation of these two words

Generosity towards friends and tolerance towards enemies

The theoretical foundations of tolerance

### **The principle of unity of being**

In the world there is only one existence and everything else is none existence. **There is no God but He** (La ilaha illa hu)<sup>19</sup>. Unity of being from the perspective of Islamic mysticism means that being from the perspective of its reality and essence is one i.e. God. And it is because of nonessential beings that it manifests its self in plurality, and the forms are representative of the Existent (Hu). So

whoever loves God also loves His manifestations and behaves towards them with tolerance. In this perspective all the world is sacred for it is the light of God.<sup>20</sup>

Baba Tahir's famous Iranian poem about this principle reads:

I look at the desert and I see the desert as You  
I look at the sea and I see the sea as You.  
Wherever I look, to mountains, pearls and fields  
I see the signs of Your beautiful face<sup>21</sup>.

### **The principle of unity in plurality and plurality in unity:**

Being is graded and although there are differences in the world it has unity of action and destination. The champion of this theory is Mulla Sadra.

### **The theory of love:**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ (in the name of Allah the compassionate and the merciful). The world is the manifestation of Divine love. God because of love is tolerant towards those who do not believe in God and have no religion for He is merciful and generous. Love is the central focus of all six books of Rumi's Mathnawi.

As Rumi writes:

Do not say, "We have no admission to that King."  
Dealings with the generous are not difficult.<sup>22</sup>

### **The principle of symmetry and harmony**

Ferdowsi writes:

Do not torment the ant which is carrying a grain  
For it has a life, and sweet life is good.

Sa'di Shirazi writes:

Make the heart of the poor happy,  
Remember the days of the poor  
I understand that there are many more powerless than you  
But, there are also those who are more powerful than  
you.<sup>23</sup>

### **The principle of solidarity**

We belong to God and to Him we return. The universe has a nature from one to the other. The human world is also interconnected and the individual and social behavior of man affects the general fate of society and nature. Tolerance or intolerance to the environment affects the social and cosmic environment because the world is in solidarity.

Rumi writes:

This world is the mountain, and our action the shout:  
the echo of the shouts comes (back) to us.<sup>24</sup>

Sa'di Shirazi writes:

Human beings are members of a whole

In creation of one essence and soul  
If one member is afflicted with pain  
Other members uneasy will remain  
If you have no sympathy for human pain  
The name of human you cannot retain<sup>25</sup>

Humanity requires that we empathize with human suffering regardless of their religion and race and try to play a constructive role in reducing human suffering.

A compassionate / Rahmani understanding of Islam based on the verse in the name of Allah the compassionate and the merciful and the Prophetic and Alavi tradition.

The Gate of Knowledge Treasure to the Unique Goddess is the golden verse of "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim" with which Quran and Sura Hamad began and is the most important document of the truth of Rahmani Islam and the collection of pure Islam Mohammedan teachings. The verse, which is the beginning of all the Surahs of the Qur'an except chapter "repentance", emphasizes the key teaching of Islam that God's mercy predominates over his wrath and mercy, and that mercy is the main attribute of God and that his attributes are subordinate to compulsion and compulsion. The expression "metaphor" is the nominal manifestation of God in existence. "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim" is semantically semantic in relation to the divine monotheism, creation, being, resurrection, and Asmaa al-Husna. Basim Allah Rahman Rahim is the central meaning of the Qur'an. According to its semantic orientation, the world is a reflection of the seal of God, and all the components of the Kainat move toward God. The One God is the Creator, the Lord, the Owner, the Godhead and the All-Merciful Ruler of the world. He has created the world with love and with all the people as his creatures enjoys the merciful. But with God the

worshiper has a special relation of being and love. Lovers love him and he loves them too.



**Figure 9<sup>26</sup>: Bismillah**  
{ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ }



### **The Qur'anic verse "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an 2:265). :**

In *Majma' al-Bayan* Tabarsi in regards to the context of revelation of verse 265 of chapter 2 of the Holy Qur'an writes: Abu Hasin, A man from Medina had two sons. When some businessmen travelled to medina for business and met these two boys they invited them to Christianity. They were influenced by them and became Christians. And when the business men left, they left with them to Damascus. Abu Hasin became very sad about this and informed the prophet about what had happened and asked them to bring them back to Islam, he asked the prophet whether he can bring them back to Islam by force. The above verse was revealed and pointed to this truth, that there should be no force in what religion a person choses.

### **Surah al-Kafirun :**

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾ لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾  
وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾ لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

Say, "O disbelievers

I do not worship what you worship.

Nor are you worshippers of what I worship.

Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship.

Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship.

For you is your religion, and for me is my religion."

Chapter al-Kafirun of the Holy Qur'an invites Muslims to tolerance and respect for the religions and opinion of others. This chapter of the holy Qur'an has had an important and deep effect in the Sufi

and Iranian literature of tolerance. This chapter of the Qur'an is a manual for living in peace with others. There is a famous Persian proverb which has been derived from the chapter of the Qur'an that says "Musa follows his own religion, and 'Isa follows his own religion."

### **Prophetic sayings:**

The Prophet of Islam has said **الْخَلْقُ عِيَالُ اللَّهِ فَأَحَبُّ الْخَلْقِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَنْ نَفَعَ عِيَالَهُ**., people are the family of God, and the most beloved person to God is he who gives profit to the people and bring happiness and joy to a family.

The prophet has said "God has commanded me to be tolerant towards people similar how he has commanded me to do my obligatory prayers."<sup>27</sup>

The Prophet has further said: "tolerance towards people is half of belief, and friendship with them is half of life."<sup>28</sup>

### **Khaniqah**

The place of living and teaching the Sufi teachings is referred to as Khaniqah, Zawiyyah or Hussayniyyah. Khaniqah is one of the civil institutions of an Islamic society that has an important role in the propagation of spirituality and fighting with aristocracy.

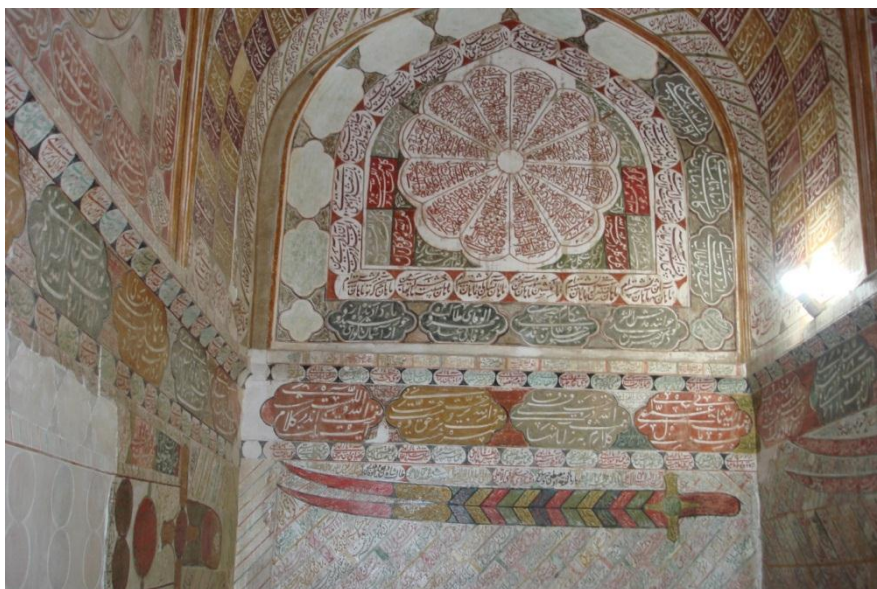
Sufi meditation, 'Itikaf for forty days, Sama and group Dhikr occur in the khaniqah.

Ibn Bazzaz in his book *Safwat al-Safa* has given a complete description of these activities in the Khaniqah of Sheikh Safi al-din Ardabili.

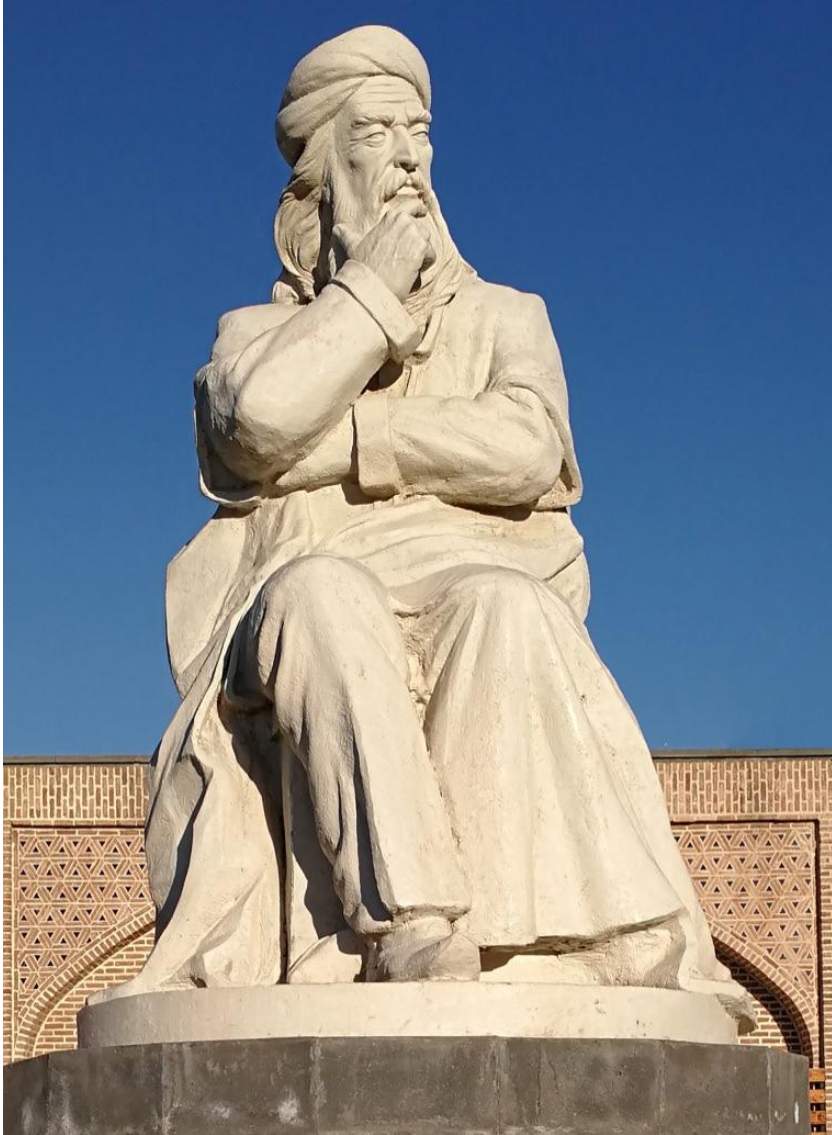
Some of these Khaniqah's are themselves a work of art. Islamic architecture and calligraphy have manifested themselves in it such as the shrine of Sheikh Safi al-din Ardabili and Shah ni'mat al-Allah Wali in Mahan, Iran.



**Figure 10: Pictures of the Khaniqah of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili**



**Figure 11-13: Picture of the shrine of Shah Ni'mat Allah wali**



**Figure 14<sup>29</sup> : Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili founder of modern Iran**

### **The role of Sufi orders in forming nations and governments**

Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī (D. 1334), Of the Prophet Muhammad's descendants and founded the Ṣafawīyyah order (*ṭarīqah*) which has had an important, constructive, and continuous role in the history of Islamic and Iranian civilisation. Shaykh Ṣafī is the spiritual father of the Safavid dynasty.<sup>30</sup> The Safavid movement was a Ṣūfī order, the centre of which was the khāniqāh of Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn. This Ṣūfī order, gradually, after becoming widespread in society and gaining influence transformed into a social movement, which rose in jihād for justice, the realisation of the rights of the oppressed and the defence of Islam. The spiritual-social jihād of the Safavid movement resulted in the consolidation of Shī'ah Islam and the revival of Iran as an independent country after the Arab and Moghuls invasion. In this way it resulted in the renewal of the golden era of the Islamic-Iranian culture. This was a feat that no other Islamic or Iranian school of thought had been able to perform.

The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, was a mystic.

And the current Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khamenei is also interested in mystical characters such as Rumi, Shaykh Ṣafī al-Dīn Ardabīlī and Hafīz.

### **The role of Sufi shrines in proximity between Muslim sects**

In Islam, like other religions, there are different sects. This plurality of sects when looked at through the lens of theology and law sometimes causes problems between Muslims. Whereas all the Sufi orders because of their love for the family of the prophet (Ali, Fatimah, Muhammad, Hassan and Hussein) that is accepted by all Muslim sects and belief in the spiritual succession of Imam Ali after the Prophet, are the axis of proximity of Muslim sects.

### **The role of Sufi orders in combatting European Colonization<sup>31</sup>**

From a historical perspective just as Sheikh Safi al-din Ardabili had an important role in forming social solidarity in Iran, the prominent Sufi movements of the Islamic world in the contemporary era have also fulfilled this role. For example Sufi orders such as Qaderiyeh and Shazeliyeh have a long history of combatting European colonisers. These two Sufi orders fought the French for many years in Morocco and Algiers and again Britain and Italy in Ethiopia and Somalia.

Sheikh Amir Abdul Qadir (1808-1883) who was a commentator of the Fusus al-Hikam of Ibn Arabi and the leader of resistance against France in Algiers was one of the leaders of the Qaderiyeh Sufi order.

Other Sufi orders such as Jezvaliyeh and darqaviyeh in West Africa and horn of Africa fought against Britain and Italy. The Sufi Zaviyehs in the west have historically been centres of defence against the attacks and occupation of Spain and Portugal.

Some of the followers of Ahmad ibn Sharif Sonoosi (1933-1873) one of the sheikhs of the Sonoosiyeh order fought against the French between 1902 and 1912 in Chad (Sahra) and from 1911 against Italy in Libya.

The idea of Islamic unity spread in Africa by some reformist Sufi orders such as Qaderieyh and Shazeliyeh and Sufi Zaviyehs used Islamic teaching to unite African tribes against colonisers.

### **The role of Sufism in confronting religious extremism today**

Today, Sufi orders are the most important barrier against religious fundamentalism such as Daesh, Taliban and Alqaeda in the Muslim world. In particular the Shazeliyeh order in Egypt, Mawlawiyeh in

Turkey, Qaderiyeh in Bosnia and Kurdistan have an important role in moderating the religious space of these societies and preventing the youth from being attracted to fundamentalist readings of Islam.

### **The role of Sufism in contemporary life**

Ayatollah Khamenei, the present leader of Iran has said: The *Divan-e Hafez* is still the most popular and best-selling book after the Koran in Iran, and the *Divan*; it is placed in all parts of the country and in many or more houses alongside the Divine Book (Qur'an).

Rumi's *Mathnawi* and Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* or *Speech of the Birds* (*Mantiq al-tayr*) has been translated and published in many Eastern and Western languages, including Russian.

*Mathnawi* is a masterpiece of mystical literature of the world that has been created in six books by Jalaluddin Rumi, The famous Iranian mystic and poet. Rumi's *Mathnawi* has deep intellectual and spiritual messages for human beings and society today. He invites human beings and society to knowledge, love, spirituality, peace, dialogue, tolerance, balance, and social generosity.

“Attar (ca. 1142–1220), the author of the *Mantiq al-tayr*, is one of the most celebrated poets of Sufi literature and inspired the work of many later mystical poets. The story is as follows: The birds assemble to select a king so that they can live more harmoniously. Among them, the hoopoe, who was the ambassador sent by Sulaiman to the Queen of Sheba, considers the Simurgh, or a Persian mythical bird, which lives behind Mount Qaf, to be the most worthy of this title. When the other birds make excuses to avoid making a decision, the hoopoe answers each bird satisfactorily by telling anecdotes, and when they complain about the severity and harshness of the journey to Mount Qaf, the hoopoe



tries to persuade them. Finally, the hoopoe succeeds in convincing the birds to undertake the journey to meet the Simurgh. The birds strive to traverse seven valleys: quest, love, gnosis, contentment, unity, wonder, and poverty. Finally, only thirty birds reach the abode of the Simurgh, and there each one sees his/her reflection in the celestial bird. Thus, thirty birds see the Simurgh as none other than themselves. In this way, they finally achieve self-annihilation. This story is an allegorical work illustrating the quest of Sufism; the birds are a metaphor for men who pursue the Sufi path of God, the hoopoe for the pir (Sufi master), the Simurgh for the Divine, and the birds' journey the Sufi path."

Many intellectual Westerners are interested in humanity and spirituality through the influence of mystical teachings. René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, William Chittick, James Winston Morris, Kabir Edmund Helminski joined Sufism. Today they play an important role in the philosophical and mystical dialogue between the Islamic world and the West. Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr<sup>32</sup>, at George Washington University who is a '*arif*', plays an important role in introducing mystical and wise Islam to the world today. He is the author of more than fifty important and profound books on the spiritual, intellectual and social dimensions of Islam.<sup>33</sup> Nasr's latest book is *The Study Qur'an*.<sup>34</sup>

Many Iranian artists today create works of art inspired by mystical teachings. Like Shajarian's works in music, Farshchian in painting, and Shahriar in poetry.

Sufism is alive today and many young people in Turkey, Bosnia, Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and Senegal shape their lives based on Sufism teachings and values. Even today some Muslim youth in America and Europe have a mystical lifestyle.

Today, Sufism is the bridge between spiritual and human dialogue between the Muslim world and the West and the East.

## **Conclusion**

‘Irfan and Sufism, as the spiritual aspect of Islam, have played an important role in forming Islamic culture and society, particularly in the arts and social fields. Today Sufism has an important role in the propagation of constructive spirituality, social tolerance and dialogue between different cultures.

In today’s world where money and weapons rule, Sufism is a path towards light and the freedom of contemporary human beings from the darkness of ignorance and material power.

## References:

- Ibn Sina, *Isharat wa Tanbihat*, Qum, Bustan kitab, 1381 H.
- Attar Nishapur, Farid al-Din, *Tadhkirat al-Awliya*, Tehran, 1360 H.
- Kulaini, *al-Kafi*, Beirut, manshoorat al-‘alami, 2005.
- Safavi, Salman, Practice Sufism and Safavid Order, London, London Academy of Iranian Studies, 2018.
- Safavi, Salman, Mulla Sadra: Life and Philosophy, London, London Academy of Iranian Studies, 2018.
- Safavi, Salman, Music and *‘irfan*(Sufism), London, London Academy of Iranian Studies ,2018.
- Safavi, Sadreddin, Allah in Quran, London, London Academy of Iranian Studies, 2018.
- Sa’di, Mosleh-ibn Abdollah, Golestan, Tehran, Nashr Sarayeh, 1382 H.
- Sa’di, Mosleh-ibn Abdollah, Bostan, Tehran, Alos, 1394.
- Rumi, Jalal al-Din, Mathnawi, Ed: Tufiq Subhani, Tehran, intesharat Ruzanih, 1378 H.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See: Safavi, Practise Sufism and Safavid Order, London, 2018.
- <sup>2</sup> Dhikr ذِکْر, are devotional acts, primarily in Sufism in which few beautiful names of God (such as: ALLAH, HU, AL-HAY, AL-QAYUM, HAQ) are repeatedly recited silently within the mind or aloud.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibn Sina, Isharat, chapter 9.
- <sup>4</sup> Attar, Tadhkirat al-Awliya, vol2, p4.
- <sup>5</sup> See: Ritter, Helmut, The Ocean of the Soul: Men, the World and God in the Stories of Farid Al-Din 'Attar, Brill, 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> Chittick, William, The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn Al-'Arabi's Cosmology, SUNY, NY, 1997.
- <sup>7</sup> See for Sufism Studies: Safavi, Salman, 'Irfan Thaqlain, Qum, Salman Azadeh Publication, 1395 H.
- <sup>8</sup> See for Rumi Studies: Alavi, Mahvash al-sadat, Decrypting Rumi's Mathnawi, 2<sup>ND</sup> edition, London, 2019. Sfavi, Rumi Principles, London, 2019. Safavi and Weightman, Rumi's Mystical Design, SUNY, NY, 2009. Chittick, William, The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi, SUNY, NY, 1984.
- <sup>9</sup> Zarinkoob, Abdulhossein, "Arzeshe Miras-e Soofieh" (ارزش میراث صوفیه), Tehran, Shirkat chap wa nashr beynalmilal, 1395 H.
- <sup>10</sup> Lewisohn, Leonard, The Heritage of Sufism, Oneworld Publications, London, 1999.
- <sup>11</sup> Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim by Mohsen Daei Nabi, Tehran, Iran.
- <sup>12</sup> Modern calligraphy by Saeid Naghashyan, Safavid Stamp (17<sup>th</sup> century), poster design by Mohammad Ali Alavi, Tehran, Iran, 107.
- <sup>13</sup> Mohsen Daei Nabi (Sufi Artist) Salman Safavi and dervish Painting on the wall by Daei Nabi, Tehran, Iran, 2017.
- <sup>14</sup> By Saeid Naghashyan, Tehran, 2016.
- <sup>15</sup> By Saeid Naghashyan, London, 2015.
- <sup>16</sup> Safavi, Salman, Music and 'irfan (Sufism), London, 2018.
- <sup>17</sup> مانند: فتوت نامه منظوم (منسوب به عطار یا هاتفی)  
کتاب الفتوة، ابو عبد الرحمن السلمی نیشابوری  
رسالة فی الفتوة، علی بن عبد الرسولی  
تحفة الاخوان، خواجه عبدالله انصاری  
کتاب الفتوة، شهاب الدین سهروردی  
کتاب الفتوة، محمد بن المعمار الحنبلی  
تحفة الاخوان فی خصائل الفتيان (عربی)، کمال الدین عبدالرزاق کاشانی  
ترجمه فارسی تحفة الاخوان فی خصائل الفتيان، کمال الدین عبدالرزاق کاشانی

تحفة الوصايا، احمد بن الياس نقاش خرتبرتي  
 عمدة الوسيلة، احمد بن الياس نقاش خرتبرتي  
 مرآة المرواة، علي بن حسن بن جعدويه  
 كتاب الفتوة، اخى احمد المحب بن شيخ محمد بن ميكائيل اردبيلي  
 كتاب الفتوة، ابو حامد، احمد بن محمد عبد الملك اشعري  
 فتوت نامه، نجم الدين زركوب تبريزي  
 رساله فتوتيه، ميرسيد علي همداني  
 رسالة في الفتوة، شيخ علاء الدوله بيبانكي سمناني  
 فتوت نامه منظوم، ناصر سيواسي  
 فتوت نامه سلطاني، ملاحسين واعظ كاشفي  
 فتوت نامه كبير يا مفتاح الدقائق، سيد محمود بن سيد علاء الدين (تفسير فتوت از منظر تشيع)  
 نساب الانساب و ادب الاكتساب، ابراهيم منيري بن اسكندر بلغراي (تفسير فتوت از منظر تسنن)  
 ارباب الطريق، حاجي ابراهيم  
 رسالة الفتوة، شيخ مقاد بن عبدالله السيوري  
 رسالة الفتوة، امام فخر الدين رازي  
 فتوت نامه قصاص، (مؤلف نامعلوم)  
 رساله هفده سلسله يا عياري نامه، (مؤلف نامعلوم)  
 ذيل على فصل «الاخيه الفتيان التركية في كتاب الرحلة لابن بطوطة»، م جودت  
 الفتوة عند العرب و الاحاديث الفروسية والمثل العليا، عمر الدسوقي  
 آيين جوانمردى، هانري كرين.

<sup>18</sup> See: Safavi, Mulla Sadra: Life and Philosophy, London, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Quran, chapter 2, verse 255.

<sup>20</sup> See: Safavi, Sadreddin, Allah in Quran, London, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Baba tahir two verse, number 162

<sup>22</sup> Rumi, Mathnawi, Book 1, verse 221

<sup>23</sup> Sa'di, Bustan, Chapter 2.

<sup>24</sup> Rumi, Mathnawi, Book 1, verse 215.

<sup>25</sup> Sa'di, Golestan, Hekayat 10.

<sup>26</sup> By Reza Badr al-Sama(1949-), Isfahan, Iran, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Kulaini, Kafi, Tab' al-Islam, volume 2, number 681

<sup>28</sup> Kulaini, Kafi, manshoorat al-'alami, Beirut, 2005, page 396, number 5 and 6.

<sup>29</sup> By Wadud Moazan Zadeh Ardaili, Ardabil, Iran, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> See: Safavi, Practice Sufism and Safaid Order, London, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> See: Safavi, Salman, *Gofteman Inqilabi dar Jahan Islam* (The Discourse of Revolutionary Thought in the Muslim World), Qum, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> See: William Chittick, Huston Smith, The Essential Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Perennial Philosophy Series) 2007.

<sup>33</sup> See: Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, Garden of Truth. Study of Quran, Islamic

Art and Spirituality. Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man. Islam in the Modern World: Challenged by the West, Threatened by Fundamentalism, Keeping Faith with Tradition. Islamic Philosophy From Its Origin To The Present.

<sup>34</sup> See: Safavi, Salman, Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Traditional and Philosophical Approach to the Quran, Transcendent Philosophy Journal, Vol 18, 2017, pp: 7-12, London.

# **An Analysis of Parallelism and Chiasmus of Rumi's Mathnawi based on the Synoptic structuralism of Professor Salman Safavi**

Saeid Khanabadi  
Beheshti University, Iran

## **Abstract**

Since the thirteenth century, literary critics and masters of philosophy and wisdom have always tried to reveal the innumerable dimensions of Mathnawi of Molana Rumi (1207-1273). In 2006, the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) published a book titled *The Structure of Rumi's Mathnawi*. This book written by Seyed Salman Safavi, one of the internationally recognized researchers in Iranian philosophy and gnosis, was awarded, in 2008, the Best Book Award in Iran.

In his research, Professor Safavi provides us with a detailed outline of the succession of anecdotes in the narratological system of Rumi in this first book of Mathnawi. Salman Safavi highlights the significant structure of Rumi's poetry and claims that this Gnostic poet has consciously created an internal discipline throughout his work in order to reinforce his thematic lessons using a logical network of mathematically and geometrically woven elements. Three essential terms are used in Professor Safavi's critical approach: the synoptic, the parallelism and the chiasm.

Analyzing the mathematical structure and the game of numbers in Mathnawi and emphasizing this calculated harmony of

Mathnawi , Salman Safavi invites us to think about the mathematical structure of the Holy Qur'an. He also presents other examples in the world literature such as the Divine Comedy of Dante, the Gathas of Zoroaster or the Seven Portraits of Nezami. This book was able to open this new horizon to young researchers eager to decipher the multidimensional mysteries of Rumi's poetry.

**Keywords:** Mathnawi , Rumi, Safavi, Persian literature, Structure, Sufism.

Since Mathnawi was written in the thirteenth century, this masterpiece of the Persian literature has been the subject of thousands of criticisms and analyses in various fields and from various perspectives. Literary critics and masters of philosophy and wisdom, in the East as well as the West, have always tried to reveal the innumerable dimensions of this rich work of Molana Jalâleddin Mohammad Balkhi more popularly known as Rumi (1207-1273). Especially after the multiple translations of Mathnawi into European languages, this key book of the Iranian Gnostic has attracted the attention of many Western experts in literary criticism. Yet, the mysteries of Mathnawi continue to fascinate art and literature lovers around the world. With regard to the thematic aspect, the semantic content and the symbolic meaning of the stories in Mathnawi , we already have several works written by Iranian and foreign masters of thought. As for the structural and formalist approaches, there is still a lack of references in the studies on the poetry of Molana. In 2006, the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) <sup>1</sup> published a book titled *The Structure of Rumi's Mathnawi* in English. This book was written by a Muslim professor, Seyed Salman Safavi, one of the internationally recognized researcher in Iranian philosophy and gnosis <sup>2</sup>. The initial idea of writing this book was born during Safavi PhD studies in SOAS, University of London(1997). Title of his thesis was: "Love The Whole But Not The Part"; An Investigation Of The Rhetorical



Structure Of Book One Of The Mathnawi Of Jalal Al-Din Rumi”(2003).<sup>3</sup> This book by Salman Safavi is also a part of the comparative studies that this Iranian professor is conducting in partnership with Professor Simon Weightman head of Department of Religions and Philosophies at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)<sup>4</sup> at the University of London. In 2008, this book by Salman Safavi was awarded the Best Book Prize in Iran. Rumi's Mystical Design by Safavi and Weightman published by State University of New York Press(SUNY) in 2009.<sup>5</sup>

The Structure of Rumi's Mathnawi has been translated into Persian by Professor Safavi's wife, Mahvash Alavi, and is now available in Iranian bookstores. This translation or, better to say, the Persian version of the work was published in Tehran by the Center for Written Heritage Research<sup>6</sup>. The book was prefaced by the philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an Iranian professor at George Washington University<sup>7</sup>. Taking into account the remarkable importance and the initiatory aspect of this key book in the structuralist researches on the poetry of Molana, the present article presents a general overview of the approach of this work and the method applied by its author. Among the six books (Daftar) that make up Mathnawi , Safavi's critique focuses on the first book of this great work by Molana. In his research, Professor Safavi provides us with a detailed outline of the succession of anecdotes in the narratological system of Molana in this first book of Mathnawi . Salman Safavi highlights the significant structure of Molana's poetry and claims that this Gnostic poet has consciously created an internal discipline throughout his work in order to reinforce his thematic lessons using a logical network of mathematically and geometrically woven elements.

Speaking of Mathnawi 's overall organization, Professor Safavi also suggests that the six books in this poetic work follow a coherent and pre-drawn structure that has been intelligently created to convey a hidden message behind this systematic harmony. Salman Safavi describes the internal structure of Mathnawi as the invisible

universe of the Hereafter, which is beyond our material world. According to Safavi, the visible face of stories, tales and fables in Molana's poetry represents the material world, while the true meaning of these stories lies in the invisible world behind Mathnawi's global structure. Unfortunately, the majority of Western readers of Molana have limited themselves to the superficial aspect of his work and have not been able to access the depth of his universe. Through this point of view, Salman Safavi compares the Mathnawi of Molana with the *Elâhi-Nâme* of Attâr, also composed of six books. According to Safavi, the six parts of Mathnawi reflect the different stages that the Gnostic man must travel in order to attain sublime perfection and divine union. For example, he states in his book that Mathnawi's first book concerns the stage of *Nafs* (the human mind) in the six stages of love. According to him, using the anecdotes of the first book, Molana stages the three faces of the human soul: so-called *Nafs Ammārah*, which orders man to act according to his animal instinct and his impulses towards the physical pleasures; *Nafs Lavvāmah*, which controls the transient desires of the first spirit; and *Nafs Motmaennah*, corresponding to the state of quietude in the purified Gnostic.

Salman Safavi formally refutes the ad nauseam tendency of some Western orientalists who consider Mathnawi as a succession of anecdotes ordered without any forethought and on the basis of a disordered model created by momentary spiritual experiences of Molana. In the introduction to his book, he presents a series of Mathnawi's criticisms and the modes of interpretation which refute the idea of the existence of a structure in Molana's poetry and consider Mathnawi as the result of a purely improvised and inspired literary creation. Safavi recognizes, however, that some Western experts have been able to conceive of the existence of a systematic structure in the composition of Molana's poetry. Among the Iranian experts who have already identified the internal structure of Mathnawi is Professor Hossein Nasr, who, in the first lines of his preface to the book of Salman Safavi, insists on the role of Master

Hadi Hâeri<sup>8</sup>, who believed in the structural composition of Mathnawi, this "Gospel of the Gnosis".

But what makes Salman Safavi's method distinct from other methods used to study Molawi's poetry? To answer this question, there is a need to clarify the three essential terms used in Professor Safavi's critical approach: the synoptic, the parallelism and the chiasm.

The first major term in Safavi's analysis concerns the synoptic aspect of his view of Mathnawi. He even begins his work with an explanation of the term "synoptic", highlighting the Greek origin of this word. In Safavi's terminology, the Synoptic Critique consists of a literary criticism based on the whole literary work. In other words, it is a criticism of the overall structure of the work and not just its partial or minimal components. This approach of Professor Safavi stands out as a new theoretical trend in Mathnawi structuralist critiques, although it can be applied to other literary texts as well. Seyed Salman Safavi divides the Mathnawi structure into four hierarchical levels. According to him, the fundamental unit and the basic element of Mathnawi is the couplet. Mathnawi is composed of 25,632 verses; he works mostly on the 4003 verses that constitute its first book. According to him, the set of couplets that illustrate the same message forms a paragraph. This definition corresponds to an anecdote. Professor Safavi uses the term "Part" to refer to the paragraphs in Molana's poetry. And according to him, the parts are considered as a speech. The speech, in the language of Safavi, corresponds to each one of the twelve main anecdotes of the first book of Mathnawi:

The first speech: The king and the beautiful slave

The second speech: The king who massacres Christians

The third speech: The Jewish king and his vizier, who plans to eliminate the religion of Jesus

The fourth speech: The lion and the rabbit

The fifth speech: The Roman emissary and the caliph Omar

The sixth speech: The parrot and the trader  
The seventh speech: The old musician of the time of Omar  
The eighth speech: The Caliph, the Bedouin and his wife  
The ninth speech: The lion, the wolf and the fox  
The tenth speech: Prophet Joseph and the mirror  
The eleventh speech: Zeyd, the Companion of the Prophet  
The twelfth speech: Imam Ali and the Unfaithful Warrior

After Salman Safavi's hypothesis, Molana chose the order of these twelve discourses in the first book voluntarily and consciously. Professor Safavi includes in his work several diagrams to demonstrate this intelligent classification. The system released by Safavi also includes transition parts or mini-speeches that are linked together as the main anecdotes of the first book of Mathnawi . Indeed, according to Safavi, the operation leader of Molana is also the secondary stories, which fit between the twelve main anecdotes. These stories have a more important role in Molana's book. Besides the internal structure of each of Mathnawi 's six books, Professor Safavi says that, overall, these six books complement each other. These are not isolated chapters; on the contrary, they form an external and homogeneous macrostructure.

The second main axis in Safavi's critical approach concerns parallelism. The origin of this term in literary studies dates back to the time of the Greek masters of philosophy, but academically, we must seek the theoretical basis of this scholarly word in the works of Russian leaders of formalist criticism in the early twentieth century. However, in approaching the structuralist theory, Professor Salman Safavi is rather directed towards the more recent critics and enumerates especially authors like Kristeva, Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Genette, Todorov, Starobinsky and Althusser. Safavi is not only interested in the parallel constructions of Mathnawi as mini-structures generated by a literary process but speaks of a synoptic macro-parallelism. Moreover, he does not limit his interpretation of parallelism to formal and apparent aspects. It tries to highlight the existence of a semantic parallelism in the topics addressed by

Molana. According to the hypothesis, he proposes, Mathnawi of Molana follows a conscious structure in form and content. According to him, for seven centuries, these parallel structures have escaped literary criticism, since no synoptic analysis has been conducted until today on Mathnawi of Molana.

The third notion in the structuralist hypothesis of Seyed Salman Safavi is that of chiasmus. But the chiasmus Dr. Safavi talks about goes beyond the definition of this lexeme as a figure of speech. Safavi conceives of this word as a microstructure in the composition and succession of the ideas of Molana in Mathnawi . Through several diagrams, Professor Safavi attempts to show both the thematic and formal chiasm that organizes the various stories of the first book of Mathnawi .

In short, Salman Safavi's book *The Structure of Rumi's Mathnawi* can be considered as a starting point for structuralist studies on the poetry of Molana. In this book, Safavi advances a new method of literary work that would be the synoptic analysis of Mathnawi as he defines it. In his preface, Hossein Nasr evokes the "mathematical symbolism" of Molana's poetry. He also highlights the emergence of new trends in literary criticism toward addressing and analyzing the mathematical structure and the game of numbers in Mathnawi . Emphasizing this calculated harmony of Mathnawi , Salman Safavi invites us to think about the mathematical structure of the Holy *Qur'an*. He also presents other examples in the world literature such as the *Divine Comedy* where Dante insists on number three to evoke the Catholic Trinity. As to the Iranian sources, Safavi intertextually analyzes the mathematical discipline of the *Gathas* of Zoroaster or the *Seven Portraits* of Nezami. Although the task of decoding Mathnawi 's mathematical cohesion was not the order of the day for Safavi's work, he was able to open this new horizon to young researchers eager to decipher the multidimensional mysteries of Molana's poetry. This Iranian and Persian-speaking Gnostic, whose call to tranquility and celestial union has not ceased for seven centuries to resonate with the ears of humanity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> London Academy of Iranian Studies, <http://iranianstudies.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Seyed Salman Safavi, born in Isfahan in 1959, is an Islamic scholar and professor of philosophy. After conducting theological and ecclesiastical studies in Iran, he obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy of religion at SOAS, the University of London and his post-doctorate in philosophy of art in the same university. He is the co-founder of the Islamic Center of England and the director of the London Academy of Iranian Studies. Salman Safavi also directs *Transcendent Philosophy Journal* and the *Islamic Perspective Journal*. Professor Safavi is also the director of "London Academy of Iranian Studies"(LAIS)<sup>2</sup> and "International Center for Peace Studies"(IPSC).<sup>2</sup> A descendant of Sheikh Safieddin Ardebili and a distant relative of the Safavid kings, he is a specialist in Gnosis, art and Iran-Shiite culture from the time of the great Shahs of Isfahan. Perfect English speaker, he is the author and editor of:

- *Perception According to Mulla Sadra*
- *A Comparative Study on Islamic and Western Philosophy*
- *Mulla Sadra & Comparative Philosophy on Causation*
- *Rumi's Principles - Islamic Mysticism Studies*
- *Mulla Sadra: Life and Philosophy*
- *Soul from the Perspective of Mulla Sadra's Philosophy*
- *Sufism*
- *Allah in Quran: Golden Verses on Divine Unity*
- *Contemporary Encyclopedia of Holy Quran*
- *Thaqalain 'Irfan (Mysticism): Theoretical and Practical Principles of Irfan and Safaviyya Spiritual Path*
- *The Practice of Sufism and the Safavid Order*
- *Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili in the Mirror of Sufism, Art and Politics*
- *Music and 'Irfan (Sufism)*
- *The Structural Interpretation of Surah al-Hamd of the Quran*
- *Quranic Studies Series ( 6 volumes)*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.soas.ac.uk/religions-and-philosophies/phdstudents/previous/>

<sup>4</sup> School of Oriental and African Studies, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sunypress.edu/p-4828-rumis-mystical-design.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> [www.mirasmaktoob.ir](http://www.mirasmaktoob.ir)

<sup>7</sup> The philosopher and Islamologist Seyyed Hossein Nasr, born in 1933 in Tehran, grandson of Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri, is the author of several books on Iranian-Islamic spirituality. He has taught for several decades in various academic institutions in the United States and conducts research on Iranian culture and civilization. Among his students is William Chittick, the American critic of the poetry of Molana.

<sup>8</sup> Hâdi Hâeri is the son of Rahmat-Ali Shâh Hâeri, Gnostic Sheikh and one of the Sufi spiritual guides in contemporary Iran. Former Deputy Minister of Culture, poet and author of several books in philosophy and ethics, Hâdi Hâeri was also a specialist in the poetry of Molana. He has educated a generation of important literary scholars such as Hossein Nasr, Allâme Jafari, Badiozzamân Forouzânfar and Jalâleddin Homâyi. Hâeri died in Tehran in 1980.

# **Instructions for Contributors**

## **Submissions**

Submitted articles should not be previously published or being considered for publications elsewhere. Authors of the accepted articles will be asked to sign a copyright form. Authors are responsible for obtaining the permission to use any material for which they do not possess the copyright. They would also be responsible for including the appropriate acknowledgements in the articles.

## **Articles**

All articles should be sent to the Editor, Dr S. G. Safavi, Journal of Transcendent Philosophy E-mail: [philosophy@iranianstudies.org](mailto:philosophy@iranianstudies.org)

Articles (including main text, notes, tables, etc.) should not exceed 40 double-spaced A4 pages. Text must be in legible, 12-point font and clear English. The title of the article and author's full name should be typed at the top of the first page followed by a brief abstract. The institutional affiliation, postal and e-mail addresses as well as fax and telephone numbers of the author should be submitted in an attached covering letter.

## **Book Reviews**

Books for review and completed reviews should be sent to the Book Review Editor, Dr Sajjad H. Rizvi, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, Stocker Road, Exeter EX4 4ND, ,United Kingdom, E-mail : [s.h.rizvi@ex.ac.uk](mailto:s.h.rizvi@ex.ac.uk)

Two copies of the typescript of reviews along with a copy on floppy disk (Microsoft Word) should be submitted. Reviews should not exceed 6 double-spaced A4 pages. The reviewed author's full name, book title and other specifications (place of publication, publisher, date and number of pages) as well as the reviewer's full name and affiliation should be typed at the top of the first page.

## **Endnotes**

Endnotes should be typed double-spaced at the end of the article rather than at the bottom of each page and numbered in a single sequence. Acknowledgements should be the last number in the article and placed in the endnotes accordingly. Endnotes are for the citation of the sources.