Outline of Annemarie Schimmel’s *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*

1  I Sacred Aspects of Nature and Culture

2  Inanimate Nature

2  Stones and rocks
3  Gems
4  Mountains
5  Earth and dust
6  Water
6  Springs and fountains
7  Water of life
7  Ocean, waves and foam
8  Rain
9  Deluge (flood)
9  Rivers
10  Fire
10  Burning Bush on Mount Sinai
11  Candles
11  Lightning and thunder
11  Wind
12  Light
13  Sun
14  Moon
15  Stars
16  Planets
16  Sky
16  Colours

17  Plants and Animals

17  Trees
20  Gardens
20  Plants and flowers
20  Wild rue, roses (gul), violets, tulips
21  Animals
21  Animal skin
22  Pigs and pork
22  Gnats
22  Bees
22  Ants
23  Spiders
23  Moths
23  Cows
23  Lions
24  Cats
24  Dogs
24  Camels
24  Donkeys
25  Horses
25  Buraq (from the Mi’raj)
25  Serpents, snakes and dragons
26  Birds
26  Soul birds
26  Nightingales (bulbul)
26  Falcons
26  Doves
26  Storks
27  Roosters
27  Peacocks
27  Parrots
27  Swans and ganders
27  Hoopoe (hudhud)
28  Crows and ravens
28  Mythical birds (Huma, ‘Anqa, Simurgh)
28  Kindness to animals
28  Eschatological peace (the lion and the lamb)

29  Man-made Objects

29  Swords, weapons and armour
30  Rods and wands
30  Flags and banners
31  Mirrors
33  Idols
33  Coins
33  Paintings and pictures
35  Woven fabrics (tomb-covers)
36  Garments, clothes
37  Ihram (pilgrimage dress)
37  Hijab, Burqa (veil)
38  Headgear (taj, turbans)
39  Garments, robes and hems as a metaphor
41  Notes

47  II Sacred Space and Time

48  Sacred Space

48  Caves
49  Houses
50  Thresholds
50  Doors and gates (bab)
High and low seats (throne vs. 'place of the sandals')
Centre of the house
Carpets and rugs
Baths
Citadel, fortress, stronghold (metaphor)
Mosques (masjid, jami’), pulpits (minbar), minarets, niches (mihrab)
Burial places, tombs, shrines (maqam, dargah)
Other sacred places
Mecca and Medina (al-haramayn; the two sacred places)
The Kaaba
Qibla
Medina
Jerusalem
Right and left side
East and West
Hahut, Lahut, Jabarut, Malakut, Mithal, Nasut (worlds/realms)
Road, way, (straight) path
Pilgrimage (hajj)
Muhammad’s Night Journey (Isra Mi’raj)
Journeys of the soul
Seven Valleys

Sacred Time

Lunar calendar
Hegira
Lunar years
Nawruz (Persian New Year)
Lunar months

Feasts
‘Id ul-Fitr (end of Ramadan)
‘Id al-Adha (Festival of Sacrifice)
Ramadan (fasting; sawm)
Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Might)
Laylat al-Milad (Birth of Muhammad; Mawlid)
Laylat al-Bara’a (Mid-Sha’ban)
Shia sacred days
Muharram (Martyrdom of Husayn)
Saints’ anniversaries (‘urs)
Other special days
Days of the week
Auspicious days
Hours
Linear time and cyclical time
Arcs of ascent and descent

Sacred Numbers
Odd numbers and even numbers
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 17, 18, 19, 40, 72, 99, 1001

Notes

III Sacred Action

Inherited values and traditions

Via Purgativa (Purification)

Customs for protection against evil spirits or the Evil Eye
Noise
Fumigation
Scents
Salt
Drawing a circle or walking around a (sick) person
Tying knot and loosening them again
Gestures (Hand of Fatima)
Henna (mehndi), turmeric and betel
Little boats of straw
Removing one’s shoes
Pilgrim’s dress (Ihram)
Covering the head and hair (women and men; veils, caps, fez, turbans, prayer caps)

Purification

Sweeping shrines
Washing sacred buildings and shrines
Ritual purity
Purification by fire (includes alchemy)
Ablutions (water) and full bath (wudu and ghusl)
Blood
Tears
Abstinence
Nightly superogative prayer
Asceticism
Ramadan (fasting; sawm)
Animal sacrifice
Self-sacrifice
Hair shaving
Circumcision
Offering and distributing flowers and sweets
Alms-giving (zakat)

Via Illuminativa
102 Intention (niyya)
103 Touching a sacred object or saintly person for blessing (baraka)
103 - Hands, peacock feathers, kissing, breathing
104 Music and dance (wirling dance in Sufism)
104 Ecstasy

105 **Via Unitiva**

105 Love and union with God
107 Eating and drinking blessed food and drink
107 Communal meals
107 Wine and intoxicating drink as a metaphor

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114 *The Word – About God, and from God*

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114 Popular religious songs
115 Repetition and rhyme
116 Dhikr (recollection of God)
116 Arabic language
117 Translation and commentaries of the Qu’ran
117 Islamic literature in other languages
119 Inspiration (ilham)
119 Divine revelation (wahy)
119 Interpretation and translation
119 Ninety-nine most beautiful Names of God and the greatest Name of God
120 Dhikr (recollection of God)
121 Personal names and titles (children, converts, rulers)
122 Divination (Qur’an, Mathnavi of Rumi, Divan of Hafiz)
123 Dreams
124 Astrology
124 Revelation and teachings of Muhammad
125 Mythology
125 Creation
125 Adam and Eve
126 Building of the Kaaba
126 Kerbela (martyrdom of Imam Husayn)
126 Pilgrimage, prayer and fasting
126 Last judgment (the Books, the Scales, the Bridge, the Mahdi, the second coming of Jesus)
126 Muhammad’s heavenly journey (isra mi’raj)
127 Demythologization and rationalization
127 Saga’s, fairy tales, fables, legends, proverbs and poetry
129 Hadith
130 Oral instruction
130 Esoteric interpretation
131 Madrasa (theological colleges)
131 Use of paradoxes and riddles
132 Ta’lim (theoretical dictation by the Shiam Imams)
132 Khutba (sermons)
133 Allegories
133 Shahada (profession of faith; seven words, twenty four letters)
134 Knowledge (‘Ilm) and wisdom (‘irfan)
135 Shari’a (Islamic law; ‘ulama, imams and mujahids)

135 **The Word to God**

135 Greetings (as-salamu ‘alaykum)
136 Blessing and cursing
137 Oaths and vows
137 - Children’s names, meals, tomb covers, little rags hanging in trees or window grills
138 Exorcism (zar ritual)
138 Invocations (takbir: Allahu Akbar)
138 Ablutions (purification with water)
138 Prayer
138 Forgiveness
139 Call to prayer (adhan)
139 Ritual prayer (obligatory prayer, salat, namaz)
140 Community prayer (congregational prayer)
141 Rak’a (17 cycles of bodily movements, like standing, genuflexions and prostration)
142 Supererogatory prayers
143 Praise of God (Subhan Allah) and hymnic poetry
145 Personal prayers (du’a, munajat)
147 Dhikr and tasbih (repeating short prayers or phrases)
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150 **Sacred Scripture**

150 The Koran (Qur’an)
151 Letters, pen, tablet
152 Adjad system (numerical value of letters)
152 Unconnected, disconnected or isolated letters of the Koran
152 Talismans, amulets and tomb covers etc.
153 Arabic alphabet
154 Calligraphy
155 The Well-preserved Tablet (lawh mahfuz; Koran 85:22)
155 The illiteracy of Muhammad
156 Alteration of the Torah and the Gospel
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I’jaz (unsurpassable style of the Koran)
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Suras or verses with special blessing (baraka; Fatiha, Sura 36 Ya Sin, the Throne verse (2:255), Sura 122)
Khatma (a complete recitation of the Koran)
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Notes

V Individual and Society

The Human Being

Dual nature of man (spiritual and material)
‘Abd (slave, servant), the highest station of man
The Perfect Man (al-insan al-kamil) in Sufism
The story of creation (Adam and Eve)
Spirit (ruh) and soul (nafs)
The body (carries power (baraka):
- Hair, beard, nails, nose, breathing, saliva, perspiration, blood, head, feet, eyes
Purification after losing ‘power’
The heart, a pure mirror
Spirit and soul
Parents
Family, fathers, mothers, children
Caliphate (Sunni Islam)
Imamate (Shia Islam)
- Twelver Shia and the Hidden Imam
‘Ulama (lawyer-divines in Sunni Islam)
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Unity of Existence (wahdat al-wujud)
Oneness of God
Other aspects of God (including His majesty (jalal) and beauty (jamal))
God’s Creation (including emanation, ‘Be! and it is’, change, signs (ayat), duality, polarity)
The meaning of this world
Angels (including the four archangels: Michael, Gabriel, Israfil, ‘Azra’il)
Djinn (spirits)
Iblis (Satan)
Death
Day of Judgment/Resurrection
Paradise and hell

VII How to Approach Islam
How to view traditional religion in modern times

Notes