

# **Imam Khomeini's Ideological Moderation<sup>1</sup>**

By Sayyid Ebrahim Sayyid Alawi

Generally speaking, in human life and day to day living which is epitomized in religious, spiritual, sectarian, ideological, scientific and political likes and dislikes and inclinations, there is a possibility of deviation towards left and right as well as deviation from the path of moderation even concerning Islamic issues such as Islamic Jurisprudence, interpretation, mysticism and Islamic political judgment.

On this basis one of the solemn duties and responsibilities of spiritual leaders and religious heads is to combat ignorance and unawareness. When we take a close look at Imam Khomeini's statements and thoughts, we see clearly that he always lays stress on preserving moderation and shunning deviation towards left and right. Imam Khomeini would forbid people from engaging in indiscriminate extremisms, deviant behaviors and thoughts. At the same time as being an outstanding Islamic jurist and enjoying a position of prominence on matters of mysticism, exegesis of the Quran and global politics, he cautioned against deviation and crossing the limits of moderation and equilibrium.

Imam Khomeini did not consider the false accusation of sectarianism leveled at a group to be correct just as he did not appreciate Islamic jurisprudence to be distanced from current issues of living and for it to be based on intangible esoteric interpretations alone. Although he considered the spiritual dimensions of certain verses of the holy Quran to be factual, yet he did not endorse the frosty exegesis of some extremist elements. Although on the subject of the Quran's interpretation, Imam Khomeini reckoned subjective interpretation of its verses to be wrong and had denounced it, yet he did not consider its every understanding as its connotation. He regarded efforts at understanding the lofty meanings of the Quran's verses to be possible and rather, necessary.

Imam Khomeini viewed issues with a distinctive clairvoyance such that he considered discussing subjects outside the scope of human knowledge to be unproductive and would caution against wasting time on those subjects.

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<sup>1</sup> The article has been summarized and translated by International Affairs Department of the Institute.

With a view to the words and statements of that late leader, in this article we undertake an examination of a few topics as examples.

### **Objective of the Prophetic Mission**

The question of ‘divine revelation’, sending down of angels and the glorious Quran’s revelation to the blessed Prophet of Islam (SA) are issues that are beyond the scope of the ordinary human being’s knowledge. For this reason, its discussion is regarded as a kind of extremism, ambitiousness and even waste of time. Would it not be better that a human being explores only those subjects that are within the scope of his understanding and finding so that while he takes a step forward he also leads human society towards progress and excellence!

A review of the books on Islamic traditions and history makes it clear that some people have entered this vast and boundless sea and spun tales of superstitious beliefs such that while they themselves have drowned, they have also been responsible for the deviation of a number of people.

Concerning this subject, Imam Khomeini states categorically that: “What is the principle behind the prophetic mission? What is the meaning of ‘Divine Revelation’? These are issues that are mystery and shall remain so. What we can appreciate from the prophetic mission is the blessings which have been obtained from this phenomenon.”

Concerning the dimensions of the prophetic mission, Imam Khomeini states thus: “The dimensions of this birth—of the prophet of Islam (SA)—which brought in its wake successive blessings and culminated in the prophetic mission and sending down of Divine Revelation to the sacred heart of the Prophet of Islam on behalf of the Blessed and Exalted God, is still unknown to mankind.”

Similarly, concerning the essential nature of Divine Revelation, he states: “Since we are unable to decipher the reality of the Divine Revelation and we cannot understand its essential nature, our duty is to get close to the ideals of the Divine Revelation. It is a great achievement should we succeed in this task.”

The aforesaid assertions are examples of Imam Khomeini’s thoughts and statements concerning desisting from affairs that are beyond human powers and capabilities and on the necessity to make use of theoretical and tangible aspects of both Divine Revelation and prophetic mission. Is it not a waste of time and loss of opportunity to become preoccupied with matters that are beyond the

scope of human ability and to talk about issues from which one does not derive any benefit?! Would it not be better that a person instead of preoccupation with such affairs benefits and also makes others to benefit from the benedictions and effects of Divine Revelation that are considered to be ideals and which have a direct relationship with human society?

On another occasion, Imam Khomeini states: “the objective of Hadrat Mohammad’s prophetic mission was Divine Revelation and the sending down of the glorious Quran; and the objective from recitation of the glorious Quran is spiritual purification so that the heart is purified and is thus enabled to comprehend the Book of God (the Quran).”

Undoubtedly, the holy Quran is a book of life and its verses call upon a human being to thought and prudence while showing the way to development. A person achieves the objective under the auspices of contemplation and rationalization in its verses and by identifying the obstacles in the path.

In his masterpiece the *Nahj al-Balaghah*, the Leader of the Faithful Imam Ali (AS) states: “Know that you shall discover the path of guidance and development when you identify its antithesis; and you shall remain firm in your pledge and covenant with respect to the Book of God (the Quran) when you have identified the person who breaches the covenant; and you shall seek recourse in the glorious Quran when you have identified the one who has shunned and rejected it. Thus, seek the truth from those who follow it (the Quran) for they are the assets of life and living and are the source of death and decline of ignorance and unawareness.”

### **Islamic Jurisprudence minus Spirituality**

Stagnation in relation to the exoteric meanings of juristic judgments, absence of interest in spirituality and intuitive knowledge as well as disregarding the soul and spirit of deeds and actions are among the major afflictions.

In the religion of Islam, in addition to physical aspects of acts of worship and their exoteric pillars, attention has been paid to the spiritual and divine aspects as well. For instance, it has been clearly stated that fasting does not involve simply avoiding eating and drinking. Similarly, concerning the mandatory daily prayers, it is mentioned that it must incorporate the spirit of humility and submission and it ought to prevent occurrence of vices. Also, concerning the rituals and obligatory acts of the Hajj pilgrimage, it is mentioned

that it is piety and abstinence from sin that ascends to the Court of God which however, demands a more detailed discussion of the clear injunctions and evidences on the subject.

The religion of Islam is like a living and active body and thus it is neither a singular soul only nor purely a lifeless and soulless figure; rather, the sought-after perfection of man is also that with this earthy body he should achieve spiritual purity and attain transcendence.

Unfortunately, in these cases there has been no shortage of radical views and there have been and there are persons who stick to the outer skin and superficialities alone while leaving aside the pulp and spiritual realities. In contrast there are others too who overlook the realities of material life and fail to take into account the exoteric injunctions and outward aspects of religious injunctions.

In a section of his speech on the subject, Imam Khomeini states: “Yet another group of people who were engaged in Islamic jurisprudence and devotional affairs and who disparaged others (philosophers and mystics) considering them to be heretics and who issued the verdict of infidel—both the approaches were contrary to the truth.”

The reason for the presence of sects and creeds in the world of Islam is usually the result of difference of style in understanding the issues and it is most regrettable that it has led to leveling of accusations of infidelity and heresy and furnished the grounds for splits.

Whenever there is unity of opinion in the fundamental and essential principles of Islam, differences in theoretical issues and nonconformist thinking on subjects of analytical thought should not create discord and split. However, adoption of bigoted stances and departure from the middle path and moderation in dealing with opinions and ideas has caused such problems to occur.

### **Spirituality minus Knowledge of Islamic Jurisprudence**

Just as Islamic jurisprudence minus the vital source of spirituality and mysticism is rigid and lifeless, mysticism minus Islamic jurisprudence is also both weak and liable to deviation. This is because the popularity of certain Sufistic ideas and the spreading of some errant wandering dervish-like methods—which is considered to be another branch of deviation and departure

from moderation—have always created problems and have ultimately led to the distortion and transmutation of religion.

On this subject Imam Khomeini states: “A group of philosophers, mystics, theologians and their likes who pursued those same spiritual aspects, denigrated the dogmatic (the Islamic jurisprudents and canonists) considering those outside their sphere of influence as being dogmatic. They interpreted most of the Quran’s verses from the mystical and philosophical aspects and totally neglected the worldly life and those aspects that are needed in this place and the training and education that ought to be imparted here. They confined Islam to spiritual commandments and matters and to the supernatural; and in their thinking, the supernatural incorporated all aspects.”

Concerning the mystics’ perception of Islam, Imam Khomeini asserts: “The mystics acknowledged Islam; but they would revert all issues to the mystical connotation; they did not believe in the issues of the day; and even if a narrated tradition or a verse (from the glorious Quran) concerning Jihad was mentioned, they would claim that it implied Jihad (sacred war) with the carnal soul. Unfortunately, in two eras we have suffered at the hands of two groups of people. They (they mystics) even interpreted fighting the polytheists as fighting the carnal soul! They interpreted things that were related to worldly living in terms of spiritualities.”

### **The upside-down Islam**

This problem began after the demise of the honorable Prophet of Islam (SA) and it spread gradually such that the pure Islam was presented with trappings which it would not be unfair to term it ‘the upside-down Islam.’

The glorious Quran states: “Do ye then believe in a part of the Book and reject ye the other? That what shall be the return for those who do so save disgrace in the life of this world and on the Day of Judgment that shall be returned to the most grievous punishment; And God is not heedless of what ye do.”<sup>1</sup>

There are some people that do not view certain Islamic and Quranic injunctions and laws to be in their favor and so they refuse to abide by them. A group of ‘Ulema’ Islamic erudite scholars who have bartered their religion in exchange for the life of the world also make every effort to vindicate them

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<sup>1</sup> Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 85

while the courtier sermonizers play their part as well. On this subject the glorious Quran states: “Verily those who deny God and His Apostles and desire that they differentiate between God and His apostles and say: ‘We believe in some and we deny some’, intend they to take between (this and) that a (midway), These are they the infidels truly, and We have prepared for the infidels a disgraceful torment.”<sup>1</sup>

In explaining this spiritual reality and while mentioning upholding equilibrium and moderation in putting forward Islamic and Quranic issues, Imam Khomeini States: “Even if some people want Islam, they want an upside-down Islam and not the Islam of the honorable Prophet (SA) and which has been revealed by Divine Revelation.”

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<sup>1</sup> Surah An-Nisa, verses 150-51