THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

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Abstrak: "Dimensi esoterik dan eksoterik agama" adalah masalah filosofis-teologis yang berkonteks oksidental. "Pengalaman Religius" dan "Sophia Perennis" adalah dua teori yang diperdebatkan dalam isu ini. Esensi agama, menurut teori yang pertama, terletak pada pengalaman yang membuat pemiliknya terlihat religius (beragama) dan eksoterisnya mencakup seperangkat keyakinan yang berawal pada kemerdekaan yang dirasakan oleh pesuluk/pejalan setelah menyentuh esensi, dan teori kedua mendefinisikan agama sebagai fenomena yang nampak yang aspek batinnya adalah monoteisme yang termanifestasi dalam bentuk Sophia Perennis dalam diri manusia, dan kerangkanya terdiri dari tradisi tradisi yang mengantar sang pejalan menuju mutiara. Dalam mistisisme Islam, agama adalah kebenaran yang terintegrasi dan lurus, termanifestasi dalam tiga aspek; eksoterik, esoterik dan ultra-esoterik. Manifestasi esoterik adalah kesatuan individual yang juga adalah mutiara agama, dan meskipun terlihat sebagai aspek luar atau eksoterik, sebenarnya adalah bayangan dari kebenaran esoterik yang sama yang bersifat kekal. Keberagamaan adalah juga kebenaran yang berlapis yang esensinya adalah intuisi yang mutlak dari monoteisme mistis; sehingga dengan demikian agama dan keberagamaan adalah saling berkaitan erat dalam esensinya.

Kata-kata Kunci: Syariat (agama), tarekat (disiplin spiritual), kebenaran, kekhalifahan, kesatuan individual

Abstract: "The Essence and Shell of Religion" is a philosophico-theological problem which is Occidental in its context. "Religious Experience" and "Sophia Perennis" are two mooted theories on this issue. The essence of religion, according to first theory, lies in the experience that makes its possessor to be seen religious and the shell is a set of beliefs that has its origin in the independence that the wayfarer feels after touching the essence

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and the second theory defines religion as a bisurficial phenomenon whose inward surface is monotheism which is manifested in the form of Sophia Perennis inside human being and the shell is consisted of traditions that leads the wayfarer toward the gem. In Islamic mysticism, religion is an integrated and seamless truth that has triple manifestations of exoteric, esoteric and ultra-esoteric. The esoteric manifestation is the *individual unity* which is also the gem of religion, though they are seen as the shell exoteric manifestations are merely diluted shadows of the same esoteric truth and thus they are imperishable. Religiosity is also a threefold truth whose essence is the absolutely certain intuition of mystic monotheism; and thus conceived, religion and religiosity are coextensive in their essence.

Introduction

There are various theories in terms of the origin and the inaugurator of the debate on the essence of religion: some have ascribed to Hegel [2] and some others see it as the initiative of Schleiermacher[3] and some have regarded it as the idea of Locke and Hume [4]. The heyday of this debate goes back to the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. The young streaks of this debate can be traced back to empiricism of Western philosophy in Renaissance. Ever since two main theories in terms of modern debates of the essence of religion caught the eye: religious empiricism and traditionalism

The essence of religion is a stage of religion which is taken as the building block and truth of religion; the ultimate telos of legislation of divine law and codification of spiritual discipline that distinguishes true believers from the hypocrites and heathens.

"The essence of religion and religiosity in the perspective of Islamic mysticism and its relation with Gnostic ontology" is the subject matter of this essay that is to deal with the essence of religion and religiosity through

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2   Mustafa Malekyan, *Naghd va Nazr, Sale 6, Shomareyeh 3 and 4* (Qum: daftare tablighate islami,1350), p. 12

3   Wein Proudfoot, *Religious Experience*, trans. Abbas Yazdani, (Qom: Cultural Institution of Taha, 1377), p.12

4   Muhammad Hosseinzadeh, *Falsafeyeh Din* (Qom: Hozeh Press, 1376) p. 157

analyzing the ideas of Islamic mystics. There are some relevant issues in this regard as follows: Is there root/branch relation between the constituents of religion and religiosity from Islamic mysticism's point of view? If so what is the root and what is the branch? How has this root/branch relation been expounded in Islamic mysticism?

Religious Empiricism and the Essence of Religion and Religiosity

Religious empiricism introduces the religious experience as the essence of religion[5]. This approach that has been initiated by Schleiermacher and pursued in different schools of thought [6] seeks two main goals [7] : 1) description of the essence of religion and its central core, 2) defense of religion through reducing its essence into religious experience and precisely depicting its various scopes (such as beliefs, rituals and their effects in a pious life) and describing their place in religion and their interrelations and safeguarding them from the attacks of scientism[8].

Religious experience, according to Schleiermacher, is essentially hinged upon the absolute sense of dependence and infinite intuition which is independent of any perception: "Religiosity is neither a science nor an action; but it is sensational purification and immediate self- consciousness" [9]. He believes that human individuals do not need any proof and/or evidence in his personal moment of religious sensation but he also expresses this experience in the light of religious beliefs and deeds; these are not the foundation that this sensation has been founded upon as the latter is essentially different from beliefs. The foundation of religion, thus, is neither thought nor action but intuition and sensation. Like Schleiermacher, William James does also believe that religion is sensational in its essence [10]. He is of the opinion that the headspring of religious life is the very human sensations [11].

5   Muhammad Reza Qa'eminia, *Religious Experience and the Essence of Religion* (Qom: Bustane Ketab, 1381), p. 115-134

6   Proudfoot, 1377, p. 108 . See also Sadeghi, 1379: 224-226)

7   William Hordon, *An Introduction to Protestant Theology*, trans. Tavus Mikaeilyan (Tehran: Elimi va Farhangi, 1368) p. 40. See also Qaeminia, p. 119

8   The criticism of these theses has been published by the same writer

9   Proudfoot, 1377, p. 34-37

10   William James, *Origin of Religious Experience*, trans. Malek Hosseini, Naghd va Nazar, 3rd and 4th issues, 1378, p. 28-29

11   Muhammad Reza Qa'eminia, *Religious Experience and the Essence of Religion (*Qom: Bustane Ketab, 1381), p. 116

Rudolph Otto describes religious experience as a numinous experience[12] and thus the essence of religion should be sought for in such an experience[13]. Stace regards the mystical experiences as the essence of religion since it is only mystical experience among various forms of religion that is common. He describes this experience as a pure experience that does not tolerate any interpretation. He reduces the external differences of these experiences to their interpretations and believes that a unique essence could be identified among these differences[14].

According to Paul Tillich, it is the ultimate attachment that makes the authentic religion not particular religious beliefs and rituals [15]. Some Iranian religious intellectuals like Muhammad Mujtahid Shabistari and Abdul Karim Soroush do also believe a la Tillich that the essence of religion and religiosity lies in religious experience and describes this experience in terms of human sensations[16].

Traditionalism and the Essence of Religion and Religiosity

Traditionalism is one of the twentieth century schools of thought that has its origin in the anti-modernist sentiments and orientalistic attitudes of nineteenth century[17]. Tradition as understood by this school does not

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12   Michael Peterson, *Reason and Religious Belief*, trans. Ahmad and Ibrahim Soltani (Tehran: Tarhe No, 1376) p. 41-42, see also Ali Shirvani, *Theoretical Principles of Religious Experience*: A Comparative and Critical Study of Ibn Arabi and Rudolph Otto (Qom: Bustane Ketab, 1381), p. 44-45.

13   Qaeminia, 1381, p. 141

14   Walter Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy*, trans. Baha'ddin Khorramshahi (Tehran: Soroush, 1367), p. 23

15   William Hordon, *An Introduction to Protestant Theology*, trans.Tavus Mikaeilyan (Tehran:Elimi va Farhangi, 1368) p. 147-148

16   Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, *Faith and Liberty* (Tehran: Tarhe 1376),p. 57-136, see also Yusefi Eshkavari, 1377, p. 168-169

17   Muhammad Hassan Abdullahi, *A Critical Study of Transcendental Unity of Religions from Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr's Point of View*, MA Dissertation, Qom: Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute, 1386, p.14-16). This school that is inaugurated by French thinker "Rene Guenon" (1886-1951) has such prominent figures as "Coomaraswamy" (20th century), "Fritjof Schuon" (1907-1998), "Martin Lings" (1909-), "Burckhardt" (1908-1984) and "Seyyed Hossein Nasr" (1312-) as its representatives. The thinkers of this school are largely under the influence of Islam and Islamic mysticism and some of them like Geneon, Shuan and Lings have already converted to Islam and Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a renowned Muslim thinker

necessarily mean costume or habit [18] but it implies a set of universal truths and principles that is originated in a divine headstream [19] and has been transferred to the believers and established by holy prophets; thus conceived, tradition is the total sum of these truths and their communalization among the believers [20].

According to traditionalism, religion has two ontological domains, i.e., earthly and ideal[21]. The relationship of the earthly and the ideal religions is an exoteric/esoteric relationship in the sense that the ideal religion shares the same truth with the earthly religion indeed. Sophia Perennis is, then, a key concept in traditionalism[22]. Sophia Perennis is a knowledge that has always been there and will continue to be; a religious truth that is absolute and divine and thus perennial and is at the heart of all religions and each religion is regarded as a particular manifestation of it [23]. Sophia Perennis is essentially manifested in the metaphysics or first philosophy that is the knowledge of the Reality of realities or the very transcendental principle of monotheism at the heart of Islamic theology [24].

As mentioned earlier, religion as understood by this school as having two domains: exoteric and esoteric [25] and the essence of religion lies in the esoteric domain; this essence is an absolute reality (truth), i.e., the transcendent essence of divinity [26] which has been referred to in different forms and manifested in Islamic doctrine of monotheism [27].

This reality renders the content of Sophia Perennis through intellectual intuition, (which is an intuitive knowledge) as belonging to the esoteric

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18   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and Spirituality*, trans.Inshallah Rahmati (Tehran: Suhravardi Research Institute Press 1380), p.34

19   Hossein Khondoghabadi, *Hekmate Javidan* (Tehran : Moa'seseyeh Danesh va Pazhuhesh, 1380), p.12

20   Nasr, *Knowledge and Spirituality,* 1380, p.135

21   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Necessity of Sacred Knowledge*, trans by Hassan Minavandi,(Qom, Taha, 1379), p. 108-109

22   Khondoghabadi, 1380, p. 65

23   Nasr, *Knowledge and Spiritualit,y* 1380, p.136 and also Nasr, *Sacred Knowledge,* 1379, p.103-104

24   Nasr, *Knowledge and Spiritualit,y* 1380, p.136 and also Nasr, *Sacred Knowledge,* 1379, p.103-104. Such knowledge, according to traditionalists, is only attainable by intuitive reason or intellectual intuition through which the reason could touch the realities by presence and without the aid of the concepts and thus epistemological duality of the subject and the object becomes vanished

25   Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufis' Doctrines*, trans. Hossein Heydari and Muhammad Hadi Amini (Tehran: Qasidesara, 1382), p. 10

26   Nasr, *Sacred Knowledge,* 1379,p. 115; 1382,p. 236; 1381, p. 97-98

27   Nasr, *Sacred Knowledge,* 1379, p.114

domain of religion and addresses the transcendent essence of divinity [28] and is the very essence of the authentic religiosity[29]. To be conceived, the essence of religion in the perspective of traditionalism is the very transcendent essence of divinity that is intuited in the believer's heart in the form of the perennial reason and does also make the essence of religiosity. Traditionalists believe that all religions share the same essence upon their esoteric domain [30] divine reality [31] and Sophia Perennis [32]. The seeming differences of religions have their origin in the fact that they are different manifestations of the same essence; but these different manifestations are rooted in different cultures, traditions, languages and races; [33] thus, this unique essence touched people of different cultures only through their own indigenous religion. As they are all true in terms of their esoteric essence, therefore, religions are also exoterically true (with regard to their creeds and rituals) in their primordial milieu until the emergence of a new religion in the same context and rightly plays their meditative role (as explained before).[34]

Accordingly, religious exclucivism of some religions is interpreted as something that belongs to the exoteric domain of a religion to protect its articles of faith and rituals and traditionalists demonstrate this latter claim through Islamic mysticism.[35]

Islamic Mysticism and the Essence of Religion and Religiosity

Islamic mysticism provides the man with a system of esoteric prescriptions and exoteric etiquette through which he would be able to spiritually become a mirror of truth. But the issue that should be addressed here is the offspring of these prescriptions and etiquette. Needless to say, this dangerous path needs a mentor to teach the formalities of the voyage

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28   Nasr, *Sacred Knowledge,* 1379, p. 14

29   Mustafa Malekyan, p. 38

30   Nasr, *Knowledge and Spirituality*, p. 480

31   Nasr, *Knowledge and Spirituality*, p. 480, and Mystical Doctrines from Yesterday to Today, p. 236, and Sophia Perennis, p. 97-98

32   Nasr, *The Necessity of Sacred Knowledge*, p. 114-115

33   Nasr, *The Necessity of Sacred Knowledge*, p. 114-115

34   Nasr, *Islam and Sophia Perennis*, p. 30-31; *The Necessity of Sacred Knowledge*, p. 118; *Knowledge and Spirituality*, p. 481; *Sophia Perennis*, p. 15

35   See: The Essence and Shell of Islamic Mysticism, p. 130-132; Mystical Doctrines, p. 230. It is worthy to note that Islamic mysticism does not ratifies the legitimacy of religions in the same time as the traditionalists claim but what they document their claims on this matter upon only reiterates on the substantial unity of religions.

to the wayfarers, thus, the existence of a divine legislator and a spiritual instructor is completely necessary for the wayfarers who are pacing toward the ultimate telos of being as it would be rationally senseless to touch the truth without a mentor, according to Islamic mysticism. Genesis and systematization (codification) are declared as mutually interrelated factors in Islamic mysticism. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi describes this as the reason of legislation of divine law and believes that religion is a spiritual rector who contrives man's here and hereafter so that he may provide the Lord's pleasure and touches happiness:

> "It is better for you – may the Lord protect you – to know that the wayfaring is the quality of the wayfarer and the path is where the wayfarer paces on by his prays, spiritual majesties and intuitive states …. And as the man is the total sum of the universe and a spark of Divine Presence – that is manifested in the Divine Names, Attributes and Actions – needs a mentor to help him through this dangerous path….
> This spiritual rector is the legislator and the path is the same revealed religion and everyone who pace on this path shall touch the truth"[36]

Thus, it could be said that mysticism sees the religion as a spiritual rector who is aware of the ups and downs of the world of being and also knows human capabilities and shortcomings and understands man as an imitation of divinity and tries to lead him toward the objectification of divine goals providing the wayfarer follows his prescriptions and divine etiquette.

The Essence of Religion in the Perspective of Islamic Mysticism
Triple Domains of Religion in Islamic Mysticism

Mystical religion leads the wayfarer forward step by step with regard to the telos of divine legislation which is assists man in objectification of the eternal end of creation and as human existence is essentially elastic and ever-moving, religion should manifest itself in various forms for different human existential stages. In such a way that if the man is in the stage of differentiation and diversities, religion manifests itself in a differentiating and diversified form and if the wayfarer is in the state of condensation, religion manifests itself in a more colorful form. As Holy Qur'an has also

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36   Ibn 'Arabi, *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiya.* (Beirut: Dār, Sadr).Vol 2, p. 382

spoken of two stages of prescriptions (condensation) and differentiation in the religion: "This is a book, whose verses are made decisive, then are they made plain, from the wise, all-aware" (11: 1). This means that divine legislation and being are totally harmonious with each other.

In mystical terminology, the manifestation of religion that belongs to the commonality and represents the ontological stage of diversity is *sharī'a* (divine law), the elites' manifestation is called *tarīqa* (divine path) and the Elite of elites' religion is *haqīqa* (truth) [37] and these three are different manifestations of a unique truth.[38]

Sharī'a: is the very jurisprudential prescriptions and divine laws that are based on a concatenation of truths and discretions.[39] And is a knowledge upon which the believers' deeds are corrected [40] and fortified [41]. Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi defines the *sharī'a* as follows: "*sharī'a* is imposing some particular actions and forbidding from some particular actions".[42] In some verses of *sharī'a* he describes it as a passage to higher stages [43] and indeed the same tradition that has been preached by holy messengers.[44]

Tarīqa: operationalization of the prescriptions of Sharī'a.[45] Mystics are of the belief that the discretions and prescriptions that are the basis of the legislation of Divine Law are like stations that lead the believer to the Divine Threshold.[46] As Divine Laws of *sharī'a* are different repercussions of Divine Word that lead the wayfarer to the Truth.

Haqīqa : this stage of religion is the fruit of the two previous stages and consists of deep mystical and Qur'anic monotheism that is manifested in esoteric knowledge of noumenal truth of being; that is to say, after appreciation of divine laws of *sharī'a* and acting upon the manners of *tarīqa*, the wayfarer ascends to the stage of truth where his heart's eye is lightened by the light of perennial knowledge. What the mystic finds in this stage is that there is an infinitely absolute and luminous being beyond all

37   Seyyed Heydar Amuli, *Jāme' al-Asrār wa Manba' al-Anwār (*Tehran: Elmi va Farhangi, 1368), p. 350 and also *Sharh Fusus* (Ibn Turkah), vol 1, p. 402

38   Seyed Heydar Amuli*, Asrār al-Sharī'a wa Atwār al-Tarīqa wa Anwār al-Haqīqa*, edited by Muhammad Khajavi, (Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, 1362), p. 5-6

39   Murtadha Muthahari, *An Introduction to Islamic Sciences* (Tehran: Sadra, 1368), p. 5-6.

40   Sharh Ta'arruf Li-Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf, vol 4, p. 1121.

41   Sharh Ta'arruf Li-Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf, vol 4, 1119.

42   Fushūs al-Hikām, p. 95.

43   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 562.

44   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 562.

45   Amuli, *Asrār al-Sharī'a*, p. 344.

46   Amuli, *Asrār al-Sharī'a* p. 345.

manifestations and ontological diversities to whom are reduced all differences and ontological diversities and are all the manifestations of an Omnipotent Oneness. This stage of *sharī'a* is an expression of the true oneness according to which the Lord is the only essential truth whose manifestations are the rest of beings and he is the Omnipresent and existentially independent as Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi defines the truth as: "*haqīqa*" [truth] is the understanding of oneness of existence and reducing the existed differences, contrasts and distinctions into that oneness."[47]

> "Truth is the manifestation of the True [as a Divine Name] beyond the veils of servitude and as the veils of ignorance are torn it becomes clear for you that the attribute of servitude is one and the same with the attribute of the True – for them – and for us the attribute of servitude is one and the same with the True itself – not the True as an attribute – then, the exoteric is creatures and the esoteric is the True, and the former has its origin in the latter."[48]

Mystics construe this monotheism as "existential monotheism" and tell that as the negation of diversified divinities is among the articles of faith in *sharī'a*, the negation of the possibility of various existents-by-themselves has been prescribed in higher levels of religion and as divine monotheism (the negation of diversified divinities) results in the decline of manifest polytheism, existential monotheism leads to disappearance of hidden polytheism,[49] then, as the polytheism is of two kinds, monotheism has also various levels the climax of which is the negation of existential diversity and insistence on the oneness of existence.

Seyyed Heydar Amuli describes the truth as seeing the diversity in unity and the unity in diversity, or in other terms, seeing the differentiation in gatheredness or the demonstration of the same and the negation of otherness or seeing the evil in the goodness or distinguishing the Creator from the creatures and the dissolution of the latter in the former and he believes that these definitions are all hinged upon the negation of otherness both objectively and subjectively and demonstration of the existence of God both objectively and subjectively.[50]

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47   Amuli, *Asrār al-Sharī'a,* p. 345
48   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, Vol 4, p. 385.
49   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-Asrār*, p. 74-75.
50   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-Asrār*, p. 74-75

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi has described the truth in poetic terms as follows:

> Verily the truth is eternally one/ but the reason defies oneness in thought/ then there is no second essence to be added to it/ rather diversity has its origin in the creation/ and the creation is nothing but one thing in its essence/ wherein there is no family, father and children.[51]

The relationship of triple spheres of religion (sameness with regard to the essence, otherness with regard to the emergence and manifestations) is the main question here. Whether they are three separable parts of religion that have no interrelation with each other? How would they be interrelated? And does this relationship prove the sublimity of one of them over the others? If it is so which one is the sublime?

Having taken the correspondence codification and evolution – as mentioned before – into account, it should be said that as evolution has an absolute truth and different emergences, codification also includes a unified truth and various manifestations and as the unique evolutionary truth was existence in the absolute sense, in divine law [*shar'*] this unique being is called God (Absolute Truth); a truth that manifests in three emergences of *haqīqa, sharī'a*, and *tarīqa*, and thus conceived, in both cases the difference is reduced to emergence; that is to say, wherever the presence of Divine Codifier is stronger the esoteric emergence of religion becomes apparent and wherever this presence is weaker the exoteric emergence of religion becomes ostensible. This absolute truth never would have become manifested in *sharī'a* as the codification of Divine Norms never could represent the Divine Codifier's intelligence in its perfect form. In the same spirit, Jandi regards religion as a unique equivocal phenomenon which has three manifestations:

> "They [whether *haqīqa, tarīqa* or *sharī'a*] are all different existential determinations (stages) and bounteous emergences that have been sprung into existence with regard to the subjects of emanation if not it is essentially a unique reality which is *the purely absolute existence* not anything else. Then, monotheism is the basic reality and the diversity merely belongs to emergences."[52]

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51   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 563.
52   Jandi, *Sharh Fushūs*, p. 267.

Mystics are of the opinion that *sharī'a* is principally one and the same with *tarīqa* and the latter is contextually identical with *haqīqa* because they are all have their origin in Absolute Truth/ Divine Legislator as its manifestations:

"Then *sharī'a* and *haqīqa* are both principally and contextually identical as *sharī'a* is haq it implies a *haqīqa*. The truth of *sharī'a* lies in what is descended in an intuition…. And it is both exoterically and esoterically identical."[53]

Muhyiddin explains this identity saying that *haqīqa* and *sharī'a* represent the same contents: "We understand that *haqīqa* beseeches the truth and it is not in contradiction with it, there is no truth that contrasts *sharī'a*, then sharī'a is one and the same with *haqīqa*."[54]

Thus conceived, these three are principally and contextually identical with respect to the truth they share each other: "*sharī'a, tarīqa* and *haqīqa* are identical in their truth."[55]. He calls this unique truth *the sacred* somewhere else.

Then, it becomes clear that these three domains are one and the same and their differences are understood in terms of the equivocality in emergence. As we mentioned before, the correspondence of codification and evolution shows us how to interpret the difference of the triple stages of religion. Due to the intensity of emergence in being, divine manifestations become multiplied and they are equivocally interrelated, it is the intensity of emergence that brings about the difference in *sharī'a*; wherever condensation is powerful, the esoteric layers of religion emerge and where the diversity comes to the throne it leads to the disclosure of exoteric layers of religion.

According to Muhyiddin, all people whether exotericists or esotericists act upon the *sharī'a* but the truth [*haqīqa*] is only revealed for the esotericists and it is just in this sense that *sharī'a* and *haqīqa* are interrelated.[56] Mustamalli Bukhari elaborates this issue in his exegesis of "*Al Ta'arruf*" as follows: "Since the secret (*haqīqa*] resides in the heart of true believer, only those who are chosen as the men of secret that adamantly abides by the rules of *sharī'a*. *Sharī'a* belongs to the exotericists and the secret is for the esotericists, *sharī'a* is a communal phenomenon and *haqīqa* is individual indeed."[57]

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53   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 563.
54   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 563.
55   Amuli, *Asrār al-sharī'a*, p. 312.
56   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 563.
57   Sharh Ta'arruf Li-Madhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf, p. 1143.

The author of *Alluma'* also believes that religion is essentially twofold, that is to say, it has an exoteric emergence along with an esoteric emergence; the former is manifested in beliefs, deeds, rites and rituals, and the latter becomes manifested in such cordial qualities as certainty, nearness and eagerness.[58]

It is indeed worth knowing that it is the very differentiated religion [*sharī'a*] that represents the path that will finally lead the believers to the *haqīqa*. Thus conceived, *tarīqa* is the spirit of *sharī'a* through which the wayfarers are lead to the final stage of *haqīqa*.[59]

Haqīqa : the Essence of Religion in Islamic Mysticism

Upon this conception of religion according to which its exoteric emergences are finally reduced to its esoteric emergences and ontological monotheism is the essence of religion and contains all inferior instants along with the perfections that they lack because *sharī'a* is the initial stage and *tarīqa* is the mediatory stage and the *haqīqa* is the final stage of religion and since the perfection of first stage is contingent upon the second and the perfection of the latter is in turn hinged upon the final stage, then, the most perfect stage of religion within which also lies its essence is the final and esoteric stage, i.e. *haqīqa*.[60]

Thus, *haqīqa* is the kernel of the kernel, *tarīqa* is the kernel and *sharī'a* is the crust.[61] This also becomes clear from the previous debates; as the protagonists of *sharī'a* are exotericists and the proponents of *tarīqa* are esotericists and the advocates of *haqīqa* are the elect of the elects.

Ontological meditations could also lead us to the same point of view because as the first and second determinations are ontologically more powerful, the stage of *haqīqa* is similarly more condensed and powerful than inferior stages and as in ontological perspective the stage of non-manifestedness is seen as the basis of the inferior instants in theology, esoteric domain is the building block of other domains and is the essence of religion.

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58 Abu Nasr al-Sarraj al-Thusi, *Alluma' fi'l Tashawwuf*, edit. Reynold Nicholson, p. 23.

59 Muhammad Ibn Hamzeh Ibn Fanari, *Mishbāh al-Uns*, edited by Muhammad Khajavi,(Tehran : Mola, 1374), p. 704.

60 Amuli, *Asrār al-Sharī'a*, p. 31.

61 Amuli, *Jāmi' al-Asrār*, p. 48.

"Haqīqa" as mystical monotheism symbolizes the individual unity because it parallelizes the authentic monism with the negation of ontological diversity. On the other hand, this stage is the stage of essential mystical monotheism; mystical existential monism (*tawhīd*) is divided into the unity of divine essence, attributes and acts, according to the latter all acts are finally reduced to divine acts and in unity of attributes all essences and attributes are reduced to divine essence and attributes.[62] These three unities are vertically interrelated and the unity of divine essence is the pinnacle of the other three unities:

> "Faded are all essences, attributes and actions in the eyes of a man who is eternally immersed in divine attributes and actions…. He sees his essence, attributes and actions lightened by divine essence, attributes and actions; since he has wholly been submerged in monotheism. Verily there is no higher spiritual stage than this stage for the wayfarer."[63]

Thus, haqīqa in its condensational sense implies the reduction of diversity of attributes, acts and essences into attributive, active and essential unity the higher stage of which is essential monism or the very *true and real unity* (*wahdah al haqīqah al haqīqīyah*).

"Haqīqa", the stage of condensation: although ontological monism (negation of ontological diversity) is taken as the core of theological monism (negation of theological diversity) but its crust is neither jettisonable nor eradicable. They believe that the exoteric monotheism should be retained along with the esoteric monotheism and they always speak of the middle course, of sobriety [64] and of true monotheism, in their view, it is an exhaustive monotheism:

> "True religion, immovable Islam and all-comprehensive essential monism implicate keeping oneself away from polytheism both exoterically and esoterically and the denial of ontological otherness both objectively and subjectively; that is to say, as mystics view the universe through the prism of oneness the observer and the observed the knower and the known appear the same to them."[65]

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62   Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār,* p. 151-153.
63   Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār,* p. 153.
64   Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, p. 88-89.
65   Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, p. 31.

Muhyiddin brings these two monotheisms (theological and ontological) and diversity and unity, or to put the matter more precisely, *sharī'a* (which represents the domain of diversity, differentiation and the kingdom of solid forms) and *haqīqa* (which represents pure unity) together in the *unity of multiplicity* and terms the people of this spiritual quality as "existential integrationists" and says that the Lord has decided an absolute solitude for them.[66]

Thus conceived, these triple manifestations should be understood in an integral fashion. Theological and ontological monotheisms are both founded upon the same principle. Thus the relationship of the shell and the essence of mystical religion become clear. In his book, Seyyed Heydar also elaborates on these three stages. Muhyiddin explains this by saying that the exoteric always exists in the esoteric and the latter is indeed beyond the former:

"There is no prescription in *sharī'a* be it obligatory or recommended that has not already been existed in the Unseen Realm."[67]

Then, the hierarchical configuration of the triple stages of *sharī'a*, *tarīqa* and *haqīqa* does not make them irrelevant to each other but they are the steps of the same ladder through which the believer touches heaven.[68] Thus, it should be announced very clearly that:

"The man who does not sanctify his outside, the Devil will spoil his inside with the mirage of truth."[69]
"*Sharī'a* is like the stone and *haqīqa* is like the gold…. Then *sharī'a* and *haqīqa* has that relationship…. This is to say that the purity of inside is hinged upon the sanctity of the outside."[70]

Shahid Muthahari depicts this hierarchical relationship in the logical interrelations of 'arif (mystic) [*haqīqa*], zahid (ascetic) [*tarīqa*] and 'abid (devout). Then no *haqīqa* is conceivable without *sharī'a* and *tarīqa*.[71]

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66   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-Asrār,* vol 1, p. 391.
67   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 1, p. 338.
68   Amuli, *Asrār al-Sharī'a*, p. 32.
69   Abu Bakar al-Kalabadzi, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf Li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, p. 1143.
70   Abu Bakar al-Kalabadzi, *Kitāb al-Ta'arruf Li-Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, p. 1120.
71   Murtadha Muthahari, *Introduction to Islamic Sciences*, (Tehran: Sadra, 1368), p. 154.

The Essence of Religiosity in the Perspective of Islamic Mysticism
Triple Domains of Religiosity in Islamic Mysticism

Religiosity in the perspective of Islamic mysticism is closely intertwined with mysticism's taking of man's role in religion. The mystics divide human religiosity into three stages according to his generic aptitude – not upon his individual dispositions; if the man – human genus – communicates Divine Word with the inhabitants of material world, he is in the stage of "messengerhood" and if he receives the sacred knowledge from heaven and is in contact with the realm of intelligence, he is in the stage of "prophethood", and if he is in direct contact with the Lord and the realm of divine knowledge, he is then in the stage of "*walāyah* [Vicegerency of God]".

Of course, as we have mentioned earlier, these statures are conceivable only for human genus – not for human individuals – and they have all been actualized in the case of Prophets and Imams, and the terms of "prophet" [*nabī*], "messenger" [*rasūl*], "Vicegerent" [*walī*] and "divine mission" [*bi'tsat*] are used to explain their stature:

Messengerhood: messengerhood indicates the difference of missions of messengers with regard to their target nations. Since the messenger brings the nation what they are in need of.[72] Sometimes, that divine mission is associated with legislation (*tashri*) and sometimes it is not so; and thus the messengers are divided into the possessors of constancy (arch-prophets) and non-constants.[73]

Having taken this definition of the messenger into account, it becomes clear that although the mission of messengers is designative and requires the immaculateness of messengerhood, what count as the point of similitude between immaculate messenger and normal males and changes this divine stature into a stage of religiosity for human genus, is the spirit of this stature that is the cordial relation with *God's people* (*khalqillah*); since messengerhood represents the exoteric side of religion all believers are potentially capable to ascend to this stage of religiosity.

Prophethood: prophet receives divine knowledge from the Lord through angels and transmits it to his people based upon their receptivity[74] and this kind of relationship with God's people needs divine legislations through which the prophet communicates perennial truths with his people. [75]

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72   Muthahari, *Introduction to Islamic Sciences*, p. 820.
73   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 1, p. 250.
74   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari, vol 1, p.166.
75   Amuli, *al al-Mukkadimāh min Kitāb Nad al-Nuqūd*, (Tehran: Tus,1367), p. 168.

Prophethood is essentially hinged upon prophet's relationship with the unseen realm of reason through angels; prophets travel through the Unseen realm and speak with the Lord via angels. Thus, normal non-immaculate males could transcend the terrestrial monde and enter into the angelic realm and spiritually become propheticized.

Walāyah: in mysticism epistemic existence of an entity precedes to its objective existence and it is said that the former is an emergence of divine knowledge. When it was within the realm of divine knowledge it had divine determinations and after leaving there it becomes humanized both qualitatively and attributively.[76] Now it is up to the true believers to redivinize their deeds and beliefs. In doing so, all dichotomies will disappear and all veils between beloved and lover will be torn away and once again they shall come together. Redivinization of human qualities and attributes is termed as walāyah :

> " Walāyah is the absorption of believer in divine essence; thus conceived, Wali is the one who has been thoroughly absorbed in the Lord. Absorption in this context does not signify total annihilation but it implies the divinization of human qualities of the believers; since there is a face for every believer in divine knowledge as has been mentioned in the following Qur'anic verse: "everyone has a face depicted by divine brush."[77] "This absorption here refers to the redevinization of human qualities and attributes which leads to his eternalization."[78]

Epistemic unification of the known and the knower and divinization of human qualities is the spirit of *walāyah*. Thus, *walī* sees the world through perennial prism and becomes aware of all secrets of creation.

After divinizing his qualities and attributes and being absorbed in divine essence the mystic finds that the only eternal being in the world is the Lord and all diversities will eventually perish and are just emergences of divine essence.[79]

Then, absorption in divine essence is the intuitive perception of absolute unity of the Lord and seeing the diversities perished in the view of eternal light:

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76   Tamhīd al-Qawā'id, p. 231 and Sharh Fusus Qaysari, vol 1, pp. 566-842.
77   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari, vol 1, p. 166.
78   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari p. 169.
79   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari, p. 158.

"When the wayfarer paces on the path of mystics who have touched the reality through spiritual purification and abstraction and sees the realities through the monistic prism of his eternal face and turns his face to this eternal light his qualities and attributes becomes redivinized and he becomes absorbed in divine essence."[80]

To this end, the mystic should travel through different existential stages and after redivinization of his qualities in his third voyage to return to the terrestrial monde. And finally in fourth voyage he shall invite his fellow men to keep his foot prints until ascending to the realm of perfection.[81]

Thus, *walāyah* gets started from the starting point of the second voyage when divine attributes are in their infinite and absolute state like divine essence itself and the wayfarers are absolutely open to divine attributes and they are distinguished with regard to the scope of their divine attributes which determines their quality of absorption and eternality. It is needless to say, this stage of religiosity belongs to human genus to which non-immaculate average people could ascend by the aid of perfect man.

"This knowledge does exclusively belong to the Last Prophet and none of the previous prophets have the merit to receive it but the Last Prophet."[82]

The Relationship of Stages of Religiosity (Identity with regard to the Context, Otherness with regard to Emergence)

According to mystical doctrines, the prophet could not rationally lead the world only with his knowledge of the realm of reason; but it is his immediate knowledge of eternal truths that helps him to manage the affairs of his people. Since in Islamic mysticism man is a superior being than angels and where the latter is forbidden to go, the truth of stature of perfect man becomes clear. Being satisfied with the angelic revealed truths, then, is not sufficient for the vicegerent of God.[83]

In Islamic mysticism there is a mediatory stage between the realm of reason (angelic realm) and divine essence entitled the realm of Allah that

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80   Tamhīd al-Qawāʾid, p. 435.
81   Tamhīd al-Qawāʾid, p. 169-170.
82   Fushūs al-Hikam, p. 262.
83   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari, vol 1, p. 154.

the angels are not allowed to enter due to their existential weakness while man has the capacity to do so. To state the matter otherwise, prophet owes his eternity to divine knowledge (the realm of Allah). Thus, prophet is *walī* before being sent to his people:

> "Prophets are the *walī*s, who have been absorbed in divine essence and eternalized by the Lord's will and transmit the truths of the Unseen to their people and thus this stature (prophethood) is a divine bounty that is only given to chosen people and is not a humanly acquired quality."[84]

In his elaboration of the difference of prophets and *walīs*, Ibn ʿArabi argues that prophets are among the *walīs* who have been chosen by the Lord to divine service; their nearness to the Lord is direct effect of their own essential aptitude and praying due to the stature of *walāyah*. Although the stature and kudos of prophets is higher and more magnificent than *walīs* but this superiority is still based on strongest *walāyah* of prophets and thus these two statures have their origin in the same head-fountain and their difference is equivocal.[85]

Thus, it becomes clear that *risālah*, *nubuwwah* and *walāyah* are mutually intertwined in an equivocal fashion as they reveal different sides of the same reality;[86] that is to say, *walāyah* is the strongest and most esoteric aspect of religiosity as *nubuwwah* is its esoteric aspect and so *risālah* is the exoteric aspect:[87]

> "Indeed, *walāyah* is the esoteric side of *nubuwwah* in the same sense that the latter is the exoteric side of *risālah*. And *nubuwwah* is people's guidance through divine legislations. These three statures are different ontological emergences of the same truth. And this is the reason why it is said that *walāyah* only belongs to the Lord and Holy Prophet's household."[88]

Walāyah is indeed the heart of *nubuwwah* and true stature of the perfect man and since the latter and *risālah* both belong to terrestrial monde they will disappear as the material world becomes perished; while *walāyah* is

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84   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari, p. 169.
85   Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyah, vol 2, p. 53.
86   Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-asrār*, p. 385.
87   Sharh Fusūs Qaysari, vol, 1, p. 163.
88   Amuli, *al-Mukkadimāh min Kitāb Nad al-Nuqūd*, p. 403-404.

a stature that is primordially eternal. Then, *walāyah* is the true stature of perfect man.[89]

> "And verily you have known that the exoteric owes its total being to the esoteric."[90]

According to these realities, mystics reiterate that *walāyah* is superior to *nubuwwah* and the latter is also superior to *risālah* as they are different emergences of religiosity:

> "*Walāyah* is superior to *nubuwwah* and the latter is superior to *risālah* as they are hierarchically formatted in exoteric/esoteric fashion."[91]

Walāyah as the Essence of Religiosity in Islamic Mysticism

It is clear that *walāyah* is a universal stature that is attainable for all human individuals and thus it is counted as the essence of religiosity although it is a very harsh path but there are strong willed wayfarers that pace it thoroughly.

Walāyah: eternity after absorption: *walāyah* is the stature of absorption of servant in divine essence which is termed as the stature of integration the possessor of which is called True Monotheist:

> "If the mystic bring these two stages – unity and diversity – together without neglecting one for the other, he shall become true monotheist."[92]

Muhyiddin has also described the stature of true monotheism in terms of integration.[93]

> "Perfect Man should be present in every single moment of being like the Lord and this happens through the third spiritual voyage during which the mystic returns to the people from the Truth by Truth and thus

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89 Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, p. 99-100.
90 Sharh Fusūs Qaysari, vol 1, pp. 166-167.
91 Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, p. 385.
92 Amuli, *Jāmiʿ al-Asrār*, p. 116.
93 *Naqd al-Nushūsh fi Sharh Naqsh al-Fushūsh*, p. 142.

human perfection and true certainty becomes realized. Thus conceived, the Last and the First are same both semantically and ontologically as they orchestrate the same symphony."[94]

Walāyah and True Certainty: it is needless to say that this stage of religiosity is not merely verbal and subjective but it needs serious effort and redivinization of human qualities:

"This stature [*walāyah*] is the intuition of divine essence in the perspective of unity and diversity and integration and disintegration."[95]

Probing into the Relationship of the Essence of Religion and the Essence of Religiosity Correspondence between the Stages of Religion and the Stages of Religiosity

After studying the essence of religion and its highest stage, i.e. *haqīqa*, and uncovering the essence of religiosity, i.e. *walāyah*, now we are to conduct a comparative analysis of their similarities to know whether there is a logical relationship between the highest stage of religion and loftiest stature of religiosity?

As we have mentioned earlier, religion has three stages of *sharī'a*, *tarīqa* and *haqīqa* and religiosity consists of the triple statures of *risālah*, *nubuwwah* and *walāyah*. Mystics hold that these stages are essentially interrelated. That is to say, prophets who has arrive to the stature of *walāyah* before his prophecy and has now been sent to his people has his own *sharī'a* with respect to his *risālah*, has his own *tarīqa* with respect to his *nubuwwah* and finally has his own *haqīqa* with respect to his *walāyah*.[96] And the prophet who has not yet been delegated has his own *tarīqa* with respect to his prophecy and also has his own *haqīqa* with respect to his *walāyah* and in the same manner the *walī* who does not have *risālah* and *nubuwwah* only expresses the *haqīqa*.

"Prophet and messenger has the right to exoterically manipulate the people upon the laws of *sharī'a* and *walī* has the same right but esoterically."[97]

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94   Sharh Fushūs Qaysari, vol 1, p. 143.
95   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 115.
96   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 346 and 367.
97   Amuli, *al-Mukkadimāh min Kitāb Nad al-Nuqūd*, p. 168.

To put the matter more explicitly, we have elaborated on the spirit of each one of them below:

> Identity in Principle and Otherness in Emergences: As the triple stages of religion are ontologically identical and are different in emergences the three statures of religiosity are also essentially identical and are different emergences of the same truth. In religiosity, *walāyah* is the principle and origin of *nubuwwah* and *risālah*. And as we have mentioned before, in both religion and religiosity the people of integration are chosen ones, indeed:
>
> "It is not so that the possessors of theological monotheism –prophets– and the possessors of ontological monotheism –*walīs*--, those who are of *walāyah*–are strange to their monotheisms; since they simultaneously possess both of them. It should be said that the monotheism that they preach only represents the state of their mission. The first delegation – theological monotheism – is for the average people and the second delegation is dedicated to the chosen people. Although the possessors of *walāyah* are seemingly inviting the people to theological monotheism but their delegation is aimed at ontological monotheism. Integration as the target quality of both delegations requires both kinds of monotheisms and the addresses of them."[98]

Correspondence of ontological realms: *sharī'a* belongs to the terrestrial, *tarīqa* belongs to the angelic realm and *haqīqa* belongs to the realm of Allah. While *risālah*, *nubuwwah* and *walāyah* are related with the material world, the angelic realm and the divine realm. Thus, the correspondence of these triple stages becomes clear upon the logical relation of "equality of equals". Despite their semantic differences, these stages are correspondent:

> "We are to demonstrate that messengers, prophets and the possessors of *walāyah* are simultaneously vigilant toward *sharī'a*, *tarīqa* and *haqīqa* as they are three stations in the path that mystics paces on to reach the perfection."[99]

Walāyah and *haqīqa*: These both are void of otherness as they do not reside in the realm of diversity. They both represent the absolute unity of realm of Allah. Thus conceived, *haqīqa* is the matter and *walāyah* is its

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98   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 87-88.
99   Amuli, *Jāmi' al-asrār*, p. 367.

intuition. It is in this sense that *walāyah* is tributary to *haqīqa*. *Walāyah* is the intuition of noumenal truth which absorbs the intuitor in divine essence and eternalizes him:

> "When the wayfarer becomes absorbed in divine essence he ascends to the stage of eternity wherein there is no sign of diversity."[100]

As if *walāyah* is unification with *haqīqa* or the very intuition of true unity of the stage of *haqīqa*, then, true unity is materially *haqīqa* and is intuitively *walāyah*, and the essences of religion and religiosity not only are correspondent but they are unified, since they are both hinged upon true and real unity. To put the matter differently, the intuition of divine knowledge at the final stage of second voyage shall be resulted in the absorption of the wayfarer in divine essence and his eternity. Thus, this absorption and eternity is intuitive. Finally, it should be said that the spirit of *walāyah* and *haqīqa* is the absolute unity of divine essence. And true wayfarer plays the role of a mirror that reflects the absolute unity of the Lord in an equivocal manner.

Conclusion

Although the problematic of "essence and shell of religion" is occidental in its origin but we are able find precise analyses of it in mystical doctrines; this requires correct understanding of theoretical principles of Islamic mysticism. According to Islamic mysticism, religion and religiosity each have their own independent reality but they are deeply interwoven.

"Religion" has an absolute reality with triple emergences of *sharī'a*, *tarīqa* and *haqīqa*. *Sharī'a* is a set of divine codes that address average minds. *Tarīqa* is a set of moral etiquette that are driven from *sharī'a* for the chosen believers and *haqīqa* represents the absolute unity of divine essence. These triple manifestations are different emergences of the same truth. Their relationship is fathomed in terms of exoteric/esoteric relation. These are essentially intertwined. This relationship is best understood when we compare between the realm of evolution and the realm of codification. *Haqīqat* as the essential unity of divine essence belongs to the realm of Allah where all diversities are reduced to unity in great name of Allah.

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100 Amuli, *Jāmi' al-asrār,* p.367.

"Religiosity" is an absolute reality with triple emergences of *risālah*, *nubuwwah* and *walāyah*. *Walāyah* is direct intuition of divine essence and belongs to Perfect Man. *Nubuwwah* is an angelically mediated relation of the prophet with the Lord that could be appropriated as *risālah* if it takes a particular form for special delegation. The relationship of these triple emergences is exoteric/esoteric relation. Thus, the essence of religiosity is *walāyah*.

What happens in the stage of *walāyah* is the absorption of wayfarer in divine essence and his eternity by divine essence. The possessor of *walāyah* redivines himself both qualitatively and attributively. That is to say, he sees the creation through the prism of unity. This intuition has its origin in the oneness of divine name of Allah where there is no sign of diversity. After being united with the Divine Name of Allah, the wayfarer returns to his people to communicate eternal truths to them. Thus, religiosity could be interpreted in an ontological manner. Although *walāyah* is the highest stage of all stages of religiosity, these stages are mutually dependent upon each other. *Walāyah* is divine aspect of religiosity as *nubuwwah* is its angelic side, and *risālah* is its terrestrial face.

Thus, triple stages of religion and religiosity are mutually correspondent. *Walāyah* is cordial intuition of *haqīqa*, *sharī'a* is the contents of the *risālah* of messengers, and *tarīqa* is the quality of prophethood in his relation with the angelic realm. These divisions become clarified through ontological contemplations. The realm of *haqīqa* is the universal name of Allah, *tarīqa* and *nubuwwah* belong to the angelic realm, and *sharī'a* and *risālah* belong to the terrestrial. Although religion and religiosity are different categories, they are defined in relation to each other.

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