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Research Article

A Mystical and Comparative Perspective to the Role of Active Interaction with the Environment in Conferring Meaning to Life

Tofig Asadov[1*], Mohammad Hossein Sharifi[2]

1. Department of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Faculty of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Al-Mustafa International University, Qum, Iran. (Corresponding Author).*

2. Department of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Faculty of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Al Mustafa International University, Qum, Iran. m.h.sharify@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: This paper expounds upon the status of active engagement with the environment on the pathway toward theomorphism and the actualization of the human viceregency. The objectives of this article include critically confronting the instrumental view of nature within secular thought and explaining its link to modern nihilism, showing that relating to nature is not merely a moral duty but an existential, mystical, and transformative spiritual practice, and explaining how this relationship cultivates inner joy, serenity, and meaning, rooted in the human natural drive to contribute positively to the world.

METHOD & FINDING: A descriptive-analytical and comparative investigation, informed by the principles of practical mysticism and classical theosophical hermeneutics, is applied in this article. Service to the environment can be elucidated at three levels of meaning-making: the level of theophanic phenomenology, in which every element of nature is regarded as a mirror of the divine names; the level of viceregency and theomorphism, in which planting a tree is a theophany of the attribute Muḥyī (the Life-Giver), and caring for an animal is a theophany of the attributes Rāziq (the Provider) and Raḥmān (the All-Merciful); and the level of spiritual wayfaring, wherein the sālik (wayfarer) is liberated from worldly attachments and attains the maqam of Riḍā (station of contentment) and annihilation in the divine will.

CONCLUSION: The adoption of an active and reverential relationship with nature presents a viable pathway out of the modern crisis of meaning. It paves the way for a balanced, holistic relationship between human beings and the entire created order, thereby elevating natural life to a plane of transcendent meaning and lasting purpose.

***Corresponding Author:**
Email: *tofiq.asadov@inbox.ru*
ORCID: *0000-0002-9460-968X*

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Introduction

The semantic structure of every civilization is founded upon a particular configuration of the relationship between humanity, nature, and the sacred. In the modern era, this relationship has been reconfigured along secular lines, reducing nature to either capital or a source of pleasure (Mir'azimi et al., 2019). The consequence of this instrumentalist outlook is an existential rupture between the human being and the order of being, giving rise to a pervasive crisis of meaning in industrial societies—a crisis that transcends mere psychological disorders and is rooted in a worldview devoid of intrinsic teleology. The question of how to imbue life with meaning has thus become one of the fundamental challenges of contemporary thought, the resolution of which demands a fundamental rethinking of the ontological foundations of the human-nature relationship.

Within this framework, the human-environment nexus is defined not merely in ethical terms but within a vertical, existential-ontological horizon. In this sense, service to nature is conceived as a devotional-mystical act directly linked to the realization of the ultimate purpose of creation and the meaning of life. This perspective, in contrast to prevalent approaches that primarily focus on the indirect psychological effects of nature upon humans, emphasizes the active and constructive agency (fāʿilī) of the human being in confronting the environment; and it maintains that authentic meaning in life is realized through loving service to the theophanic manifestations of the Real (Ḥaqq) in nature.

What distinguishes the mystical approach from other perspectives is a particular understanding of nature grounded [in the doctrine of the divine names]. According to this view, the universe possesses no independence from the Divine; rather, every natural phenomenon is a mirror of the divine names and attributes (Qadrdan Qaramaleki, 2019: 41). Within such a semantic system, any human interaction with nature—from contemplative vision and reflection to cultivation and preservation—constitutes an encounter with God in His theophanies. In this station, the sālik sits in contemplation of the cosmic order with the eye of insight and reads every phenomenon not as an independent object but as a sign pointing to the Signifier (Davoudzadeh et al., 2026: 29).

This existential awareness constitutes the deepest roots of tranquility and existential meaning; for the human being no longer perceives themselves as an abandoned entity in an absurd universe, but rather as a vicegerent entrusted with the task of cultivating and manifesting mercy upon the earth by divine permission (cf. Mazahiri Seyf, 2007).

Imam 'Ali explicitly emphasizes human responsibility toward lands and animals:

"Fear God concerning His servants and His lands, for you are responsible even for the tracts of land and the beasts" (Nahj al-Balāghah, Sermon 167).

From a mystical standpoint, this responsibility is not an externally imposed obligation but an opportunity for the realization of the station (*maqam*) of vicegerency and theomorphism. From this vantage point, service to the environment is interpreted as one of the gates to divine proximity—a gate through which the human being, by manifesting the divine

attribute of Muḥyī in planting a tree, Rāziq and Raḥmān in feeding animals, and Ḥafīẓ (the Preserver) in tending a garden, gradually transforms from a passive spectator into an influencer.

The significance of this research lies in its non-reductionist approach to the human-nature relationship; it does not merely examine nature's impact upon the human being but analyzes the human act toward nature as a form of spiritual wayfaring. This approach, in addition to its theoretical richness, bears practical implications for the fields of positive psychology, environmental ethics, and cultural policymaking, and can offer a comprehensive model for confronting the crisis of meaning in the modern age.

This study aims to demonstrate, through the lens of Islamic mysticism, that authentic meaning-making occurs when the human being defines themselves in a viceregal relationship with nature—that is, when they regard nature as a trust from God and strive for its preservation and cultivation, rather than functioning as a mere consumer or passive observer. This relationship encompasses three interrelated levels: theophanic phenomenology (*tajallī*), theomorphism (*tashabbuh bi-al-asmāʾ*), and mystical wayfaring (*sulūk*). Each of these levels, independently yet complementarily, leads to sustainable psychological vitality and existential meaning.

Thus, the central research question is: From the perspective of Islamic mysticism, how can active human service to the environment lead to the resolution of the meaning crisis and the realization of a pure life and a joyful existence?

Conceptual Framework

The environment is defined as the totality of physical, social, psychological, and cultural conditions surrounding an organism (Reed & Thompson, 2015). It includes both natural elements—such as water, air, soil, and climate—and the complex interactions between living organisms (biotic) and non-living components (abiotic) that operate together in a specific time and place to sustain life. Consequently, understanding the environment requires examining both its physical dimensions and the socio-cultural contexts in which organisms exist (Wali et al., 2009, p.7).

On the other hand, divine viceregency signifies the existential comprehensiveness of the human being and their manifestation of the divine names and attributes. The station of viceregency is perfected when the viceregent fully embodies and represents the One who has appointed them (God), possessing all existential modes, effects, rulings, and measures that pertain to that station (Shujāʿī, 2014).

Also, theomorphism is the process by which the human being acquires and is characterised by the divine attributes. According to the Quranic verses (cf. Quran, 7:180; 2:31), God has set forth the most excellent names and the loftiest attributes as the best path for the cultivation of the human being—so that the human being, as God's vicegerent, may first comprehend these names and attributes and then act in accordance with them (Shujāʿī, 2014).

Another keyword in this study is theophanic manifestation. The concept of theophanic manifestation in Islamic mysticism is linked to the discussions on the 'Most Beautiful Names' (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) and the 'theophanies and

determinations of the divine essence'. The divine names, through the course of theophanies, serve as the intermediary of divine grace (*fayḍ*) and are the source of all the multiplicities that have appeared in existence (Parcham et al., 2021).

Literature Review

Previous research in this field has largely focused on the effects of the environment on mental health from a medical perspective or on its legal obligation from a jurisprudential viewpoint. However, a mystical analysis of why and how service to nature is linked to the meaning of life remains underexplored. In the studies conducted, few scientific works have examined service to nature from a mystical perspective as a theophany of the divine names. Nevertheless, several authoritative sources provide theoretical foundations that can be used as background or a theoretical framework for this research:

1- Islāmī & Ḥasanzādah Nīrī (2021) demonstrates that Rumi, in his *Mathnawi*, predominantly employs natural elements and beautiful imagery to refer to the divine names and attributes. This supports the mystical principle that nature serves as a mirror for the knowledge of God.

2- Zakī (2007) addresses the jurisprudential and legal aspects of environmental protection; it also mentions the effect of a clean environment on the human soul and body, drawing upon the traditions of the Infallibles regarding nature's impact on the body and spirit.

3- Herawati (2026) re-examines Ibn 'Arabī's concept of the *barzakh* through the lens of spiritual ecology. It argues that the *barzakh* functions not merely as an eschatological intermediary but as a dynamic, growth-oriented realm where the human being matures through embodied, experiential engagement with the natural world.

4- Passmore and Krause (2023) examines the link between meaning in life and relating to the beyond-human natural world. It argues that connecting with [the natural world contributes to meaning in life — sentence completion to be confirmed against the published source; see Part 2, §3].

6- Taylor (2010) examines the evolution of green religions. The book addresses how environmentally oriented, spiritually motivated individuals and movements can be understood as religious, and explores nature spirituality as a vehicle for attaining spiritual wholeness and meaning beyond material isolation.

The most important difference between this research and previous works lies in the following:

- It does not view the human-nature relationship as one-sided—merely nature's impact on humans—but rather analyses the human act toward nature as a form of spiritual wayfaring.
- It does not regard nature as other than God, but rather as the locus of divine theophany; thus, service to nature is identical to proximity to God.
- It employs the model of theomorphism to explain sustainable psychological vitality.
- In Islamic thought, active service to the environment is a devotional-mystical act directly linked to the meaning of life. This relationship is not transactional but existential in its unity: service to nature is service to the theophanies of the Real, and this awareness constitutes the deepest roots of tranquillity and existential meaning.

- Environmental preservation is not a burdensome moral duty but rather a gate to divine proximity (*qurb*) and a door to meaningful life. Those who walk this path will not be afflicted with existential depression, for every day, upon seeing a planted tree or a treated animal, they witness the theophany of the divine attribute within themselves—and this is the most powerful motivation for living.

Conferring Meaning to Life through Engagement with the Environment

This paper draws upon scriptural proofs (Quranic and narrative evidence) alongside mystical unveiling (kashf), spiritual intuition (shuhūd), and an ontological analysis grounded in the doctrine of the personal unity of existence.

1. Mystical Ontology: Nature as Theophanic Manifestation

From the perspective of Islamic mysticism, and in accordance with the principle "There is nothing in existence but God", the entire cosmos is the manifestation and appearance of the divine names and attributes (Ghurāb, 1981: 186).

Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, in Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam, explicitly states: "All existence is God's names, His attributes, and their theophanic manifestations" (Ibn 'Arabī, 1980: 149).

That is to say, nothing exists in the world except as a theophany and manifestation of one of the divine names or attributes. A tree is the theophany of the names (the Creator) and Muḥyī. Water is the theophany of Muḥyī and Muṭahhir (the Purifier). An animal is the theophany of Rāziq and Raḥmān. Thus, the tree, the bird, and the water are each the Face of God (wajh Allāh). As Quran declares:

"*So whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah*" (Quran, 2:115).

Imam 'Ali states:

"I have never seen anything without seeing God before it, with it, and after it" (Fayḍ Kāshānī, 2014, Vol. 1, p. 99).

Within such a worldview, neglect of nature constitutes ingratitude toward God, for the human being has become heedless of witnessing the divine signs in the natural world.

2. Mystical Anthropology: The Human Being as Vicegerent and Locus of Comprehensive Theophany

In the Quranic verses, the human being is introduced as "*The vicegerent of God*" (Quran, 2:30).

Allāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in al-Mīzān, interprets vicegerency as the embodiment of divine attributes in the domains of action and knowledge. From a mystical standpoint, the perfect human being is the theophany of the all-comprehensive name of God, while the natural world is the manifestation of the partial names—such as Khāliq, Rāziq, Muḥyī, and Mumīt (the Taker of Life). The vicegerent is one who, to the extent of their capacity, assumes the moral qualities of God. Thus, the duty of the vicegerent is al-rubūbiyyah al-iʿtibāriyyah (conventional lordship) upon the earth: cultivating it, spreading mercy, preserving the trust, and establishing justice and equity (Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 2011, Vol. 1, p.179).

Accordingly, when a human being plants a tree, they place themselves within the attribute of Muḥyī and, by divine permission, within the attribute of the Creator. This theomorphism produces a pleasure far surpassing sensory gratifications—a pleasure that may be termed spiritual delight and the inner essence of felicity.

3. Mystical Teleology: The Meaning of Life as Divine Proximity

From a mystical perspective, the meaning of life is encapsulated in attaining divine proximity and annihilation in the Real (Kasāʾīzādah, 2013).

One of the pathways to such proximity is service to creatures—provided that the human being does not perceive the creature as independent from God but rather as a mirror reflecting Him. Thus, a Muslim does not merely see a tree in nature; rather, they perceive the sign of God's creativity and mercy. Neglect of this aspect is a veil.

Therefore, service to nature within this worldview possesses an outer form, while its inner reality is service to the Divine Presence (Ḥaḍrat Ḥaqq) in His theophanies. This very awareness transforms all environmental actions into acts of worship. Hence, the noble verse "*I am placing a vicegerent on the earth*" (Quran, 2:30) signifies that the human being is God's successor upon the earth.

The Three Stations of Spiritual Wayfaring in Relation to the Environment

These three stations begin with contemplative witnessing, proceed to devoted service, and culminate in loving annihilation within the divine will (*mashīʾat*). Each station opens a new horizon of meaning-making for the *sālik*, elevating them from the most superficial layer of engagement with nature—namely, sensory encounter—to its most profound depth, namely, existential encounter. The clarification of the mentioned three stations comes as follows:

1. Theophanic Phenomenology: Nature as Divine Signs (*āyāt*)

This station lays the foundation for all subsequent stages; for until the human being contemplates nature from a monotheistic perspective, they will never undertake a loving action rooted in profound knowledge. In this station, the *sālik* sits in contemplation of the cosmic order with the eye of insight and reads every phenomenon not as an independent object but as a sign pointing to the Signifier.

This station is grounded in the mystical principle that the world is the unfolded book of God; that is, the universe is God's open book, and every particle of it is a sign that must be recited. Hence, contemplation of nature here becomes synonymous with reciting the cosmic verses. With every gaze upon a tree or the sky, the wayfarer becomes, in effect, a celebrant of God's praise, as Quran declares:

"*The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed He is all-forbearing, all-forgiving*" (Quran, 17:44).

This station, in essence, teaches the wayfarer the understanding of the glorification of creatures and delivers them from the modern neglect of the language of existence. Thus, it can be said that in Islamic mysticism, everything in the universe is a name among the names of God and a theophany of the All-Merciful Breath (*nafas Raḥmānī*) that has become manifest. The late Imam Khomeinī writes: "The entire world is a mirror of the beauty and majesty of the Real. So wherever you turn, you see Him" (Imam Khomeini, 2009: 63).

From this vantage point, being in nature and looking at a tree and the sky—when accompanied by attention to the Named (*Musammā*), namely God—is itself a great act of worship. Quran states:

"*Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night*

and day, there are signs for those who possess intellect" (Quran, 3:190).

The *ūlū al-albāb* (those who possess intellect) are those who, in nature, do not see merely physical phenomena but rather recite the divine signs.

Concerning the role of attention in transforming sensory pleasure into mystical delight, Imam Sadiq introduces looking at greenery as a source of vitality and joy (Ḥurr ʿĀmilī, n.d., Vol. 2, p.11).

But why? The mystical response is: because the colour green symbolises divine life and perpetuity. Seeing a verdant tree brings the sign of the Life-Giver before the human eye. This very remembrance rescues the human being from heedlessness of the Source of Life and generates spiritual expansion.

But wherein lies the difference between this perspective and secular psychology? In secular psychology, nature functions as a sensory stimulus that reduces cortisol and increases dopamine. In the mystical approach, the same stress reduction occurs, yet it is accompanied by a transcendent awareness: the human being knows that this tranquillity is a theophany of the All-Encompassing Mercy of the Real flowing through nature. Thus, the resulting peace is deeper and more enduring (Karīmiyān, 2016: 36).

Hence, even without any specific physical action, the human being—merely through a mystical gaze upon nature, which is none other than reflection upon the signs—can take the first step toward meaning-making. However, this stage is that of the spectator; the human being has not yet attained the station of agent *(fāʿil)*.

2. Theomorphism: Service to Nature as the Realization of Vicegerency

One of the most prominent mystical teachings—also reflected in theological discourse—is that human perfection lies in assuming the moral qualities of God. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"Assume the moral qualities of God" (Narāqī, 2002, p.79).

This assumption, however, is not confined to individual ethics; it is also realised in the encounter with nature. Thus, if the first station was knowledge and vision, the second station is action and agency. At this station, the wayfarer emerges from passive spectatorship and sets foot into the arena of active service. They no longer merely see the tree; they plant it. They no longer merely gaze at the beauty of the animal; they feed it and offer it shelter. This station is the concrete realisation of the station of Divine Vicegerency, wherein the human being manifests the divine attributes upon the earth to the extent of their capacity.

This station offers a practical answer to the fundamental question, "For what shall I live?" The mystical reply is: to be God's vicegerent on earth and to actualise His names within myself and in the world. This response is of the nature of performative meaning rather than abstract meaning; meaning inheres in the act itself, not in its external outcomes, rendering it immune from relativism and transience (Rūzbih, 2025).

As examples, we will deal with the theophany of the divine attributes Muḥyī, Rāziq, and Ḥafīẓ:

Theophany of the Attribute Muḥyī in Planting a Tree

God introduces Himself in Quran as Muḥyī:

"*Know that Allah revives the earth after its death*" (Quran, 57:17).

When you plant a seed in the soil, water it, provide sunlight, and it becomes a tree—this is a creation by God's permission. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

"There is no man who plants a tree, but Allah records for him a reward equal to what grows from that tree" (Muttaqī Hindī, 1989, Hadith 9233).

From a mystical perspective, this reward is not a material recompense but rather proximity to the Real (*qurb ilā al-Ḥaqq*), for the human being has become a participant in the attribute Muḥyī. The feeling of being a source of existence—creativity within the cosmic order—is the most direct response to the crisis of nihilism and nothingness. A person who plants a tree and watches it grow can no longer say: "I have no effect upon the world."

Theophany of the Attributes Rāziq and Raḥmān in Feeding Animals

God has introduced Himself as Rāziq and Raḥmān. When a human being feeds a hungry animal, or shelters a wounded cat, they are, in reality, participating in divine providence and mercy. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said in a well-known tradition:

"The merciful are shown mercy by the All-Merciful. Show mercy to those on earth, and He who is in heaven will show mercy to you" (Muttaqī Hindī, 1989, Hadith 5969).

From a mystical standpoint, mercy (*raḥmah*) is an attribute that, when actualised in the human being, draws them nearer to Raḥmān—one of the divine names of particular majesty. This is explicitly stated in another tradition concerning animals:

"In every living liver there is a reward" (Ibid., Hadith 16063).

That is, every moist and living being—be it animal or plant—if shown mercy, carries a reward. This reward is precisely the psychological vitality arising from the feeling of being merciful.

Theophany of the Attribute Ḥafīẓ in Tending a Garden and an Animal

God is Ḥafīẓ. Protecting a tree from blight, safeguarding a spring from pollution, shielding an animal from harm—all are manifestations of preservation by God's permission. Imam 'Ali states:

"Fear God concerning His servants and His lands, for you are responsible even for the tracts of land and the beasts" (cf. *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 165).

This responsibility is not a burden but an opportunity to actualise the attribute of being a preserver (*ḥafīẓ*) within the human being.

As a result, at this station, the human being is transformed from a spectator into an agent and servant (*fāʿil wa khādim*). They no longer merely enjoy nature; they serve it. This service connects them to the divine names and enables them to experience the pure life (*ḥayāt ṭayyibah*) promised in the Quran (Quran, 16:97). The psychological vitality at this stage is not fleeting but stems from gratitude in action and existential contentment.

3. Annihilation and Submission: Accepting the Immutable Laws of Nature

Ultimately, in the third station, the sālik penetrates the depth of the mystical truth that the true Agent is God (cf. Rabbānī Gulpāyigānī, 2013), and that they are merely an instrument and means. This awareness liberates them from all pride of agency and bestows upon them a tranquillity that depends not on outward achievements but on the relationship they have with the Real.

At this station, the wayfarer perceives the immutable laws of nature not as obstacles but as theophanies of the name Qahhār (the All-Subduer) and the name Jabbār (the All-Compeller), and through this lens, attains the station of contentment with the divine decree. In Islamic mysticism, this station is the highest degree of spiritual wayfaring, wherein the wayfarer is neither joyful in times of ease nor sorrowful in times of hardship, but becomes satisfied with the satisfaction of the Real—and this is the ultimate perfection of the human being.

One of the greatest psychological challenges facing humanity is confrontation with death, disease, drought, and the loss of animals and plants. The secular worldview regards these events as meaningless and accidental, which engenders profound depression. Islamic mysticism, however—grounded in the verse: "*We will surely test you with something of fear, hunger, and loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient*" (Quran, 2:155)—interprets these deficiencies as divine trials and the very prelude to patience and perfection.

In Islamic mysticism, the human being is duty-bound to create the means: to plant trees, to feed animals, to prevent pollution. Yet the final outcome—whether rain comes or not, whether the animal lives or dies—rests with God. The Prophet Jacob declared:

"*I complain of my anguish and sorrow only to God*" (Quran, 12:86).

This entrustment (*tafwīḍ*) and reliance (*tawakkul*) grant the human being a peace that liberates them from the constraint of "I must achieve a specific result."

It is narrated that even if the Hour is established and someone holds a sapling, they should plant it (as in the earlier tradition). The mystical meaning of this tradition is that the human being performs their duty until the very last moment, even if they do not see the outcome. This is precisely annihilation in the divine will (cf. Muttaqī Hindī, 1989, Hadith 9056).

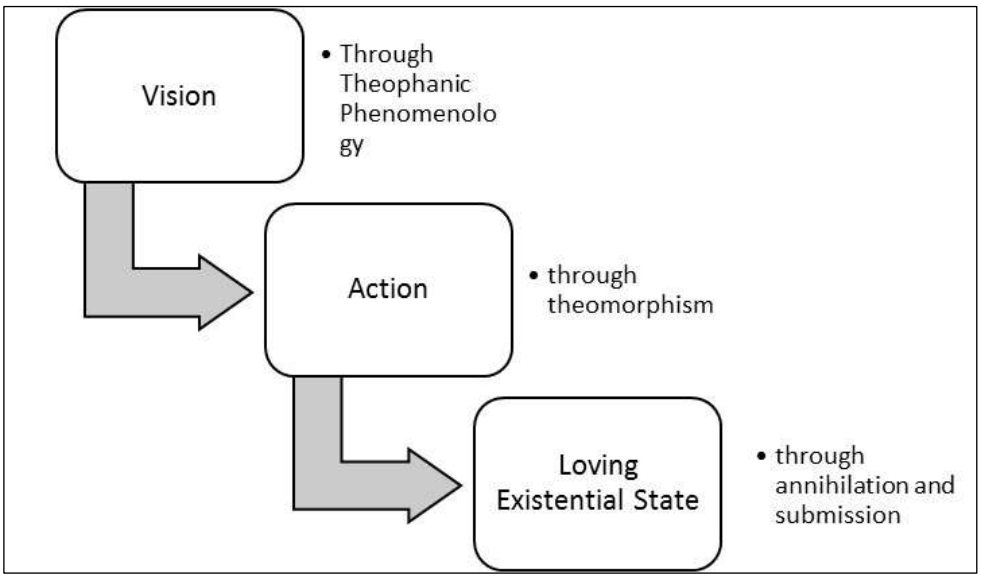
Hence, contentment and submission are the peak of psychological vitality. The gnostic reaches a point where they are not only grieved by the deficiencies of nature but perceive them as the very embodiment of wisdom and mercy. Psychologically, this station is equivalent to extraordinary spiritual resilience. Such a person does not succumb to depression, because they view the death of an animal not as a tragedy but as a return to the embrace of the Real. They know that "*Indeed we belong to God, and indeed to Him we return*" (Quran, 2:156). This awareness transforms grief into mystical mourning, not into paralytic depression.

As a result, this station completes the two preceding stations. If the human being remains only in the first station (theophanic phenomenology), they are a passive spectator. If they remain in the second station

(theomorphism), they are an agent but may become attached to outcomes. The third station dissolves this attachment and leads the human being to pure servitude. At this point, service to the environment is undertaken neither for sensory pleasure nor even for theomorphism, but solely out of the command of God and love for His theophanies.

As a general analysis of the above three mentioned stations—and in accordance with the diagram below—we can state that they delineate an existential evolutionary trajectory that begins with vision, proceeds to action, and culminates in a loving existential state

[Figure 1: The Evolutionary Trajectory of a Meaningful Life



In the first station, through theophanic phenomenology, the wayfarer recites nature as divine signs and derives mystical vitality from this very recitation.

In the second station, through theomorphism, the wayfarer participates in the divine attributes and, through active service to nature, actualises the station of viceregency and experiences the pure life.

In the third station, through annihilation and submission, the wayfarer is released from all attachment to outcomes and attains the station of contentment and pure servitude, wherein every particle of nature is the very theophany of the Beloved, and service to it gains meaning not for reward but for the sake of love itself.

This threefold trajectory is not merely a mystical theory but a practical programme for living a meaningful life. It can offer a decisive response to the crisis of meaning in the modern world, guiding the human being from existential emptiness to mystical plenitude.

Conclusion

In the secular worldview, nature is not ensouled, and service to it is undertaken either for economic utility or for temporary psychological relief. Neither of these approaches leads to enduring

meaning, for they seek meaning outside the relationship with the sacred.

From an Islamic mystical perspective, however, the relationship with the environment is not something that the human being constructs through manipulation of nature; rather, it is discovered in the correct relationship with creatures as theophanies of God. And this correct relationship is nothing other than loving service to nature, without expectation of material benefit.

In other words, this research has demonstrated that the crisis of meaning in the modern world is largely due to humanity's rupture from a mystical view of nature. In the Islamic mystical approach, nature is not an object but rather a theophany of the divine names and attributes. Within such a view, active service to the environment is not a burdensome moral duty but a path to the realisation of divine viceregency, theomorphism with the names Raḥmān, Rāziq, Muḥyī, and Ḥafīẓ, and ultimately annihilation in the divine will. All three stations lead directly to meaning in life and sustainable psychological vitality.

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Authors' Contributions

The author was the principal conceptual designer of the study and supervised the entire research process. The author solely participated in writing the paper and has read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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AUTHOR BIOSKETCHES

Tofig Asadov. *Department of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Faculty of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Al-Mustafa Open University, Iran.*
Email: *tofiq.asadov@inbox.ru*
ORCID: *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9460-968X*

Mohammad Hossein Sharifi. *Department of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Faculty of Philosophy and Studies of Religions, Al Mustafa Open University, Qum, Iran.*
Email: *althakhaer@gmail.com*
ORCID: *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9939-0533*

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