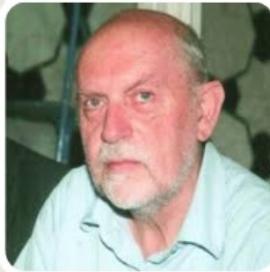


The Fusion of the Gnostic and Politics in Life of Imam Khomeini

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The Fusion of the Gnostic and the Political in the Personality and Life of Imam Khomeini (R.A.)

It is related that when teaching a class on ethical advancement at Qum in the 1930's, Imam Khomeini (R.A.) would always close his lectures with the following sentence from the *Munajat-i Sha'ban*, a litany unique in that all the Twelve [Ma'sumin] Imams recited it:

O God, grant me total separation from other than You and attachment to You; brighten the vision of our hearts with the light of looking upon You, so that they may pierce the veils of light and attain the source of magnificence, and our spirits be suspended from the splendor of Your sanctity.

The Imam always assigned great importance to the study and recitation of the supplicatory prayers of the Imams (A.S.) from the Ahlul-Bayt (A.S.), as a means of attaining *Munajat-i Sha'ban* spiritual insight as well as petitioning the Creator, but this appeal from the *Munajat-i Sha'ban* seems to have been

particularly close to his heart.

It appears in texts and pronouncements belonging to different phases of his life: in the commentary on a hadith of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (A.S.) concerning “the meeting with ALLAH” (*līqā'ullāh*), contained in *Sharh-i Chihil Hadith*, a work completed in 1939; in one of his works concerning the inner dimensions of prayer, *Mīraj al-Salikin*, also finished the same year; in *Jihad-i Akbar ya Mubaraza ba Nafs*, a lecture on ethical purification delivered in Najaf in about 1972; in the lectures on the exegesis of Surat al-Fatiha that were televised in December, 1979 and January, 1980; and in *Rah-i 'Ishq*, a letter written by the Imam to his daughter-in-law, [Khanum] Fatima Tabatabai, in 1983.

The aspiration “*to pierce the veils of light and attain the source of magnificence*” may therefore be regarded as a constant element in the devotional life of the Imam, and only by bearing it in mind can the totality of his struggles and achievements, including the political, be correctly understood. It was with a gaze fixed on “the source of magnificence”, a mode of vision utterly different from that of the common political leader, that the Imam led a vast revolutionary movement to success.

The integrality and comprehensiveness of the Imam's personality and vision of Islam are such that analytical distinctions among their various dimensions are in a sense artificial, reflecting an effort to understand the Imam rather than his actuality. It is nonetheless legitimate – or at least inevitable – to speak of the Gnostic (*'irfani*) and political aspects of his life and activity and to accord a certain primacy to the former, in terms of not only chronology but also significance.

The Imam is generally regarded, by both Westerners and Muslims, as nothing more than an unusually gifted revolutionary leader, yet all who knew him intimately, as well as many who met with him but briefly, can testify that he possessed a vision transcending the political at the very same time that it controlled and embraced it. It is precisely this inclusion of the political in the Gnostic that is perhaps the most distinctive feature of the Imam's persona.

As for the chronological primacy of gnosis in the life of the Imam, this is amply demonstrated by the history of his early years in Qum. His immediate purpose in going there in 1920 was no doubt to study with Shaykh 'Abd al-Karim Ha'iri, one of the principal authorities of the day in jurisprudence, and he distinguished himself in this essential area of Islamic learning long before his emergence as a *marja'-i taqlid* in the early 1960's.

But in Qum he soon developed an interest in *'irfan* and associated disciplines that set him apart from many of his contemporaries and was, indeed, often viewed with suspicion and even hostility; many years later he had occasion to remark: “*It is regrettable that some of the 'ulama should entertain such suspicions and deprive themselves of the benefits to be gained from studying 'irfan.*”

His first guide in the pursuit of *'irfan* was Mirza'Ali Akbar Yazdi (d. 1926), a pupil of Husayn Sabzavari who had himself studied under Mulla Hadi Sabzavari (d. 1872), the author of *Sharh-i Manzuma*, one of the basic texts of *'irfan*; the Imam was thus affiliated to one of the principal lines of the teaching and

transmission of Shi'ite gnosis.

Another early guide was Mirza Aqa Javad Maliki Tabrizi (d. 1924), who had been teaching in Qum since 1911. He held two classes on philosophy and ethics, a public one at the Madrasa-yi Fayziya and a private one in his own home that was attended by a number of gifted and favored students including the Imam.

The Imam also studied with Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Rafi'i Qazvini (d. 1975), among whose few published writings is a commentary on the *Du'a al-Sahar*, the same profound supplication to which the Imam devoted his first work, *Sharh Du'a al-Sahar*; it is therefore possible that the Imam's attention was first drawn to this text by Qazvini.

The Imam's chief teacher in gnosis was, however, Ayatullah Muhammad 'Ali Shahabadi (d. 1950), to whom he respectfully referred in his own writings on *'irfan* as "our master in theosophy" (*ustad-i ilahi-yi ma*). He met Shahabadi soon after the latter's arrival in Qum (probably in the late 1920's), and the answer he gave the Imam to a question on *'irfan* convinced him that he was in the presence of a true master. After initially refusing the Imam's request for permission to study with him, Shahabadi consented to teach him philosophy, but it was gnosis the Imam wished to pursue, and he persisted until Shahabadi agreed to instruct him in that discipline.

Every Thursday and Friday, as well as on holidays, usually alone but sometimes in the company of one or two other students, the Imam listened to Shahabadi lecturing on the commentary by Da'ud Qaysari (d. 1350) on the *Fusus al-Hikam* of Ibn 'Arabi, the *Miftah al-Ghayb* of Sadr al-Din Qunavi (d. 1274), and the *Manazil al-Sairin* of Khwaja 'Abdullah Ansari (d. 1089). The Imam's interest in these texts, particularly the last, remained demonstrably with him throughout his life.

In so far as the Imam's fusion of Gnostic and political concerns can be traced to any source other than illumination and immersion in the Qur'an and the teachings of the *Ma'sumin*, it is to another aspect of Shahabadi's influence upon him that it may be attributed.

Shahabadi was one of the relatively few *'ulama* in the time of Reza Shah to raise his voice against the misdeeds of the Pahlavi dynasty. He would regularly preach against the first Pahlavi during the commemoration of 'Ashura, and on one occasion manifested his extreme discontent by entering an eleven-month retreat at the shrine of Shah 'Abd al-'Azim.

A similar commitment to the political sphere manifested itself in one of his books, *Shadharat al-Ma'arif*, a brief work which has been well described as "social as well as Gnostic in content." Here Shahabadi analyzes the causes of decline and discontent in Muslim society, proposes the diffusion of authentic Islamic knowledge as a means of remedying the situation and creating unity, and concludes that although the establishment of perfect Islamic governance is a task reserved for the *Sahib al-Zaman* (AJ), the political dimension of Islam, implicit in all its juridical ordinances, cannot in any way be neglected, for "Islam is most certainly a political religion" (pp. 6-7).

The Imam began his teaching career at the age of twenty-seven by providing instruction in *hikmat*, a discipline closely related to *'irfan*, and soon thereafter organized private sessions in *'irfan* itself. It was in these sessions that the Imam trained and inspired some of his closest associates, including above all Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari, whom the Imam described after his assassination in May 1979 as “the very quintessence of my being.” The texts taught to this elite were the section on the soul (*nafs*) in the *Asfar al-Arba'a* of Mulla Sadra and the *Sharh-i Manzuma*.

Gnostic and devotional matters also formed the subject matter of the Imam's earliest writings. In 1928, he wrote a detailed commentary on the *Du'a al-Sahar*, the prayer recited before dawn during Ramadan by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A.S.). This work was followed in 1931 by *Misbah al-Hidaya ila al-Khilafa wa al-Wilaya*, a brief but dense exposition of the innermost reality of the Prophet (S.A.W) and the Imams (A.S) that draws not only on a meditation on the hadith of the *Ma'sumin* but also on the *akbari* concept of the Universal Man (*al-insan al-kamil*).

In 1937, the Imam completed a series of glosses on Qaysari's commentary on the *Fusus al-Hikam* and on the *Misbah al-Una*, Hamza b. Fanari's commentary on the *Miftah al-Ghayb* of Qunavi. Two years later, the Imam completed his first work in Farsi, *Sharh-i Chihil Hadith*, a voluminous commentary on forty hadith of predominantly ethical and gnostic content. Also dating from 1939 is the Imam's *Mir'aj al-Salikin wa Salat al-'Arifin* (also known as *Sirr al-Salat*), a treatise in Farsi detailing the inner meaning of every part of the prayer, from the ablution that precedes it to the threefold *takbir* that concludes it.

Somewhat more accessible than this dense and challenging work is another book on the same theme, *Adab al-Salat*, completed in 1942. Finally, mention may be made of *Sharh-i Hadith-i Junud-i 'Aql o Jahl*, a work completed in 1944 which, has been described as the fullest and most systematic exposition of the Imam's views on ethics and gnosis.

Beyond this enumeration, it is neither possible nor desirable on the present occasion to attempt a fuller presentation of the Imam's contribution to the discipline of *'irfan*; it will be enough to refer the reader to Yahya Christian Bonaud's *L'Imam Khomeyni, un gnostique méconnu du XXe siècle* (Beirut, 1997), an excellent work of both synthesis and analysis.

However, in connection with the trajectory of the Imam's life – the transition from early emphasis on *'irfan* to later engagement in the political realm – it is imperative to note that the Gnostic writings are not a digest or extension of received opinions and formulations, drawn up in youth only to be laid aside in maturity; rather they are the manifest fruit of a powerful, original, and lasting vision.

As was remarked by Sayyid Ahmad Fihri, who attended some of the Imam's lectures in Qum during the 1930's, “it is apparent that he [the Imam] has experiential knowledge of all he wrote upon.” To put it somewhat differently, the Imam's works on *'irfan* were but the early, literary expression of a process of *suluk*, of continuous advancement towards the repeatedly invoked “source of magnificence.”

The Imam's leadership of the Islamic Revolution and his establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran

may be therefore be said to have constituted, from a certain point of view, a further stage in that process of spiritual wayfaring; the fruits of his inward strivings came ultimately to transcend his own person and to manifest themselves with profound effect in the political realm.

This characterization may be justified with reference to the first three of the four journeys that furnish both the subject and the title of Mulla Sadra's *Asfar al-Arba'a*, a work with which the Imam was intimately acquainted.

The first is the journey from creation to the divine reality (*min al-khalq ila al-haqq*), a movement away from immersion in the multiplicity of creation to exclusive awareness of the sole reality that is coterminous with the divine essence. The second journey takes place within the divine reality by means of that reality itself (*fi al-haqq bi al-haqq*); it consists of the perception of the divine perfections (*kamalat*) and of a series of extinctions in the divine names followed by subsistence through them.

The third journey is that which leads back from the divine reality to creation (*min al-haqq ila al-haqq*); however, it does not bring the wayfarer back to his point of departure, for it is a journey that is accomplished by means of the divine reality (*bi al-haqq*) and has as its result the perception of the mysteries of the divine acts (*af'al*) as they unfold in the phenomenal world.

If the impertinence of speculating on the spiritual progress of the Imam be forgiven, it may be suggested that his period of primary emphasis on *'irfan* and associated matters corresponded to the first and second journeys described by Mulla Sadra, and that his involvement in the political sphere and his leadership of the Islamic Revolution were analogous to the third journey.

What is certain that the unique insight the Imam displayed at critical junctures during the revolution and the early years of the Islamic Republic cannot be explained purely in terms of political sagacity; a clarity of vision was at work which enabled him to see beyond the immediate conjuncture, and it may be permissible to describe this capacity as a witnessing of the *af'al* as they became manifest in the political sphere.

If this characterization is justifiable, it becomes plain that the Imam generally refrained from overt political activity until 1962 not only because of an unwillingness to dispute the quietist attitude of the senior *'ulama* of the day, but also because an essential process of inner preparation was underway. It was the Imam's own progress toward "the source of magnificence" that enabled him to lead a revolution that was like a collective *suluk* of the Iranian people.

This having been said, it must be conceded that the scheme of the three successive journeys has an inevitably metaphorical character, in that the concreteness and definite accessibility of a terrestrial destination are lacking in the trackless realm of inward journeying. Moreover, the application of the scheme to a given life cannot be taken to imply an exact correspondence to chronologically distinct periods. It is no doubt for this reason that traces of political awareness and interest can be discerned in the life of the Imam even before his emergence on the national scene in 1962.

He had some contact with scholars who contested various policies of Reza Shah, not only his master Shahabadi but also Hajj Aqa Nurullah Isfahani and Mulla Husayn Fisharaki who led a protest in Isfahan against compulsory military service in 1924; Ayatollah Angaji and Mirza Sadiq Aqa who led a similar movement in Tabriz in 1928; Aqazada Kafa'i who was brought to Tehran for trial after the Mashhad uprising of 1935; and Sayyid Hasan Mudarris, whom the Imam later described as “the leader of those who stood against oppression.”

Moreover, the Imam often touched on political themes in the poetry he wrote at the time and which was privately circulated in Qum. Thus when in 1928 Reza Shah abolished the capitulations that had been granted to foreign powers and sought thereby to present himself as an authentic patriot, the Imam responded with a poem that included this line: *“It's true he has now abolished every capitulation, but only to hide from you the abolition of the nation!”*

In any event, such was the climate of the day in Iran that even such an essential component of Shi'ite spirituality as *rauzakhwani* {the recitation of texts commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (A.S.)} automatically took on political connotations.

In an interview granted to the present writer in December 1979, the Imam recalled that the assemblies of *rauzakhwani* in which he participated in Qum during his youth rarely took place, and even then informers often infiltrated them, with the result that those participating were arrested. Still less to the liking of the Pahlavi regime than such traditional manifestations of piety were the public lectures on ethics given by the Imam in Qum in the early 1930's and, after a hiatus, from 1941 onward.

Although based on the *Manazil al-Sa'irin* of Ansari, one of the texts the Imam had studied with Shahabadi, these lectures served as the vehicle for a comprehensive exposition of Islam as a whole, including its political dimensions. Sayyid Ahmad Fihri recalled: “I count the time I spent attending those lectures among the most precious hours of my life. In his lectures the Imam taught true Islamic ethics, which cannot be separated from revolution, in such a way that he left a deep impression on all who attended.”

Another listener to those lectures, Ayatollah Murtaza Mutahhari, attributed to them “the formation of a good part of my intellectual and spiritual personality.” Moreover, it was not only religious scholars who attended the lectures; people from other walks of life would come from places as far afield as Tehran and Isfahan, defying the wish of the Pahlavi regime to isolate the religious institution in Qum from the general population.

The interconnectedness of the Gnostic and sapiential with the political and confrontational also came clearly to the fore in *Kashf al-Asrar*, which appearing in 1945 was the first published work of the Imam. The book is in the first place a crushing response to *Asrar-i Hazarsala*, a Wahhabi-inspired polemic against many of the key doctrines of Shi'ism.

This is accomplished largely through the marshalling of a wide range of scriptural and rational

arguments, but the Imam also has recourse to the great authorities of *hikmat* and *'irfan*, men such as Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra. Further, the currency of works such as *Asrar-i Hazarsala* is denounced by the Imam as one consequence of the anti-religious policies of the Pahlavi regime, and it is in *Kashf al-Asrar* that the Imam expounds for the first time the doctrine of “the governance of the jurisprudent” (*Vilayat-i Faqih*) that was to become the constitutional foundation of the Islamic Republic.

In May 1944, at about the same time he must have been engaged in writing *Kashf al-Asrar*, the Imam issued what appears to have been his first political proclamation, calling for action to deliver the Muslims of Iran and the entire Islamic world from the tyranny of foreign powers and their domestic accomplices; the autograph copy of this proclamation is headed not only by the *bismala* but also by the injunction, “read it and put it into effect.” The Imam begins, very significantly, by citing Qur'an:

“Say: I enjoin upon you one thing only -- that you rise up for God, in pairs and singly, and then reflect.” (Qur'an, 34:46)

This is the same verse that opens the chapter on awakening (*bab al-yaqza*) at the very beginning of Ansari's *Manazil al-Sa'irin*, the handbook of spiritual wayfaring beloved of the Imam since his days of study with Shahabadi. “Rising up for God” counts, then, as the essential point of departure for *suluk*; it is defined by Ansari as “awakening from the slumber of neglect and rising from the pit of lassitude.”

The Imam similarly says of the verse in question that in it “God Almighty has set forth the progress of man from the dark realm of nature to the farthest point of true humanity,” so that the injunction contained in it is “the sole path of reform in this world.”

But immediately after offering this Gnostic and ethical interpretation of the verse the Imam proceeds to analyze the lamentable state of the Muslim world, attributing it to the fact that all are engaged in “rising up for the sake of their appetitive souls” (*qiyam barayi nafs*); it is only through “rising up for God” that matters can be rectified.

“Rising up for God” thus becomes both an act of personal redemption and a commitment to change and reform Muslim society, an insurrection equally against spiritual lassitude and neglect in oneself and against corruption, irreligion and tyranny in the world. There is perhaps no clearer textual indication of the interconnectedness of the ethical and Gnostic with the political in the worldview of the Imam than in this understanding of “rising up for God.”

During the roughly eighteen years that elapsed between the issuing of this early proclamation and the beginning of the Imam's sustained public struggle against the Pahlavi regime in the autumn of 1962, he appears to have devoted himself primarily to teaching *fiqh* and *usul* and writing authoritative books on those disciplines.

It has, however, already been pointed out that for the Imam *'irfan* was above all an existential matter, so that the diversion of his pedagogical and literary energies to *fiqh* and *usul* cannot be taken to mean that

'irfan disappeared from the horizons of his inner life.

There is evidence; moreover, that even his teaching of these exoteric sciences was colored by Gnostic concerns and that this was one factor in attracting an unusually large number of students to his classes. To quote Sayyid Ahmad Fihri once more, the Imam was able “to demonstrate the conformity of the *shari'a* to the logic of *'irfan* as well as the conformity of *'irfan* to the logic of the *shari'a*.” In addition, the teaching methods of the *hauza* [theology school] have always involved the transmission to the student of more than formal learning; a complete ethos and worldview pass from one generation to the next.

That the Imam in particular was able to convey to his students essential spiritual virtues and qualities is apparent from the testimony of the late Muhammad Javad Bohonar that “the Imam would instill in us a sense of spiritual nobility, of responsibility and commitment, of spiritual and intellectual richness; his words would resound in our ears for many days after we left Qum to go preaching during Ramadan.”

The Imam addressed himself in detail to this task of the ethical and spiritual training of his students in the lectures on the “**Major Jihad**”, the struggle against the self-indulgent tendencies of the self, which he delivered at Najaf in 1972. It is significant that these lectures were given after the better-known series on the governance of the jurisprudent, and appropriate that they were first published as a supplement to them.

For the establishment of Islamic government was seen by the Imam as both dependent on and aiming at the spiritual purification of Muslim society and those called upon to lead it, the religious scholars; success in the “minor jihad,” the struggle against external forces hostile to Islam, was indissolubly linked to exertion in the “**Major Jihad**.”

It is surely not accidental that the first tradition selected for commentary by the Imam in his *Sharh-i Chihil Hadith* was the hadith from which this pair of terms, major and minor jihad, is derived: “When a group of combatants whom the Prophet (S.A.W.) had sent forth returned, he addressed them saying, 'Welcome to a people who have completed the minor jihad; the major jihad remains for them to fulfill.' They asked: 'O Messenger of God, what is the major jihad?'

He replied: “The jihad against the self.” In his commentary on this hadith, the Imam expounds a concise but complete program of inner combat, its first stage being the reflection (*tafakkur*) that is ordained in Qur'an, 33:46, the verse cited by the Imam at the beginning of his first public proclamation.

The numerous proclamations and directives, gathered together in the 22-volume collection entitled *Sahifa-yi Nur*, which the Imam issued first in the course of the struggle that led to the foundation of the Islamic Republic and then during the first ten years of its existence necessarily deal first and foremost with the problems and crises of the day.

These documents also contain, however, numerous allusions to Gnostic and ethical concerns, demonstrating once again the inseparability of the spiritual and ethical in the worldview of the Imam; a

thematic index of the *Sahifa-yi Nur* lists more than 700 passages of varying length dealing with the concerns of ‘*irfan*.

Here, only two examples will be discussed. On December 22, 1979, when addressing the people of Qum, the Imam described the success of the revolution as due to the fact that the people of Iran had oriented themselves to the divine presence and thereby taken on “a divine existence.”

Later, after the beginning of the Iraqi aggression in September 1980, the Imam repeatedly said of the martyrs that they had gone to “the contemplation of ALLAH” (*liqa’ullah*). This contemplation, a major theme of ‘*irfan*, had been the subject of a small treatise written by the Imam some time during the 1930’s and published as a supplement to the lengthier work of his teacher, Aqa Javad Maliki Tabrizi, on the same subject.

He treated the subject at greater length in his *Sharh-i Chihil Hadith*, where he clarifies that the meaning of *liqa’ullah* is not comprehensive rational knowledge of the divine essence but “a comprehensiveness of Gnostic witnessing attained by inner vision” (“*ihata dar ‘irfan-i shuhudi va qadam-i basirat*”). He connects it, moreover, to the same supplication with which we opened this discussion, and it may therefore be concluded that for the Imam the martyr was one who by means of his death penetrated “the veils of light” to attain “the source of magnificence.”

Perhaps the clearest public evidence of the Imam’s continuing attachment to ‘*irfan* and even his belief in the permissibility of conveying it to the broadest possible public came with his televised lectures on the exegesis of Surat al-Fatiha in December 1979 and January 1980. The lectures were suspended for a variety of reasons before the Imam had proceeded beyond the first two verses of the surah, but even in their incomplete form they are a remarkable exposition, clear, eloquent, and accessible, of key topics of ‘*irfan*, especially the modes of divine manifestation and the meanings of the divine names.

Worthy of note are also the tumultuous events through which Iran was passing at the time the lectures were delivered: the intensified confrontation with the United States that followed on the deposed Shah’s entry to America and the occupation of the United States Embassy in Tehran by the Students Following the Line of the Imam; the struggle to institutionalize the new order; various counterrevolutionary plots; and upheaval in the armed forces.

It was against this background of turmoil that the Imam chose, with the perfect tranquility that characterized his demeanor, to lecture to the Iranian nation on key topics of ‘*irfan* that might have been thought irrelevant to the urgent concerns of the day.

To understand this choice, it may be appropriate to recall an episode in the life of Imam ‘Ali (*’alayhi ’s-salam*) to which the Imam himself refers in the lectures on Surat al-Fatiha. Once, when advancing to do battle with Mu’awiya, Imam ‘Ali (A.S.) began discoursing on the inner meaning of *Tawhid*.

One of his companions asked him whether the time was suitable for the discussion of such matters. He

responded, “This is the reason that we are fighting Mu’awiya, not for any worldly gain.” The conclusion follows that it is precisely in the midst of the struggle for the establishment of an Islamic order that the deepest meanings of *Tawhid* may be fittingly evoked; the Gnostic and the political, *‘irfan* and *jihad*, are seen once again to be indissolubly linked.

The Imam’s concern that Islamic gnosis should be properly known expressed itself even in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. In a letter to Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union, dated January 4, 1988, the Imam not only foretold the collapse and utter discrediting of Communism, with a prescience that outstripped the expertise of conventional Kremlinologists, but also warned against the spiritual and ethical chaos into which post-Soviet Russia has now in fact fallen.

The essential problem confronting Russia, the Imam asserted, was not that of property, the administration of the economy, or personal freedom, but the absence of a valid faith in God. As a contribution to remedying the situation, the Imam proposed that Gorbachev dispatch Soviet scholars to Qum to study *inter alia* the works of Farabi, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, Mulla Sadra, and Ibn ‘Arabi.

Important and eloquent testimony to the Imam’s essential nature as a Gnostic of high rank is also contained in more intimate documents, written towards the end of his life: the poems in which he anticipated the union with the Divine Beloved to which he had constantly aspired, and letters to his son, the late Hajj Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini, and his daughter-in-law, [Khanum] Fatima Tabataba’i. Both the poems and the letters are marked by a strongly emotive tone that distinguishes them from the writings on *‘irfan* he had composed during the first phase of his life in Qum.

As for the public testament that was released after the Imam’s death on June 3, 1989, it consists primarily of counsels to various classes of the Iranian people and warnings of the problems they will face in preserving the Islamic Republic. It is therefore easy to dismiss as a mere preliminary the Imam’s opening emphasis on the *hadith-i thaqalayn*, that foundational text for all of Shi‘i thought, and to overlook the occurrence, in the exordium, of a reference to “the reserved name” (*al-ism al-musta’thar*) of God.

The sense of this term, which ultimately goes back to a petitionary prayer of the Prophet (A.S.), may be summarized as the divine name (or compendium of names) that relate to the divine qualities that are not and never will be manifested, being “held in reserve” in God’s hidden knowledge concerning himself. As has been suggested by Ayatollah Muhammadi Gilani, the reference made by the Imam to “the reserved name” at the very beginning of his testament indicates a wish on his part to encourage the cultivation of *‘irfan* after his passing as an indispensable part of his legacy.

It is from the invocation of “the reserved name,” together with all the names manifest or capable of manifestation, which the Imam descends, as it were, in the main body of his testament, to the plane of the divine acts that is simultaneously the plane of socio-political struggle. He thus underlined for the last time, subtly but unmistakably, the linkage between the Gnostic and the political that had been the hallmark of his life and one measure of his full and creative assimilation of the guidance of the Qur'an

and the *Ma'sumin*.

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