

THE ALCHEMICAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE SELF: DISCIPLINING THE *NAFS* IN THE METAPHYSICS OF IBN ARABI

Yarashova Mohlaroyim Shukhrat qizi

Lecturer, Department of History and Philology, Asia International University

mohlaroyimyarashova@gmail.com

Abstract

This article explores the concept of *Nafs* (the soul or self) and its education (*Tarbiyah*) within the ontological framework of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (1165–1240). Known as *al-Shaykh al-Akbar*, Ibn Arabi does not view the *Nafs* merely as an enemy to be suppressed, but as a mirror to be polished. This study examines the stages of the soul's ascent, the practical methods of spiritual discipline, and the ultimate realization of the "Perfect Human" (*Al-Insan al-Kamil*).

1. Introduction

In Islamic mysticism, the struggle with the self (*Jihad al-Nafs*) is often termed the "Greater Holy War." However, in the complex metaphysical system of Ibn Arabi, this struggle is not a dualistic battle between "good" and "evil," but a process of ontological refinement. For Ibn Arabi, the *Nafs* is a comprehensive reality that bridges the gap between the Divine (*al-Haqq*) and the creation (*al-Khalq*). To educate the *Nafs* is to move from a state of fragmentation and ignorance to a state of unity and Divine witnessing.

2. The Ontological Status of the *Nafs*

Ibn Arabi defines the *Nafs* as a "microcosm" containing all the realities of the universe. He famously posits that "He who knows his self, knows his Lord." This implies that the self is not an obstacle to God, but the primary theater in which God is revealed.

However, the *Nafs* in its raw, uneducated state is clouded by "imaginary existence" and attachment to the material world. The goal of *Tarbiyah* (education/discipline) is to remove these veils so the soul can reflect the Divine Names clearly.

3. The Hierarchical Stages of the Soul

Ibn Arabi, following the Quranic terminology, acknowledges several stages of the *Nafs*. The transition between these stages represents the "polishing" of the mirror:

1. ***Nafs al-Ammara (The Commanding Self)***: The lowest state, dominated by earthly desires and the ego's arrogance.

2. ***Nafs al-Lawwama (The Reproachful Self)***: The awakening of the conscience. The soul begins to recognize its deficiencies.

3. ***Nafs al-Mulhama (The Inspired Self)***: A transitional stage where the soul begins to receive spiritual intuition.

4. ***Nafs al-Mutma'inna (The Tranquil Self)***: The state of "certainty" where the soul is at peace with the Divine Will.

4. Practical Methodologies of *Tarbiyah*

In his works, particularly *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations), Ibn Arabi emphasizes four pillars of spiritual discipline necessary for the refinement of the *Nafs*:

Pillar	Practice	Spiritual Objective
Silence (<i>Samat</i>)	Refraining from unnecessary speech.	Cultivating internal listening and presence.
Solitude (<i>Uzlah</i>)	Withdrawing from social	Forging a direct relationship with the

Pillar	Practice	Spiritual Objective
	distractions.	Creator.
Hunger (Ju')	Fasting or moderation in eating.	Weakening the animalistic impulses.
Wakefulness (Sahar)	Night vigils and prayer.	Sharpening the spiritual intellect.

Beyond these physical disciplines, Ibn Arabi places supreme importance on **Dhikr (Remembrance)**. He argues that the *Nafs* is shaped by what it remembers; by constantly remembering the Divine, the *Nafs* eventually loses its "egocentric" identity and adopts a "theocentric" one.

5. The Doctrine of *Fana* and *Baqa*

The culmination of *Nafs* education in Akbarian thought is the experience of *Fana* (annihilation of the self-consciousness) and *Baqa* (subsistence in God).

- **Fana:** This is the "death" of the ego's claim to independent existence. The seeker realizes that their existence is a shadow of the Divine.
- **Baqa:** This is the "resurrection" where the seeker returns to the world, seeing God in everything. The *Nafs* is no longer a barrier but a tool for Divine action.

6. The Goal: *Al-Insan al-Kamil*

The ultimate purpose of disciplining the *Nafs* is to reach the rank of the **Perfect Human**. This is an individual who has fully realized their potential as a Divine image. The *Nafs* of the Perfect Human is completely transparent, allowing the light of the Divine Names to shine through without distortion.

7. Conclusion

Ibn Arabi's approach to the *Nafs* is profoundly optimistic. He does not view human nature as inherently fallen, but as inherently "veiled." Through the rigorous education of the soul—balancing ascetic discipline with metaphysical knowledge—the human being can transcend the limitations of the ego. In the modern world, where the "self" is often defined by external consumption, Ibn Arabi's model offers a timeless path toward internal liberation and spiritual wholeness.

References:

1. Ibn Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam* (The Bezels of Wisdom).
2. Ibn Arabi, *Al-Futuh al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Revelations).
3. Chittick, W. C., *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*.