

Zahir and Batin

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“You eat the shells of the almond nuts, but you do not eat the nuts, which is why you do not know about the special characteristics of the almond nut. You ignore the nut and eat the shell, you do not search for the real attributes [worth] of it.”

Farman Mubarak of Mawlana Sultan Muhammad Shah
Zanzibar 13th July, 1899

Why did our 48th Imam say this?

Our 48th Imam is saying that if you only practice zahir (exoteric) and do not understand its batin (esoteric meaning), then it is like you are eating only a shell of an almond, which does not give you any benefit.

What is Zahir and Batin?

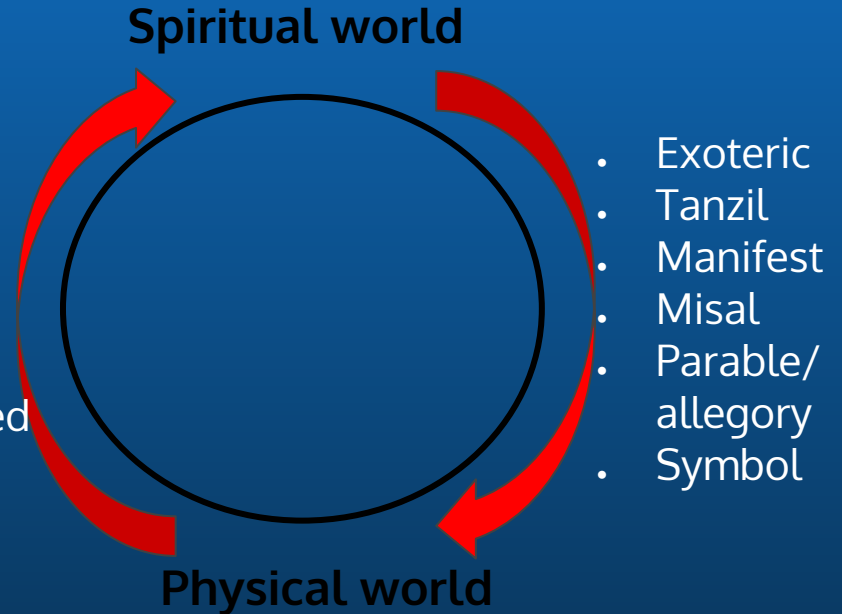
What is zahir?

Zahir is the exoteric or physical aspect of our religion.

What is batin?

Batin is the esoteric or spiritual aspect of our religion.

- Esoteric
- Ta'wil
- Hidden
- Mamsul
- Meaning
- Symbolized



Zahir and Batin Part 1

“It is important that if you recite or know parts of the Qur’an, you should be able to explain their meaning. Do not forget that our branch of Islam is an esoteric branch of Islam. Esoteric means that what is written is there, but its meaning is not there to everyone. **It is there only to those who are part of our Jamat.**”

Farman Mubarak of Noor Mawlana Shah Karim AL-Husayni Hazir Imam
Bombay, 22 November, 1967

What is the meaning of this farman?

In this farman mubarak Mawlana Hazir Imam emphasizes the importance of being in the Ismaili tariqa to be able to understand the esoteric meaning of the Qur’an. This is because the Ismailis are the only community, who throughout history have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet. Every Imam of the time gives the esoteric meaning according to his time and space.

Speech of Mawlana Hazir Imam

“In time, the Shia were also sub-divided over this question [of rightful leadership], so that today the Ismailis are the only Shia community who, throughout history, have been led by a living, hereditary Imam in direct descent from the Prophet.”

Mawlana Hazir Imam Shah Karim al-Husayni
Address to both Houses of Parliament of Canada,
Ottawa, Canada 27th February 2014

Zahir and Batin Part 2

The holy Prophet said: "Indeed, among you there is the one who will fight for the sake of the ta'wil of the Qur'an, as I did for the sake of its tanzil." The prophet was asked: Is he Abu Bakr or Umar? He said: "No, rather he is the mender of shoes (khasifu 'n-nal)." That is, Ali.

What does the tanzil and ta'wil mean?

The tanzil means the zahir and the ta'wil means the batin.

What does it mean when it says the tanzil and ta'wil of the Quran?

The tanzil of the Quran is what is written but the ta'wil is the inner/hidden meaning.

Tanzil means to come down and ta'wil means returning back to its origin.

(see diagram on slide three)

Zahir and Batin Part 3

It is said in a Hadith: "Indeed, the Quran has a zahr (exoteric aspect) and a batn (esoteric aspect) and every batn goes up to seven batn or up to seventy batn."

(al-Mizan, I, 7). These are the external and internal bounties of the True Religion as mentioned in verse (31:20): "And he has completed his favors upon you, both externally and internally."

1000 Wisdom, wisdom number 688

How many batini (esoteric) meanings can be of each zahiri (exoteric) verse of the Quran?

According to the above mentioned hadith, zahr has only one aspect, but batn can have up to seven or seventy meanings or even more.

For example, if someone raises and points one finger to the sky it is only one act, but it can have multiple meanings. That person could be saying look at the sky, or God is one, or warning you, etc. depending on the situation.



What is the best example for zahir and batin?

The best example for zahir and batin is the personal world. Our physical body is zahir and our soul is the batin.



What is an example of zahir and batin in nature?

An example of zahir and batin in nature could be a flower. The petals and stem are what we can see, the zahir. The fragrance of the flower is what we cannot see, the batin.



The exoteric of revelation
is like brackish water,
but the esoteric is like pearls
for people who are wise

Since pearls and jewels are
to be found on the sea-bed
look for the pearl-diver
instead of running on the
shore

Pir Nasir-i Khusraw
Shimmering Light an Anthology of Ismaili Poetry



Exercise: Let us use our intellects and search for the inner, the batin, or esoteric meaning of the following:

- 1) We drink ab-i shifa or niyaz in Jamat Khana. **What is its esoteric meaning?**
- 2) We do dua-karav-wi every time we go to Jamat Khana. **What is its esoteric meaning?**
- 3) The holy Qur'an says the example of Allah's light is a lamp (24:35) this is an exoteric statement. **What is its meaning?**
- 4) What does "nurun ala nur" (light upon light) in the same verse (24:35) mean?