

Analysis of the Meaningful Trajectory of Love in ‘Attār’s Asrār-nāmeḥ Based on Joseph Campbell’s Hero’s Journey Pattern

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Introduction

The archetype of the hero’s journey first appeared in Jung’s theories and was later fully developed by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2019). Campbell’s seventeen stages, organized into “departure”, “initiation” and “return” describe the hero’s movement from the ordinary world into the unknown, followed by transformation and eventual return. In this study, the final phase is referred to as the “beyond-return,” in which the hero becomes united with the Creator or returns as a spiritual guide after self-annihilation.

A mythological–semantic reading shows that, like Attar’s other works, *Asrār-nāmeḥ* also stages a hidden spiritual journey by two enigmatic heroes, closely aligned with Campbell’s monomyth. As Attar’s earliest text, it reflects youthful states of fear, longing, doubt, and awakening within the framework of divine love and light. Guided by “love” and propelled by “pain”, the seeker confronts worldly dangers and bodily limits. The study argues that *Asrār-nāmeḥ* offers one of the most symbolic portrayals of mystical ascent, where the simultaneous “descent of love” and “ascent of the soul”, echoing Campbell’s cycle of departure and return, constitute its central structure.

Research Method

The mystical-romantic path and path play a fundamental role in Sufi thought. This study deciphers the hidden layers of spiritual and mythological journey in Attar’s *Asrarnāmeḥ* and shows how the journey of love and soul positions the work as an early mystical text in which all the esoteric stages of transformation and ascension are revealed. Attar’s works are structurally based on spiritual movement and journey, a model that parallels -and sometimes surpasses- Campbell’s model of the hero’s journey because it stems from the mystic poet’s inner mystical experience shaped by love and soul. Using Campbell’s monomythical components of the hero’s journey as an interpretive framework, this study asks how the archetypal stages of the hero’s journey can show that the *Asrarnāmeḥ* constitutes a symbolic, multilayered descent-ascension of love and soul. A descriptive-analytical approach and a close reading of

selected passages reveal a structural correspondence between Attar's view of spiritual journey and Campbell's model of the hero's journey. The theoretical framework in Campbell's model is that the hero embodies a single, eternal mythological essence, and that the cyclical stages of his departure, ascension, and return can be identified and analyzed—with variations—in many world myths as well as in Attar's four major Masnavis. When Attar's main theme is read as man's ascent to spiritual perfection, the dominant archetype becomes the human journey, driven by natural and supernatural forces. Its structural core is based on three recurring motifs: love as the principle of movement, pain as the driving force, and silence as the symbolic mode of mystical progress. Aligning these three motifs with Campbell's framework makes it clear how each stage of Attar's spiritual ascension creates its own imaginative expression. In the *Asrarnamēh*, love is central and opposed to reason, and its stages can be traced from the opening sections, especially the narrative of the ascension, to their climax in the "Sea of Soul." Through symbolic and multilayered discourse, Attar links each chapter to these three key elements that cross death as a bridge between worlds. These elements correspond to the stages of the hero's journey: the presence of love and companionship with the soul (crossing the threshold), the experience of pain and descent (divine mission), the transcendence of self and the confrontation of death and life and the transformation of man (the beginning of movement), the spiritual dawn, silence, and fading away, which mark the return to one's origin. This love of the seeker is more clearly associated with the soul in Attar's other works and his mystical journey.

Conclusion

The *Asrār-nāmeh* presents this mystical journey presents love and the soul as an endless ascent from eternity to eternity, where the seeker, through love, passes through birth and existence, death and nothingness. According to Campbell's Hero's Journey framework, love appears as both the old guide and the seeker, guiding and accompanying the exiled soul in the world and caught in oblivion towards awakening, answering the call, and accepting the pain of separation. Love allows for reflection on self, God, and creation, enabling the seeker to face the trials of the path, to transcend self and symbolic death, to unite with the Creator, and even to return as a spiritual guide. This mytho-mystical structure depicts a cosmos in constant motion, where all beings are in motion and yearning for love, for love, and towards it.

Keywords: mystical path, love, A hero's journey, Joseph Campbell.