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Religious and Mystical Experience in Shia *Ḥadīth*: Phenomenology, Metaphysics, and Epistemology

This paper examines reports of religious and mystical experience in Shia *ḥadīth* literature and devotional texts, and explores their implications for contemporary philosophical discussions of religious experience. While Islamic mysticism has often been studied through later Sufi and philosophical traditions, the rich experiential materials embedded in early Shia sources—*ḥadīth* collections and supplications—remain underexplored as primary data. The paper argues that sustained engagement with these sources yields philosophically significant insights for theorizing religious experience.

The paper proceeds in three stages. First, it offers a typology of Shia reports of religious and mystical experience, distinguishing among three literary and experiential modes. In some texts, such as Sermon 222 of Nahj al-Balāgha, the Imam describes in the third-person mode the experiential states of God’s devoted servants, portraying a heightened form of perception in which hearts “see” and “hear” realities ordinarily hidden from others. In other reports, such as the *Ḥadīth* of Ḥāritha, an exemplary follower recounts his experience in the first-person, describing a transformed perception of this world and the hereafter. In yet other texts, supplicatory materials such as *al-Munājāt al-Shaʿbāniyya*, the Imam does not report an experience but prays for the attainment of specific experiential states, articulating a normative horizon of mystical possibility.

Second, the paper undertakes a phenomenological analysis of the experiences and states described in these sources. It examines their intentionality (God, divine attributes, eschatological realities, religious affections, etc.), modes of access (non-conceptual encounter versus conceptually articulated knowledge), affective structure (fear, yearning, intimacy, shame, love, etc.), enabling preconditions (observance of Shariah obligations, night prayer, fasting, tears, etc.), temporal profile (episodic, gradual, or stable states), and the relation between selfhood and divinity (ego-diminution and non-unitive relational models).

Third, the paper analyzes the metaphysical, theological, and epistemological implications of these reports. It addresses the ontology of “seeing” without eyesight and heart-based perception, the moralized conception of divine hiddenness (i.e., the idea that experiential distance from God is primarily due to moral or spiritual impediments such as sin and heedlessness), and the integration of divine nearness with transcendence. Epistemologically, it investigates agreements and tensions among reports, proposed marks of veridical experience (e.g., purification, ethical fruits, conformity with the Quran, etc.), recognized epistemic defeaters (e.g., pride, sin, imaginative projection, satanic whispering), and the extent to which these experiences are treated as publicly assessable or indirectly verifiable.



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Hashem Morvarid is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Trinity University in San Antonio, whose work bridges Islamic philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy. Trained traditionally in Islamic sciences at the Seminary of Qom, he holds an MA from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad and two doctorates in philosophy—one in analytic philosophy from IPM in Tehran, and one in classical Islamic philosophy from the University of Illinois at Chicago. Before joining Trinity in 2025, he held the William H. Miller Postdoctoral Fellowship at Johns Hopkins University. His research spans analytic metaphysics, Islamic philosophy, and *kalām* and Shia theology—with a focus on Avicenna, divine attributes, modality, and religious epistemology—and has appeared in journals including *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Philosophical Studies*, and *Synthese*.