مطالعات عرفانی (مجله علمی)
دانشکده ادبیات و زبان‌های خارجی دانشگاه کاشان
شمارۀ چهل‌وسوم، بهار و تابستان ۱۴۰۵، ص۲۱۷ـ۲۴۸

10.22052/se.2026.255746.1183

Epistemological Foundations of Shi'a Mysticism: An Analysis of the Epistemological and Spiritual System of Sayyid Hossein Yaghoubi Qa'eni

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Received: ١٤٠٤/٠٦/٠٤
Accepted: ١٤٠٥/٠٥/٢٢

Introduction

The quest for spirituality and divine knowledge has always been a persistent concern throughout human history, manifested in various mystical traditions. Among the rich branches of Islamic mysticism, the Shi'a tradition - particularly the Najaf school - holds a special place, as it is founded upon deep epistemological and spiritual principles derived from the Quran and the teachings of the Infallible Imams (AS). Despite extensive research on mainstream Islamic mysticism, some influential figures of the Najaf school remain unknown. One such figure is Sayyid Hossein Yaghoubi Qa'eni (d. ٢٠١٧ CE), a prominent but lesser-known mystic whose teachings combine divine love, strict adherence to Sharia, and a particular approach to spiritual wayfaring (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ٢٠٠٥: ١٣٨-١٥٠). The main research question is: What are the distinctive components of Yaghoubi Qa'eni's epistemological and spiritual system, and how can it be re-interpreted within Shi'a mysticism? This research is fundamental-theoretical in purpose and qualitative in nature, employing an inductive content analysis approach. The analysis population consists of the available written and audio works of Yaghoubi Qa'eni, with purposive sampling employed. This article, while explaining the key dimensions of his thought - including the division of mystical knowledge into "verbal" and "experiential" (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ٢٠٠٥: ٢٢٦), his subtle understanding of the "unity of the soul" (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ٢٠٠٥: ٢٧٧), and his emphasis on containing all mystical discoveries within the definitive framework of Sharia (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ٢٠٠٥: ٣٥٦ and ٤٩٠) - endeavors to elucidate the distinctive features of his mystical system.

Findings

Yaghoubi distinguishes between "verbal mysticism" and "experiential mysticism," and considers awareness of "poverty before God" as the key condition for passing through the higher stages of spiritual wayfaring (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ٢٠٠٥: ٢٢٦ and ٧٣٠; Gorji, audio file, ١٩٨٤). In his view, divine love is the only force that can uproot moral vices. Adherence to Sharia is non-negotiable, and the "Sharia criterion" is the sole measure of the validity of mystical experiences (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ٢٠٠٥: ١٥٠, ٣٥٦, ٤٩٠ and ٥٨١).

In his five-level ontology (nature, imagination, heart, soul, spirit), the "realm of the soul" is the station in which the soul of the divine saint becomes the locus of

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manifestation of the divine names (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ۳۰۳, ۵۱۳ and ٦٥٧). The presence of a master is indispensable, and his authenticity is measured by his educational impact, not miraculous acts (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ۲۳۹, ٥٤٨ and ٥٨٦). Yaghoubi assigns a minimal role to formal visions and distinguishes "formal discovery" from "heartfelt discovery" (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ۳٥٦, ٤٩٠-٤٩١, ٤٩٩-٥٠٤ and ٧٥١). The "unity of the soul" is a pleasurable yet highly dangerous state that may lead the wayfarer to claim sainthood (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ۲۷۷ and ٥٣٥-٥٣٦). The centrality of the Ahl al-Bayt's guardianship and the "divine universal soul" as the intermediary of grace are key components of his thought (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ۱۸٥ and ٥١٢-٥١٣). Annihilation in Yaghoubi's thought never means existential union, but rather immersion in the vision of God (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ٥١٥-٥١٦). His approach to miraculous acts stands in contrast to Sufi currents (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ٦٠٧, ٦٣٠ and ٦٨٦). He emphasizes the possibility of "abstraction from form" and believes direct reception of grace from God is possible (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ٣٤٢, ٥١٣, ٦٤٢ and ٥١٣-٥١٤). He considers "perception of the path" as the condition for spiritual leadership (Yaghoubi Qa'eni, ۲۰۰۵: ٥٨١).

Conclusion

The legacy of Yaghoubi Qa'eni presents a coherent Shi'a model of Islamic mysticism combining heartfelt love, adherence to Sharia, and devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). At its core lies the belief that true knowledge is founded upon love - a love with greater capacity for purifying the soul than dry ascetic practices, yet never separate from Sharia but realized in obedience to divine commands. His epistemology distinguishes between transmitted knowledge and mystical experience, emphasizing the discovery of divine truths through spiritual experience confirmed by Sharia. His five-level ontology provides a structure for explaining spiritual ascension, and his classification of visions, along with warnings about the "unity of the soul" and hasty claims of annihilation, reflects his caution and humility. His approach to miraculous acts shows that such acts alone are not criteria of sanctity; rather, servitude and continuous love for God are the true criteria. Ultimately, Yaghoubi's system provides a balanced path connecting passionate love with Sharia and guidance of the Ahl al-Bayt. In an era divided between extremism in externalism and lack of discipline in internalism, this model exemplifies the integration of love and law. This research has shown that Yaghoubi Qa'eni's mystical system is not merely a personal legacy, but a theoretical-practical framework for redefining the relationship between mysticism and Sharia in the contemporary age.

Keywords: Shi'a Mysticism, Sayyid Hossein Yaghoubi Qa'eni, Love-Based Spiritual Path, Adherence to Sharia, Ontology.