

The History of the Islamic Seminaries of Qum, Part 2



Rasoul Imani Khoshkhu

Translated by
Mohammad Javad Shomali

Al-Islam.org

Message of Thaqalayn Vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2014

Authors(s):

Rasoul Imani Khoshkhu [3]

Publisher(s):

Ahlul Bayt World Assembly [4]

Translator(s):

Mohammad Javad Shomali [5]

Category:

General [6]

General [7]

Journal:

Vol. 15, no. 1, Spring 2014 [8]

This article delves into the history of the Islamic seminaries of Qum. Part 2 continues with the seminaries of Qum after the Islamic Revolution, including an explanation of the core courses offered in philosophy, exegesis, theology, and jurisprudence.

Topic Tags:

Islamic Seminary [9]

Hawza [10]

Rasoul Imani Khoshkhu

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Abstract

The former articles in this series explored the historical origins of the main religious seminaries in the Shi'a world, and its role in bringing about a unique culture in the scientific, social, and political spheres. The seminaries created well-educated and pious Shi'a scholars who pursued ijtihaad with the use of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and reason to respond to the needs of the Muslim community. The previous article delved into the history of the Islamic seminaries of Qum.

Using Islamic traditions and historical records, the significance of Qum according to the Ahlul Bayt was explained, along with its link to Lady Ma‘sumah’s arrival to the city and its impact on the future of the seminaries’ success. This article continues with the seminaries of Qum after the Islamic Revolution, including an explanation of the core courses offered in philosophy, exegesis, theology, and jurisprudence.

The Islamic seminaries of Qum after the Islamic Revolution

Before the Islamic revolution in 1979, the government was a constant obstacle in the seminaries’ progress with the ongoing propaganda against seminarians to discourage people from admissions¹. Seeing that the Islamic revolution in Iran was the result of the seminaries’ progress supported by the people, after the revolution the seminaries became popular among people. The leadership of Imam Khomeini further strengthened this.

Numerous clerics moved to different parts of the country on various occasions to spread seminary teachings to encourage the youth to study Islamic sciences. The impressive growth of the Qum seminaries both in terms of quantity and quality were due to the abovementioned activities. The seminary scholars were not preoccupied with fighting against the Pahlavi regime any longer, and so they continued to engage in academic accomplishments with focused minds. Moreover, several new majors were offered in various fields of study.

The Qum seminaries expanded across the country and throughout the world. Today, most cities in Iran have seminaries directed under the Qum seminaries.

Although studying religion is a right for all Muslims, before the revolution in Iran seminaries were only opened to men. However, after the revolution, seminaries for women were also founded not only in Qum, but in cities across the country.

Those interested in learning religious studies have also come to Qum from across the world, and this is considered one of the greatest blessings of the Islamic Revolution. Nowadays, many foreign students residing in Qum are seminarians and eventually return to their countries to convey the message of Islam, particularly Shi’ism. The seminaries of Qum invited both men and women from foreign countries, and both are provided with the same facilities.

Moreover, although at first glance university and seminary studies did not have much in common, shrewd measures were taken for seminary studies to find a way into the universities. After the Islamic Revolution, some modules on Islamic studies were integrated in the national curriculum for undergraduate programmes and, as a result, more seminarians started teaching in universities and this paved the way further for cooperation between the two institutions. Ayatullah Mutahhari and Ayatullah Mufatteh also played a major role in this. On the other hand, it was made possible for the students of the seminaries who were interested in studying in the university to do so.

Today, many great teachers from the seminaries are present in the universities and along with teaching certain religious studies are the messengers of the valuable Shi'a teachings in these academic centres.

For a more profound understanding of the educational dimensions of the seminaries of Qum, the following provides a brief review of some of the available educational fields.

3. Core Courses in the Qum seminaries

3.1. Philosophy

Philosophy is one of the most fundamental sciences on which all sciences depend. Religious sciences are related to God and the universe, and these discussions depend on accepting certain realities in existence which are only studied and proven in philosophy. The philosophical method is an intellectual one, and, in the Shi'a understanding, the intellect ('aql) is one of the sources for understanding Islam.

Philosophy in the Islamic world has a very long history. During the era of the Abbasids, there was a great interest in Greek works among the intellectuals, all of which were translated. Despite this interest and huge translation works, it was with the efforts of philosophers such as Farabi, Avicenna, and Suhrawardi in the next centuries that Islamic philosophy really developed.^{2.3}

During the history of Islamic philosophy, three main doctrines were present: Avicennism (Mash-shaa'), Illuminationism (Ishraq), and the transcendent theosophy (al-Hikmah al-Muta'liyyah). The Avicennism that was in debt to the ancient Greek school of thought was dominant for years. Farabi, Avicenna, and Ibn Rushd were the most famous scholars of this doctrine.

In the sixth century, Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi developed the philosophy of Illuminationism (Ishraq) which was followed later by many followers. This continued until the eleventh century when Mulla Sadra founded the transcendent theosophy (al-Hikmah al-Muta'liyyah) which is the philosophy which is currently studied. Of course, due to the deep rational and philosophical content in the Shi'a Imams' sermons and narrations, the Shi'a Islamic seminaries tended towards philosophy earlier and more than the rest of Muslim world.

Philosophy in the Islamic seminaries of Iran goes back to the arrival of Mulla Sadra (979–1050 AH) in Kahak, a village 30 kilometers outside Qum. As mentioned, philosophy in Qum began in the fourth era as a result of Mulla Sadra's migration. Fayz Kashani and Fayyaz Lahiji were among his students. And philosophy continued to exist with the efforts of Qadhi Saeed Qummi. Establishing the philosophical method of transcendent theosophy and expressing innovative theories about existence and reality, Mulla Sadra painted a new perspective in discovering the realities of the universe, such as his theory of substantial motion (al-Harakat al-Jawhariyyah).

In the recent period, philosophy in the seminaries of Qum witnessed great scholars who had an important effect on the philosophical and political thinking of the Islamic world similar to previous periods

when philosophers such Mulla Sadra and his students played a major role in the Safavid Era. Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Hasan Rafi'l Qazwini (1310–1395 AH) was among the pioneers of the philosophical movement in the seminaries.

He had studied intellectual sciences such as logic and philosophy in the seminaries of Tehran from Ayatullahs Abdunnabi al-Nuri, Hakim Mirza Muhsen Kermanshahy, Fazel Tehrani, and Mirza Mahmoud Qummi. He came to Qum at the time of Ayatullah Haeri where he taught rational sciences. Amongst his most talented students was Ayatullah Khomeini. Ayatullah Khomeini was known for his attention towards several dimensions of the Islamic sciences, especially that of philosophy. Various philosophical, jurisprudential, ethical, and mystical topics that played a role in his philosophical-political thinking were coherently taught in his lessons.

Due to his efforts, the theory of 'The Governance of the Jurist' (Wilayatul Faqih) was established and found followers in the seminaries. After expanding from the seminaries of Qum to the Islamic revolution, it led to the establishment of the Islamic government.

Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i was another philosophical figure who greatly promoted Mulla Sadra's theories. He taught Asfaar⁴ and Shifa⁵ and wrote Bidayat al-Hikmah and Nihayat al-Hikmah. Tabataba'i wrote tens of books, treatises, and commentaries on divine philosophy. His important role was his innovative method of discussing theories on divine philosophy and his counter-arguments against the philosophy of dialectic materialism. He discussed and responded to issues brought up in the materialistic school of thought in his Usul-e-Falsafeva Raveshe Realism.

This book was then published in different parts of the Islamic world with an additional commentary of his student, Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari.

Ayatullah Mutahhari was a follower of the philosophical doctrine of his two great teachers, Ayatullah Khomeini and Allamah Tabataba'i. He wrote about and taught comparative philosophy, cautioned people about Marxism, and promoted Islamic thinking to seminary and university students, as well as the laymen. Mutahhari's specialty was his ability to explain and analyse philosophical problems and render it easy for all to understand. Other renowned philosophy professors in the seminaries were Ayatullah Abdullah Jawadi Amuli, Ayatullah Hasan Hasanzadeh Amuli, and Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi.

Among the various branches of philosophy, political philosophy was also developed during this period; previous eras did not include this field. In this period, Islamic political thought was discussed and its initial principles were compiled. The theory of 'The Governance of the Jurist' was introduced in a thorough and comprehensive manner, and the critical study of western philosophical schools of thought became available.

In this period, the principles of Islamic beliefs and the Islamic political philosophy were drawn from the scriptures and made available to everyone⁶.

In the present period, philosophy has become one of the main fields of study in the seminaries; many books have been written on the subject, such as Usul-e Falsafe wa Rawesh-e-Realism (Principles of Philosophy and Method of Realism), Bidayat al-Hikmah (The Beginning of Philosophy), and Nihayat al-Hikmah (The End of Philosophy) by Allamah Tabataba'i Harakat wa Zaman (Motion and Time) by Ayatullah Mutahhari, Rahiqhe Makhtum by Ayatullah Javadi Amuli and Amuzesh-e-Falsafe by Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi.

3.2. Islamic Theology (Kalam)

Theology, as was explained earlier, deals with verifying religious beliefs and is responsible for responding to questions raised against Islam. Islamic theologians primarily benefit from two sources: intellect and tradition⁷.

In the seminaries of Qum, the narrators of the hadiths reported and explained the theological teachings of the Imams. Theology in Qum had a distinctive nature and had adopted a special method in delivering those topics and issues. Hadith compilations such as Al-Kafi, 'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, Al-Ghaybah, and Kifayatul-Asar include theological discussions with the authors' views expressed using a tradition-based (naqli) method.

In later periods, especially in the fourth period, the rational approach was common in the field of theology as depicted by the works of Mulla Sadra and Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji, the most dominant scholar in the field of theology during this period (1072 AH). Moreover, he adopted a mystical approach in his writings and explained the various results it would bring versus the philosophical or the theological (Kalam) approach.

Mirza Hasan Lahiji and Qadi Saeed Qummi were among the famous theology scholars of the Qum seminaries after Mirza Lahiji. In this period, valued books such as Gowhar-e Murad, Shawareq al-Ilham, and Sarmaye-ye Iman by Mulla Lahiji, Sham' al-Yaqin fi Ma'rifatil-Haqqwal-Yaqin by Mirza Hasan Lahiji and Kelid-e Behesht by Qadi Saeed Qummi were released.

Currently, discussions of theology have an impressive growth among students of religious studies. Sub-branches of Islamic theology such as Imamate⁸ and Mahdawiyyat⁹ have their own text books. Allamah Tabataba'i, Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi, and Ayatullah Subhani are the most prominent scholars of Islamic theology during this period, each having written numerous books on its branches.

3.3 Exegesis of the Qur'an (Tafseer)

Muslims believe the Qur'an to be God's words revealed to the heart of Prophet Muhammad who then accurately recited the verses to the people. The study of Quranic exegesis (tafseer), which began during the Prophet's lifetime, deals with understanding the inner and apparent meaning of the Qur'an. In Shi'ism, although the real interpreters of the Qur'an are the infallible Imams, it is possible to acquire a deep understanding of the verses using their hadiths. For this reason, from the early centuries until now,

Shi'a scholars, especially those from Qum, have written books specifically on Qur'anic exegesis:

Third century: *Tafsir-e Qummi* by Ali ibn Ibrahim Qummi;

Fourth century: Though there were many books on exegesis by Shaykh Saduq, his father Ibn Babuyeh Qummi, and his teacher Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Waleed¹⁰, they are unavailable today;

Sixth century: *Rawzul-Jinan* by Abul Fatih Razi;

Twelfth century: *Kanzud-Daqaiqwa Bahr ul-Gharaib* by Muhammad Reza Qummi Mashhadi, where he expounds on the verses of the Qur'an using the Imams' narrations.

After the Islamic revolution, exegesis developed more with numerous books written on it, including a variety of topics as explained in the following:

A. Sequential exegesis of the Qur'an: From the early days of exegesis, most exegetists (mufassir) began explaining the Qur'an from the first until the last chapter. Such examples include *Tafseer al-Mizan* by Allameh Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai, one of the most renowned exegesis books using this method; *Tafseer Nemuneh*, the work of a group of scholars from the Qum seminaries under the supervision of Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi, also translated to many languages; and *Tasneem* by Ayatullah Javadi Amuli.

B. Thematic exegesis of the Qur'an: A new technique in the seminaries, the exegetist, with a particular subject in mind, reads through the verses, collects the subject-related ones, and by analysing those verses, draws conclusions related to the subject. *Manshoor-e Javeed* by Ayatullah Subhani, *Ma'arif-e Qur'an* by Ayatullah Misbah Yazdi, and *Payam-e Qur'an* by Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi are some primary examples.

C. Qur'anic sciences (Ulume Qur'ani): In recent centuries, researchers studied the Qur'an with an outward view of its verses, called Qur'anic Science (Ulume Qur'ani). Topics such as the Qur'an's history of the revelation, the names and titles, various types of revelation, definite and indefinite verses (muhkam wa mutashabih), abrogated and abrogating verses (nasikh wa mansukh), and Meccan and Medinan chapters are discussed in this field. *Al-Tamheed* by Ayatollah Ma'refat is one of the more renowned books on this subject.

3.4. Jurisprudence (fiqh)

The predominant subject taught in the seminaries of Qum was jurisprudence, or the practical laws of religion, also closely related to the field of Principles of Jurisprudence (Usule Fiqh). While usule fiqh establishes the necessary principles needed for deriving rulings of religion from the sources, fiqh delves into the sources and use the principles established in usul to derive the practical legislative laws.

The Ash'arids in Qum reported the hadiths of the Imams about jurisprudence. The teachers of the

second era of the seminaries published numerous books in the field of jurisprudence. Several examples include *Al-Mahasi* by Muhammad ibn Khalid Barqi (275 AH), a man who lived during the lifetime of Imams; *al-Nawadir* by Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Isa Ash'ari Qummi; the five volume (out of eight) *al-Kafi* by the late Kulayni devoted narrations related to jurisprudence; Shaykh Saduq's *Man La Yahthuruhal Faqih* (or “he who does not have access to a jurist”) and other books on jurisprudence, such as *al-Muqni*¹¹.

Furthermore, even scholars who have not written on jurisprudence prioritized it in their discussions. In the third era, although the seminaries underwent an overall recession, there are available works written on jurisprudence, such as *Fiqhul-Qur'an* by Saeed ibn Abdullah Qutbuddin Rawandi (573 AH) who left Kashan to reside in Qum.

In the recent periods, Mirza Qummi (1151–1231 AH) made enormous efforts to develop this field. The founder of the seminaries of Qum, Ayatullah Haeri, also a mujtahid¹², invited many of the renowned Grand Ayatollahs to come to Iran from Iraq for jurisprudential discussions. Ayatullah Burujerdi, Ayatullah Khomeini, Ayatullah Mar'ashi Najafi, Ayatullah Golpaygani, and Ayatullah Araki are among the great jurists of the recent centuries.

Numerous books and pamphlets have been written since then. *Tahrirul- Wasilah* by Ayatullah Khomeini is one of the most outstanding works in this field in the recent years. Jurisprudential discussions have become the most important topics in various seminaries across the Islamic world, especially that of the Qum seminaries, where hundreds of sessions on jurisprudence are held every day.

Propagation and Society

The Qum seminaries have never known themselves as an institute separate from people. This institute knows itself as the inheritor of the prophets; like the prophets, they have been involved in propagating the religion of God by spreading divine knowledge through education, and rebelled against oppression from the heads of state.

Since its formation, the seminaries propagated the teachings of the prophets as their mission. Today, students of Islamic studies travel to different parts of Iran and the world on special occasions such as the month of Ramadan, the first ten days of Muharram, and the last ten days of Safar to disseminate the teachings of Islam. Their primary goal is to guide people through lectures, public sessions, and private consultations. However, guiding people is not limited to special occasions; the scholars of the seminaries also maintain their contact with the people through various means.

Today one of the important sections of the seminaries deals with propagation. Those qualified to propagate travel to many countries, cities (including within Iran), and remote villages throughout the year.

The seminaries are also responsive to the domestic and foreign changes that occur in the society and the world. Their most important activity in this regard is their role in the Islamic revolution of Iran in the year 1357 S.A.H. In 1342 SH, under the direction of Ayatullah Khomeini the leader of the seminaries of Qum, the people of Iran rose up against the oppression of the Pahlavi regime. In that time and after the exile of Reza Pahlavi who promoted anti-Islamic policies, such as banning women from wearing hijab, his son Muhammad Reza Pahlavi took his place and pursued the same objectives.

Ayatollah Khomeini believed that being silent towards the anti-Islamic activities of the government was not permissible. With his famous speech in the Fayziyyah School of Qum, he opened a new chapter in the history of Iran. Other scholars in the country, along with the people of Qum, announced their support for him and endured much difficulty doing so. This epochal uprising was eventually spread from Qum to cities across the country, and all of these movements were under the leadership of the scholars of the seminaries, many of whom were imprisoned, exiled, or lost their lives as a result. This lasted for fifteen years until 1357 SH, when the uprising of the masses and scholars became victorious.

After the Islamic revolution, the seminaries of Qum remained active in various social fields; due to the invading attack of the Ba'th regime of Iraq against Iran, many scholars hastened to the battlegrounds to participate in the battle imposed on Iran to defend their country. Their presence was heart-warming for other battalions, and among them many were martyred.

The awareness of the seminaries of Qum with respect to the national and foreign developments and changes, and the seminarians' firm stand against the oppression and injustice had always been a source of comfort and inspiration for the masses.

1. Refer to: Misbah Yazdi, Muhammad Taqi, Mabahesi Darbare-ye Hoze, p.s 44-47
2. Refer to: Tabatabai, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, al-Mizan, volume 5, p. s 279 and 280
3. Refer to: Tabatabai, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, Shi'a dar Islam, p. 92
4. This refers to Sadr al-Din Shirazi's monumental 4-part, 9-volume Al-Hikmat al-Muta'aliyahfi'l-Asfar al-Aqliyyah al-Arba'ah ("The Transcendent Wisdom in the Four Intellectual Journeys").
5. This refers to Avicenna's Kitab al-Shifa (The Book of Healing). This book is on science, logic and philosophy and not medicine.
6. Sayyid Kabayeri, Sayyid Ali-Reza, Howze Haye Elmiyye Shi'i Dar Gostare-ye Jahan, pp. 408-412
7. The Qur'an and the sayings of the 14 Infallibles
8. The study of issues related to the imamate of the infallible Imams
9. The study of issues about the saviour, Imam Mahdi
10. Refer to Najjashi, Ahmad ibn Ali, Rijal al-Najjashi, pp. 281, 383, and 391
11. Refer to Najjashi, Ahmad ibn Ali, Rijal al-Najjashi, p. 391
12. A mujtahid is a scholar who is qualified to derive laws of the religious from the sources.

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