

Conceptualization of Spiritual Education in Seyyed Hosein Nasr's Thoughts and Comparing It with the Current Definitions

Babak Shamshiri Saeed Rahimian Hosein Ali Tajali Ardekani

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 the current definitions of the concept. This study has been done through the qualitative method called transcendental analysis. Therefore, that concept was conceptualized through investigating and eliciting the requisite assumptions from Nasr's philosophical approach. Findings showed that in Nasr's thoughts, spiritual education is the process of actualizing all the innate potentialities of human 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 heavenly religion. The aim of spiritual education is to know the Ultimate Reality intuitively. Compared to the current definitions, the concluded concept is more similar to that of Carr's and Tabatabaie's ideas while it is different from Miller, Duff and Bigger's perspectives.

Keywords: spirituality; spiritual education; conceptual comparison; Seyyed Hosein Nasr

Introduction

Human is a multidimensional being and has wonderful potentialities. This wonder of creation achieves his or her complete prosperity when it is paid attention to all the aspects of his or her being and when the ground of educating all his or her capacities and potentialities is prepared. In a word, he or she should be looked at as a whole and be educated as he or she must be.

In today's society, considering the context living in it that is affected by modernism and its components such as humanism, scientism, empiricism, rationalism, secularism, materialism, reductionism and quantity domination, human beings are tearing the nature into pieces and are destroying the opportunities. This attitude has influenced human beings and many of their institutes, particularly education and has caused the ignorance of some human aspects. It has caused chaos in human thoughts and behaviors that have led to some consequences such as day to day developing of psychological disorders, suicide, murder, anxieties, family collapse, lifestyle change and moral and social disorders.

If we contemplate for a moment, we can realize that besides bio/neurological elements, racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, etc, one other potential factor for the most mentioned outcomes is the fact that human has a lost pearl called spirituality. One who has a meaning for his or her being and life can live in any conditions. Nasr thinks that the answer to some of the above problems is spiritualism. He states: 'we should emphasize on the importance of authentic spirituality that deals with the inward dimension of religion. The answer to some problems can be found only by Sufism. If religion is its skin and external dimension and we ignore its core or essence, then many questions would remain unanswered for religious people and the danger of leaving one's religion would be developed; a fact that occurred in the modernized West' (Nasr 2010). Therefore, serious endeavor for spirituality and spiritual education is urgent for everyone, every society and country in the world.

The most fundamental educational institute of every society is its formal education system. So it is this institute's duty to pay serious attention to spiritual education, but it needs philosophy or philosophies of spiritual education and programs before taking action. Developing such philosophies and programs needs theoretical, normative and analytical studies to avoid some superficial outcomes, inefficiencies and failures in the process of taking action.

Considering what was mentioned above, this study is to conceptualize spiritual education in Seyyed Hosein Nasr's thoughts, a traditionalist philosopher who like other traditionalists pays special attention to religion, spirituality, the sacred, orthodoxy, perennial philosophy, modernism criticism, art and transcendental unity of heavenly religions. He has deep spiritual investigations and apprehension in theory and practice. Then, the concluded concept is compared with the current definitions of spiritual education to know the similarities and differences.

Research method

This study was done by the qualitative method called transcendental analysis. Bagheri writes: 'this method is done in two phases called description and determination of requisite conditions. In the first phase, a phenomenon is described. The phenomenon is such that it can be experienced unavoidably. In other words, the mentioned descriptive statement is a statement that we believe in it and it is self-evident. In the second phase, this question is posed that what requisite condition or conditions we need to have the descriptive phenomenon' (Bagheri 2010, 137).

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's Divine nature that is to reinforce disposition, expand knowledge and to take action congruent with it' (2012).

In searching the above concept, Hand (2003) presents diverse definitions that are '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: 'Carr's approach and Miller's one'. He attributes the second definition to Miller and considers the other three ones to Carr.

a. Spiritual education as teaching truth and training spiritual virtues

Carr considers 'spiritual education as a distinctive part of education that is to teach truths 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. So, education in a spiritual disposition and education in a spiritual activity that were mentioned before are realized in the context of such spiritual truths and principles. Therefore, the students not only should learn the cognitive prerequisites, but also they should internalize them. Making their dispositions divine and affecting truths on their spiritual experience qualities and their activities, the student consciously examines and transverses different ways of communicating with God by prayer.

Carr thinks that 'the basic step for understanding the nature of spiritual education is to determine that this concept considers what distinctive form of knowledge and which special series of dispositions. Spiritual truths focus on an aspect of human life that is metaphysical, eternal and enduring, truths such as: man does not live by bread alone; no man can serve two masters.' Moreover, in Carr's idea, 'spiritual principles are those that are originated from a divine goal whether explicitly or implicitly. These principles are formed to actualize human. He states that it is better to pursue our spirit redemption before seeking and achieving material things' (Carr 1995).

According to Carr, 'one who considers such principles in his or her life and transverses his or her life with divine goals experiences a spiritual life that is effective in his or her flourishing by the formation of personality features, habits and spiritual dispositions' (Hand 2003). Carr considers this kind of education as 'education in a spiritual disposition.'

Spiritual education involves activities that should be taught to students. Carr categorizes these activities as 'contemplative and devotional.' He doesn't consider learning these activities necessarily based on the students' religious presuppositions. 'Even those who don't 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.'

b. Spiritual education as training of the human spirit

Miller is a curriculum theoretician that emphasizes on paying attention to spirituality in curriculum. When he writes about spirituality, he means the importance of the human spirit. Miller defines the spirit generally. In his idea, 'spirit is the alive and deep energy that gives meaning and direction to life. Spirit denial is the denial of an essential component in our existence' (Miller 2001, 12). Miller's proposed principles and methods are to exhilarate all the elements engaged in education. Miller doesn't 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.'

To know more about spiritual education in Miller's idea, it is influential 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 empowers 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 idea, Hand considers 'training the emotional aspect of the spirit as a more suitable definition of spiritual education' (Hand 2003).

Duff considers 'student's mind and heart quality promotion a better definition for spiritual education. In this way, the whole personality of the student is engaged and leads to the adjustment and harmony among his or her physical, emotional, intelligence, and spiritual dimensions'. He states, 'spiritual practices are not simply a part of curriculum domain, but they can be used in all dimensions of learning' (Duff 2003).

Another thinker in this field is Stephen Bigger who writes about secular spiritual education. In his conceptual discussion, he presents 'spiritual education as referring to 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 opinion, 'spiritual

development is a secular, holistic, deep rooted yet dynamic form of consciousness, deep personal growth integrating 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 also can become a prison which by dogmatism inhibits personal 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' (Bigger 2008, 60-68).

Nasr's anthropological assumptions

To conceptualize spiritual education in Nasr's opinion, we used his anthropological foundation. In his view which is a traditionalist one, 'human is a whole composed of body, soul and spirit' (Nasr 1993, 172). 'These three dimensions have a hierarchical order and each upper dimension governs the lower ones' (Nasr 2008, 72). Each of these dimensions has some layers as well.

The first existential dimension of human is his 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. And 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. And except for the gross, physical body, all of the other bodies are immortal and survive death' (Nasr 2008, 52-53).

Now it is time to discuss the second dimension of man which is the soul. At first, we deal with its nature. In Rahmati's words, Nasr believes that 'the soul, as the medial dimension of man, 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 world dimensions. Therefore, it correlates the physical dimension with the spiritual (intellectual) one. But morally and spiritually, willpower and volition belongs to this dimension. For that reason, there are infinite potentialities available for man that he can attempt 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 doesn't prove any spiritual perfection in human' (Nasr 2013, 72).

Just like the body, the soul has several grades. 'As ordinarily understood, the *nafs* is the source of limitation, passion and gravity, the source of all that makes man selfish and self-centered. This *nafs* Which is called the *al-nafs al- ammarah* (the soul which inspires evil), following the terminology of the Quran, must be transfigured through death and purgation. It must be controlled by the higher self. With the help of the spirit the *nafs al- ammarah* becomes transformed into the *nafs al-lawwamah* (the blaming soul), 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-lawwamah* becomes transformed to the *nafs al-mutma`innah* (the soul at peace), 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 *nafs al-motma`innah* becomes transferred into the *nafs al-radiyah* (the satisfied soul), 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 Quran asserts, and finally realizing the Self through its own annihilation (*fana*) and subsequent subsistence (*baqa*) in God' (Nasr 1993, 11).

Soul, the inner dimension of human which is between the body and the spirit corresponds to the imaginal world. In Nasr's view, 'it doesn't have much value in comparison with the spirit and finally it can't be separated from that world either.' In the 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 crossing the soul and entering the spirit's territory that becoming closer to the Truth and becoming united with Him is possible.

Nasr believes that 'in Islamic cosmology, spirit is at the core of cosmic existence and belongs to the Divine world' (Nasr 1987, 54). Therefore, the third and the last existential dimension of man that his being depends on it was discussed. It became evident that against materialistic views, Nasr gives a Divine dimension to spirit and considers it as 'the Divine Blow' that is inherent in man's existence. To train this core existential dimension, it is essential to cross the lower layers to reach this core that has absolute abstraction to be illuminated with its light.

Another assumption in Nasr's anthropology is the term nature which is too important in conceptualization of spiritual education. In his opinion, 'inward human being there is the immutable and permanent sea of [hu]man's nature. The situation of this permanent nature which [hu]man carries within himself [or herself] wherever he [or she] goes versus the Real in its metaphysical sense has never altered nor can it ever do so' (Nasr 1972, 148). Clarifying Nasr's anthropological assumptions, it is time to present the concept of spirituality in his

view.

Conceptualization of spirituality in Nasr's view

Nasr believes that 'the word *spirituality* in its current use, and not the Latin term from which it derives, is a modern term. As far as his own research 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' (Nasr 2007, 29). So, against out of religion or secular spiritualities, Nasr has a religious view to spirituality.

Spirituality that Nasr speaks about considers the inner part of religion that is spiritual way (*tariqah*) and is in the framework of religious mysticisms, specially Sufism. In this realm, Nasr believes that 'Sufism, 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' (Nasr 2008, xv). But we shouldn't ignore the fact that he considers 'spirituality for the external world' as well.

He writes, 'in my opinion there is an element of spirituality even to 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 secret rites and institutions even of the outward kind; but when it comes to man's life, especially religious life, he identifies spirituality more than anything else with the inward dimension, with the esoteric dimension of being. As he said there is an element of spirituality even in the exoteric dimension of religion' (Nasr 2010, 171). Furthermore, he says, 'spirituality has to do with the inner aspect of things, with the inward, with the exoteric. He thinks that spirituality identifies itself primarily with the inward and also with the reflection of the inward dimension of reality in the outward' (Ibid).

He writes that in his view, 'spirituality in itself is what the word itself reveals, that is, to be in contact with the world of Spirit, and that 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 *nirvana*. Everything else, including love or universality, flows from the Ultimate Reality/Truth' (Nasr 2010, 168). Now that his anthropological assumptions and spirituality in his point of view were clarified, it is time to inquire spiritual education.

Conceptualization of spiritual education in Nasr's point of view

Considering the previous themes, this question is raised that how the fulfillment and union with the Ultimate Reality is 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 fault' (Nasr 2008, 267). 'The roots of our fallen human soul are sunk deeply in the soil of this world. The first action to take is to pluck these roots out of that which is transient and evanescent and sink them into the Divine reality. ...Awakening from the sleep of forgetfulness, which is the necessary condition for following the path, brings about the realization that the world that we usually take as being the sole reality is itself a dream' (Nasr 2008, 95).

Another condition to follow the path to God is introspection which leads to God awareness. Nasr says, '[hu]man should focus his [or her] mind on inward himself [or herself] and have inner concentration, because he [or she] can become aware of his [or her] God only by this inward concentration and contemplation' (Nasr 1987, 199).

In Nasr's thought, 'crossing from form to essence, from outward to inward, from symbol to the symbolized truth, whether for the world, Revelation, or human is possible through Sufism which is considered as 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' (Nasr 1997, 83). He considers 'Islam [*Shariah* as the first layer of every religion since Nasr is in favor of religious pluralism] as a prerequisite condition to follow Sufism seriously' (Nasr 2008), but this phase is not sufficient and it is essential to attain faith. Therefore, the spiritual education process is impossible without gaining knowledge of and taking part in the religious rites and the realization of their purpose. In his idea, 'only true mysticism with a Divine origin and in the framework of a heavenly religion can quench the mystical attainment thirst. Only Divine path can guide man to God and only this path can guarantee the ultimate prosperity of the soul and the union with the One God' (Nasr 1972). So, it is required to

explore religion in Nasr's thought.

Nasr considers religion to have different layers just like human and the universe. The first and the most outward layer is *Shariah*. The next layer is *Tariqah* and the most inward layer is Truth (*Haqiqah*). Nasr believes, 'true religion is a religion that has the three dimensions of *Shariah*, *Tariqah* and *Haqiqah*. In Islam, some Moslem mystics, especially Shazeliyah masters, use the geometrical allegory of circle to explain these three dimensions of Islam and to present the importance of *Tariqah*. Circle's environment is the symbol of *Shariah* and all Moslems are in the environment simply by accepting the outward of religion and acting according to *Shariah*. Being in any point on the environment, they have an equal distance with the center of the circle which is the symbol of Truth. But if one didn't enter *Shariah* and didn't act according to it, it would be evident that he isn't even on the circle's environment. Therefore, one cannot claim that he has a status and position in the Truth adjacency. ...But it is not enough to be on the environment because one cannot advance further from Islam and extrinsic faith only by remaining on the environment and as a result he cannot attain the perfect Islam that is *Ehasan*. So, the environment (*Shariah*) shouldn't be considered absolute, but the whole importance of the environment is that it is the prerequisite to reach the center. The ultimate aim is to reach the center of the Truth' (Nasr 2008, 53-54).

Considering what was said before, the first prerequisite is to be on the circle's environment of religion. Then, it is needed to go forward from the circle's radius which is *Tariqah* to its center that is the Sun of the Truth. Nasr considers '*Shariah* without *Tariqah* would be like a body without a soul, and *Tariqah* without *Shariah* would be devoid of an external support and simply could not subsist and manifest itself in the world' (Nasr 2000, 118).

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 the knowledge of God is attained and man can become the manifestation of His names and attributes. ... The aim of the spiritual way is the God and its source is man in his worldly grade and *Tarighah* unites man to the God through training spiritual virtues and special teachings' (Nasr 1972).

In Nasr's view, 'Sufism accomplishes [hu]man's true needs by resorting to human's true nature, ... Sufism reminds human to attain his [or her] natural needs and cut his [or her] attachment to the external world and to root himself [or herself] in his God given nature, the nature that is within his [or her] heart' (Nasr 1972). Nasr believes, '[hu]man's aim which is the union with God and the aim of spiritual education resides inward the human and requires raising and retrieval. ...He says, the affirmation of *Tawhid*, one might say, is in the very nature of man and Islam is the religion that addresses itself to that deep, profound nature which, although covered by layers of forgetfulness and egoism, is nevertheless present in the heart of every human being' (Nasr 2003, 29-30).

Clarifying the meaning and function of nature in Nasr's view, it is time to consider the second element called moral virtues and their training. In his opinion, 'it is impossible to understand metaphysical realities without attaining virtues, truth belongs to God not to us. ...we only can realize truth by attaining virtues' (Nasr, 2008). he emphasizes, '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' (Nasr 2000, 134).

'In Arabic, virtue means beauty, mercy, piety and Knowledge at the same time' (Nasr 1989). In Nasr's point of view, 'virtue as understood in Sufism is not simply moral virtue but rather spiritual virtue with a noetic and existential dimension. For example, humility is not simply the sentimental attitude of humbling our egos before God and the neighbor. It is the metaphysical awareness that before the Absolute we are nothing and that the neighbor is not 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' (Nasr 2008, 126).

In Nasr's thought, 'moral purification is the way to take part in and share with the Truth. In this process, firstly man's existence should be purified from vices. Therefore, the first step of moral purification is the removal of the soul vices. Nasr writes that man is imprisoned by his own passions which usually prevent the intelligence within him from functioning in its normal fashion according to man's primordial nature, or what Islam calls *al fitrah*. Such infirmities as pride, pettiness, and falsehood are deformations of the soul which are obstacles that stand before the realization of knowledge (Nasr 1989, 269). In another work he says that the duty of *faqir*, one crossing the spiritual way, is to remove the vices that prevent the virtues from manifesting themselves in the soul (Nasr 2008, 126). In his idea 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' (Nasr 2008, 126).

The next step is decorating the soul with the virtues. Nasr emphasizes on 'three virtues which, in fact, characterize spiritual life as such that are humility, charity and truthfulness, which are in essence the same virtues that characterize the Prophet. ...Humility as a spiritual virtue means to realize that God is everything and we are nothing. It means that vis-à-vis God we realize our impotence and see the nothingness of the human before the Divine' (Nasr 1989, 135).

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 (*inbisat*), through which man realizes his oneness with all being, including not only men but also creatures' (Nasr 1989, 136-137).

The most important virtue is truthfulness that is the summit of the other two virtues and it is based on them. Therefore, those two virtues are the prerequisite of this virtue. Nasr considers this virtue as 'the crowning virtue.' 'It is like the apex of a triangle whose other angles are humility and charity; the attainment of truth in fact requires both of these other virtues. Furthermore, truthfulness is inseparable from sincerity. Truthfulness means first of all halting in complete surrender before the Truth. It means also to see the truth of things, to be honest in thought and deed, to be sincere, and to remain always on the side of the truth no matter what consequences it might have for us. There is no higher virtue for in being truthful we confirm most clearly our theomorphic nature since God is the Truth. In attaining fully this virtue we become ready to enter the Garden of Truth' (Nasr 2008, 127).

Nasr believes that 'by attaining truthfulness human can see things as they are, in their true nature which does not veil but reveal the Divine. It means to see God everywhere. Truthfulness or sincerity is, therefore, the virtue by means of which [hu]man realizes unity or *Tawhid* and lives in the constant presence of God' (Nasr 2007, 137). So human becomes the all reflecting mirror of the Divine names and attributes and becomes His manifestation. To verify this fact Nasr says, 'the human soul when purified and dressed in the garment of spiritual virtues is itself the highest kind of beauty in this world, reflecting directly the Divine beauty' (Nasr 1989, 224). Nasr considers 'these three major virtues that are humility, charity and truthfulness or sincerity the beauties of the prophets' souls', especially the prophet of Islam who is the best model.

Travelling upon the path that takes human to his or her destination requires knowledge, love and action that is originated from the will and volition and is attained by using human's existential powers and faculties. Now we explore Nasr's view in this matter. Nasr speaks about three powers inside human that are intellect, sentiment and will. 'As a theomorphic being he [or she] possesses or can possess that absolute and unconditioned intelligence which can know the truth as such; sentiments which are capable of going beyond the limited conditions of [hu]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' (Nasr 2007, 181). In the process of spiritual education these three powers are participating actively from the beginning to the last step and are developing knowledge, love and action of the person continuously to achieve his or her ultimate goal. Now we investigate their functions.

Intelligence's (intellect) function is to know the Absolute. In Nasr's idea, by intellect he 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 to know what exists or has a sign of being' (Nasr 1989). In his idea, 'the purpose of those powers is God.' Moreover, 'in the ancient metaphysical view, Sentiment and Will are related with the intellect and are flourished with it (Ibid).'

Therefore, knowledge is the first step that love and action follow it in the spiritual way. Intellect cannot give 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 full of nothingness. In the spiritual way, the harmonious function of the three powers takes human to the Absolute Reality. In other words, action should be based on knowledge obtained from the intellect and on love originated from the sentiment.

In relationship between knowledge and love, Nasr believes that 'in Sufism 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' (Nasr 2008, 69). Therefore, it is impossible to enter the Garden of Truth without love.

Considering action Nasr thinks that 'action doesn't produce truth. It is the function of knowledge. But action based on truth can 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 impossible 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 of the illuminative knowledge and spiritual love to grow in the soil of the soul' (Nasr 2008, 90-92). 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-ammarah bi'l-su*)' (Ibid). sometimes the fear of God is called piety, the fear from God with sincerity and alertness in action, that through it one can sacrifice his evil soul and cross the spiritual way faster.

On the whole, Nasr believes that to take action both knowledge and love with mercy are needed in order for action to be effective. The righteous action prepares the soul to elevate to the knowledge and love domains to

enter the Garden of Truth, in a way that releases its wings from the chains of this world and selfish actions.

Finally, Nasr considers 'two main gates to the Garden of Truth: knowledge and love. The roads leading to these gates, however, are paved with human action. Furthermore, he believes that to fear God, in contrast to His creatures, is to love Him and move toward Him, and to love Him is to know Him as far as the Sufi perspective is concerned. That is why a hadith states, 'The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God'. Fear of God deals with the level of action and turns the will of the adept away from evil acts, which have a negative effect upon the soul, and toward goodness and virtue' (Nasr 2008, 82). Therefore, one who crosses the spiritual way toward his or her perfection aim should examine the circle of fear of God, knowledge and love.

In Nasr's ideas, other basic elements to reach the aim of spiritual attainment are '*wilayat*, master of the way, affirmation (*ta'yid*) and Divine Succour (*tawfiq*).'

'The Arabic root of the term *walayah/wilayah* is *wly*. 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, 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' (Nasr 2008, 106-107). Nasr believes 'no authentic spiritual path is possible without a master and Sufism is certainly no exception to this universal principle. The Sufi master is the representative of the esoteric function of the Prophet of Islam and by the same token he [or she] is the theophany of Divine Mercy which lends itself to these willing to turn to it' (Nasr 1972, 54). Moreover, he explicitly states, 'only the power of the *shaykh* (master) can deliver man from himself-from his carnal soul- so as to enable him to behold the Universe as it really is and to rejoin the sea of Universal Existence' (Nasr 1972, 58).

About Divine Succour, Nasr writes, 'to enter upon the Sufi path, to become initiated into the way or *Tariqah*, is to be 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'yid*) as well as through the *barakah* contained in the methods of Sufism' (Nasr 1972, 47).

On the whole, Nasr's understanding of spiritual education is that it is the process within which the actualization of all the innate potentialities of human as a whole toward his or her monotheistic nature occurs. It is attained by developing knowledge, love, righteous actions and acquiring virtues to transcend from human's existential layers to train his or her spirit and know the Ultimate Reality by taking action based on a heavenly religion.

Conceptual Comparison

By comparing Nasr's understanding of spiritual education with the current definitions, some similarities and differences were found. At the first glance it seems that it is close to Miller's definition, but with more consideration it becomes evident that Miller's understanding of spirit is limited to affective aspects and refers to the alive and deep energy that gives meaning and energy to life. His offers are going to make the elements engaged in the education energetic. But Nasr considers spirit as 'a Divine donation' and defines it more comprehensively. He considers it as 'the most inward dimension of human' that should be trained by following and taking part in the actions of a monotheistic religion. Miller's ideas have the advantages of considering the education elements precisely, but Nasr has no ideas about them.

Duff's view which was 'to promote the quality of the mind and heart of the students' ignored the spirit. It wasn't as thorough as Nasr's idea. It didn't pay attention to the human's nature and the religion rules, actions and rites as well.

Carr's definitions have more meaning association, because in his first definition he considers 'truths and spiritual virtues and indicates two inseparable theoretical and practical domains' which are evident in Nasr's views, but Nasr emphasizes more on intuitive and inward knowledge than teaching truths academically. Nasr is after actualizing inward truth. In Carr's other definitions which were 'education in a spiritual disposition and education in a spiritual activity', there are meaningful similarities, because in his words 'through making the dispositions Divine and affecting truth on the quality of life and spiritual experiences, different ways of communicating with God are being examined consciously through prayer.' These themes were evident in Nasr's ideas as well.

Bigger's definition which was a secular one distances from Nasr's view because he considers religion as a staging post and the cause of dogmatism in continuing the way. But Nasr believes in taking action according to a heavenly religion from the beginning to the end. Nasr considers no spirituality without religion. Bigger focuses on the logical reason and new psychology findings that Nasr, the traditionalist philosopher, criticizes them seriously. Bigger pays no attention to the spirit as well.

Spiritual education in Tabatabaie's thought is much closer to Nasr's ideas because it has the components nature, soul abstraction, knowledge advancement and taking action in congruent with human's nature and knowledge. But its difference from Tabatabaie's view is that 'Tabatabaie doesn't consider moral vices and virtues so important by considering the devotional love' (Bagheri 1998). He thought that 'in the Quranic moral method,

vice elimination is more important than vice repellence. In this view, when someone loves somebody, his or her perception and the way he behaves changes substantially' (Tabatabaie 1995). The reason of taking action or quitting it refers to one's love toward his or her beloved, not to achieve spiritual virtues or to remove vices. But in Nasr's opinion, attaining spiritual virtues of the soul is one of the three basics of Sufism and it is one of his fundamental components. In his opinion, the soul should be purified from the vices to achieve the virtues. He considers spiritual realization void without achieving virtues.

The significance of Nasr's understanding of spiritual education over the other definitions is that it is more inclusive in a way that it covers most of them, though there are some differences. Since Nasr believes in 'the transcendental unity of religions and religious pluralism' and it is evident in his aforementioned ideas about religion and spiritual education, his approach can reduce hostility, war, terror, etc among people whether young or old, specially the religious ones, and it gradually brings about unity, peace and quiet among them.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that in Nasr's thoughts, spiritual education is the process of actualizing all the innate potentialities of human as a whole toward his or her monotheistic nature by developing knowledge, love, righteous actions and acquiring virtues to transcend from his existential layers to train his or her spirit and know the Ultimate Reality and to return to his or her prototype in God. It is acquirable by taking action based on a heavenly 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 crossing the perfection path. Then, it needs introspection and inward contemplation to gain a brief knowledge of the soul. After that the trainee should have a brief knowledge of religion and taking part in the actions and rites of the outward layer of religion called *Shariah*. Then the trainee enters the second layer which is the median dimension between *Shariah* and the Truth called *Tariqah*. It is the inward layer of religion and is in correspondence with the second dimension of human called the soul. The trainee purifies his or her soul based on his or her monotheistic nature that requires crossing from the soul layers, purifying it from vices and decorating it with the 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, human steps forward by using the three powers, intellect, sentiment and will, with a mutual interaction among them to develop knowledge, love and righteous action that itself requires the fear of God (*makhafah*). So, one can attain wisdom and the inward truth of the things.

Another condition to follow the spiritual way is to have a perfect master who is united with the chain of *welayah*. In Nasr's view, the sacrifice of the evil soul is impossible without the master and travelling this path to the destination is possible only for few people without him or her. 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 is more specific than moral education (soul purification) and moral education is more specific than religious education. So spiritual education is the most specific one. In other words, spiritual education without moral and religious education is meaningless. They 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.

Spiritual development happens in all the different periods of life from birth to death at different levels and in different stages. So, all people, whether child, young or old, can attain some degrees of spirituality depending on their levels of affective, cognitive and volitional domains. The significance of Nasr's approach to the education of children, youth and young adults is that he considers them as a whole and pays attention to all their potentialities. So, he pays attention to their affective, cognitive, aesthetic, moral, art, physical, imaginal and religious education. He doesn't ignore any of them.

As Nasr is a traditionalist and introduces 'traditional art (literature, music, calligraphy, architecture, etc), nature and sacred books (Nasr 2008)' existing in all cultures as the contents for spiritual education, children, youth, young adults and adults can advance their understandings of spirituality by watching, learning or practicing those arts; touring, enjoying or contemplating in nature; reading, reciting and thinking deeply about those books according to their levels of affective and cognitive domain in school and out of school activities.

Nasr's approach to spiritual education is not necessarily a religious one, since he considers acquiring virtues, especially humility, charity, truthfulness and sincerity as requirements of spiritual education and those virtues are not necessarily religious ones. If we consider spirituality to have different levels, children, even those who don't follow a religion can acquire some levels of spirituality by attaining those virtues. One other essential component of Nasr's approach is human's innate nature (*fitrah*) which is within every human being whether religious or not. Therefore, his approach is more inclusive and considers all people and can be used in every society.

It can be concluded that his approach to spiritual education can lead to peace education since it is not necessarily a religious one and he believes in transcendental unity of religions and religious pluralism. Therefore, by applying it, our children can learn to live in peace and quiet with others and love them. This approach can

decrease hostility, fear and wars among people. It would lead to the avoidance of terrorism, exclusivism and radicalism as well.

References

- Asharie, Z. Bagheri, Kh. & Hoseini, A. 2012. An Analysis of the Concept, Principles and Goals of Spiritual Education in Allameh Tabatabaie's Thought. *Biquarterly Journal of Islamic Education*, 7 (15), 89-112. (In Persian).
- Bagheri Noaparast, Kh. 2010. *Approaches and Methods in Philosophy of Education*. Tehran: Institute of Social and Cultural Studies. (In Persian).
- Bagheri Noaparast, Kh. 1998. *Foundations of Moral Education Methods*. Tehran: Islamic Advertising Organization Publication. (In Persian).
- Bigger, S. 2008. Secular Spiritual Education? *Educational Features*, 1(1).
- Carr, D. 1995. Rival Conceptions of Spiritual Education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 30(1).
- Duff, L. 2003. Spiritual Development and Education: A Contemplative View. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 8(3), 227-237.
- Hand, M. 2003. the Meaning of Spiritual Education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 29(3).
- Miller, J.P. 2001. *Education and the Soul: Toward a spiritual Curriculum*. Tehran: Thought Metacognitive Publication. (In Persian).
- Nasr, S. H. 2000. *Ideal and Realities of Islam*. Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc.
- Nasr, S. H. 2010. *In Search of the Sacred*. USA: Praeger.
- Nasr, S. H. 1984. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Nasr, S. H. 1989. *Knowledge and the Sacred*. New York: State University of New York Press. Nasr, S. H. 1972. *Sufi Essays*. New York: George Allen &Unwin, Ltd.
- Nasr, S. H. 2007b. *the Essential Seyyed Hosein Nasr*. Indiana: World Wisdom, Inc.
- Nasr, S. H. 2008. *the Garden of Truth*. New York: Harper Collins Publisher.
- Nasr, S. H. 2013. *the Garden of Truth*. Translated by Enshaallah Rahmati. Tehran: Sophia. (In Persian).
- Nasr, S. H. 1993. *the Need for Sacred Knowledge*. UK: COZON Press, Ltd.
- Nasr, S. H. 1997. *Three Muslem Sages*. New York: Caravan Books.
- Nasr, S. H. 2003. *Young Muslem and Modern World*. Chicago: KAZI publications, Inc.
- Tabatabaie, M.H. 1995. *Tafsire Almizan*. Ghom: Teachers Community of Scientific School. (In Persian).