

The Symbolic, Mysterious Language in the Thought of Muslim Philosophers

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Abstract

Man employs a variety of methods to communicate his ideas and intentions. When he trusts that his audiences are competent enough to comprehend his oral or written message, and when he feels assured that no prejudice or misunderstanding exists on the part of the audience; he speaks directly and avoids figurative or ambiguous language. In contrast, if he feels or predicts otherwise, he tends to apply another strategy, expressing meanings implicitly under the guise of allusion, symbolism, and/or allegories. Some researchers believe that symbolic mysterious language (*ramz*) is exclusively employed in mathematics and mysticism to express topical objectives, but in this article, we will attempt to explain the application of this language in philosophy, and demonstrate why Muslim philosophers leaned toward using this encoded language. The author of the present study believes, to the best of his knowledge, that this research study is the first of its kind that seeks to explore the motives and considerations behind the use of this encoded language by philosophers.

Keywords: symbol, mystery, language, Muslim philosophers, allusion, allegory.

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Introduction

Problem Statement

The significance of the language and its function is undeniable, as it is through language and words human beings communicate and express their intents to fellow humans; people use spoken language to communicate with a present audience, and the written language to communicate at a spatial and temporal distance. Given the fact that speech is more susceptible to change, man has invented writing in its modern and ancient form (symbol writing). Thus, in order to communicate with fellow humans, man employs speech and writing; the former to engage present audience, and the latter to communicate with absent audience (absenteeism in terms of space or time). Language can take multiple forms: the language of words (*zaban-e qal*), language of (internal) state (*zaban-e hal*), literal language, figurative language, symbolic language, the language of allusion, metaphor, simile, etc. Such forms are employed and discernible in speech and writing.

Sometimes, people elect to use a direct language in speech and writing; thereby speaking and writing plainly without employing any level or type of ambiguity or allusion. On other occasions, however, people may tend to speak or write indirectly and to use metaphors, allusions, analogies, subtle intimations and symbols. Using this kind of implicit, indirect language is common among across social classes and professions, including poets, men of letters, astronomers, logicians, mathematicians, and so forth.

Based on another classification, language is divided into ordinary or natural language, and formal or symbolic language. In distinguishing these two languages from each other, it is argued that when ordinary language is unable to enable communication, we use formal or symbolic language. In the study of logic (both classical and

modern), symbolic language is used to facilitate tasks such as learning. Instead of using linking words and/or phrases that connect propositions, symbolic logic uses symbols and refers to them as “propositional connectives.” Logicians’ purpose of using symbolic logic is to remove details from an argumentation and keep the focus on its general logical form (Lacoste 1997, 127).

The use of symbolic mysterious language is not limited to the field of logic; various other sciences, including those mentioned hereinabove, may employ this code to express intents and objectives. However, addressing all such applications would be impossible within a single paper.

In their language, mystics use two kinds of expressions:

1. Non-metaphorical expressions (or non-symbolic expressions)
2. Metaphorical expressions (or symbolic expressions)

As for religion, it is argued that prophethood has two dimensions: guardianship (*wilayat*) and legislation (*tashri*). In relation to these two dimensions, there are two kinds of knowledge: esoteric (*batin*) and exoteric (*zahir*). The legislative dimension of prophethood is concerned with exoteric knowledge, because its target audience is ordinary people; prophets are commissioned by God to speak to the people in their ordinary language, and convey revealed messages of God (Majlisi 1965, 75:140).

When the mystic is concerned with the appearance of religion, and address common people, he uses ordinary language; and when he speaks to the friends of God, who are familiar with mystic’s special language, he uses the language of allusion and mystery, i.e., symbolic or metaphorical language.

In order to realize the significance of symbolic terms, such as mystery, subtle intimation (*isharah*) and analogy (*tamthil*), employed

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by the mystics, we shall make references to their own statements. Generally speaking, if one wishes to understand a particular group of people, he shall learn their particular language (terms and expressions) to eliminate misunderstanding or misinterpretation.

The Abdál have certain mystical expressions of which the doctrines (of external religion) are ignorant.

If you become an exponent (imitator) of the song of birds, how will you become acquainted with the (real) meaning of the bird?

If you learn the note of a nightingale, how will you know what (feelings) it has towards a rose? (Lahiji 2004, 30)

Before defining the metaphorical terms such as symbols and subtle intimations, and explaining what Muslim philosophers meant by using them, we will give a brief review of the term *ramz* (mystery and symbol), and its application by several philosophers and adherents of religions.

Throughout the history of philosophy, the Orphics and Pythagoras are introduced as the first thinkers who practiced the “symbolic” use of language. It is also reported that Plutarch of Chaeronea, born in 45 CE, used symbolic and allegorical interpretations in convincing common people. In his book *Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch introduces Osiris as the symbol of “Good,” and Isis as the symbol of “Evil” (Copleston 1996, 1:30), thus giving a symbolic and allegorical interpretation.

In an introduction to *Hikmat al-Ishraq* [*The Philosophy of Illumination*], Shaykh al-Ishraq (Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi) presents light as the symbol of “Good” and darkness as the symbol of “Evil.” He asserts that early philosophers such as Hermes, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato, used a “symbolic”

language (Shirazi 2001, 16). He also maintains that the illuminationist principle of light and darkness, observed by Iranian philosophers such as Jamasp, Farshad the Lion (or Farshad the Camel), and Buzarjomehr had a “symbolic” basis (Shirazi 2001, 17). There are also a number of religions, presented as mystery religions in the history of religions (Noss 1966, 60).

Gnosticism, which emerged in Christendom during the second and third centuries CE, and shared a number of beliefs and practices with Hermetic, Sabian, Zoroastrian, and Manichean religions, was considered as a mystery religion (Ilkhani 2006, 16-31).

Avicenna in his allegorical stories, such as *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, *Risalat al-Tayr* (Treatise of the Bird), and *Salaman and Absal*, and Suhrawardi in *Qiṣṣat al-ghurbah al-gharbiyyah*, *‘Aql-i surkh*, and *Awaz-i par-i Jibra’il* [The Chant of Gabriel's Wing] spoke in a symbolic language.

Results and Discussion

The Human Need for Mystery and Symbolic Interpretation

If we acknowledge that reality has many layers and the capacity of construing reality differ from one person to another, then we find out the necessity of symbolic interpretation. With a symbolic interpretation, man passes through the appearance (*zahir*), which has a certain degree of truth, and reaches access to the inside (*batin*), which contains the whole truth.

It is out of this human need that God speaks of both the outside and the inside in the Quran, and provides both decisive (*muhkam*) and allegorical (*mutashabih*) verses. According to Mufasssers (Quranic commentators), we can give an exoteric interpretation (*tafsir*) of decisive verses; while in respect of allegorical verses, the conventional

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exegesis that is a kind of unveiling of hidden truth, is not sufficient. In order to interpret the true meaning of these verses, we need *ta'wil* (esoteric interpretation) that goes beyond the direct meaning of words to esoteric meaning. In this sense, *ta'wil* can be regarded as a symbolic and an esoteric interpretation (Corbin 2005, 55, 75). In other words, we cannot explain allegorical verses and we need to interpret them in order to extract the deep inherent meaning. Hence, in order to figure out the real intention of the author, knowing the exoteric meaning of words and expressions is not sufficient, since the author's intention may go beyond ordinary words, and superficial meaning and language. In this case, we need an esoteric interpretation to unveil his intention and eliminate misunderstanding. Using esoteric interpretation to realize the intention of the author is a method in the science of hermeneutics.

Thus, the symbol is an expression of a higher truth into a lower level or setting, and a symbol helps direct man to such a higher level of perfection. It is the symbolic manifestation of the Absolute Being in a finite entity. Thus, in order to access the higher level of reality, we need to comprehend symbolic language.

The consummate wisdom of God requires that all predisposed souls achieve the level of perfection that befits them, thus, God has stated a number of realities in a symbolic language, a language that is not understandable to common people (Quran 3:7).

In explicating the significance of symbols and symbolism, we can claim that all the universe, ranging from the Breath of the Divine Compassion (*nafas al-Rahman*) to the first substance (the *Materia Prima*), encompass mysteries and symbols. Each being, at any existential rank, stands as a sign that points to a higher reality and truth. In a platonic and illuminationist sense, each being in this world reflects a light from a higher "god."

Employing symbolic language suggests that, when the senses and intellect fail to figure out the truth, we have to resort to intuition or divinely-infused knowledge, as these realities lie beyond the primary reach of senses and intellect:

The secrets of Idrisi Science would be intuitive, not acquisitive.

How can the satanic sense find about the mysteries of the Science of Divine Names? (Khaqani-Shirvani 2000, ode 2)

The use of mysterious language implies that the world consists of several concurrent layers. According to illuminationist and Sadrian philosophers, there are four realms of being: The Realm of Absolute Unity (*'alam-i lahut*), the Realm of Power (*'alam-i jabarut*), the Realm of Intelligence (*'alam-i malakut*), and the Realm of Physical bodies (*'alam-i nasut*). The key to understanding mystical and symbolic interpretations is comprehending the world of subsistent images (*'alam-i mithal*) or the discrete imaginative world.

“*Ramz*” and “*Ishareh*” in Philosophy

Shams al-Din Shahrazuri, the first commentator of *Hikmat al-ishraq*, defines “*ramz*” as follows:

Ramz is developed when the speaker uses a word not literally (in a sense already attributed to it), but in a new sense. This kind of application is possible, as the speaker has established a kind of association between primary and secondary meanings of the term. However, as the listener gets only the literal meaning of *ramz*, he will oppose the speaker.” (Shahrazuri 2001, 25)

Here, Suhrawardi implies that *ramz* possesses an internal signification not interpretable by ordinary people. Commenting on the

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Quranic verse “and make you to grow again in a fashion you know not. You have known the first growth” (Quran, 56:61-62), Suhrawardi writes: “The verse refers to two types of human birth: the first is birth from a mother and the second birth, more significant than the first one, is death. Due to the mysteries and symbols, this kind of birth remains unknown, and it is impossible [for ordinary people] to reach its true meaning” (Suhrawardi 1976, 59-60).

Here, Suhrawardi has gone beyond the literal, primary meaning of “death,” that is a state of separation between the soul and the body, and has delved into the inner and real meaning that is rebirth. Obviously ordinary people would fail to conceive the second meaning.

In his testaments, Suhrawardi addresses his readers saying:

Beware not to get obsessed with the discordance of words, because [according to the Quran], “in the day of Resurrection, when all shall be raised from the dead,” and man appears before the divine court, out of thousands of the dead raised from the graves, nine hundred and ninety nine would be those killed by the sword of words, intimations and allusions; they themselves are responsible for their suffering, because they were inattentive to the real meaning of [the truth], and spoiled the principles and sources [of life]. (Suhrawardi 1976, 82)

According to Suhrawardi, human prosperity depends on the understanding of realities and esoteric meanings. He believes that, only a few people, seek for real meanings, while the majority is obsessed with words and outer form, an obsession that hinders their progress.

It seems that Farabi was the first Muslim philosopher to deal with the concept of *ramz* or mystery. He writes:

Plato refused to write down his knowledge and put it in access of those internally impure and intellectually imperfect. However, as soon as he got concerned with forgetting and losing all he had acquired up to that date, and failing to recollect them again, he selected a symbolic, mystical language for recording his knowledge and philosophy; in this way, no one, but the right people, could find access to his knowledge. Aristotle, on the contrary, expressed everything unequivocally. (Farabi 1984, 84)

It seems that Suhrawardi, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra, and other Muslim philosophers were inspired by this statement of Farabi, when they say that early philosophers encoded their messages in a symbolic language. In the introduction to *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (The Philosophy of Illumination), Suhrawardi writes: “Early philosophers have expressed themselves in a symbolic language, and any objection to their remarks is concerned with the literal meaning of their words, rather than their real intentions. Thus, we cannot reject their mystical, symbolic statements” (Shirazi 2001, 16). Qutb al-Din Shirazi writes:

'Since rejecting and revoking a symbol is subject to the comprehension of the author's or the speaker's intention, and since this intention which is the real meaning of the symbol is hidden and obscure to someone who calls it untrue, and since this objector has merely a superficial understanding of the symbol, which is far from the author's intentions, thus, the objector cannot actually deny the symbol, because he is denying something which he does not know (Shirazi 2001, 16).

Furthermore, in explaining Aristotle's methodology and its difference with that of Plato, Razi says: “When Plato blamed Aristotle for explicating philosophical problems, Aristotle answered: “Though I

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have disclosed philosophical secrets and explained them to the public, I have put some valleys and troubles in them, so that except a few wise men, no one will discover my intentions and real meanings” (Shirazi 2001, 16).

Mir Damad extended the application of symbolism beyond the realms of philosophy and mysticism, and introduced it to *Sharia* (Islamic Law), stating that:

Early philosophers and wise men were in the habit of speaking in a symbolic language, giving expression to their argumentations, and presenting the abstract intellectual concepts in tangible forms. Their words in the form of symbols are famous among both the public and the elite. Philosophers did not exclusively use this method of speaking in symbolic language; it was the habit of the prophets and God’s messengers, as well as those who were the treasuries of divine secrets. (Mir Damad 2001, 146-47)

Mulla Sadra believes that former philosophers tended to use symbolic language to comply with the method of the prophets. He writes: “That should not be left unsaid that the method of former philosophers was an imitation of that of the prophets who spoke in a symbolic language” (Shirazi 1963, 364)

Mulla Sadra delivered the most extensive elaboration on the subject of symbolic language and the necessity of its application, compared to other Muslim philosophers. Not only did he believe that Quranic verses should be interpreted, he also suggested that the accounts or statements narrated by the Prophet and Imams shall be interpreted either (Shirazi 2003, 344). Mulla Sadra believes that, knowing the essence of God is arduous, both in terms of finding appropriate methods and speaking about it, so that acquiring this knowledge happens as scarcely as finding a red ruby; thus, whenever

the Quran speaks about the essence of God, the language is figurative and symbolic (Shirazi 2003, 129).

The Difference between *Ramz* and *Majaz* (Trope and Allegory)

As stated earlier, *ramz* is a type of *kinaya*, and in order to understand the difference between *ramz* and *majaz*, we need to explain the difference between *majaz* and *kinaya*. *Majaz* is distinct from *kinaya* in the sense that *majaz* does not conform to reality, because it refers to something nonexistent. In this sense, *majaz* resembles a false statement, but still differs from it; because in *majaz*, there is always a circumstantial indicator (*qarinah*) that suggests the speaker's intention is beyond literal meaning; while in a false statement, there is no such indicator. Thus, in *majaz*, the literal meaning is irrelevant, because there is always an indicator that the intention remains beyond superficial meaning, otherwise the proposition would be false. When the speaker says "I saw a lion at the bathroom," the "bathroom" is an indicator which prevents the reader from considering "lion" as a wild animal.

However, in *kinaya* there is no need for an indicator to signal that literal meaning is not the real intention. In other words, in *kinaya*, the literal meaning is relevant too. Thus, *ramz* is the product of both the literal and figurative meaning, outer and inner meanings; which bestows the enigmatic nature on the *ramz*. In explicating the difference between *ramz* and *majaz* (trope and allegory), Henry Corbin writes:

Allegory is a rational operation, implying no transition either to a new plane of being or to a new depth of consciousness; it is a figuration, at an identical level of consciousness, of what might very well be known in a different way. The symbol announces a plane of consciousness distinct from that of rational evidence; it is the "cipher" of a mystery,

the only means of saying something that cannot be apprehended in any other way; a symbol is never “explained” once and for all, but must be deciphered over and over again. (Corbin 2005, 56)

The reason why symbol is never explained once and for all, is that it is a sign of a mystery, and mystery is a hidden obscure multilayer and multidimensional concept; every time it is disclosed, a single layer out of many layers is unveiled, and each individual may decipher that particular sign based on his own capacity and level of comprehension (Taftazani 1988, 408).

The Reasons and objectives of using symbolic language according to Muslim Philosophers

An important question regarding the subject of a symbol is why a writer or a speaker uses symbolic language, or for which necessity he elects to use such a language. Muslim philosophers and mystics have provided different answers to this question, and their answers were sometimes similar. The present paper aims to study the answers of Muslim philosophers. The significance of this study emerges from the fact that it was traditionally thought that symbolic language was solely used by mystics. But here we will prove that philosophers also took interest in this language; and for this purpose, the study will focus more on the answers of Muslim philosophers to the above question.

Muslim philosophers’ objectives of using a symbolic language can be listed as follows:

1. For confidentiality purposes to prevent outsiders from knowing their intentions

Confidentiality was a central and a shared objective of Muslim philosophers in using a symbolic language to deter from gaining

access to their intentions. The reason for keeping secrets was out of a conviction that some truths can be understood solely by the qualified, the worthy, and the predisposed individuals; while the others who lacked these qualities would fail to benefit from this truth and may incite revolt against the inherent philosophy and its philosophers. Throughout Islamic history, there had been multiple examples of public revolts against philosophy and philosophers, instigated by traditionalists and textualists; the accounts of some of such incidents are recorded in the history of philosophy.

As mentioned earlier, Farabi was the first Muslim philosopher to refer to the issue of philosophers' confidentiality in explaining the motives behind using a symbolic language. Farabi said, when Plato felt that he was vulnerable to amnesia or fallibility, he decided to write down his works. But he recorded them in a mystical, symbolic language to be accessible only to the qualified and worthy individuals (Farabi 1984, 84).

After Farabi, Avicenna also attributed the use of symbolic language to the same motive. In the conclusion of his book, *Al-Isharat wa al-tanbihat* (Remarks and Admonitions), he narrated:

My brother! In this book, I have disclosed the essence of reality to you, and provided you with the good morsels of wisdom, veiled in symbolic words. Thus, secure this book from: 1. Those who do not appreciate wisdom; 2. Those who are heedless, and may put the book in access of anyone; 3. Those who are deprived of burning brilliance, unable to understand the deep issues stated in it; 4. Those who are not brave, and may socialize with vulgar people and follow commonality; 5. Those worthless people who deny philosophy (Avicenna 1982, 419).

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Not only had Avicenna warned readers from making the book accessible to unqualified people, but he also requested that the book be protected from them. He wrote:

I intended to write about all forms of prayers [fasting, pilgrimage of Mecca ...] in this treatise [*Sirr al-alat* (The Secret of Prayer)]. However, as it is difficult to deal with the issues which must not be disclosed to the all, I provided an explicit, obvious classification. I call this book forbidden to one who is submissive to his passions, and is ignorant of the truth; because he is like an impotent person who cannot imagine the pleasure of intercourse, and the blind person who cannot acknowledge the pleasure of vision. (Avicenna 2009, 17)

Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi commented on Suhrawardi's statement saying: "Former philosophers expressed their meanings in symbols." He believes that one of the objectives of philosophers was barring the unworthy and unqualified from understanding their meanings, because if they get access to wisdom, they would abuse it by committing sins and evil acts (Shirazi 2001, 16; Shahrzuri 2001, 22).

This manner of speaking in a symbolic language and seeking to safeguard secrets from the public is attributed by Mulla Sadra to philosophers, mystics and prophets. In elaborating on the symbolic nature of the divine words in the Quran, Mulla Sadra stated:

When God would bestow his mercy on men, and came to foster imperfect but noble souls, he set their provisions to be from the breast of the divine world and heaven; he provided them with the spiritual nourishment of letters, veiled under intimations and symbols [He disguised spiritual nourishment as words and letters], thus, the strangers should not know the secrets, and the unqualified individuals, unable to learn the secrets, should not enter the world of

mysteries. (Shirazi 1981, 7:41; Shirazi 1963, 90)

Furthermore, commenting on the *hadith* mentioned earlier—“We, the prophets, are committed to speak unto men according to the measure of their understanding”—Mulla Sadra says that Muhammad did not express divine realities in the original form handed over to him; he presented them in the form of allegories and examples. He did so because the people of his time, except Imam Ali who was dubbed as the soul of Muhammad and his confident companion in the Quran, would fail to understand the essence and reality of the truth revealed to him (Shirazi 1987, 1:539). Mulla Sadra continues:

Know therefore that dispersing knowledge and truth among the unworthy, is unacceptable by all creeds and doctrines; that is why early philosophers have presented their ideas in symbolic, mystical language, rather than in an explicit manner. They were cautious not to allow the unworthy to find access to their knowledge. [If the knowledge and truth were in access of the unworthy], it is as if you have put jewelry around the necks of pigs. There is a story about a man who came to Ibn Sirin and recounted his dream. He said that in his dream he saw himself putting jewelry around the necks of pigs. Ibn Sirin [giving an interpretation of his dream] said: you are teaching knowledge to the unworthy. (Shirazi 1987, 1:539)

On the Quranic verse 12 (Quran 65:12), Ibn ‘Arabi comments:

There are many mysteries and secrets in interpretation of “[God’s] Command descending”; I have mentioned some of them in this section [eleventh section]. It is reported that Ibn Abbas had commented on this verse and said: “If I give you an interpretation of this verse, you would stone me, or you would call me Kafir

(unbeliever)!” (Ibn Arabi 2000, 1:363-477)³⁹

Then after relating Ibn Abbas’s remarks, Ibn ‘Arabi refers to Imam Sajjad’s statements and writes:

‘Ali ibn al-Husayn (Zayn al-‘Abidin) points to this knowledge [of secrets and mysteries], and says: “You, who is knowledgeable! If I tell you the truth, hidden in Muhammad’s *hadith* (“So God created mankind in his own image”), you would count me pagan, and for some of Muslims it would be permissible to shed my blood.” (Ibn ‘Arabi 2000, 1:363-477)

2. Fear of the Unrighteous

One of the reasons for using symbolic language by philosophers was the fear of unrighteous people and their misinterpretation. As stated earlier (Shirazi 2000, 364-477), Mulla Sadra mentioned this reason. In the preface of his book *Asfar*, he narrated his own story of being entangled within superficiality and inanity of the vulgar. At one place, he writes: “We are certainly dealing with ignorant people who do not understand, and their eyes fail to see the radiance of wisdom and its mysteries. Their eyes, alike the eyes of bats, do not bear the light of wisdom and its consequences. It is heretic, according to them, to investigate and contemplate divine problems.”

Sadra concluded his account saying: “As I found conditions unsuitable for writing and expressing the truth, I practiced *taqiyya* (reservation), and showed tolerance toward the wicked.” The fear of the unrighteous is a significant point and many thinkers had such an obsession. Rumi writes in *Mathnawi*:

I would have explained this (matter) with (eager) contention, but I fear lest some (weak) mind may stumble.

The points (involved in it) are sharp as a sword of

steel; if you have not the shield (of capacity to understand), turn back and flee!

Do not come without shield against this adamant (keen blade), for the sword is not ashamed of cutting. For this cause I have put the sword in sheath, that none who misreads may read contrariwise (in a sense contrary to the true meaning of my words). (Rumi 1981, book I, no. 690)

3. Improvement of Mental Faculties

Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi believes that using symbolic language is useful for expanding mental faculty (Shirazi 2001, 16). In this sense, symbolism is a kind of riddle or enigma that, to be conceived, shall be disclosed to enable the recipient to go through exoteric meaning to real signification. Obviously, disclosing such a riddle needs a mental effort that ordinary people cannot afford. Thus, attempting to resolve secrets and mysteries leads to the development of rational abilities (mental faculty).

4. Conformity with the ways of God and the Prophets

The text of the Quran is equivocal and inexplicit. On the other hand, the readers attain different degrees of understanding. That is why the Book of God (Quran) comprises of four things: the statement set down, the implied purport, the hidden meanings relating to the supra-sensible world, and the exalted spiritual doctrines (Majlisi 1965, 77:278). Prophet Muhammad aimed to respond to the varying needs and levels of human comprehension, when he said: “We, the prophets, are committed to speak unto men according to the measure of their understanding” (Majlisi 1965, 77: 140).

Several examples of Mulla Sadra’s ideas were cited on the mysterious nature of the *muqatta’at* (disjointed letters) in the Quran,

and the fact that in the Quran, references to the essence of God are expressed in a language of mystery and allusion. Not only the Quran, but also Prophet Muhammad resorted to encoded expression to convey messages to his audiences. For instance, one of the companions of the Prophet, named Abu Razin Aqili, asked him: “Where was God before He created the universe?” (Fanari 1995, 366). The Prophet answered: “He was in a thin layer of cloud with no air above or below” (Fanari 1995, 366). Here, the Prophet is certainly using a symbolic language, and by “a thin layer of cloud” he meant “the Breath of the Compassionate” (Nafas al-Rahman) (Fanari 1995, 387; Furghani 2000, 129-30).

Thus, it is certain that both the Quran and *Sunnah* used symbolic language on occasions, and employing this language by philosophers can be a sign of devotion to the Holy Book (the Quran) and *Sunnah*. In this regard, Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi writes:

To be consistent with the ways of God and the prophets, philosophers recorded their works in a symbolic language, because the holy books revealed to the prophets were books of mysteries. Veiling contents in secrets and symbols makes the book accessible both to ordinary people, and to the elite; in this way, the former enjoy the exoteric meaning of the book, while the latter enjoy the esoteric counterparts. Those realities [concerning punishment] indicated within the holy books are deterrents, keeping people away from the immoralities; other verses [concerning the blessings of heaven] cause them imagine some fancies and illusions [such as houris, the springs and rivers] and [get eager to them]; [those who have an illusory understanding of the realities, their illusion] leads them to an illusory felicity. And those who are obsessed with the outward form (*zahir*), if the reality was disclosed to them with no ambiguity, they would have failed to conceive it [and instead of acceptance

of and submission to the reality] they would have denied it; thus, their denial might result in their destruction. (Shahrzuri 2001, 16)

CONCLUSION

The author in this article shed the light on the mystery and symbolic (*Ramz*) language in the thought of Muslim philosophers. Since the explanation of the problem required prerequisites and hypotheses, they were explained as follows:

- The importance and role of language for human as a medium for expression and communication of goals and purposes to peers.
- To express their intentions, humans use a variety of linguistic codes: Traditional, natural, metaphorical and symbolic languages.
- Examples of the use of symbolic mysterious language in religions and by philosophers to achieve certain goals and purposes were laid out, including Orphism, Gnosticism, Mystery Religions, the philosophical works of Avicenna (*Risalat Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, *Risalat al-tayr*, and *Risalat Salaman wa Absal*), and the works by Suhrawardi (*Qiṣṣat al-ghurbah al-gharbiyyah*, *ʿAql-i surkh*, and *Awaz-i par-i Jibraʿil*)—all being written in symbolic mysterious language.

Having completed the preliminary discussion, the author moved on to discuss the following issues:

- Why do humans need a symbolic mysterious language, besides conventional and normal languages?
- Definition of the concepts: *ramz* (mystery and symbol), and allusion and its subsets.

- The definition of the terms “mystery” and “symbol” in the view of Muslim philosophers.
- The difference between *ramz* and *majaz* (*trope and allegory*)
- The rationale behind employing a mysterious and symbolic (*ramz*) language by Muslim Philosophers.

In this study, the author pointed out four reasons and objectives as follows:

1. Encoding to safeguard confidentiality for fear of strangers’ intentions.
2. Eliminating potential misinterpretation
3. Enhancing mental capacity and faculty
4. Abiding by the style of God and the prophets who employed a symbolic and mysterious language to convey their goals and purposes to mankind.

To the author’s best knowledge, no earlier research study has been published on the use of the symbolic mysterious language by Muslim philosophers, hence this study can be considered a starting point for subsequent research on the topic. Further research in this area can tackle and analyze other aspects of the topic.

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