# The Problem of Religion in Ibn Sīnā's Philosophy

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## Abstrak

### Persoalan Agama dalam Filsafat Ibnu Sīnā

Ibnu Sina sampai saat ini masih dianggap sebagai failasuf Muslim yang kontroversial. Ia merupakan salah seorang failasuf Muslim yang telah banyak menggoreskan penanya di bidang logika, metafisika, psikologi, agama, kedokteran, dan ilmu alam.

Pendekatannya terhadap agama melalui teori emanasinya telah mengundang berbagai kritik dan komentar. Kemampuan imajinatif Nabi, makna simbolik doktrin-doktrin keagamaan, pemaknaan mistik serta hukum kausalitas psikologis merupakan sumber kekontroversialan pemikiran Ibnu Sina. Berawal dari usahanya untuk merekonstruksi hubungan yang harmonis antara filsafat dan agama, akhirnya, para kritikus menempatkannya pada posisi pilihan yang sulit antara ortodoksi dan heterodoksi.

Penilaian tak berdasar tersebut agaknya semata-mata disebabkan adanya kesalahpahaman terhadap filsafat Ibnu Sina yang pada kenyataannya berusaha menggabungkan unsur 'aql' dan 'naql' dalam keutuhan diskursus ketilsafatannya. Ini terlihat pada usahanya dalam menjelaskan persoalan kenabian yang menurut pengamatannya tidak begitu berbeda dengan failasuf dan mistik, kecuali kemampuan imajinatif yang dimiliki oleh para nabi. Kemampuan imajinatif nabi tentunya lebih tinggi. Untuk memahami kemampuan imajinatif tersebut, masalah simbolisasi menjadi penting untuk dibahas.

Menurut Ibn Sina, kemampuan imajinatif para nabi didukung oleh kekuatan **intelektual** dan **spiritual**, di samping adanya kenyataan bahwa dalam kenabian terdapat aspek **simbolik**.

Selain itu, Ibnu Sina jelas terpengaruh oleh ide-ide Platonis melalui teologi Aristoteles, ketika Ibnu Sina cenderung tidak mengakui adanya kebangkitan kembali badan yang sudah terpisah dari jiwa.

Bagi Ibnu Sina, arti *simbolik* tidak hanya diperlukan untuk menafsirkan makna kebangkitan jasmani kembali, tetapi juga terhadap hukum agama.

Selain itu, pemaknaan mistis juga tidak dapat dipisahkan dari persoalan agama.

Akhirnya, tata aturan simbolisasi psikologis juga (diperlukan) dalam memahami filsafat Ibnu Sina, karena simbul - seperti yang dikemukakan Fazlur Rahman - memiliki kewajiban batin untuk menjembatani penafsiran antagonistik, yakni bahwa simbul bukanlah simbul semata-mata yang terpisah dari realitas dan tidak berkaitan sama sekali dengan tingkah laku individual maupun sosial.

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## ملخص

## القضايا الدينية في فلسفة ابن سيناء

يعتبر ابن سيناء إلى يوم الناس هذا، فيلسوفا مسلما مثيرا للجدل. فهو أحـد الفلاسفة المسلمين الذين كرسوا أقلامهـم فـى المجـالات المختلفـة مـن منطق، وميتافيزياء، والنفس، والدين، والطب، والطبيعة.

وكان منهجه الذى سار عليه فى مجال الدين وهو ما يعرف بالفيوضية مثـار نظر ونقد. إن القدرة المتخيلة للنبوة، وما جاء به مـن الرمـوز الدينيـة، والـدلالات الصوفية، والقوانين السببية النفسية، كل ذلك يمثل أمورا مثيرة للجدل فى أفكـار ابن سيناء.

وقد بدأ هذا الجدل عند ما قام بمحاولة لإعادة تشكيل الصلة الحميمـة فيمـا بين الفلسفة والدين. الأمر الذى دفع بالنقاد إلى خيار حرج بالنسبة إلى مكانة هذا الرجل أن يكون بين تيار المحافظين أو تيار التعددية.

هذا التقسيم الذى لاينهض على أرضية قوية يبدو منه وكأنه يعود إلى إساءة فهم الناس لفلسفة ابن سيناء الذى كان فى الحقيقة يعمل على جمع العقل والنقل

فى تكاملية فلسفته الجدلية. ويظهر ذلك بوضوح فى محاولته تبيين قضية النبـوة، والذى نهب فيها أنه لا يأتى أى خلاف فى الأمر بين الفلاسفة والصوفية؛ اللَّهُـم إلاَّ فى مجال القوة المتخيلة التى لا يمتلكها إلاَّ الأنبياء.

هذه القوة المتخيلة الخاصة بالأنبياء، لا شك أنهـا أعلـى مرتبـة، والوقـوف على هذه القوة المتخيلة فى الأنبياء يقضى البحث فى قضايا الرموز؛ وكان البحث فيها أمرا من الأهمية بمكان.

وعند ابن سيناء أن القوة المتخيلــة للأنبيـاء معـززة بمـا لديهـم مـن القـدرة العقلية والروحية. هذا بالإضافة إلى ما فى النبوة من النواحى الرمزية.

ولا شك أن تأثير الأفلاطونية فى أفكـار ابن سـيناء ظـاهر. جـاء ذلـك عـبر لاهوتية أرسطو، ويتمثل فى نزعته أن البعث - يوم القيامــة - لا يكـون جسـديا، بعد مفارقة الروح منه.

يرى ابن سيناء أن الدلالات الرمزية ضرورية لا فـى مجـال التفسير للبعـث فحسب بل لها قيمتها أيضا فى مجال أحكام الشريعة، كما أن الـدلالات الصوفيـة لا تستغنى عنها القضايا الدينية.

هذا، وإن الإجراءات للرموز النفسية تكون ذات أهمية لاستيعاب فلسفة ابن سيناء. فالرموز - عند فضل الرحمن - لها مقتضياتها الباطنية لتكون همـزة وصـل بين فهم المعانى المتباينة وتفسيرها. والمراد من ذلك أن الرموز لا تكون ذات قيمة بذاتها منفصلة عن الحقيقة، لاتمت - بحال من الأحوال - إلـى سـلوكيات الفـرد والمجتمع بأدنى صلة.

## Introduction

Up to this modern are, Ibn Sīnā still becomes a controversial figure in Islamic philosophy. There are many interpretations on his religious philosophy. Actually, he wrote many subjects covering from logics, metaphysic, psychology, religion, medicine and natural sciences.

From these diverse subjects, the problem of religion had been a crucial point, since he had a unique conception in treating a religion, even, at times, contradictory to the most general orthodoxy. Because of this position, al-Ghazālī launched severe criticism and accused him as an infidel in his work 'Incoherence of the Philosophers'.[1]

If al-Ghazālī bluntly criticized his idea concerning God's emanation in the act of creation, where he pointed out that this idea is an arbitrary reasoning and a dark thought,[2] it is curiously enough that in opposite thought, the modern writer such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, can understand and appreciate Ibn Sīnā's thought from the point of his esoteric idea. He writes as follows:

> "The Universe in this perspective is compared to the rays of the Sun, and God to the Sun itself. The Rays of the Sun are not the Sun but also they are nothing other than the Sun. This Perspective in alien to the exoteric element of monotheistic traditions in which the absolute distinction between the creator and the creature is preserved. In Islam the doctrine of emanation, or effusion, therefore, can be understood and integrated only in the esoteric aspect of the Tradition.[3]

From another part of his book we read :

> "In some of Ibn Sīnā's more esoteric works, in fact, God is identified with the source (al-manba') of the overflowing of light (fayādan al-nūr) which fills all things. So, one can say that Creation is the realization of the intelligible essence and existence, the theophany (tajjalli) of these essences, so that being and light are ultimately the same to give existence to creature and to illuminate them with the Divine Light which is the ray emanating from His Being"[4]

These two ideas presented by al-Ghazālī and Seyyed Hossein Nasr are the mirror of the sharply dichotomical approach to Ibn Sīnā's philosophy. This approach will give two kinds of opposite ideas, both of them blame each other, and will not give us real understanding of Ibn Sina's whole philosophy.

To approach the problem of religion in his philosophy, to my knowledge, we need not dichotomical models of approach as the models will only

lead us to a diametrically opposite direction, without being able to grasp the convergence which might exist in its deepest and genuine problem shared by both opposite ideas.

The central questions which I would discuss in this article are: How did Ibn Sīnā treat a religion ? and, to borrow Fazlur Rahman's term, did Ibn Sīnā treat a religion symbolically or literally or a kind of combination between both?[5]

Realizing the diverse subjects of religion that can be discussed, I would facus on the problem of 'religion' in its common feature, namely religion as a system of belief and its laws in practical life.

## The root of controversy in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy

It has been much argued, that almost all prominent Muslim philosophers such as, al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd are heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. In exploring Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, for example, Fazlur Rahman in his valuable book *Prophecy*, gives a footnote on almost every idea of Ibn Sīnā which can be easily referred to Greek philosophy.

Islam as a revealed religion is based on God's revelation and, on the contrary, Greek philosophy is based merely on human reason. It seems there is a tension between both. Ibn Sina wanted to reconcile between this apparent tension.[6] In doing such a great and ambitious work, consequently, he stood on a suspected and debatable position whether he was still a religious person or an heretic. This haphazard judgement will not bring us closer to a position which enables us to obtain real understanding of the core of the problem of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy.

Despite of the existing controversies between reason and revelation, reason and rational explanation were held in such a high esteem by some muslim intellectuals. The Qur'an itself warns against blind obedience to one's predecessors (II,170;V, 104) and repeatedly addresses itself to the understanding of its audience (III, 65; XII, 2). Although the teachings of the Qur'an are based upon divine authority, they often seek, through by rational persuasion, to bring about faith. The rituals mentioned in the Qur'an are often grounded in reason and Muslims are commanded to understand their spririt and purpose. Many of the rituals are designed to contribute to the welfare of Muslims themselves. (XX,14); (IX, 60; LIX, 7). So, the point here is that to establish rational understanding is a much valued aspect of traditional Islam even where Muslims are suspicious of philosophy.

The problem, then, why did not Muslims enthusiastically embrace Greek philosophy as the acme of rationality and employ it to make sense of problems which arose in the interpretation of Islam ? A variety of tentative answers may be offered. One of them is a suspection that philosophy is an essentially alien way of thinking. Muslim intellectuals were, and indeed still are, sometimes wary about pre-Islamic and non-Islamic themes which become incorporated in Islam. ⁷ For example, some of the customs and rituals of Islam are assumed to have a non-Islamic origin, to be reflections of older and pagan, traditions, yet accepting that such pratices have pagan precedents and has seemed, to some Muslims, to be impious and unworthy of the considerable religious respect in which those practices are held by the community.

Philosophy is meant to one thing, the pre-Socratics, another to Aristotle, to the Stoics and to the thinkers of the Hellenistic age. Philosophy clearly bore the marks of its Greek creators, and it was transmitted to the Islamic world through the good offices of the Christian community, and so in some ways it was doubly alien in character due to its origins even before its content was considered. ⁸

This kind of judgment, actually, makes Ibn Sīnā's position difficult, if not, even controversial. Almost the orthodox wings accuse him as an heretic or infidel culminated in al-Ghazālī's work *Tahāfut al Falāsifah*.

Regardless of a suspection coming from his contemporaries Ibn Sīnā continued his philosophical discourse, not merely guided by reason, but at the same time, by Qur'ān, too.

Qur'an III, 6 says as follows :

> "It is He who sent down upon the Book, wherein are verses clear that are the Essence of the Book, and others ambigious. As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambigious part, desiring dissension, and desiring its interpretation; and none knows its interpretation, save only God. And those firmly rooted in knowledge say, "We believe in it; all is from our Lord; yet none remembers but men possessed of minds". "

There is a controversy in Islam, however, whether the latter kind of verses are to be interpreted or not: the extreme orthodox wing of Islam disallows delving into interpretation of those 'ambigious' verses and they put a full stop after the word 'God', in the above quotation so as to exclude "those firmly rooted in knowledge" from understanding them. The more liberal, however, including many moderate orthodox ulama, allow interpretation and do not stop at the word 'God' so as to include 'those firmly rooted in know-

ledge' among the category of those who can understand.[10]

Of course, this doctrine must have arisen out of an attempt to justify so many arbitrary allegorical interpretation - the Shi'ite, the mystical and the philosophical.

It is by a certain that Ibn Sīnā preferred to be in a liberal position as it enables him to interprete the verses of Qur'an as his reason dictates since Qur'an itself allows human reason to think more deeply and originally, not merely to follow something blindly. Deliberately, Ibn Sina borrowed and applied Greek philosophy which had flourished long time before Isla-mic history began to appear.

Ibn Sīnā interpreted the verses of the Qur'an symbolically, not literally as the traditionalist and orthodoxy did. The relevant question which arise immediately whether Ibn Sīnā's symbolic interpretation on Islamic doctrine is arbitrary and excessive so as to exclude him from the boundary of Islamic religion and its noble tradition are: Is the symbolic meaning necessary? If necessary, what is then its advantage? If not, why do almost Muslim philosophers emphasize on its importance?

## The "imaginative faculty' of the prophet

Seen from Greek philosophical perspective, the phenomenon of prophecy as one the most basic pillar of a revealed religion is really new. They had not an experience to deal with such issue although they had already the idea of 'intuition' put forward by Aristotle. Indeed, it had not a strong power as the prophecy had, let alone the clear mission brought by a prophecy in human life. Because of that reason, Ibn Sīnā's explanation and elaboration concerning the idea of prophecy, most probably is his own personal conception.[11] Originated from this conception, the idea of symbolic meaning of religious doctrine and also the inner meaning of the worded verses of Qur'an will naturally follow.

According to Ibn Sīnā, the prophet, the philosopher and mystic are identical in their intellectual level. What makes a prophet different from two others is his strong imaginative faculty.[12]

A function peculiar to the imaginative faculty is figurization and symbolization. Every datum, whether it is intellectual or sensible or emotional, imagination transforms it into vivid and potent symbol capable of impelling to action. If, e.g., our appetitive faculty is in a state of preparedness, say towards pleasure, but is not strong enough to move the organism, the imagina-

tive faculty stirs up symbols and images of pleasure so lively that they move the organims.

Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā applied this kind of explanation into the realm of the figurization of religious intellectual truth. Imagination must necessarily expresses this truth in figurative language since, not being an immaterial faculty, it cannot grasp the universal and the immaterial. But imagination can not always perform this function because in ordinary waking life it is engaged as intermediary between the perceptual and intellectual faculties: it receives sensual images from the former, acts upon them by division and combination, and places them at the service of the mind for practical needs of life.[1]

Ibn Sīnā believed that the prophet's imagination figurizes the intellectual and spiritual truth, and receives particular images from the heavenly bodies. It can not usually represent the naked truth since it is over prone to symbolization by association of images. Thus, from the early beginning he started, before going into the detail discussion on the meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, the basic belief and the religious law, Ibn Sīnā had argued that, however, there was a symbolic aspect in the prophecy.

This notion is very significant as the basis of his fundamental thought in his one unified system of philosophical framework in dealing with religion. Without grasping this fundamental notion, it will be hard to understand what he said as a philosopher dealing with religion.

Starting from this kind of interpretation on the essence of prophecy, he dealt with religious matters from the loophole of its symbolic meaning. The symbolic meaning is more underlined than its literal one by most Muslim philosophers.

## The symbolic meaning of religious doctrine

Ibn Sīnā, obviously, was unhappy and felt constrained to point out that there are things which the religious law lays down, others which we can prove by reason and demonstration. In lenghthy expositions he completely disregarded the resurrection of the body and dwells on the return of the soul after its separation from the body. It is here that he was very much influenced by Plotinian ideas on the Islamic world through the so called Theology of Aristotle.

The perfection of the rational soul is achieved in attaining full intellectual knowledge, in receiving the imprint of the form of the universal order of

the     intelligible, and in partaking of the Good that emanates from God. It is in these situations that it finds eternal existence, not in the pleasure of a fleeting life on earth. The soul must preceive the essence of perfection by deducing the unknown from the known, and by striving towards it with constant effort and action. Just as beings, originated first as intelligences, then as souls and then as bodies, so on its return the soul leaves the body  behind and goes to join the intelligences and through them the source of all emanations, who is God. Hence to speak of the resurrection of the body is only figurative. It is in fact the release and the resurrection of the soul that takes place. It is the soul and not body that is immortal.[14]

In such way, Ibn Sīnā's purely reasonal thought grasps the meaning of resurrection of human being, whereas the orthodox wing stresses the bodily resurrection together with soul resurrection.

The manner in which Ibn Sīnā treated the doctrine of the ressurrection is still better illustrated by the interpretations that he placed on some of the verses of the Qur'an. It is with sincerity and in perfect good faith that he accepted the Scriptures of his religion, but he considered the language symbolic and metaphorical, meant to make the ideas more vivid. In fact, it is full of imagery, that is in order that it should appeal to the ordinary man who is unable to appreciate the true significance of all that he read. Otherwise, to accept the Scriptures literally and in their entirety is an affront to the intelligences, which for him was something that is in divine essence divine. He found it  idle to indulge in the formal exegesis associated with the different shools of theology. He sought philosophical meanings and he incorporated them into his system; he didn't hesitate to quote Greek philosophers in supporting his interpretations.

He certainly accepted the doctrine of prophetic inspiration, and the authority of Muhammad as the Lawgiver of Islam; he both practised and defended on theoritical grounds, the ritual worship and religious obligations of his faith. But it can not be denied that for him, as for the Greeks of old whose writings he knew so well, God's highest gift to man not faith but reason.[15]

His interpretation of one of the most impressive and elevating passages in the Qur'an, where God is spoken of as "the light of the heavens and earth" is a most revealing example of his religious writings; and showed clearly the attitude he chose to take. He still went further and asserted that  there is world of the sense, a world of imagination, and a world of the minds; then that  the senses deserves to be considered "the world of the graves' ; and the

world of the mind is the true 'abode and that is paradise'.[16]

According to him, it is not only the doctrine of resurrection which needs interpretation from the symbolic meaning, but the religious laws similarly need such interpretations. In his book *Risāla al adhawiya*, he wrote as follows :

> "As for religious law, one general principle is important namely that religions and their laws, produced by a prophet, seek to communicate with the masses as a whole. It is obvious that the deeper truths concerning the real unity, that there is one maker who is exalted above quantity, quality, place, time, position and change, which lead to the belief contains no parts .. that he can not be pointed to as existing in a particular place, it is obvious that these deeper truths can not be passed on to the multitude. For if this had been communicated in its true form to the bedoin Arabs, and the crude Hebrews, they would have immediately refused to believe and would have unanimously declared that the belief which it was proposed they accept was belief in an absolute nonentity "[17].

Ibn Sīnā strongly held that if a person speaks the bare truth to the public, his message must be considered to be devoid of divine origin and that the symbols must remain the literal truth for the largest part of humanity.

### Ibn Sīnā's mystical understanding

The Problem of religion and its symbolic meaning in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy can not be wholly separated from his treatise on mysticism. Scholars have been undecided as to whether to call Ibn Sīnā a rational mystic or a mystic rationalist. There may be little in his early works to show an inclination towards mysticism. And yet he devoted the closing pages of one of his latest books, viz, the *Ishārat*, to what is avowedly mystic thought.[18]

When there are many writers, especially from orthodox wing accusing him as purely rationalistic thinker, more appreciative to philosophy than to Qur'anic teaching, then there will be little doubt in doing such accusation, if we read his treatise on mysticism.

Ibn Sīnā wrote three visionary narratives which form the parts of a great cycle differing in point of view from his better-known Peripatetic works. These writings constitute along with the *Risālah fi'l-'ishq* and the last chapters of the *Ishārat*, most of what remains of his esoteric philosophy.

These narratives are the records of the intellectual visions of author described in a symbolic language which itself constitutes an integral aspect of the visions and which is not allegory. In these narratives Ibn Sīnā had a vision of the Universe as a vast "cosmos of symbols" through which the ini-

tiate seeking Divine knowledge, or Gnosis (*ma'rifah*) must travel. The Cosmos, instead of being an exterior object, becomes for the Gnostic (*'arif*) an interior reality; he sees all the diversities of Nature reflected in the mirror of his own being.[19]

Ibn Sīnā, despite of his great admiration for the Greek Philosophers, always tried his best to make his philosophy conformable to the Islamic perspective. It is true that in many of his writings he did not express the sense of the utter nothingness of the finite before the Majesty of the Divine which is characteristic of Islamic spirituality, but he did try to conform his ideas to the Qur'anic revelation as much as the rationalistic approach in the Peripatetic school would permit. He always kept before him the ideal of combining the philosophy of Greek with *Hikmah* or Wisdom which was originally the possession of the Hebrew prophets and later revealed in its fullness in Islam.

In his books *Manṭiq al-Mashriqīyīn*, Ibn Sīnā clearly stated that he was not truely follower of the Greek philosophers. He had an alternative idea when the Greek philosophy does not fit him anymore. He stressed that his real views was written in his *Manṭiq al-Mashriqīyīn* or Oriental Philosophy.[21]

A modern Persian scholar, Qasim Ghani, like most other contemporary Persian authors, considers 'Oriental Philosophy' to lie outside both Aristotelian and the Neo Platonic schools.[22]

H. Corbin, has studied the question of *Ishrāq* most thoroughly. He considers the word 'Oriental' as primarily a symbolic term signifying the realm of light and not just geographical designation. 'Oriental Philosophy' means journey to the realm of the spirit and way from the prison of sense and matter.[23]

A close study of the esoteric writings of Ibn Sīnā will reveal that the 'Oriental philosophy' is not at all a philosophy in the rationalistic sense, or a system of dialectic to fulfill certain mental needs ; rather it is a form of wisdom or a "theosophy" which has for its purpose the deliverance of a man from this world of imperfection to the 'world of light'. It is non-Greek in the sense that the specific 'genious' of the Greeks of the historical period was dialectical. Its language is therefore primarily symbolic rather than dialectical even if it begins with Aristotelian logics and employs some of the cosmological ideas of Peripatetic philosophers.

The Oriental Philosophy emphasized 'wisdom' and mystical experience'. They were concerned not only to explain it but also to explore its implications for life in their society. Since, on the oriental interpretation, philosophy

is not just an abstract and systematic account of 'Being' but also the concrete and practical search for genuine human happiness, it has consequences for human behaviour public and private. Curiously enough, that this kind of notion which originally came from Ibn Sīnā had much influenced two predecessors of Ibn Rushd, namely Ibn Bajjah and Ibn Ṭufayl in Spain, the West part of Muslim world in Twelfth century.[24]

From his deep and long research, eventually, Seyyed Hossein Nasr decides that the inner meaning of the 'Oriental Philosophy' can only be known in the light of Ibn Sīnā's relation to Islamic esotericism in general and taṣawwuf in particular.[25]

According to Sufis themselves, taṣawwuf is a set of doctrine, spiritual techniques, and finally a grace or barakah, the totality of which constitutes the essence of Islam, the realization of Unity (*Tawḥīd*).[26]

In the domain of cosmology, the late works of Ibn Sīnā possesses many points of similarity with the conception of Nature of the gnostics (*'urafā'*). In both cases there is the concept of the interiorization of the cosmos, the journey through the Universe to what lies above it, and a symbolic interpretation of all natural phenomena.

Therefore, whatever the effective realization and the spiritual station of Ibn Sīnā may have been, his theoretical consent of tasawwuf and the expression of many Sufi doctrines in the cosmology of his work on "Oriental Philosophy', permits us study him in two distinct ways : Firstly, we may identify his early works, especially the *Shifā*, and the *Najāt*, as the most complete expressions of the philosophy of Peripatetic School in Islam, a school that was much influenced, especially in the case of Ibn Sīnā, by the physics of Aristotle and Neoplatonis cosmology. Secondly, we may study the cosmology of his later works, especially the visionary narrative, as an early expression of the doctrines of the Ishrāqī school which were developed more fully in the following centuries and as a description of certain elements of the gnostic conception of Nature.[27]

From these explanations, it proves that there are two kinds of symbolic meaning proposed by Ibn Sīnā. The first is concerned with the symbolic meaning of the verses of the Qur'an, the religious doctrine and religious laws as opposed to the merely literal meaning proposed by orthodoxy. The second symbolic meaning is concerned with the gnostic or the mystical experience and the inner understanding of religious person, not merely to underline the external aspect of religious practices. These two aspects of symbolic meaning

have strongly coloured Ibn Sīnā's philosophy in dealing with the problem of religion.

## The Psychological Law of Symbolization

The most crucial point being suspected by the traditionalist and the orthodox wings in the case of symbolic meaning of the verses of the Qur'an introduced by philosophers or mystics is the philosophical conception of religion - both its belief and its laws - as a mere symbol which is entirely separated from the reality and their ignorance concerning the practical aspect of the religious teaching exemplified by daily activities of the Prophet, furthermore, their discriminative outlook between the ordinary people or masses which belong to the religiously minded one in one side and the higher rank of them which belong to the philosophers on the other side

So, not only did this symbol-reality dichotomy cut at the roots of the traditional Islam but it sought to introduce a distinction of the naturally privileged and the naturally barred in society to which essential egalitarianism was a cardinal article of the Islamic faith. For that reason, the philosophical distinction, in fact, was incurable and far more dangerous then the mystic distinction between those having an inner spiritual life and those who were content only with the external observance of the law, for a para-mystical distinction - that of Islām and Īmān - was accepted by orthodoxy, as expressing a distinction within a whole, between the spirit and letter of the law, and not an absolute separation of the two.[28]

As a matter of fact, symbol is not merely vague symbol, extremely separated from reality, or passively resides in the realm of human imagination and has nothing to do with external human individual or social behaviour. On the contrary, this symbol has 'inner compulsion' which is called by Fazlur Rahman as Psychological Law of Symbolization. This notion will mediate between two antagonistic interpretations and will include the "Technical Revelation" or the practical aspect of that symbol. Since the masses can not grasp the purely spiritual truth, the prophets communicate this truth to them in materialistic symbols and metaphors.[29]

If the compulsory law of symbolization is seriously taken, for it would, then, mean that the prophet himself believes in the truth of symbol just as much as he believes in the truth of its spiritual inspiration and its practical aspect, so it will make a great problem for the philosophers.

Unfortunately, these philosophers do not often do so. Usually they sepa-

rate sharply between symbolic aspect and its practical aspect. They look degeneratively to the Technical Revelation which works as political manoeuvre of mankind for a good end by a shrewd and good man through deliberate pious lies.

They said that when these contemplative and practical virtues come to exist by themselves, e.g. not figuratively, in the mind of the Lawgiver, they constitute philosophy, while in the minds of masses they are religion. Religion, then, exists oly for the masses, for the prophet himself only the highest prize of philosophy.[30]

Religious symbols, if they are to be properly understood, must be interpreted. But this interpretation can be only for the sake of a few who are possesed of sufficient intelligence to understand it ; for the mass of dullards the letter of the revelation and the materialistic symbols must remain the literal truth. This doctrine is very common among the muslim philosophers.[31]

This is why the whole account of the Unity (of God) in religion is anthropomorphism. The Qur'an does not contain even a hint to the deeper truth about this important problem, nor a detailed account concerning even the obvious matters needed about the doctrine of Unity, for a part of the account is apparently anthropomorphic while the other part contains absolute transcendence (i.e. total unlikeness of God to His creation) but in general term, without specification or detail. The anthropomorphic phrases are innumerable but they (i.e. the orthodox interpreters of the Qur'an) do not accept them (as they stand). If this is the position concerning the Unity, what of the less important matters of belief as the resurrection of the bodies, the meaning of religious observance and the inner spiritual meaning of Islamic teaching.

What the philosophers can not realize, in fact, is the intimate connection between the symbol and its reality, and effect of the symbol in the practical life of human being to pursue the good life in society. They only emphasized the symbolic aspect of the religious doctrine without being conveyed to apply the truth symbolized in material word to the real five in the human society. No matter how true their symbolic interpretation on the religious doctrine is, but if the society live in chaos-since they do not apply what the truth dictates in their conscience in their practical life, so that symbolic meaning will be no much use.

It is the Technical Revelation, then, which impels people to action and to be good, and not purely intellectual insight and inspiration. No religion therefore, can be based on pure intellect. However, the technical revelation, in

order to obtain the necessary quality of potency, also inevitably suffers from the fact that it does not present the naked truth but truth in the garb of symbols. But to what action does it impel? Unless the prophet can express his moral insight into definite enough  moral purpose, principles, and indeed into a socio-political structure, neither his insight nor the potency of his imaginative-revelation be much use. The prophet, therefore, needs to be a Lawgiver and stateman; indeed the real lowgiver and statesman is only a prophet.[32]

This practical criterion throws into still bolder relief of the personality of the prophet Muhammad in the philosopher's mind. The Law (Syari'ah) must be such that it should be effective in making people socially good, should remind them God at every step, and should also serve for them as a pedagogic measure in order to open their eyes beyond its own exterior, so that they may attain to a vision of true spiritual purpose of the Lawgiver.

The Law is not abrogated at any stage for anybody, but the philosophical vision of the truth gives to the Law its real meaning; and when that vision is attained, the Law seems to be a ladder which  one has climbed but which it would  still be unwise to discard. For those relatively unfortunate souls which can not see throught the law its philosophic truth, the technical revelation and the latter of the Law must remain the literal truth.

## Conclusion

The problem of religion has to be approached from many different aspects. The dichotomical approach, either from symbolic or literal approach, will give no much benefit for understanding the totality and the complexity of the phenomena of religions. Both interpretations have to become one single unified system of approach.

Ibn Sina as a Muslim philosopher had paved the way to understand religion from its abstract entity, namely from an intellectual aspect, but we have to be careful in understanding his conception. This conception, namely the symbolic approach to the religion has its deep meaning only when it is related to and combined with the literal approach which has a real contact with the practical life of the human being.

Religion can not be approached only by either side of approach, since a religion commits with the totality of the human life, not only to its intellectual aspect. The totality of human life includes  psychological,  social, and ethical, human life and  intellectual aspects as well as some other aspects. All analyses of religions which only emphasize on one aspect of human  life will fall

into reductionism, and will not give us the real understanding of the totality of human being.

Fazlur Rahman's approach to the problem of religion in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy has an aesthetic richness - not dichotomical approach - as to cover and unite the both sides of an antagonistic approaches. ●

## End Notes:

[1] W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1958), p. 37

[2] Al-Ghazāli, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, translated by Sahib Ahmad Kamali, (Lahore, Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), p. 77.

[3] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, (Great Britain, Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1978), P. 202.

[3] *Ibid.* P. 213.

[5] Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam. Philosophy and Orthodoxy*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint, 1979), p. 41

[6] Soheil M. Afnan, *Avicenna. His Life and Works*, (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1956), p. 168.

[7] Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Medieval Islamic Philosophy*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), P. 13-14.

[8] Soheil M. Afnan, *op.cit.* p. 13 and Oliver Leaman, *op. cit*, p.14

[9] A.J. Arberry, *The Qur'an Interpreted*, New York, Collier Books, Mcmillan Publishing Company, 1955, p. 73.

[10] Fazlur Rahman, *op.cit.*, p. 77. cf. Muhammad Abū Zahrah, *Ibn Taimiyyah. Hayātuhu wa 'Asruhu Ārā'uhu wa Fiqhuhu*, dār al-Fikr al-Araby, 279-80.

[11] Soheil M. Afnan, *op.cit.*, p. 141.

[12] Fazlur Rahman, *op.cit.*, p. 36

[13] Fazlur Rahman, *op.cit.*, p. 36-37

[14] Soheil M. Afnan, *op.cit.*, p. 183

[15] Quoted from Fazlur Rahman's *Prophecy*, p. 42

[16] Soheil M. Afnan, *op.cit.* p. 187-188

[19] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *op.cit.* p. 263

[20] *Ibid.* p. 184.

[21] *Ibid.* p. 186-187.

[22] *Ibid.* p. 190.

[23] *Loc.cit.*

[24] Ani Nasri, "The 'Mystic' and Society According to Ibn Bajjah and Ibn Tufayl", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XXVI, No. 3, 1986, p. 223.

[25] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *op.cit.* p. 191

[26] *Ibid.* p. 192

[27] *Ibid.* p. 196

[28] Fazlur Rahman, *op.cit.* p. 64

[29] *Ibid.* p. 40.

[30] Fazlur Rahman, *op.cit.* p. 76.

[31] Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-Maqāl fī mā baina al-Hikmah wa al-Syari'ah min al-Ittiṣāl*, Egypt, Dar al Ma'arif, Egypt, 1969, p. 36-38

[32] Fazlur Rahman, "Ibn Sīnā", *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, M.M. Sharif (Ed.),

Volume One, Germany, Otto Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 500-501

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