

Portrait

Allameh Mohammad Taghi Jafari

Allameh Mohammad Tagi Jafari was born in Tabriz in August 1925. His childhood coincided with the Second World War. His mother died when he was still in his late teens. Although he was clever enough to finish elementary school in a couple of years, poverty forced him to leave school and go to work.

“One night, I dreamed that a hand gave me a bowl of milk to drink. ‘Who was that?’, I asked. ‘That was Imam Ali (A.S.)’, someone told me, ‘who gave you the milk of knowledge.’ Every thing I have said or written about him arises from that milk.”

After elementary school, one night his father heard him talking in his sleep. He was reciting a poem about his losing the chance to do what he loved – to study. The next morning his father let him go back to school.

He began studying at the Talebieh school of theology. When he was twelve, he developed a great interest in philosophy. His great hunger for studying the reasons behind the creation of man and the universe brought him to Tehran, then to Qom, where he was granted the honor of wearing the clergy outfit.

One year later, his mother died, and he went back to Tabriz. There he was encouraged to go to Nadjaf.

“For over one year, I slept only two hours a day. I had begun comparing Western and Eastern philosophies”, Allameh Jafari said. “I realized that Western philosophies, despite their clarity and sense of experimentalism were unable to fulfill all of man’s demands.”

Soon, he also began teaching in Nadjaf. He was only 23 when he was awarded the title of *iğtihād*, the highest level of jurisprudential reasoning.

In 1959, he returned to Iran after 11 years of constant studying in Nadjaf. He was in Mashhad for a while, but the water did not suit him, so he moved to Tehran. After a few years, he went on a pilgrimage to Nadjaf, and was about to settle there for good. He asked two of his mentors at Nadjaf for advice, but they advised him to go back to Iran. He moved back to Tehran and began teaching various theological subjects, but soon he decided to devote his time to research and fulfilling people’s lives with what they really needed.

“All outstanding figures of history have submitted themselves to the ‘sense of duty’ that arises within them, the sense of responsibility that is truly inevitable,” Allameh Jafari accounts for his dramatic decision.

Also, one few weeks before his decease in 1998, while he was in a hospital in London, he said: “When I came back to Tehran, I realized there were plenty of lectures on jurisprudence, but the youth still didn’t know what to do with themselves! I assumed the duty of fulfilling the need.”

Allameh Jafari tried to open a new scope of mysticism. “If we do not expand mysticism to other fields like education, politics, morals and management, it will lose its influence”, he once said. He himself was a truly a man of high mystic valor, although he did not express it.

Perhaps what made him extremely popular with the public was his extreme modesty. In 1963, when Allameh Jafari and Bertrand Russell wrote to each other and discussed various matters frequently, he went to the *Etela’at* newspaper headquarters the next day. He was ignored at first, but was finally showed into the editor-in-chief’s office. It was af-

ter the editor-in-chief looked at the photos when he realized who he had behaved abruptly with. He apologized and asked the Allameh to join him for tea.

Indeed, his mere lifestyle was the greatest of his works. When he was busy writing his grand treatise and analysis of Mowlavi's *Mathnavi*, he would wrap each completed volume in a cloth and walk to the printing house himself. He lived a life of extreme austerity.

Allameh Jafari spent over forty years lecturing at universities and discussing with academic scholars. While other cleric scholars were teaching at seminaries, he was busy guiding the intellectuals.

His two greatest works were his *Interpretation and Critique of Mowlavi's Mathnavi* and his *Translation and Interpretation of the "Nahjol-balagheh"*¹. The treatise on Mowlavi took five years to write and filled 14 volumes.

"When some of my educated friends asked me many years ago to teach them a course on the *Mathnavi*", the Allameh once recalled, "I realized what rich mystic, moral and psychological concepts underlies the poetry. The book also had a significant rule in our culture. However, there are also some contradictions and mistakes. I felt it my duty to distinguish the right from the wrong."

Allameh Mohammad Taghi Jafari was still working on Volume 27 of his *Nahjol-balagheh* treatise when he passed away in a hospital London.

Attempting to guide people toward a life of prosperity and good, Allameh Jafari has presented us with the concept of "a reasonable life".

"A reasonable life consists of a conscious lifestyle in which all of man's compulsory, fatalistic aspects are covered by the development of authority-based freedom, guiding man toward comparatively evolutionary goals, gradually building up his character, and letting him enter a life of greatness and perfection-moving in harmony with the universe to divine extreme."

The Triangle of Questions

The clue to the three basic questions in life:

Where have I come from? Where am I going to? Why am I here? Is the Koranic verse, "We come from God, and return back to God", therefore, who am I? – I am a human being, with God's divine spirit in me. Where have I risen from? – God's will. Where am I going to? – God's divine presence. And why am I here? – To try to achieve a reasonable life, and be attracted by divine perfection.

Democracy in Islam

Allameh Jafari quotes from Plato, who said: "Oh people of Athens! I am quite distressed of what this democracy might end up to!"

"Plato says he is afraid! Plato, who was undoubtedly one of the greatest men of all time ... Democracy claims to be people governing people – but which people? Those who sew up at night and tear up in the day?"

Allameh Jafari believed recognizing man's aim in life to be essential: "Life requires an aim, and it is necessary to respect man's innate virtues. Man is a part of the universe, and he must know where he stands in it. He desires freedom, and individual and social justice."

But how should his freedom be? – "Freedom is the ability man acquires while choosing his means or end. It is a positive virtue, indeed one of man's greatest."

He always believed that man was created with a potential for greatness. "Mankind", he has said, "is the finest creation ever, therefore he must face a truth greater than the universe, not less."

Allameh Jafari believed achieving a universal culture for all people in the world to be one of man's ideals. "Global culture", he thought, "does not merely mean all of the cultural activities and phenomena in the world, for every society has its own, exclusive cultural realities inherited from its history, geography and religion. Global culture consists of the general realities of culture, such as the principles of ethics (affection and respect for one's fellow men, sacrificing for great human ideas),

accepting a proper life for all, accepting man's dignity, logical (responsible) freedom for all human beings and accepting to make great effort toward man's highest goals.

By logically establishing the four fundamentally important domains (global economy, global power, global rights and global politics), global culture is feasible. We all know that all religions – which originate from Abraham's religion, and Islam is the most comprehensive of them all – also support a global culture. No nation can achieve a true culture – the proper qualities and practices for the phenomena and activities of man's life based on logical thought and emotions transcending from 'Logical life' – with a diseased culture or authority unable to develop man's physical and mental needs."

Allameh Mohammad Taghi Jafari had a great deal of discussions and correspondence with the renowned British philosopher Bertrand Russell, particularly in the fields of philosophy, religion and taboo.

Russell believed that allowing pornography to be freely published would reduce the public's interest in them, but Allameh Jafari pointed out that the case was obviously the contrary, for after so many years, people's infatuation continues to morbidly increase.

In 1996, Allameh Jafari was asked to look into the Human Genome Project by the UNESCO. His ideas on this issue have recently been published. Although agreeing with the vast, useful applications in fields such as medical research, disease prevention, plants' development, and many others, Allameh Jafari strongly warns the world about its possible inadvertant uses. "When all leading scientists and scholars of the world unquestionably agree that man's knowledge today is a mere drop of the ocean it really should be, how can we ever trust this potentially lethal weapon in the hands of the tyrants leading governments nowadays?!" He further adds that since misusing it would destroy man's very identity, his actual true self, providing highly severe restrictions upon the application of the Genome plan seems absolutely vital, for they can prove to be extremely more lethal than even the nuclear or chemical bombs, the effects of which were limited to the human body.

Allameh Jafari was hugely respected by a great deal of scientists and scholars around the world. Here are only a few of the tributes they have paid him:

“In ancient Athens”, says Professor Volgharis, head of the theology faculty at the University of Athens, “instead of names for the streets, there were pillars to guide people to where they needed to go. They were called *Hermes*, and served to direct passers by to get to their destination safely. Gradually, excellent men of wisdom who guided people were also called *Hermes* – men of God who had devoted themselves to serving people and studying. Just like bright stars in the sky, they selflessly gave their light to direct the people, asking for nothing in return. Mohammad Taghi Jafari was such a man. He was an honor not only to his own country, but even to the whole world as well. I was lucky enough to meet him twice. His deep and great thoughts had an immense impression on me. Allameh Jafari was a man who had gotten closer to God by means of his wisdom and his lifestyle. It will always be my pleasure to have known him.”

Another Greek scholar, Professor Athanasius Deli Kastapoulos, says: “Allameh Jafari was truly a great philosopher and a man of great intellect. He made a great contribution to Islam. We discussed life after death for two hours. Finally, we came to the conclusion that scientifically treating heaven and hell is not feasible. He believed that Muslims are not afraid of death, for they see it as a passageway to heaven.”

“I still remember how he behaved toward my students at the University of Athens”, recalls Professor Evangelos Motchopoulos, “I was quite angry because the students were making a lot of noise, and I thought might not take seriously a lecture that was not going to be presented in their own language – although we had a skilled interpreter to translate for them. Suddenly, when Allameh Jafari began to speak, all of them were listening fascinated. They were totally absorbed in his speech, and applauded feverishly when it ended. Indeed, it must have been God’s blessing that he could get his message through like that.

I never even once saw him sad or upset. He was a model of perfection in character and self-confidence. Allameh Jafari was Iran's Islamic spirit, a social critique of modern times. He had successfully combined ancient values with those of today."

Allameh Jafari passed away on November 16, 1998 in London. One of his former students, Professor Nakanishi, said in a message for the memorial conference a year after the Allameh's decease: "Meeting Allameh Jafari last year changed my life forever. Particularly significant to me were his ideas on the Human Rights. Although he believed that the Human Rights Declaration was a valuable global system, he pointed out to me that Islam's viewpoint on it was quite different from that in the West. In Islam, he taught me, Human Rights are derived from God-given virtues and justice."

A List of Allameh Jafari's Published Works

Jurisprudence

1. Jurisprudential treatises comprise the following topics:
 - Purity of the People of the Book
 - Permissibility of (consuming) slaughters of the People of the Book
 - Non-exclusiveness of Alms in nine items
 - Rule of harmlessness and not to be noxious
 - Permission and prohibition of the meat of different kinds of animals
 - Animals' rights in Islamic jurisprudence
 - The punishment for robbery in Islam
 - The prohibition of abortion
 - Civil Responsibilities due to children's offences in Islamic civil code and jurisprudence
2. The Universal human rights from the perspective of Islam and the West (Persian and English)
3. A legal and judicial study of the Human Genome Project
4. Fostering (Arabic)

Philosophy

1. Freedom of will and determination
2. A collection of articles comprising the following subjects:
 - Descartes' perfectionist argument on the existence of God
 - The perfectionist argument to prove God
 - The aim of life
 - An introduction to the concept of the Philosophy of Ownership
 - Motion and evolution
 - Motion and evolution from the point of view of Quran
 - The Natural and the Supernatural
 - Science at the service of human beings
 - The relationship between science and truth
 - Science from the point of view of Islam
 - Science and mysticism from the point of view of Avicenna
 - Hope and expectation
3. The relationship between man and the universe
4. The ideal of life and the ideal life
5. Criticism of David Hume's view on four philosophical topics:
 - Abstract concepts and thoughts
 - Self
 - Causality
 - What Is and What Should Be
6. Explanations and critiques of the Russell-Wyatt dialogue
7. A critical review of Bertrand Russell's best
8. Islam's view of aesthetics and art
9. The Philosophy of Political Principles (Political Philosophy) of Islam
– translation and interpretation of Hazrat Ali's Decree to Malik Ash-tar
10. A critical review of *Adventures of Ideas*, the most important book by Alfred North Whitehead in Western philosophy

11. In the presence of wisdom (a number of international speeches)
12. The philosophy of religion
13. A treatise on the philosophy of science
14. Philosophy and the purpose of life
15. Philosophy and ariticism of secularism
16. An introduction to philosophy
17. Molavi and his world-insights
18. Cooperations between religion and science (Arabic)
19. Between freedom of will and determination (Arabic)
20. The most recent understanding between Old and Modern Philosophy (Arabic)
21. Man and creation
22. Music from a philosophical and psychological perspective

Mysticism

1. Islamic mysticism
2. Is there any difference between religion (sharī'at), mysticism (ṭarīqat), and the truth (ḥaqīqat)?
3. The supplication made by Imam Hussain in Arafat (in Persian and Arabic)
4. An interpretation and criticism of Mowlana Rumi's *Mathnavi* (15 volumes)
5. Imam Ali and mysticism
6. Reasons and factors for the attractiveness of Mowlavi's (Rumi's) words

Psychology

1. Is war in the nature of human beings?
2. Conscience

Islamic Tenets

1. A translation and commentary of *nahju 'l-balagheh* (27 volumes)

2. Translation of *nahju 'l-balagheh* (1 volume)
3. Man from the point of view of Quran
4. Imam Hussain, martyr of the progressive culture of humanity
5. Man's knowledge in the sublimation of perfectionist life
6. Imam Ali in his own words
7. Science and religion in a reasonable life
8. Religion and ethics (morality)
9. Knowledge from a scientific and Quranic viewpoint

Literature and its origin

1. Three poets (Hafiz, Saadi, Nezami)
2. An analysis of Khayyam's personality (a review of his philosophical, literary, scientific and religious ideas)
3. From one sea to another (an index of Molavi's *Mathnavi* in 4 volumes)

Scientific issues

1. The act of mental abstraction
2. A treatise on the law of Equilibrium in analytic and synthetic method
3. Science and values in scientific laws
4. The relationship between science and truth

Management

Management motivation in Islam and a critical review of contemporary views on motivations Culture

1. Imitative culture and progressive culture
2. A plan for cultural revolution

¹ Arab. *nahğ al-balāğā* = "the rhetorical way" (Anm. d. Red.)