

## A Philosophical Explanation of the Luminous Veils (Ḥujub-i Nūrī) Based on the Principles of Transcendent Theosophy (Ḥikmat-i Muta'āliyah)

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### ABSTRACT

Luminous veil (ḥijāb-i nūrānī) is among the enigmatic terms in Islamic mysticism, which has also been employed in transmitted religious texts (mutūn-i mā'thūr-i dīnī). Despite accepting this term and believing in the existence of luminous veils at the higher stages of spiritual wayfaring (sulūk)—veils that are immaterial (mujarrad az māddah)—Ṣadr al-Mutā'allihīn [Mullā Ṣadrā], in agreement with other Islamic philosophers, holds that the concept of veil (ḥijāb) is exclusively confined to material things. The present research attempts to explain, through a philosophical approach, how a veil can exist in immaterial beings. In this direction, after a lexical and terminological examination of the word "veil" (ḥijāb), and through the discovery and analysis of those fundamental principles of Transcendent Theosophy (Ḥikmat-i Muta'āliyah) that play a role in explaining this issue—such as the absence of a decisive boundary between the immaterial and the material, as well as the adherence to the theory of the "spirit of meaning" (rūḥ-i ma'ānā), which is fully compatible with Ṣadrian principles—a negative ('adamī) yet comprehensive definition of veil is offered that can apply to both material and immaterial, or luminous and dark, instances. Subsequently, with attention to Ṣadrian principles, an existential (wujūdī) interpretation of "luminous veils" (ḥujub-i nūrī) is also presented, namely, "the intensity of manifestation and effulgence of divine perfections" (shiddat-i zuhūr wa tajallī-yi kamālāt-i ilāhī). Furthermore, the research findings indicate that through a precise explanation of Ṣadrian ontological foundations, the possibility of the existence of veils in immaterial realms can be proven in such a way that it does not conflict at all with the philosophical view that confines the concept of veil to material things.

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## 1. Introduction

In transmitted religious traditions (*mā'thūrāt-i dīnī*) and mystical works (*āthār-i 'irfānī*), the question of veils (*ḥujub*) and obstacles to attaining the Sacred Divine Essence holds a special place. Among the key concepts in this domain is the term "luminous veil" (*ḥijāb-i nūrānī*), which is explicitly mentioned in a passage of the *Munājāt al-Sha'bānīyah* ("...until the eyes of the hearts pierce through the veils of light..."), referring to immaterial (*mujarrad*) and luminous obstacles at the higher stages of spiritual wayfaring (*sulūk*) that, despite their immateriality, act as a barrier between the wayfarer (*sālik*) and the ultimate destination of the spiritual journey.

In contrast, Islamic philosophers—from *Khawājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī* and *Shaykh al-Ishrāq (Suhrawardī)* to *Mullā Ṣadrā*—confining the concept of "veil" (*ḥijāb*) to material and corporeal beings, have denied the existence of any veil in immaterial realms. The convergence of these two perspectives creates an apparent contradiction between revealed-mystical data (*dādh-hā-yi waḥyānī- 'irfānī*) and rational-philosophical findings (*yāftih-hā-yi 'aqlī-falsafī*).

Given the belief of Islamic philosophers in the absence of contradiction among rational, revealed, and mystical findings—and rather in their mutual confirmation and completion—this research seeks, relying on the principles of Transcendent Theosophy (*Hikmat-i Muta'āliyah*), to offer a philosophical explanation of how a veil can exist in immaterial beings and to answer the main question: How can the apparent contradiction between the philosophical confinement of the concept of veil to material things and the concept of immaterial luminous veils in religion and mysticism be resolved?

## 2. Methodology

The present research was conducted using an analytical-descriptive approach (*rawish-i taḥlīlī-tawṣīfī*) and a library-based method (*rawish-i kitābkhānah-ī*).

Step one: The lexical and terminological meaning of "veil" (*ḥijāb*) in religious and mystical texts was examined.

Step two: Through the discovery and analysis of the fundamental principles of Transcendent Theosophy that play a key role in explaining this problem—including the absence of a decisive boundary between the immaterial and the material, as well as the theory of the "spirit of meaning" (*rūḥ-i ma'nā*) concerning words—an effort was made to present a comprehensive and negative (*'adamī*) definition of veil applicable to diverse material and immaterial instances.

Step three: With attention to *Ṣadrian* principles, a novel and existential (*wujūdī*) interpretation of the compound term "luminous veil" (*ḥijāb-i nūrānī*) was offered.

The research draws primarily on primary *Ṣadrian* texts, classical works of Islamic philosophy, and transmitted religious sources, including the *Munājāt al-Sha'bānīyah* and relevant *ḥadīth* literature.

### 3. Findings

The findings of this research demonstrate that by carefully examining the principles of Transcendent Theosophy, a comprehensive definition of veil can be attained that goes beyond confining this concept to material things.

#### 3.1. A Comprehensive Negative Definition of "Veil"

According to this research, "veil" (ḥijāb) can be applied to any obstacle (whether material or immaterial) that, by its very manifestation, causes concealment and the non-manifestation of the veiled entity (maḥjūb). This negative definition allows application to instances such as:

A physical curtain (pardih) – as a material veil that, through its physical presence, prevents observation of what lies beyond;

Envy (ḥasad) – as an immaterial dark veil (ḥijāb-i mujarrad-i zulmānī) that, as a psychological trait, prevents the flourishing of the sound soul and the pure human nature (fiṭrah);

Knowledge (‘ilm) – as an immaterial luminous veil (ḥijāb-i mujarrad-i nūrānī), whenever it steps outside its instrumental role and becomes an independent goal on the path of spiritual wayfaring, thereby limiting the wayfarer's horizon and transforming into a luminous veil.

This is because every level of existence (martabih-yi wujūd), however immaterial and luminous, due to its own specific existential limit, when considered independently and disconnected from its source, cannot be a manifestation of a higher level of itself. Consequently, for a wayfarer who becomes arrested at that level, it acts as a veil.

#### 3.2. The Problem of Applying "Veil" to the Divine Essence

The negative definition of veil—because it entails a limitation on the side of the veiled entity—cannot be applied literally (bi al-ḥaqīqah) to the Sacred Divine Essence. This is because no limitation whatsoever exists in an existence that is pure manifestation (zuhūr-i maḥd). For this reason, Mullā Ṣadrā, when applying this concept to God, identifies the veil and the veiled as in reality one, introducing it as the creation itself (khalq). Nevertheless, the use of expressions such as the "station of the Unseen of the Unseen" (martabih-yi ghayb al-ghuyūb) for the Divine Essence indicates that the being-veiled (iḥtijāb) of the Essence from creatures is real and undeniable.

#### 3.3. An Existential Interpretation of Luminous Veils

It appears that offering an existential interpretation of "luminous veils" as "the intensity of manifestation and existential perfection of a reality" (shiddat-i zuhūr wa kamāl-i wujūdī-yi yik ḥaqīqat) can guide a more precise explanation of such terms. In this interpretation, luminous veils are understood not as negative, limiting entities, but rather as existential levels and manifestations that, due to the intensity of their manifestation of the veiled entity, cause that entity to remain hidden from the perception of the wayfarer.

According to this analysis, luminous beings (*wujūd-hā-yi nūrī*) act as veils as long as they are considered independent entities; but essentially and in themselves, they are pure light and helpers of the wayfarer on his spiritual journey. In other words, we are speaking of a single existence that has different aspects and considerations: from the aspect of being considered independent, it is a veil; from the aspect of being known as "the very relation-to-God" (*‘ayn al-rabṭ*), it is light. The necessity of the existence of these luminous veils for the wayfarer—according to a ḥadīth from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), which states that the absence of these veils would cause the burning and destruction of weaker existences—derives from this second aspect, which makes the wayfarer's observations and perceptions proportional and commensurate with his existential degree.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted, the following conclusion is reached:

Confining the meaning of veil to material things is meaningless and incompatible with the principles of Transcendent Theosophy. With a deeper look at the statements of Islamic philosophers, especially Shaykh al-Ishrāq (Suhrawardī) on this subject, it becomes clear that they are concerned with explaining the absence of material veils in immaterial beings. In other words:

A veil is created at every level of existence in proportion to the intensity or weakness of existence at that level.

One of the characteristics of the material level, resulting from the existential weakness of this level, is existential density (*kathāfat*) and condensation (*tarākkum*), which creates physical obstacles and veils in material beings.

However, this characteristic does not exist in immaterial beings, which possess greater existential intensity; consequently, the kind of veil resulting from this characteristic does not exist in immaterial beings.

Since the negation of the more specific (*salb-i akhass*) does not entail the negation of the more general (*salb-i a‘amm*), the negation of material veils in immaterial beings does not entail the negation of any veil from them. Rather, the possibility of the existence of non-material veils among them remains intact. Thus, when an ontological explanation of the existence of veils among immaterial beings is provided—as has been offered in the present research—the existence of such veils does not contradict the apparent statements of the philosophers.

Therefore, this reading of "veil" and "luminous veils" not only creates no contradiction among the statements of Islamic philosophers, transmitted religious traditions, and mystical thought, but also provides a powerful tool for a deeper and more coherent understanding of concepts such as the "being-veiled of the Divine Essence and Attributes" from creatures, as well as for explaining some subtle expressions found in ḥadīth literature.

### Declarations

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