



# The Outward and Inward Dimensions of Spiritual Realisation within the Purview of the Holy Quran and Masnavi of Mawlana Rumi

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## Abstract:

*According to the Holy Quran, man's spirit has a meta-historical essence and it has been conceived by the Quran as the Divine breath enshrined within the material existence of man. Spirit being the divine element within the man, is capable of experiencing and interiorizing the divine noumenon within the entire cosmic phenomena including man's own being. This insight into the divine signs both inward and outward is a clear example of the Quranic tendency towards interiorizing the mystical experiences within the recesses of man's inner self. Quranic concept of spirituality does not believe in the hyper-mystical tendencies like the ones expounded in neo-platonic or non-Semitic traditions, but it takes lead even from the material world and sees each and every cosmic phenomenon as a definitive sign of Divine creative wisdom and thus urges man to pass on from material towards the spiritual. By recognizing the divine creative principle in the outer cosmos and within man's inner self, man's predilections are directed by the Quran towards the realization of the absolute Divine truth-the truth which can neither be analyzed nor synthesized but experienced at a deeper intuitive level. The current study will try to see that how Quran wants a believer to gather the signs of Divine creative wisdom both within his own spirit and within the extended cosmos, and how it blends both the streams of exoteric and esoteric experiences towards a deeper realization of the absolute Divine truth, that there is no god but God. It will also be tryst towards showcasing the fact that religion is not a merely a mode of denominational learning or a mere intellectual discourse, but it has to be lived by man and realized by the dint of entire being and existence.*

**Key Words:** Holy Quran, Spirituality, phenomenon, noumenon, man

**Introduction:**

Man, in the per view of the Holy Quran, has been fashioned upon the nature divine (*fitratullah*) and it is this Divinely ordained nature of man which sets a context to his urge to attain the gnosis (*maarifah*) of the Ultimate Divine Realty. It is by virtue of this higher principle engrained in man that he is able to experience and interiorize the Divine noumenon with in the cosmic phenomena, which corresponds to the exoteric aspect of his spiritual journey; and within his own self which corresponds with the esoteric aspect of the same. The current study is an effort to showcase the fact that how both these outward and inward aspects of man's spiritual journey make a perfect blend towards his realisation of God and how both these aspects have been validated, alongside prophetic guidance by the Quran and how they have found a prime place within the mystical tradition of Islam.

**Spiritual realisation in Quranic Perspective:**

Man by the dint of his very nature is a self-transcending being, who has an ontological urge to transcend his immediate selfhood towards something higher, permanent and absolute. The rationale behind this urge necessitates the presence of some higher principle in man, which in the parlance of the Holy Quran is known as *Ruh*, and which for the sake of convenience may be referred to as the spirit. The spirit according to the Quran has a meta-historical essence and has been breathed into the material existence of Adam – the prototype man by Allah from His own presence:

Behold! Thy Lord said to the angels: "I am about to create man, from sounding clay from mud moulded into shape;

When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of my spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him<sup>1</sup>."

It is the presence of this spiritual element in man, which provides a definitive context as well as an essential background to the spiritual journey of man towards the realisation of God (*maarifah*) and again it is this spiritual principle which enables a man to find a higher Divine meaning to his own self and to the universe, which otherwise is a multi-verse. Accordingly Quran exhorts a believer to see the signs of Divine presence throughout the extended cosmos including his own self:

"Soon We will show them our signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the truth"<sup>2</sup>

So far as the realisation of the Divine noumenon by virtue of observing the outer phenomenal cosmos is concerned, it forms the exoteric dimension of man's spiritual journey towards God, wherein the natural phenomena are considered as the signs pointing towards the ultimate Divine Reality:

Verily in the heavens and the earth, are signs for those who believe; and in the creation of your selves and the fact that animals are scattered (through the earth), are signs for those of assured faith.

And in the alternation of night and day, and the fact that Allah sends sustenance from the sky, and revives therewith the earth after its death, and in the change of the winds, - are signs for those that are wise.

Such are the signs of Allah, which We rehearse to thee in truth: then in what exposition will they believe after Allah and his signs<sup>3</sup>

Within the mystical tradition of Islam, the created things which reflect the creative wisdom of Allah are not things per se, but they are the manifestations of Allah's creative attributes. When looked upon as things per se, they obliterate our vision of the Divine, but when viewed as the manifestations of Divine attributes, then each atom, in the words of Jalal-ud-din Rumi opens up a vista of Allah's self-disclosure:

*Har hawa o zarayie khud manzarayst*

*Na kashudah kai buwad kanja darayst*<sup>4</sup>

“Each atom is a place where He will appear

But if it is closed who'll say: ‘the door is here’<sup>5</sup>

Again in the beautiful words of Rumi, the attributes of Allah pave a way towards his realisation, which in turn are manifested in the created phenomena and as regards His essence, it is even far beyond the mere manifestations:

*Ay sifaatat aafaaab e marifat*

*Wa aafaaab e charakh band e yak sifat*

*Gah khursheed o gahey daryaa shawi*

*Gah koh e kaaf gaah anqaa shawi*

*Tu na ein baashi na aan dar zaat i khweesh*

*Ay fazoon az wahamhaa waz beesh beesh*<sup>6</sup>

“Your attributes are gnosis's bright sun,

Which holds the heavens all in place as one.

You look now like the sun and then the sea,

Mount Qaf, and the phoenix magically,

But in your essence you're none of those things –

You are much more, beyond imaginings”<sup>7</sup>.

Although the phenomenal world manifests the omniscience of its creator just like the presence of sun is manifested by the shadow, yet the mystical adepts often crave for a more direct approach towards the realisation of the Divine Reality. This craving desire finds an apt expression in the ecstatic outpouring of Rumi, wherein he says:

*Aaftaab aamad daleel e aaftaab*

*Gar daleelat baayad az way ru mataab*

*Az way ar saaya nishaaney meedihad*

*Shamas har dam nur i jaanay meedihad*

*Saaya khwaab aarad tura ham chun samar*

*Chun bar aayad shamas inshaqal qamar<sup>8</sup>*

“Sunshine reveals its nature in each ray,

So if it's proof you want just look this way!

Shadows can indicate what's shining bright

But it's the sun which fills your soul with light

Shadows like late-night chat make people doze,

The moon was split when that divine sun rose”<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the outward aspect of a man's spiritual journey towards the Divine realisation, it is possibility of this immediate and direct apprehension of the Divine Reality within the recesses of man's inner self, which forms the esoteric aspect of his spiritual journey. The possibility of this intuitive 'vision' of the Reality by man within his own self has been viewed by most of the classical Sufis within the Quranic backdrop of man's nature being fashioned upon the nature Divine. It is the projection of this Divine principle in man which alongside prophetic guidance informs his sense of religiosity and God consciousness. Quran aptly asserts to this effect as follows:

Set thy face truly to the religion being upright, the nature in which Allah has made mankind:

No change (there is) in the work (wrought) by Allah:

That is the true religion:

But most among mankind know not<sup>10</sup>.

Quran verily envisages inner or higher self of man to be the work field of the Divine. It is not the biological self of man that can have a glimpse of the Divine noumenon, but his deeper intuitive self, that has been created in Divine mould. If the corporeal senses, other than the inner intuitive self of man would have been able to apprehend the almighty Lord, then all cows and asses, in the words of Rumi, should have caught his glimpse. Man is honoured above all creatures because of his higher transcendental selfhood which is always potent to commune with the Divine:

*Gar badeeday his e haiwaan shah raa*

*Pas badeeday gaaw o khar Allah raa*

*Gar na budaay his e deegar mar turaa*

*Juz his e haiwaan beerun az hawaa*

*Pas banee Aadam mukarram kay buday*

*Kay ba his e mushtaraq mahram shuday*<sup>11</sup>

“If bestial senses could see God, a herd

Of cows and asses would see – how absurd!

If you don’t know of other senses, son,

Apart from lust, which is the bestial one,

Explain why man was honoured specially

And singled out to gain proximity?”<sup>12</sup>

Within the context of Sufism (the mystical tradition of Islam), it is this inner intuitive self of man which needs to be purged of all dross impurities of his own baser self, so that the vision of his own divine nature does not get blurred and so that he is capable of interiorizing Allah’s presence within the entire cosmic phenomena including his own being. It is this intuitive selfhood of man which has been symbolically addressed to as *Qalb* (heart) by the Quran which, according to Iqbal, “is a kind of inner intuition or insight which, in the beautiful words of Rumi, feeds on the rays of sun and brings us into contact with aspects of Reality other than those open to sense-perception<sup>13</sup>.” Verily it is this heart (*qalb* or *dil*) which signifies the inner urge of a mystic to have an immediate and objective vision of the Divine Reality, which according to Rumi, may be alluded to the parable of the reflection of a beloved’s countenance upon the face of a mirror that has been cleansed of all rust<sup>14</sup>. Likewise when a seer sets his foot on the spiritual journey and by virtue of rigorous self-discipline (*mujahidat*), cleanses his heart, from the dust of baser self, and simultaneously polishes it with the love and remembrance of Allah, his heart becomes able to intuit the Divine Reality which in fact is the ultimate ground of all being and existence including man’s own. It is this reality which can neither be apprehended by mere rational analysis or synthesis nor acquired through mere rote or denominational learning, but acquired at a deeper intuitive level by coming in immediate unison with the Reality.

## Conclusion:

By seeing through the veils of phenomenal existence within the outer cosmos and by virtue of passing through the veils of his baser self and becoming intuitively one with the underlying noumenal Reality and by virtue of subsisting through it, a spiritual way farer there upon traverses various regions of the spiritual journey from Allah and back towards him – the circular nature of this journey being oft expressed by Sufis within the per view of the famous verse fragment of Holy Quran, “To Allah we belong and to Him is our return<sup>15</sup>”.

## References and End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Holy Quran, 15: 28; 29 (Translation of Abdullah Yousuf Ali, The Presidency of Islamic Research's, KSA, 1413 A.H)

<sup>2</sup> Holy Quran, 41:53

<sup>3</sup> Holy Quran, 45: 3-6

<sup>4</sup> Mawlana Jalal-al-Din Rumi, *Masnavi-i-Manavi* (Daftar Awal), Sub-Rang Kitab Ghar, Delhi, 1974, p. 363

<sup>5</sup> Jalal Al-Din Rumi, *The Masnavi* (Book One), English translation by Jawid Mojaddedi, Oxford University Press New York, 2008, p. 229

<sup>6</sup> Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, *ibid*, (Daftar Doum), pp; 19,20

<sup>7</sup> Jalal Al-Din Rumi, *ibid*, tr. Book Two, p.6

<sup>8</sup> Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, *ibid*, p. 43

<sup>9</sup> Jalal Al-Din Rumi, *ibid*, English tr. Book One p. 11

<sup>10</sup> Holy Quran, 30:30

<sup>11</sup> Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, *ibid*, (Daftar Doum), p.21

<sup>12</sup> Jalal Al-Din Rumi, *ibid*, tr. Book Two, p.7

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam*, New Delhi: Kitab Bhawan, 2011, pp.15, 16.

<sup>14</sup> Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Rumi, *ibid*, (Daftar Awal), p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Holy Quran, 2:156