

## **The Signs of Spiritual Awakening and Its Difference from Modern Spirituality**

### **Signs of Spiritual Awakening from Cognition to Behavior in the Monotheistic Perspective**

In our time, speaking of spiritual awakening is no longer limited to religious circles and texts. Today, from social networks to modern psychology courses and emerging mysticisms, terms like increasing inner awareness, positive energy, karma, or chakra alignment are frequently discussed. At first glance, these terms might seem aligned and similar to the concept of spiritual awakening in the Islamic tradition, but with a little scrutiny, it becomes clear that their epistemological basis and existential purpose are completely different.

In psychological approaches and schools of modern spirituality, the human being is the center of cognition, and the goal of awakening is to increase individual awareness to achieve mental peace, inner satisfaction, and anxiety control. In such a view, the universe is imagined as a collection of energies and forces that man must harmonize with to be freed from suffering and anxiety. Consequently, the indicators and signs of spiritual awakening in this framework are mostly interpreted in the form of subjective experiences, emotional states, and pleasant inner feelings.

However, in the monotheistic perspective, spiritual awakening is not merely a subjective experience or feeling better; rather, it is a kind of recognition of the

human's place in the order of existence. An awakened human does not see themselves as the center of the universe; instead, they redefine their relationship with the Creator and the purpose of creation. In this view, peace and happiness are not the ultimate goals; rather, they are the natural fruits of divine knowledge and closeness to God. This kind of awakening drives humans from self-centeredness and hedonism toward God-centeredness and a purposeful life.

The signs of spiritual awakening in the monotheistic attitude have a fundamental difference from what is proposed in modern schools of mysticism. In emerging schools, inner visions or emotional pleasures are considered signs of awakening, but in the divine view, true awakening is a rational, emotional, and behavioral process that consists of the enlightenment of the intellect, the reviving of the heart, and ultimately its manifestation in behavior. This process, unlike emerging schools of spirituality, does not rely solely on inner experience and emotion, but considers intellect and divine revelation as the two wings of human guidance.

Spiritual awakening is a kind of inner reconstruction and transformation in the three main domains of human existence:

**-Cognition and Knowledge:** a correct understanding of the truth of existence and the human's place in it.

**-Emotion and Heart:** a transformation in motivations, emotions, and inner tendencies.

**-Will and Behavior:** the manifestation of the effects of awakening in human decisions and lifestyle.

In the following, by separating these three domains, we will closely examine the signs of spiritual awakening in Islamic thought and its difference from the perspectives of psychology and Western mysticisms.

### **Signs of Spiritual Awakening in the Domains of Cognition and *Ma'rifa***

Spiritual awakening begins with a transformation in cognition. No lasting change occurs in our feelings or behavior unless our way of looking at the world changes first. As long as we interpret the world only through the lens of sensory experiences and observable data, our knowledge remains superficial and limited. But when we understand that reality goes beyond the tangible, and that behind the appearance of the universe lies a deeper and more enduring truth, the first spark of the signs of spiritual awakening is formed within us.

In Western psychological approaches and emerging schools of spirituality, this transformation is usually interpreted as the expansion of inner awareness or an increase in mental power; that is, a person tries to expand their understanding through focus and meditation to experience greater peace or capability. However, in the monotheistic view, awakening does not mean expanding the mind inward, but rather means our intellect and heart turning toward a truth outside ourselves, which is the source of all order and management in the universe, namely divine Lordship. This difference is a fundamental one.

The first of the signs of spiritual awakening in the domain of cognition is belief in the unseen. As long as we consider only the tangible to be real, we will be trapped in the narrow prison of this world. The Holy Quran considers guidance specific to those who have faith in the unseen [1], that is, they see beyond the appearance

of things. Faith in the unseen is the realization of the truth that what the eye sees is not the whole reality. Beyond phenomena, a divine meaning and a wise order flow. Such faith frees the mind from dispersion and anxiety and grants it cohesion and peace because an awakened person does not see the world as purposeless or random, but considers it part of God's wise design.

The second sign of awakening in the domain of cognition is belief in the hereafter and faith in Heaven and Hell. Faith in the unseen broadens our horizon beyond the material world, and belief in the hereafter gives direction to life. An awakened person does not confine life to the narrow span of this worldly realm, but sees it as a passing stage on the path to eternity. Such a person believes that divine justice will be realized in a more perfect world. This belief gives life meaning and balance, which means suffering is not fruitless for us, and pleasure is not our ultimate goal. In hardships, we find peace by remembering Heaven, and in joys, we remain humble by remembering Hell. Spiritual awakening creates a balance between hope and fear, and modern psychology, despite its advancements, has not yet been able to provide a stable foundation for this balance.

The third sign is honesty in the search for truth. An awakened person avoids self-deception and self-serving interpretation, accepting the truth as it is, even if it is to their detriment. Honesty means loyalty to the truth, not following personal interests or social preferences. Truthfulness and honesty mark the firmness of a heart that resists excuses and the temptation to hide what is right. At this stage, cognition penetrates from the surface of the mind to the depth of faith, and the intellect and heart align on the same path.

## **Signs of Spiritual Awakening in the Domains of Emotion and the Heart**

When a correct cognition of the truth of the realm of existence is formed, the human heart is also transformed. The signs of spiritual awakening manifest most clearly in the domain of emotion and the heart where faith makes its way from the surface of the mind to the depths of the soul.

In many emerging schools of mysticism and positive psychology schools, inner human experiences such as feelings of lightness, peace, or freedom from anxiety are considered criteria for spirituality. In this view, the ultimate goal is achieving a good mood and mental peace. But in the monotheistic insight, these feelings, although valuable, are not the ultimate goal; rather, they are a sign of the heart's connection with God.

In the domain of emotion, divine love is the first sign of awakening. When *ma'rifa* of God penetrates the human soul, the heart naturally inclines toward Him. This love is not a blind dependence or a fleeting emotion, but a conscious attachment to the source of perfection and goodness. The awakened human does not see God as distant; they feel Him alive and present in everything. Such love takes us from self-centeredness to God-centeredness and frees the heart from the captivity of superficial desires.

Another of the signs of spiritual awakening in this domain is delight in worship. For the neglectful heart, worship is the repetition of movements and words, but for the awakened heart, it is an opportunity for conscious presence and conversation with the Beloved. The Prophet of Islam (Peace be upon him and his family) said: "The delight of my eyes is in prayer" [2]. This saying shows that for the awakened person, worship is not a heavy duty; rather, it is a source of inner

strength and peace. This delight comes from awareness because they know who they are speaking to and what truth they stand before.

The third of the signs of spiritual awakening in emotion is contentment and peace in the face of divine destiny. In modern psychology, acceptance usually means coming to terms with reality to reduce anxiety. But in the monotheistic perspective, contentment means seeing divine wisdom behind every event, even in suffering and hardships. This perspective is rooted in faith and is a clear sign of the awakening of the heart because the awakened human sees themselves in the hands of the Wise God in every situation.

In summary, divine love, delight in worship, and contentment are the three main signs of an awakened heart. A person who has awakened in this domain has an inner peace that does not stem from apathy or ignorance, nor does it depend on external conditions, but rather springs from a connection with an imperishable truth. The awakened heart paves the way for awakening in will and behavior; where faith and emotion turn into decision and action.

### **Signs of Spiritual Awakening in the Domains of Will and Behavior**

Spiritual awakening becomes complete when the maturity achieved in the domains of cognition and emotion is seen in human behavior. If awakening only remains in the mind or heart, it will not lead to real growth.

In emerging schools of mysticism, awakening usually means achieving a good mood and individual peace; that is, the individual tries to lessen their suffering and reduce inner conflicts. Meanwhile, in the monotheistic view, spiritual

awakening is not limited only to feeling good; rather, it is the beginning of a change in behavior and the direction of life. The awakened individual does not only think about reducing their own suffering, but becomes aware of their responsibility toward God, others, and the world.

The first sign in this domain is humility. The awakened person understands that their wealth, ability, and success are not from themselves, but from the grace of God. This awareness keeps them away from arrogance and judging others, leading to realism and conscious humility. While in many individualistic attitudes, spiritual growth is interpreted as absolute self-belief, in the monotheistic view, awakening means recognizing the human's position before God, the result of which is humility born of awareness, not of weakness.

The second sign is a spirit of service and responsibility. An awakened person cannot remain indifferent to the suffering and needs of others. They feel a sense of duty at work, in the family, or in society because they see life as a field of testing and an opportunity for growth. In the material view, success means achieving personal interests, but in the divine view, success means being useful to others and performing righteous deeds. Sincere service is one of the signs of spiritual awakening in behavior.

The third sign is steadfastness on the path of truth. True awakening holds meaning when a person remains steadfast in the face of hardships and temptations. Steadfastness means adhering to the truth even in times of suffering, temptation, or when apparently receiving no reward. Unlike emerging schools of spirituality, in the monotheistic view, perseverance and steadfastness

on the path of truth are highly important because the goal is not momentary feelings of peace, but nearness to God.

In these three aspects—namely humility, service, and steadfastness—awakening expands from the inside out. The awakened person knows the truth, finds peace in their heart, and manifests its signs in their behavior. They neither run away from the world nor drown in it; they live in the world, but are not attached to it, and their goal goes beyond the world. This is the very meaning of the "blessed and righteous life" (*Hayat Tayyibah*) [3]; a wakeful and pure life in which intellect, heart, and action are aligned on the path of truth. This is the most complete manifestation and sign of spiritual awakening.

Examining the signs of spiritual awakening in the monotheistic perspective shows that this awakening is not just a mental state or an emotional experience; rather, it is a process that flows through all existential dimensions of the human being.

In many perspectives of modern psychology and emerging schools of mysticism, the ultimate goal of awakening is inner peace, but in the monotheistic view, peace is the result of the path, not its destination! The ultimate goal in this view is closeness to God and a conscious, free connection with the Absolute Truth and Perfection.

True spiritual awakening means returning to one's true self; it signifies knowing where we came from, what we were created for, and how we can draw closer to perfection in every moment. Such a person has a tranquil heart and a clear mind, and acts responsibly in their behavior.

Which of the signs of spiritual awakening do you know? Have you felt the effects of this kind of awakening in your own life? What do you think is the difference between spiritual awakening in the material and monotheistic perspectives?

## References

[1]. 2: 2-3

[2]. Kulayni, *Al-Kāfi*. [Volume 5, Book 3, Chapter 1](#).

[3]. "Whosoever acts righteously - whether a man or a woman - and embraces belief, We will surely grant him a blessed and righteous life." (Quran, 16:97)