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THE STUDY OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION IN SEYYED HOSEIN NASR'S WORKS AND COMPARING IT WITH SOME CURRENT DEFINITIONS

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to probe the concept of spiritual education in Seyyed Hosein Nasr's thoughts and to compare it with current definitions of the concept. This study is done through the qualitative method called transcendental analysis. Therefore, the concept is conceptualized through investigating and eliciting the requisite assumptions from Nasr's philosophical approach. Findings show that in Nasr's thoughts, spiritual education is the process of actualizing all the innate potentialities of a human being as a whole towards his or her monotheistic nature through developing knowledge, love, righteous actions and acquiring virtues to transcend his or her existential layers to train his or her spirit, to know the Ultimate Reality and to return to his or her prototype in God. It is acquirable by taking action based on a revealed religion. The aim of spiritual education is to know the Ultimate Reality intuitively. Compared to current definitions, the said concept is more similar to that of Carr's and Tabatabaie's views while it is different from Miller, Duff and Bigger's perspectives.

Keywords: Spirituality, Spiritual education, Conceptual comparison, Seyyed Hosein Nasr.

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Introduction

The human is a multi-dimensional being and has wonderful potentialities. This wonder of creation achieves his or her complete propensity when all aspects of his or her being are paid attention to and when the ground for educating all his or her capacities and potentialities is prepared. In other words, he or she should be looked at as a whole and be educated as he or she ought to.

In today's society, considering that the context we live in is affected by modernism and its ideologies such as humanism, scientism, empiricism, rationalism, secularism, materialism, reductionism and quantity domination, human beings are tearing their nature into pieces and destroying the opportunities. These influences have affected human beings and many of society's institutions particularly education, and has caused ignorance and negligence of some human aspects. It has caused chaos in human thought and behaviour that leads to negative consequences such as psychological disorder, suicide, murder, anxiety, family collapse, lifestyle change and moral and social disorder.

If we contemplate for a moment, we realize that the main cause of the aforementioned problems is the fact that human beings have lost the value of spirituality. One who presumes a meaning for his or her existence based on spirituality can live in any condition. Nasr thinks that the answer to some of the above problems is spiritualism. He says that we should emphasize the importance of authentic spirituality that deals with the inward dimension of religion. He thinks that the answer to some of the problems can be found only in Sufism. If religion is reduced to its skin and external dimension and we ignore its core or essence, then many questions would remain unanswered for its adherents, and there will arise the danger of people leaving their religion such as is happening in the modernized West.⁴ Therefore, there needs to be a serious endeavour to enhance spirituality and spiritual education for everyone in every society and country in the world.

The most fundamental institution of every society is education. So it is this institution's duty to pay serious attention to spiritual

⁴ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *In Search of the Sacred* (USA: Praeger, 2010), 250.

education, but it needs to delve into philosophy or philosophies of spiritual education and curriculum before taking action. Developing such philosophies and curriculum needs theoretical, normative and analytical studies to avoid superficial outcomes, inefficiencies and failures in the process of taking action.

Considering the points mentioned above, this study seeks to conceptualize spiritual education in the thoughts of Seyyed Hosein Nasr, a traditionalist philosopher who like other traditionalists pays special attention to religion, spirituality, the sacred, orthodoxy, Perennial philosophy, criticism of modernism, art and the transcendental unity of revealed religions. He has deep spiritual comprehension of and insights into theory and practice. Thence, the investigated concept is compared with current definitions of spiritual education to know the similarities and differences.

Research Method

The study was conducted using the qualitative method called transcendental analysis. Bagheri writes that this method is carried out in two phases: description and determination of requisite conditions. In the first phase, a phenomenon is described. The phenomenon is such that it can be inevitably experienced (unavoidably). In other words, the description of the phenomenon is a statement that we believe in and is self-evident. In the second phase, a question is posed: what requisite condition or conditions do we need to have the descriptive phenomenon?⁵

Spiritual Education Literature

In an article Ashari, Bagheri Noaparast and Hoseini have concluded that in Mohammad Hosein Tabatabaie's thoughts, spiritual education is the process of soul abstraction in accordance with human Divine nature to reinforce disposition, expand knowledge and to take action in congruence with it.⁶

⁵ Khosro Bagheri Noaparast, *Approaches and Methods in Philosophy of Education* (Tehran: Institute of Social and Cultural Studies, 2010), 137.

⁶ Zahra Asharie, Khosro Bagheri & Afzalosadat Hoseini, "An Analysis of the Concept, Principles and Goals of Spiritual Education in Allameh Tabatabaie's Thought," *Biquarterly Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 15 (2012): 89-112.

In discussing the above concept, Michael Hand, a professor of philosophy of education in the school of education University of Birmingham who has published books and articles on education, the nature and aims of religious education, presents diverse definitions namely: 1. education based on spiritual principles; 2. education of the human spirit; 3. education in a spiritual activity; and 4. education in a spiritual disposition. He states two approaches in spiritual education namely, Carr's and Miller's approaches. He attributes the second definition to Miller and considers the other three as Carr's.⁷

a. Spiritual education as teaching truth and training spiritual virtues

Carr considers spiritual education as a distinctive part of education that is to teach truth and train virtues. Therefore, there are both theoretical and practical parts which are interrelated. In other words, any spiritual activity results from the awareness of a series of principles and spiritual truths. Hence, education in a spiritual disposition and education in spiritual activity that were mentioned earlier are realized in the context of such spiritual truth and principles. Therefore, the student should not only learn the cognitive prerequisites, but also internalize them. Making his or her dispositions divine-like and effecting truth on the quality of his or her spiritual experiences and activities, the student consciously examines and traverses different ways of communicating with God specifically by prayer.

Carr thinks that the basic step for understanding the nature of spiritual education is to determine that this concept considers what are the distinctive forms of knowledge and which are the special series of dispositions. Spiritual truth focuses on an aspect of human life that is metaphysical, eternal and enduring, and truths such as 'man does not live by bread alone' or 'no man can serve two masters'. Moreover, in Carr's view, spiritual principles are those that are originated from a (quite) divine goal whether explicitly or implicitly. These principles are formed to actualize human beings. In

⁷ Michael Hand, "The Meaning of Spiritual Education," *Oxford Review of Education* 29, no. 3 (2003): 399-401.

his view, it is better to pursue the redemption of our souls before seeking and achieving material goals.⁸

According to Carr, one who considers such principles in his or her life and traverses his or her life to achieve divinely set goals and pursues a spiritual life that is effective and flourishing by the formation of personality features, habits and spiritual dispositions and ventures in some examples of virtues⁹ is experiencing education in a spiritual disposition.

Spiritual education involves activities that should be taught to students. Carr categorizes these activities as contemplative and devotional. He does not consider learning these activities necessarily based on the students' religious presuppositions. Even those who do not have religious beliefs learn different forms of prayer and supplication in this form of spiritual education. Therefore, they achieve a sympathetic understanding of religious feelings. They can hear and experience God's voice or a transcendental being's voice in the mysterious silence among the voices of this world.¹⁰

b. Spiritual education as training of the human spirit

Miller is a curriculum theoretician who emphasizes on paying attention to spirituality in the curriculum. When he writes about spirituality, he means the importance of the human spirit which he defines generally. In his view, the spirit is the living force and deep energy that gives meaning and direction to life. Spirit denial is the denial of an essential component in our existence.¹¹ Miller's proposed principles and methods are to exhilarate all the elements engaged in education and in this he does not consider spiritual education as a separate domain in education. In his view, the teachers, students, schools, classrooms, courses and teaching methods should have energy and spirit.

⁸ David Carr, "Rival Conceptions of Spiritual Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 30, no. 1 (1996): 158-178.

⁹ Hand, "The Meaning of Spiritual Education," 399-401.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ John P Miller, *Education and the Soul: Toward a Spiritual Curriculum* (Tehran: Thought Metacognitive Publication, 2001), 12.

To know more about Miller's views on spiritual education, it is important to pay attention to his proposed methods. Some of his proposed methods are as follows: beauty of classroom and school environment; effective non-speech communication in teaching; giving priority to and using art among the courses such as theater, music, writing fictions and poetry; teaching spiritual activities such as contemplation; recording feelings, wishes and dreams. These methods make the educational environment delightful and enforces the student's inward life. Miller believes that in the current education system focused on quantitative and logical thinking, students' inner qualities are ignored. The change that the exhilarating education is looking for is to adjust and harmonize between the outward and inward qualities of the students. Prioritizing Miller's view point, Hand considers training the emotional aspect of the spirit as a more suitable definition of spiritual education.¹²

Duff considers promoting the quality of student's mind and heart as a better definition of spiritual education. In this way, the whole personality of the student is engaged and leads to the adjustment and harmony among the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions. In his view point, spiritual practices are not simply a part of a curriculum's domain, but they can be used in all dimensions of learning.¹³

Another thinker in this field is Stephen Bigger who writes about secular spiritual education. In his conceptual discussion, he presents spiritual education as personal understanding at its deepest level. He describes a new secular model of rational spiritual education in which deep personal growth is viewed as the core process of not only spiritual education, but also of general education at its finest. In his view point, spiritual development is a secular, holistic, deep rooted yet dynamic form of consciousness and deep personal growth which integrates our understanding. Spiritual education is in a real sense education done properly, embracing the whole being of the learner. Religion can be a helpful staging post but can also become a prison which, by dogmatism, inhibits personal

¹² Hand, "The Meaning of Spiritual Education," 399-401.

¹³ Lois Duff, "Spiritual Development and Education: A Contemplative View." *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8, no. 3 (2003): 227-237.

growth. Today we need deep and dynamic integrative thinking as food for new growth and renewal. He writes that global as well as personal well-being depends upon it.¹⁴

Nasr's Anthropological Foundations

To conceptualize spiritual education in Nasr's thoughts, we used his anthropological foundations. In his view which is a traditionalist one, human being is a whole composed of body, soul and spirit.¹⁵ These three dimensions have a hierarchical order and each upper dimension governs the lower ones.¹⁶ Each of these dimensions have some layers as well.

The first existential dimension of the human is his or her body. According to Sufi metaphysics, we have multiple bodies within us, each with its own faculties. At first, we have a reality on the corporeal level, which is the most outward aspect of our being. Above that level we have a psychological reality, which itself partakes of many grades. Then we have an imaginal faculty corresponding to the imaginal level of cosmic existence, which is related to the world of the psyche; then a mind, which is a reflection of the intellect; then the intellect itself (identified in essence and on the highest level with spirit) on the human level with several degrees and again corresponding to the cosmic and also metacosmic intelligible orders. Finally, at the center of our being resides the Divine, the Self of all selves. Each body possesses its own faculties of knowing in the same way that our physical body possesses the five external senses. Except for the gross, physical body, all of the other bodies are immortal and survive death.¹⁷

Now it is time to discuss the second dimension of man which is the soul. We will first deal with its nature. In Rahmati's words, Nasr believes that the soul, as the medial dimension of the human,

¹⁴ Stephen Bigger, "Secular Spiritual Education?" *Educational Features*, 1, no. 1 (2008): 60-68.

¹⁵ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *The Need for Sacred Knowledge* (UK: COZON Press, Ltd, 1993), 172.

¹⁶ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth* (New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2008), 72.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

has a dual nature not only ontologically, but also morally and spiritually. Ontologically, it is not purely material nor purely abstract. It corresponds with the imaginal world in correspondence to the cosmic dimensions. Therefore, it correlates the physical dimension with the spiritual (intellectual) one. Morally and spiritually, willpower and volition belongs to this dimension. For that reason, there are infinite potentialities available to human beings in attempting to activate them. The soul can be empowered by diligence and regular teachings not only to rule its body, but also to govern other bodies and to take possession of them. Although this capability of the soul is undeniable, it does not prove any spiritual perfection in human beings.¹⁸

Just like the body, the soul or *nafs* has several grades. As ordinarily understood, the *nafs* is the source of limitation, passion and downward movement, the source of all that makes human beings selfish and self-centered. This *nafs* which is called the *al-nafs al-ammārah*,¹⁹ following the terminology of the Qur'ān, must be transfigured through death and purgation. It must be controlled by the higher self. With the help of the spirit the *al-nafs al-ammārah* becomes transformed into the *al-nafs al-lawwāmah*,²⁰ gaining greater awareness of its own nature, an awareness that is made possible through the transmutation of its substance. In the further stage of inner alchemical transmutation, the *nafs al-lawwāmah* becomes transformed to the *al-nafs al-mutma`innah*,²¹ attaining a state in which it can gain knowledge with certainty and repose in peace because it has discovered its own center, which is the Self. Finally, according to certain Sufis, the *al-nafs al-mutma`innah* becomes transferred into the *nafs al-radiyah*,²² which has attained such perfection that it has now become worthy of being the perfect bride of the Spirit, thus returning to its Lord, as the Qur'ān asserts,²³

¹⁸ Seyyed Hosien Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, trans. Enshāallah Rahmati, (Tehran: Sophia, 2013), 72.

¹⁹ the soul which inspires evil

²⁰ the blaming soul

²¹ the soul at peace

²² the satisfied soul

²³ Qur'ān, *Fajr*, 89: 28.

and finally realizing the Self through its own annihilation (*fanā'*) and subsequent subsistence (*baqā'*) in God.²⁴

The soul, the inner dimension of human which is between the body and the spirit corresponds to the imaginal world. In Nasr's view, in itself it does not have much value and its value is related to the spirit and finally it cannot be separated from the world either. In a mystical way, this dimension ultimately takes all its credit from the Spirit that is the "Divine's Blow" in man's existence, it is by transcending the soul and traversing into the spirit's realm that becoming closer to the Truth and the Real (*al-Hagg*) is possible.

Nasr believes that in Islamic cosmology, spirit is at the core of cosmic existence and belongs to the Divine world.²⁵ Therefore, the third and the last existential dimension of the human being that his or her being depends on it was discussed. It is evident that against materialistic views, Nasr gives a Divine dimension to spirit and considers it as the *Divine Blow* that is inherent in human existence. To train this core existential dimension, it is essential to transcend the lower layers to reach this core that has absolute abstraction of light and to be illuminated with its light.

Another assumption in Nasr's anthropology is the term *fitrah*²⁶ which is very important in the conceptualization of spiritual education. In his view, in the inward dimension of the human being exists the immutable and permanent substance of man's nature. The situation of this permanent nature which the human being carries within himself or herself - the Real in its metaphysical sense - has never and will never be altered.²⁷ Clarifying Nasr's anthropological foundations, it is time to present his views on spirituality.

Nasr's Views on Spirituality

Nasr believes that the word *spirituality* in its current use, not the Latin term from which it derives, is a modern term. As far as his own

²⁴ Nasr, *The Need for Sacred Knowledge*, 11.

²⁵ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1989), 54.

²⁶ nature

²⁷ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (New York: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd, 1972), 148.

study has shown, the term *spirituality* as it is used today began to be employed by French Catholic theologians in the mid-nineteenth century and then crept into English. We do not find the use of this term as we now understand it earlier than the nineteenth century. Today it denotes for many people precisely those elements of religion which have been forgotten in the West and which therefore have come to be identified wrongly with spirituality as distinct from religion. From his point of view, which is always of course a traditional one, there is no spirituality without religion. There is no way of reaching the spirit without choosing a path which God has chosen for us, and that means religion (*religio*). Therefore, the reason he is using both words is not for the sake of expediency, but to emphasize that he means to include a reality which encompasses both spirituality and religion, in the current understanding of these terms, although traditionally the term *religion* would suffice, since in its full sense it includes all that is understood by spirituality today.²⁸ As opposed to non-religious or secular spiritualities, Nasr has a religious view of spirituality.

The spirituality that Nasr speaks about considers the inner dimension of religion that is spiritual way (*tariqah*) and is in the framework of religious mysticism, specifically Sufism (*tasawof*). In this realm, Nasr believes that Sufism as a spiritual way, is a vast reality that provides the means for those who follow its tenets to reach the “Garden of Truth”. It is the path to the Garden and, on the highest level and in its inner reality, the “content” of the Garden as well as the means of reaching the presence of the Gardener.²⁹ But we should not ignore the fact that he considers spirituality to be relevant to the external world as well.

He states that in his perspective there is an element of spirituality even at the exoteric dimension of religion and also of virgin nature, because there is nothing in the world which by the very fact that it exists does not reflect the Source of all existence. The “perfume” of spirituality can be found everywhere, especially in sacred rites and institutions even of the outward kind. However,

²⁸ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *The Essential Seyyed Hosein Nasr* (Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc. 2007), 29.

²⁹ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, xv.

when it comes to human life, especially religious life, he identifies spirituality more than anything else with the inward or the esoteric dimension. As he says there is an element of spirituality even in the exoteric dimension of religion.³⁰ Furthermore, he says that spirituality has to do with the inner aspect of things, with the inward and with the exoteric. He thinks that spirituality identifies itself primarily with the inward as well as with the reflection of the inward dimension on the outward level of reality.³¹

In his view, spirituality in itself is what the word itself reveals, that is, to be in contact with the world of Spirit, which transcends all particularities of the human state and of the material world. The ultimate goal of spirituality is really the same whether one speaks of God or *nīrvānā*. Everything else, including love or universality, flows from the Ultimate Reality/Truth.³² Now that the concepts of anthropology and spirituality from his point of view have been clarified, it is time to inquire into his views on spiritual education.

Basic Principles of Spiritual Education in Nasr's Views

Against the previous discussion, the question that is raised is how is the fulfillment and union with the Ultimate Reality made possible? The first step for spiritual attainment is self-knowledge. In Nasr's words, the first step toward perfection is the awareness of one's limitations.³³ Awakening from the sleep of forgetfulness, which is the necessary condition for following the path, brings about the realization that the world we usually take as being the sole reality is itself a dream.³⁴

Another precondition to follow the path to God is introspection which leads to God awareness. Nasr says that human beings should focus his or her mind on his or her inward self and have inner concentration, because he can become aware of God only by this inward concentration and contemplation.³⁵

³⁰ Nasr, *In Search of the Sacred*, 171.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, 168.

³³ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 267.

³⁴ Ibid, 95.

³⁵ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 199.

In Nasr's thoughts, crossing from outward to inward, from symbol to the symbolized truth, is possible through Sufism which is considered as Islamic mysticism *Tariqah* and the intrinsic dimension of religion. In his words, Sufism as a way of spiritual realization and the attainment of sanctity and gnosis is an intrinsic aspect of the Islamic Revelation of which it is in fact the heart and inner, or esoteric, dimension.³⁶ He considers Islam as a prerequisite condition to follow Sufism seriously,³⁷ but this phase is only sufficient and it is essential to attain faith. Therefore, the spiritual education process is impossible without gaining knowledge of and practicing the religious rituals and the realization of their purpose. In his view, only true through mysticism with a Divine origin and in the framework of a revealed religion can we attain the mystical goals of self-realization.³⁸

Nasr considers religion to have different layers just like human beings and the universe. The first and the most outward layer is the *Shariah*; the next layer is *Tariqah*; and the most inward layer is the *Haqiqah* (Truth). In Islam, some Muslim mystics, especially *Shadheliyah* masters, use the geometrical allegory of circle to explain these three dimensions of Islam and to present the importance of *Tariqah*. The circle's circumference is the symbol for the *Shariah* and all Muslims are on the circumference simply by accepting the outward dimension of religion and acting according to the *Shariah*. Being in any point on the circumference, they have an equal distance from the center of the circle which is the symbol for Truth. However, the circumference (*Shariah*) should not be considered absolute. The whole importance of the circumference is to reach the center. The ultimate aim is to reach the center which is the Truth.³⁹

Nasr considers that *Shariah* without *Tariqah* would be like a body without a soul, and *Tariqah* without *Shariah* would be devoid

³⁶ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (New York: Caravan Books, 1997), 83.

³⁷ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 105.

³⁸ Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 58.

³⁹ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 53-54.

of an external support and simply could not subsist and manifest itself in the world.⁴⁰

There are three basic components in Nasr's Sufism: human nature, spiritual virtues and the One God. He believes that only by these three elements is the knowledge of God attained and man can become the manifestation of His Names and Attributes. The aim of the spiritual way is the One God and its source is the human being in his or her worldly grade, and *Tariqah* unites him or her to the One God through training spiritual virtues and special teachings.⁴¹

In Nasr's view, it is impossible to understand metaphysical realities without attaining virtues for truth belongs to God not to human beings. He says we can only realize truth by attaining virtues.⁴² He emphasizes that without the spiritual virtues it is not possible to realize the Truth- the aim of spiritual education- in one's life and in the substance of one's soul.⁴³

Nasr's point of view is that virtue as understood in Sufism is not simply moral virtue but rather spiritual virtue with noetic and existential dimensions. For example, humility is the metaphysical awareness that before the Absolute we are nothing and that the neighbour is incomplete in the same way as we are, and that even in his or her incompleteness possesses existence which comes from God and before which we must have an attitude of humility.⁴⁴

In Nasr's thoughts, moral purification is the way to take part in and share with the Truth. In this process, firstly the human being's existence should be purified from vices. Therefore, the first step of moral purification is the removal of the soul's vices. Nasr writes that the human being is imprisoned by his or her own passions which usually prevent the intelligence within him or her from functioning in its normal fashion according to human's primordial nature, or what Islam calls *al-fītrah*.⁴⁵ In another work he says that the duty of a *faqīr*, or one who is traversing the spiritual way, is to remove the

⁴⁰ Seyyed Hosein Nasr, *Ideal and Realities of Islam* (Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc. 2000), 18.

⁴¹ Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 60-61.

⁴² Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 65.

⁴³ Nasr, *Ideal and Realities of Islam*, 134.

⁴⁴ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 126.

⁴⁵ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 269.

vices that prevent the virtues from manifesting themselves in the soul.⁴⁶ In his view in order to gain the virtue of humility we must overcome the vice of pride, and in order to be embellished with the virtue of truthfulness we must stop being hypocrites and remove from ourselves the vice of deceitfulness.⁴⁷

The next step is decorating the soul with the virtues. Nasr emphasizes on three virtues which characterize the spiritual life as such namely, humility, charity and truthfulness, which are in essence the same virtues that characterize the Prophet's character. Humility as a spiritual virtue means to realize that God is everything and we are nothing.⁴⁸

The second virtue is charity. It is, in fact, concerned not only with the external act and the moral attitude connected with it but also, and most of all, with a state of being. Spiritual charity is an expansion (*inbisāt*) through which a human realizes his or her oneness with all beings, including not only human beings but also other creatures.⁴⁹

The most important virtue is truthfulness which is the summit of the other two virtues and is based on them. Therefore, the two virtues of humility and charity are the prerequisite of the virtue of truthfulness which Nasr considers as the crowning virtue. It is like the apex of a triangle whose other angles are humility and charity; the attainment of truthfulness in fact requires both of these other virtues.⁵⁰

Nasr believes that by attaining truthfulness the human being can see things as they are, in their true nature which does not veil but reveals the Divine. It means to see God everywhere. Truthfulness or sincerity is, therefore, the virtue by means of which the human being realizes unity or *Tawhīd* and lives in the constant presence of God.⁵¹

Travelling upon the path that takes the human being to his or her destination requires knowledge, love and action that is originated

⁴⁶ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 135.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 136-137.

⁵⁰ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 127.

⁵¹ Ibid, 137.

from the will and volition and is attained by using human existential powers and faculties as well. Nasr speaks about three powers inside human beings that are the intellect, sentiment and will. As a theomorphic being he or she possesses or can possess absolute and unconditioned intelligence which can know the truth as such; sentiments which is capable of going beyond the limited conditions of man and of reaching out for the ultimate through love, suffering, sacrifice and also fear; and a will which is free to choose and which reflects the Divine freedom.⁵² In the process of spiritual education these three powers are participating actively from the beginning to the last step of continuously developing knowledge, love and action in the person to achieve his or her ultimate goal. We will now investigate their functions.

The function of intelligence (intellect) is to know the Absolute. By 'intellect' Nasr means the intuitive intellect that leads to intuitive knowledge. In his view, knowledge is recognition of the Absolute Reality and intellect is that miraculous mercy that is capable of knowing what exists or is a sign of being.⁵³

Therefore, knowledge is the first step and love and action follows it in the spiritual way. Intellect cannot give the human knowledge by itself. Sentiment that is not based on knowledge is a void flush and an action that is not originated from knowledge and love is a vacuum. In the spiritual way, the harmonious function of the three powers takes the human to the Absolute Reality. In other words, action should be founded on knowledge obtained from the intellect and based on love originated from the sentiment.

In the correlation between knowledge and love, Nasr believes that love is the complement of gnosis and is related to the reality of realized knowledge. Both knowledge and love are present in any integral Sufi teaching, as is the element of action. In any case the path of Sufism combines knowledge and love.⁵⁴ It is therefore impossible to enter the Garden of Truth without love.

In relation to action Nasr thinks that action does not produce truth. It is the function of knowledge. But action based on truth can

⁵² Nasr, *The Essential Seyyed Hosein Nasr*, 181.

⁵³ Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 79.

⁵⁴ Nasr, *The Garden of Truth*, 69.

lead to the concrete realization of truth. Correct action, rooted in the good and the true, has the effect of removing the veil and allowing us to know the truth in more than an abstract manner. Action based on truthfulness, especially such actions as prayer, charity, sacrifice and truthful speech help the knowledge of the Truth to become actualized in the soul. He also thinks that because action with love breaks walls of the ego and makes us realize that deep down the “other” is also our self, one receives the greatest recompense in return. Of course no action with truth or love is possible without what Abrahamic religions call the fear of God. There is an element in the soul that must be controlled through the fear of God in order for the flowers or effects of illuminative knowledge and spiritual love to grow in the soil of the soul.⁵⁵ In his view, the necessity of the fear of God is for an element in the soul that commands and incites the soul to evil (*al-nafs al-ammārahbi'l-sū*).⁵⁶ Sometimes the fear of God is called piety - the fear of God with sincerity and alertness in action - that through it one can sacrifice his or her evil soul and traverse the spiritual way faster.

Other basic elements to reach the aim of spiritual attainment are *wilayat* (master of the way), affirmation (*ta'yīd*) and Divine Succour (*tawfīq*).

The Arabic root of the term *walayah/wilayah* is *waly*. This root has numerous meanings, including having domination over something, lordship, sanctity, being a master, rule, friend and intimate. In any case when a person wishes to embark upon the path to the Garden of Truth he or she must find an authentic spiritual master in whom this power is present and receive through a rite that goes back to the Prophet the initiation transmitting the power of *walayah/wilayah* to him or her.⁵⁷ Nasr believes that no authentic spiritual path is possible without a master and Sufism is certainly no exception to this universal principle.⁵⁸

In relation to Divine Succour, Nasr writes that to enter upon the Sufi path, to become initiated into the way or *Tariqah*, is to be

⁵⁵ Ibid, 90-92.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 106-107.

⁵⁸ Nasr, *Sufi Essays*, 54.

given this possibility of reversing the tendency of the soul from the outward to the inward, a change of direction which is possible only through Divine Succour (*tawfiq*) and affirmation (*ta'yīd*) as well as through the *barakah* contained in the methods of Sufism.⁵⁹

Conclusion

It can be concluded that in Nasr's thoughts, spiritual education is the process of activating all the innate potentialities of the human being as a whole toward his or her monotheistic nature by developing knowledge, love, righteous actions and acquiring virtues to transcend his or her existential layers, to educate his or her spirit and know the Ultimate Reality, and to return to his or her prototype in God. It is acquirable through acting based on a revealed religion. The aim of spiritual education is to know the Ultimate Reality intuitively.

First of all, this process requires self-knowledge and awareness of one's defects and traversing the path of perfection. Then, it needs introspection and inward contemplation to gain knowledge of the soul. After that the student should have a brief knowledge of religion by taking part in the actions and rituals of the outward layer of religion called *Shariah*. Then the student enters the second layer which is the intermediate dimension between *Shariah* and the Truth called *Tariqah*. It is the inward layer of religion which is in correspondence with the second dimension of the human being called the soul. The student purifies his or her soul based on his or her monotheistic nature that requires traversing from the soul's layers, purifying it from vices and ornamenting it with virtues, especially humility, charity, truthfulness, and sincerity. After that, the soul becomes the reflective mirror of God's Names and Attributes. In the stages of this process, the human being proceeds by using the three powers, intellect, sentiment and will, with mutual interaction among them to develop knowledge, love and righteous action that itself requires the fear of God (*makhafah*). Henceforth, one can attain wisdom and the inward truth of things.

Another condition to follow the spiritual way is to have a perfect master who is connected with the chain of *wilayah*. In Nasr's

⁵⁹ Ibid, 47.

view, the sacrifice of the evil soul is impossible without the master and travelling this path to the destination without him is possible only for a few people. In this process, Divine Succour (*tawfiq*) and Divine affirmation (*ta'yid*) are prerequisites as well.

We can conclude that in Nasr's view, spiritual education transcends or is more specific than moral education (soul purification) and moral education is more specific than religious education. So spiritual education is the highest and most specific form of education. In other words, spiritual education without moral and religious education is meaningless. All these forms of education have mutual interaction and are interrelated. If we consider spiritual education to have different grades, then we can say that by moral and religious education we may obtain some degrees of spirituality.

Comparing Nasr's Views with Current Definitions

Comparing Nasr's concept with current definitions, some similarities and differences can be found. First, we can compare it with the definition of John P. Miller, a full professor of curriculum who has conducted many scholarly and professional activities in the field. At first glance it seems that Nasr's concept is close to Miller's definition, but on closer consideration it becomes evident that Miller's understanding of spirit is limited to its affective aspects and refers to the alive and deep energy that gives meaning and energy to life. But Nasr considers spirit as a Divine gift and defines it more comprehensively. He considers it as the most inward dimension of a human being that should be educated by following and participating in the teachings of a monotheistic religion. Miller's viewpoint has the advantage of considering the educational elements precisely which Nasr does not discuss.

Next is the viewpoint of Lois Duff who has done research on teaching and learning, pedagogy and curriculum development at the Bristol School of Business, England. Duff's view is to promote the quality of the mind and heart of students while ignoring the spirit. This is not as thorough and comprehensive as Nasr's views, and does not pay attention to human nature and also the rules of religion.

David Carr, a philosophy of education professor at the University of Edinburg who has published many writings on ethics,

spiritual virtue, philosophy of education, arts education and spiritual education, has provided more meaning associations: his first definition considers truth and spiritual virtues and indicates two inseparable theoretical and practical domains which are also evident in Nasr's views. Nasr emphasizes more on intuitive and inward knowledge than teaching truth academically and seeks to actualize inward truth. In Carr's other definitions on education in a spiritual disposition and education in a spiritual activity, there are meaningful similarities. Through making the dispositions Divine and affecting truth on the quality of life and spiritual experiences, consciously different ways of communicating with God through prayer are being examined. These themes are evident in Nasr's views as well.

Stephen Bigger, head of Applied Education Studies at the University College of Worcester, distances himself from Nasr's views in a secular definition where he considers religion as a staging post and thone which distances from Nasr's view. But Nasr believes in taking action according to a revealed religion from the beginning to the end. To Nasr there can be no spirituality without religion. Bigger focuses on logical reason and new psychology findings which Nasr, the traditionalist, seriously criticizes. Bigger also pays no attention to the spirit.

Mohammad Hosein Tabatabaie, a prominent thinker and philosopher who wrote *Tafsir al-Mizan* - an interpretation of Qur'ān to Qur'ān - propounds a definition of spiritual education which is close to Nasr's views and has the components of nature, soul abstraction, knowledge advancement and taking action in congruence with human nature and knowledge. However, they differ in that Tabatabaie does not consider moral vices and virtues as important in explaining devotional love.⁶⁰ His view is that in the Qur'ānic moral method, vice elimination is more important than vice repellence, and when a person loves another person, his or her perception and the way he or she behaves change substantially.⁶¹ The reason for taking action or stopping it refers to one's love toward his or her beloved,

⁶⁰ Khosro Bagheri Noaparast, *Foundations of Moral Education Methods* (Tehran: Islamic Advertising Organization Publication, 1998), 154.

⁶¹ Mohammad Hosein Tabatabaie, *Tafsire Al-mizan* (Ghom: Teachers Community of Scientific School, 1995), 216.

not to achieve spiritual virtues or to remove vices. In Nasr's view, attaining spiritual virtues of the soul is one of the three basic teachings of Sufism, and is one of the fundamental components of his views on spiritual education. In this viewpoint, the soul should be purified from the vices to achieve the virtues, and spiritual realization is void without achieving virtues.



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