

A Meeting with Imam Khomeini

Authors(s):

Robin Woodsworth Carlsen [3]

Category:

Scholars [4]

Journal:

Vol.7 No.4 [5]

A remarkable description of a meeting between the late Imam Khomeini and the journalist Robin Woodsworth Carlsen.

Person Tags:

Ayatullah Sayyid Imam Ruhallah Musawi Khomeini [6]

A Meeting with Imam Khomeini

Introduction

Robin Woodsworth Carlsen met Imam Khomeini during his third visit to Iran since the Islamic Revolution. Earlier he had written two books on Iran, the first, *Crisis in Iran: A Microcosm of the Cosmic Play*, after his visit following the capture of the US spy-den in Tehran by the Muslim students, and *Seventeen Days in Tehran: Revolution, Evolution and Ignorance* (1980) after his second visit.

His third book about revolutionary Iran, *The Imam and His Revolution: A Journey into Heaven and Hell* (1982) from which the following excerpt describing the impressions of his meeting with Imam Khomeini is taken, was written following his third journey to Iran in February 1982.

A philosopher and poet from Canada, he has written numerous books and essays, some of which are: *Enigma of an Absolute: The Consciousness of Ludwig Wittengstein*, *The Wings of a Snow Man: Wallace Steven's 'Adagia' With Commentary*, *The Discovery of Grace: An Aesthetic Justification for God's Resistance to Himself*, *The Cosmology of Christ: Revelations of the Self According to the Gospel of St. John*, *The Intelligence of the Heart and Ceremonies of Innocence*, the last two being collections of his letters and poems.

He has shown a remarkable perception—perhaps unique among Western writers and journalists—of the meaning of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the spirit that has been determining the course of its evolutionary ascent under the leadership of Imam Khomeini. Of course, the perception is conditioned by his own past spiritual development and training, as well his aesthetic outlook on history, but his account of experiences in Iran bears the unmistakable stamp of spiritual clarity and liberation, liberation from the idols of the cave and the marketplace.

The impressions that Imam Khomeini made upon this Canadian writer are by no means unique. In fact what he describes is the experience of thousands or perhaps millions of human beings who have had an opportunity to encounter the great charisma, charm, and faith emanated by an authentic disciple of Islam. Only that he has described it more eloquently than others and so well that this account represents an authentic historical document and testimony.

Let us add that what this witness describes is not merely an authentic account of an encounter with an Islamic spiritual leader; it is also an account of an encounter with the spirit that moves the people of Iran, the same spirit that was responsible for the people's choice of this leader, the spirit that followed his commands and exhortations with singular devotion, the spirit that established the Islamic Republic in Iran and defends it against all kinds of satanic aggressions and plots, the spirit that chose Iran for starting its sacred work of reshaping the destiny of humanity and moves onwards.

It is the spirit which leaves no doubt in those who have encountered it that no terrestrial power or force can hinder its triumphant march, for it is the spirit of human salvation and liberation. Yet this heavenly spirit, so full of radiance and glory, is invisible to the inhabitants of the 'hell,' who are unable to see it with their eyes, but who feel its presence like a terror in their hearts. We congratulate Carlsen for possessing the purity of heart and the clarity of vision for being able to behold it so clearly and for being capable of describing it so vividly. (Editor)

A Visit with Imam Khomeini

... The night of February 8 it was announced that those invited to the conference would be addressed by

Imam Khomeini at his residence in North Tehran. As soon as I heard the confirmation of what had been tentatively scheduled for any one day during the several weeks when the conference was in session, I immediately sensed the significance of this event for myself, for finally I would have the chance to measure the worth of this man directly; he would be held up to the scrutiny of my critical spiritual sensibilities, ... for although one cannot judge the inner state of consciousness of an individual, one can at least decide if there are some signs of a personal performance that would lend some credence to the notion of having achieved a state of 'liberation' from the narrow boundaries of the ego.

There was just too much vengeance, blood, and doctrinal absolutism for me to finally assent to the idea that Khomeini was an 'enlightened' being, for although most reputed saints have emerged from a tradition—that is, from an organized, highly structured and antiquitous system of worship and purificatory practices—they are, when they have reached the climax of their devotion, detached from 'politics,' from heavy involvement in the surface appearance of life, from the rigid ideological warfare and clashing of opinions that dominate the more worldly individual.

Khomeini's embrace—unconditionally—of harsh Islamic justice, for instance the stoning of an adulterer, the severing of the hand of a thief, and his violent denunciations of the United States and the Soviet Union—his attribution of all problems to the conspiracies of imperialism—all this seemed a little too one-sided and belief-ridden to be the representations of a human being who dwelled in the equanimity and putative bliss of the Absolute, the state of permanent freedom from the primacy of ego-hood.

And then there were the portraits on Time magazine, the many depictions of the Imam, especially during the hostage crisis and even after the fall of the Shah: all these suggested a morbid seriousness, a humourless severity, and an apparent absence of gentleness, playfulness, or—and this is most important—compassion. The manifest characteristic of the human personality that had achieved some unity with pure consciousness was the radiant reality of love, the love that was simply the fact of that harmony, the fact of that non-separateness from and absolute cooperation with the laws of the universe that worked for the happiness of each creature.

This had been the measure of all the great saints, whether Saint Francis, the Buddha, Lao-Tse, or even the Sufis I had read. Imam Khomeini was a symbol in the West of the most obdurate atavistic pride and implacable hatred. And even some Westerners with whom I had talked who had met Khomeini commented on his charisma, but in the same breath remarked at the total absence of humour or warmth in his demeanour.

Now I had the opportunity to judge for myself.

A Lecture by Ayatollah Khomeini

Once on our way by bus to the Jamaran residence (the hall where Khomeini was to speak was connected to his house) there was the buzzing excitement that indicated something powerful was about to

happen. For myself I knew that I could trust my intuition enough to determine whether Ayatollah Khomeini was essentially good, essentially bad, or an admixture. I also sensed that something dramatic was to happen to me, as if the psyche has a presentiment of that which will radically affect one's perception, one's experiences.

I tend to believe that something within Creation knows what is about to happen, or rather that, given the tendencies of a given situation, some form of the reality that is imminent (but unknowable to the individual) begins to participate in the moment of experience even before the important event has happened. In other words there is the absence of time; the present holds the meaning of the future, especially the immediate future that is to profoundly influence one's experience of reality. If something remarkable is to happen to one, the fact of that reality will still be contained in the reality of experience leading up to the experience which has yet to happen.

I knew that whatever would happen in the hall where Khomeini would speak, it would be tumultuous and consequential; how could it be otherwise in a situation in which one individual human being embodied and dictated the intention and the reality of a revolution? The ambivalence, the ambiguity that I had experienced in regard to the person of Khomeini was about to be resolved: I would know the essence of his motivation, the essence of the claims of his countrymen as to his spiritual greatness. The actual event of his speaking followed inevitably from the sequence of steps that started with the bus ride to North Tehran through the various checkpoints, and finally the entrance into the hall.

Since it was guaranteed that we would see the Imam, the bus ride contained the reality of that meeting, and therefore the potency of this reality flowed into the present experience of riding towards our destination. In a sense I felt that all of my speculations, hunches, concepts of the revolution would dissolve in the face-to-face encounter with the leader of that revolution. I was not disappointed.

There were at least five or six checkpoints at which we were frisked for any weapons or object that might be used to threaten the life of the beloved (and hated) leader of Iran and the Islamic Revolution. Nothing—no pencils, no cameras, no object of any kind—were permitted to be taken past the first checkpoint. As we walked briskly through what seemed a labyrinth of alleys there was the sense of the eagerness with which each invited individual was insuring a suitable view of the speaker—in other words, I was aware that many of us were walking quickly to obtain the best seats. And while we walked I couldn't help but notice the brightness, the alertness, the liveliness in the air itself; this was a very different part of Tehran; it had a humming energy, a vitality, a special kind of consciousness.

Was this due to the actual reality of this person called Ayatollah Khomeini, or was it due to the attitude that characterized the people's estimation of Khomeini? I felt at the time it could be both, since again I determined that something was indeed objectively different about the space we were entering. This was the centre of the opposite of apathy and lassitude that I had found on the street of Tehran; here in the lanes leading up to the lecture hall in the early morning—it was about eight o'clock—hundreds of Revolutionary Guards, ordinary citizens, and clergymen were all part of the corridor of guardians and

staff who orbited around the sun of Khomeini.

I could see that they relished their work, that this was where (as well as in the midst of battle) the revolution manifested its living force. Indeed I thought that we were approaching the very source of the revolution, so harmonized did the climate of feeling seem in conjunction with the principles, the mythological realities of the revolution.

Now the reader should realize at this point in my story that I was well aware of all those things attributed to the regime, and especially the authority of the Imam: the brutal torture, the thousands of executions, the raping of women prisoners, the resuscitation of SAVAK; the abolishment of music, dance, and any offending aesthetic or recreational activities that are accepted as normal in the modern world; the killing of young children, the shooting of high school girls, censorship of the press, the cruel campaign of murder and desecration of the Baha'i community, the refusal to permit Amnesty International to enter Iran, –in short the systematic and violent overthrow of all semblance of democracy, the instituting of a system of rule that compared unfavourably with the Shah even at his worst. I had heard all these things; I had even heard these things from people whose integrity and credibility I could not doubt.

Iran was in a state of vicious madness and the source of the evil repression was none other than the person whom I was to see perform and later meet. Before the shifting towards a concerted campaign against all 'opponents' of the regime (which had caused this increased hostility against him), Ayatollah Khomeini had been the object of extreme hatred in the United States for being linked intimately with the seizing of the innocent American diplomats.

Then there were still many forces in Iran who supported Khomeini; now, however, in the wake of the executions and persecution of opponent of the regime the hatred of Khomeini has been entrenched even in the hearts of many who had fought against the Shah, Iranians who had even served in the provisional government, who had, in fact, been loyal to Khomeini up until the last six months. Now I was to see in the flesh the personage whose will had dominated Iran, whose policies (although attributed to God) had caused so much disruption in Iran and had drawn so much negativity from the West.

I secured a seat at the front of the hall; Khomeini's chair, draped with a white sheet, was situated on a stage above us at least fifteen feet from floor level. A white-bearded mullah surveyed us as we entered the hall, and adjusted the microphone, waiting patiently for the sign that the Imam would be coming through the closed door to the right of the stage upon which he would give his lecture. The hall was redolent with whispered expectation, and from time to time certain Muslims would shout a slogan or a passage from the Qur'an and would then be joined by the hundreds of other Muslims and Revolutionary Guards who were in attendance.

No smoking was allowed inside the hall and the reverence that was predominant in the attitude of all those waiting for the Imam's entrance made this scene one in which the usual smells and ambience of Iran were significantly altered.

Even as I looked up at the stage at the place where Khomeini had given hundreds of speeches my eyes registered the physical calm, the physical purity, the physical freshness that hovered, or rather collected in a block of solid, translucent energy that seemed in such contrast to the hotel we had been in, to in fact every other environment I had been in two trips to Iran. Even the mosques did not radiate this quality, this wholeness of energy. Could the Imam after all be an enlightened human being, a true Sufi—or perhaps even more?

All signs indicated that something was urged to happening in this hall that transcended anything in Iran that happened outside the hall— the only feeling that seemed at all familiar with this feeling was the war front and then when I had walked through Beheshte Zahra Cemetery. I could only account for this by assuming that perhaps martyrdom was real, that the sudden and sanctified splitting of the soul from the body, carrying that soul up into heaven because of the intention of the martyr, has created an energy that was holy, an energy that was blessed by Allah Himself. Whatever was the case the atmosphere where Khomeini's chair sat was radiant and alive. Harmony, not hatred, dominated here.

While we waited for the Imam, a parade of Lebanese Palestinian children whose parents had been killed in Israeli bombing attacks (and who had been adopted by the Iranian government at the behest of Khomeini) marched into the hall singing in Arabic various songs about the revolution. They stood in front of us just below the stage, looking slightly more bewildered than the hundreds of Iranian students from the Islamic high schools that had marched and shouted for us.

They had been invited to listen to the Imam, and in their yachting-like uniforms (blue caps, white dress) they patiently stood, while their teachers organized their chanting and their positioning. Each day, apparently, Khomeini met with individuals and groups associated with the running of the revolution. He was especially interested in those children whose parents had been killed in refugee camps by strafing Israeli jets. They constituted the oppressed, the people who suffered innocently at the hands of the aggressors; they were thus specially suited to the categories of moral judgement of Islam and the revolution.

Only another manifestation of evil could have created these orphans; the Palestinians were the victims of American imperialism, since it was American weapons that had drawn the blood of the fathers and mothers of these children. Everything was separated into good and evil; each struggle in the world fell into the categorization of the oppressed fighting against the oppressors. These Lebanese children were symbols of that struggle, were symbols for the moral distinctions necessary to uphold the revolution and maintain its absolutist basis. Without the reality of evil, one cannot posit the existence of its opposite: good.

The Iranians themselves might not be qualified to call themselves pure, but their Islamic motivation was pure, and the enemy certainly was evil. How could it be that it was anything but God that would oppose evil; since evil existed, what countered it was good. The Iranians had been taught to think in this way by their leader, nothing, not the distinctions of Ebrahim Yazdi, nor the resistance of the Mujahideen could

deter those supporters of the “Line of the Imam” from sticking to these black and white categories of judgement, for only in this way could the allegory of good versus evil be enacted.

We were there for about forty–five minutes before there were signs that the Imam was about to make his entrance. The signal was clear; several other turbaned 'ulama emerged from the door and indicated to the mullah who was waiting on stage that the chieftain, priest, holy man commander and Imam was on his way. At the appearance of Khomeini in the doorway everyone jumped to his feet and began shouting, “Khomeini!” “Khomeini!” “Khomeini!” in the most vibrant athletic, rejoicing, militant tribute that I had ever witnessed for another human being.

Everyone seemed completely taken over by the spontaneous surge of love and adulation, and yet there was the proclaiming with every cell of their heart the absolute confidence that what and who they were honouring was worthy of such honour in the eyes of Allah. Indeed I would say that the explosion of ecstasy and power that greeted the Imam was itself not so much a simple reflex based upon a fixed idea of the Imam; it was rather the natural and exuberant hymn of praise, of celebration that was demanded by the very majesty and overpowering charisma of this man.

For once the door opened for him I experienced a hurricane of energy surge through the door, and in his brown robes, his black–turbaned head, his white beard he stirred every molecule in the building and riveted the attention in a way that made everything else disappear. He was a flowing mass of light that penetrated into the consciousness of each person in the hall. He destroyed all images that one tried to hold before one in sizing him up. He was so dominant in his presence that I found myself organized in my sensations by that which took me far beyond my own concepts, my own way of processing experience.

I had expected–no matter what the apparent stature of the man to find myself scrutinizing his face, exploring his motivation, wondering about his real nature. Khomeini's power, grace, and absolute domination destroyed all my modes of evaluation and I was left to simply experience the energy and feeling that radiated from his presence on the stage. A hurricane he was, yet immediately one could see there was a point of absolute stillness inside that hurricane; while fierce and commanding, he was yet serene and receptive.

Something was immovable inside him, yet that immovability moved the whole country of Iran This was no ordinary human being; in fact even of all the so called saints I had met–the Dalai Lama, Buddhist monks, Hindu sages–none possessed quite the electrifying presence of Khomeini.

For those who could see (and feel) there could be no question about his integrity, nor about the claim, however muted by people like Yazdi, by his people that he had gone beyond the normal (or abnormal) selfhood of the human being and had taken residence in something absolute. This absoluteness was declared in the air, it was declared in the movement of his body, it was declared in the motion of his hands, it was declared in the fire of his personality, it was declared in the stillness of his consciousness.

There was no mystery about why he was so loved by millions of Iranians and Muslims throughout the world and he demonstrated, to this observer at least, the empirical foundation for the notion of higher states of consciousness. Yes, the severity, the humourlessness, the absolutist judgement was apparent; yet given the circumstances within which he was placed, there was the affirmation of appropriateness in his every gesture and aspect. This was the most extraordinary person I had seen.

At first he did not speak; another religious leader addressed the audience, Khomeini sitting in a kind of immaculate silence and perfect equilibrium. He was motionless; he was detached; he was in an ocean of peacefulness; and yet something was in pure motion; something was dynamically involved; something was ready to wage constant war. He dwarfed all those people whom I had met in Iran; he dominated the stage even while the other mullah spoke.

All eyes were on Khomeini, and there was not the slightest trace of egotism, of self-consciousness, even, if I can say it, of inner dialogue or random thinking. His whole being focused relentlessly yet spontaneously on the point of concentration that aesthetically and spiritually fitted into the dramatic scene we were witnessing. Despite the fierce intention, the absolute sense of uncompromising rectitude, there was yet the sense of something perfectly effortless and smooth that dictated the manifest movements of his hands, the sound of his throat clearing, the focus of his attention.

Here hundreds of patriots and Muslims had shouted his greatness, had sworn their love, their absolute adulation; yet while receiving all this he remained within himself, he remained unmoved; he remained in the dignity of some imperturbable inner state that was beyond the boundaries of a causation that I was familiar with.

The reader may wince at the extravagance of my description of this man; he must know, however, that despite everything that I had heard, despite the contradictory evidence I had received before (the seeming violence of the rhetoric, the lack of creative playfulness and so on), the actual and immediate impression of what Imam Khomeini was had nothing to do with some sort of idea or concept.

The experience was too overpowering for that. Imagine for a moment the pushing of the body of oneself out of one's mother's womb, or the moment when one might awaken to the fact that one was being created inside a foetal body, or the moment when one was conscious of dying, or the moment when one first discovered the power of egos: these experiences have as their basis a primary determinant outside of the frame of reference the individual; what is dominant is the intrinsic nature of the reality which is giving birth to the experience.

Such is what happened on the morning of Wednesday, February 9th, 1982 in North Tehran. The subjectivity of the experience seemed to be objectified by something that was at the very basis of my consciousness; I transcended the mode of experience that normally determined what sensations, thoughts, feelings constellated into my awareness of self. Khomeini was that powerful; Khomeini was that strong; Khomeini was that egoless and invincible

In a moment I saw all the impulses of the revolution, the whole history of the overthrow of the Shah, the rhythms of martyrdom, the bygone Islamic civilization that had temporarily overshadowed the West: all of this was contained in the presence of this man. He was the source of the revival of Islam, he was the source of the revolution, he was the source of whatever power this revolution and Islam represented to the world.

Without him I am certain the monarchy would still be in place and Islam would be effectively eliminated as a factor in the political destiny of the Middle East. Once seeing Khomeini I questioned whether even the revolution in Iran would survive in its vitality and coherence for it seemed pretty obvious that all inspiration was derived from Khomeini's leadership. Khomeini was the revolution. Those given the awareness or feeling to know what he represented (the wholeness of life biased through Islam) could not help but be filled with the fervour of Islam, the blessed confidence of martyrdom, the determination to spread Islam to the world.

He uplifted and transformed; this was done not through some projected idea of his charisma; it was done by the actual material of life; it was accomplished through the intention of that which had created this whole drama. No, Khomeini was at the centre of this Islamic eruption; Khomeini was the fountainhead of the spiritual power that flowed into the hearts of Muslims throughout the Middle East—at least those Muslims who instinctively were close to the heart of Islam.

He did not smile once; his face was implacably set in the resolution of his will; God demanded everything from him; he had given his life to serving God. There was nothing to laugh at, to be amused at, to wonder about; his course had been set and he was in the determined consequences of that course: to bring Islam into the prominence which its divine genesis had portended. He lived for Islam; he had become the instrument of Islam; he had no purpose but the enactment of Islam. His individuality seemed merged with the universality of his higher purpose.

I detected no mental entropy, no inner reactions to his environment; no, there was only the inevitable pattern of duty that placed him into the servitude of Allah. Of course neither science nor psychology could verify these observations; they entirely escaped the instruments, the diagnosis of experiential reality; nevertheless one might suspect that his brain waves would yield readings of hemispheric coherence not typical of those of us still in the normal grip of conflict, ambivalence, and insecurity. Physiologically, octogenarian that he was, there was the impression of soundness, of efficiency, of non-wasted energy and performance.

Everything he did—from the motion of his hands to the opening of his mouth to the sound of his words—was under the aegis of one ordering intelligence. He was totally non-divided; he gave the sense of someone who had not only mastered himself but was himself now the servant of another master, and one can only assume that he had either hallucinated himself into the experience of submitting to God, or that indeed he had achieved that permanent grace that was the subject of my controversial discussion with Ebrahim Yazdi and the Lebanese professor.

Here he was, perhaps the most hated man of post Hitler civilization, yet one saw him as being utterly undemagogic; one saw him as—at the very least—an Old Testament prophet, an Islamic Moses come to drive Pharaoh from his lands (Pharaohism being expressed in all those values and activities that ignored the reality and pre-eminence of Allah).

Despite the hatred (and I thought of all the millions of people who had gone through many days of their lives during the hostage crisis filled with negative thoughts about “The Ayatollah”—how the most powerful hostility had focused itself on him) he yet appeared untouched by this destructive energy. He had been strong enough to survive it; he had been perhaps strong enough to be chosen to release it; now he was hated even more for thousands, perhaps millions, of his countrymen— not to mention Saddam Hussein and the monarchs of the region—now turned against him.

I intuited that the very hatred directed against him had in fact strengthened the revolution, had in fact made him that much more powerful; he did not live for the approval of others, he did not live to be a hero; he did not live for any personal satisfaction; he lived for the truth he experienced in the laws of Islam, in the revelations of the Prophet, in the happiness and immortality that could be achieved through Islam.

All this will seem preposterous to most of those who read this book, and yet the clarity with which these impressions asserted themselves made them self-evident and as truthful as the awakening from a dream. Khomeini was for real, and the projection of the personal, or I should say, impersonal presence of Khomeini diminished the impression of any other political leader I had seen.

He might be the enemy of pluralistic values; he might be the enemy of individualist freedom; he might be the enemy of democratic government; he might be the enemy of the metaphysics of variable subjectivity (i.e. the universe of the individual); but one could not deny that, despite his severe countenance and the rigid and inflexible values and laws for which he stood, he was, for all that, the most towering force of wholeness and integrity; he was a microcosm of Truth as it passed through Islam.

He was not someone with whom one could discuss the meaning of individual choice, or the sensuous beauty of ballet, but he was yet the most formidable human being on the stage of international politics, and he seemed, at least from my vantage point, to be easily a contemporary of Christ himself, not that Khomeini would ever compare himself with Christ—but he radiated that same uncompromising integrity and one-pointed intention. How was it that a human being who had not tasted the variety of human experience, how was it that a human being who denied the experimental riches of personal freedom, how was it that such a person could contain, could embody so much of the order of the universe itself.

Well, for those readers who find the apologetics of stoning to death adulterers a trifle disconcerting—or the execution of homosexuals— the description and interpretation I have given may seem the most inflated form of self-distorting perception. Nevertheless I wish to make it clear that one must—at least for purposes of drawing some conclusions about this revolution and the adamant love in which Khomeini

is held by over half of his countrymen—separate the ideological statements of Khomeini from the spontaneous measure of the man's stature as a human being. His stature is not so much derived from his words, nor his authority, but from the living expression of his being, from the very way in which the universe reacts to the organized form of his personality.

For all his extremist rhetoric, for all his bitterness towards the United States, for all his cursing of the West, he still transcends the content of his words, the content of his writings; what is primary is the elemental grace that floods into one's heart with the slightest intention to open oneself to the naturalness of one's experience. A film or theatre director, if he were to view the performance of Ayatollah Khomeini would say this was the one actor who could play the role of a Messiah—or the Twelfth Imam, so magnificent was his stage presence, so absolute was the sense of his confidence, so unalterable was his will.

And yet I must go further: Imam Khomeini broke into my heart and my brain with a current of emotion that I can only describe as extreme positivity, what I prefer to call 'love'. Yes, despite his call for Islamic executions (and in his very speech that day he called for a pardoning of thousands of prisoners who were amenable to change of allegiance), his unwavering stemness of mien, his invulnerability to individual feeling, he was charged with a love that actually seemed to purify my heart, to fill it with a bliss that I had not known before.

Even while he just sat there—before he spoke, while one of the mullahs gave the predictable tirade against the superpowers, the predictable paean to Islam—I found myself gazing upon his face (and the light that surrounded him) and at the same time being filled up with that energy that I associated with the most vital kind of creativity and power.

He was a generator of the energy and feeling that overwhelms the heart and cleanses the—if I may say it—soul. I had wanted to retain my disinterestedness, my critical detachment when seeing the Imam. I had known myself to be not capable of being dominated by another human being; I had taken a certain amount of satisfaction in knowing that my inner integrity could not be disturbed by some experience outside of myself. yet here I was losing the boundaries of my own individuality; here I was discovering feelings and refined sensations that had been unknown to me. Here I was being filled up by a mad Muslim holy man, the individual who was thought least likely perhaps in the whole world to be capable of conferring upon a Western journalist the sense of divine happiness, divine clarity of awareness.

But this was my experience; Imam Khomeini was experienced to be that singular reality which could expand my consciousness, purify my heart, clarify my brain, and leave in his wake the sense of an undiminishable grace, a grace that somewhere I still carry with me, however overshadowed it might be by present preoccupations.

Feeling the energy of Beheshte Zahra Cemetery had drawn out pure emotion from me; here in the presence of the fierce embodiment of militant Islam I had reached the flowering of my own individuality,

the vision of bright integrity that reached up towards heaven itself. There were no metaphors for the sense of reality that swept over me, and it can only be carved in the memory of the universe that what I saw that day, what I experienced in my heart—the meaning that articulated itself spontaneously and irrevocably in my soul—was the single most important fact of this revolution, but more still, the single most important fact about existence itself.

A human being could after all achieve a greatness that proclaimed contact with a Creator. Imam Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini might be declared insane, a monster, a killer, an enemy of freedom and light; he was nevertheless a supreme testimony to the power of man to achieve a perfect integrity, and within that integrity, the most awesome kind of personal beauty and grace. Since Khomeini was indeed a man of God, since Khomeini did embody the truth of Islam, since indeed Khomeini deserved to be loved with Shi'a martyrdom passion, it behooved us on the outside to try to understand this revolution and to see why it might be possible that God would visit such a reality upon us.

The reality I have described here is the reality that is at the very centre of the future of the Middle East. I believe that until someone can recognize the truth of what I have written here, he or she cannot comprehend the design of destiny, nor the forces that now shape the events of the Middle East. The face of Jerry Falwell in comparison to the face of Ayatollah Khomeini is for me the difference between the pudgy Bible salesman and John the Baptist.

Of course since there is no consensus about the nature of God, or in fact whether He even exists, therefore there is little chance that there can be any sort of significant agreement about whether He is found manifesting in the consciousness of a human being, the one creature in this world whose nervous system would seem capable (because of its self-conscious reflectivity) of conveying or embodying the finest expression of intelligence.

If God is anything He is Intelligence. The accounts of Christian mystics, the saints of the East, and of course the Sufis (not to mention the prophets) make it quite clear what the evidence of a God-shaken, God-possessed human being is: the actions of such an individual are taken over by an intelligence that seems to be computing the activities of the larger world; the specific and localized ego of such an individual no longer determines or controls the actions which flow from his or her individuality. That individuality has been universalized and the physical, mental, and emotional character of such an individual must necessarily reflect the universal reality now embodied in his or her consciousness. Did Imam Khomeini fit this description, these criteria?

So much did he conform to these standards that even if one did not have any religious frame of reference, or any kind of touchstone for the mystical, the transcendental, one would still witness a torrential energy, an unshakable stillness, and an indefatigable love and compassion. Yes there was the austere, unrelenting point of concentration in his countenance, but even if ignorant of its cause, one still sensed the oughtness of this expression: i.e. its configuration, its character was being determined by Necessity.

True, if one has achieved a state of equilibrium with the Divine such that one's resistance to the force of God's intelligence no longer exists (the false ego has been annihilated) then the method through which such a state has been achieved will be reflected in the face, in the personality of the individual.

Ayatollah Khomeini's march towards the realization of his own unbounded nature the awakening of himself to pure consciousness, to the Absolute, had not been through effortless pleasure, through some simple and natural technique of transcendence; no, it had been achieved through the most indomitable, titanic will, through the most exacting and unswerving devotion to the rules and ceremonies of Islam. One experienced, in looking up at him, how Khomeini had as if from the first breath he drew as an infant, been one-pointedly living his life for the highest purpose and within the most universal tradition.

Like the famous saints of India, he had, right from the beginning, sought enlightenment giving up all the idle pleasures of youth to concentrate his intention upon the goal of all human life, the fully realized Self. His individuality was still there, and that individuality because of its conditional and contingent nature, could not be made of the Absolute however his individuality was now held inside that absolute, now had its purpose in serving that absolute, and my impression was that I had never seen such an uncompromising expression of the Absolute...

If Khomeini, who is viewed as the exemplar of Islam, as the most realized of all Muslims living in the world, as the shadow of the Twelfth Imam –if such a person as he has not reached that “absolute light “where one is “effaced in God” how can we believe the Imam when he promises that Islam and the Prophets existed for this very goal?

The Imam may, for obvious reasons, draw people's attention away from the notion of his own successful inner jihad, but the very fact that he allows his portrait and his own reputation to stand as being the supreme expression of this revolution is a tacit admission that he has in fact achieved this state in which he, as a drop, has merged into the Absolute(Allah), the ocean, the clue to the sternness, the sense of implacable will and hardness in his face is the fact that the means to this goal have come about through a perpetual jihad, which is “inconceivable unless a person turns his back on his own desires and the world.” Khomeini has defined “the world” in the context of this analysis as “the aggregate of man's aspirations that effectively constitute his world, not the external world of nature with the sun and the moon, which are manifestations of God.

It is the world in this narrow, individual sense that prevents man from drawing near to the realm of sanctity and perfection.

We agree that coming close to and eventually reaching God must be, if there is such a thing as God, the highest pursuit of man, since this logically is what God seeks for man, this logically, because it ends in deathlessness and bliss, is what man seeks for himself. Khomeini in one of his speeches relates a tradition of the Prophet:

“When anyone leaves his home, migrating to God and His Messenger, and then overtaken by death, it is

incumbent on God to reward him.”

However, it is obvious that in order to reach this goal much has to be sacrificed. The goal is the completion of man for the source of “all true knowledge” dwells there, and “objective reality belongs exclusively to that light”; “our origin is that light.” God, it would seem, rewards us with the summit of His love only if we prove we are willing to forego so many of the experiences that He has made available to man on this earth.

And this is the source of an earlier denunciation of Khomeini's Puritanism as “a joyless and morbid devotion to a God who demands constant sacrifice.” Khomeini has interpreted the will of God through the Qur'an, through the principles of justice of the Prophet and the Imams; there is no suggestion that one could achieve the climax of being through some path or system of devotion that did not demand “constant sacrifice.” Now whether it is true that God ultimately has created this universe solely to have man transcend it, and much of man's earthly pleasures to ensnare him, to tempt him into sin, is a question presumably only answerable by God.

In my own intuition about this matter I believe there may be ways towards God (the Absolute, the Divine Essence) which may be more compatible with the desires of man, which may not demand such control and discipline. One thing is obvious, however: Imam Ruhullah Al-Musavi Al-Khomeini has achieved his goal, since although he still strived for the perfecting of his own country and the establishment of the primacy of Islam throughout the Middle East (and of course the world) he was entirely detached from all inner anxiety, inner turmoil, inner strife.

The profound discipline and austerity of his whole life might reflect itself in the adamant features of his character and even his face, but the magnificence of the fullness that had overtaken his whole being left no doubt about the reward, nor the reality that now was his. From this writer's perspective Imam Khomeini radiated everything promised in the scriptures of Islam, and that which he radiated was what was absolute in this universe.

It was the source of the universe—biased as I have said, through the idiom of Islam—that directed the course of the revolution; it was the source of the universe that determined the adoration of the people; it was the source of the universe that directed the resurgence of Islam. However much we in the West might decry Khomeini, however much Khomeini's countrymen—many in exile—might condemn, and attempt to destroy this revolution, and however much even persons such as Ebrahim Yazdi might issue their very qualified approval of what was happening in Iran, the primary impulse was being directed by something absolute, as that Absolute passed through the person and consciousness of Ayatollah Khomeini.

All his writings, his speeches, and now this performance (as I said, one didn't even have to listen to the content of this present talk) pointed towards the confluence of the successful outer jihad and the successful inner jihad. Imam Khomeini was the embodiment of that fusion (the establishment of an

Islamic Republic, the conquering of external enemies, the victory of Islam in other parts of the world—and the establishment of that inner condition of integration and union which was the victory of the higher self over the lower self, and the mergence of the individuality into God); this revolution was the enactment of that fusion.

To doubt Khomeini's state of consciousness, or his understanding of and devotion to Islam was to entirely miss the essence of this revolution and the future of Islam in the Middle East. I, who could not surrender my own intuition of the more cooperative, intrinsically supporting nature of the universe towards the completion and fulfillment of itself within the microcosm of man (and thus the final and essential justification for the primary impulse of Western civilization with its emphasis on and over-glorification of the individual and the uniqueness of the personality), could not become a Muslim, could not join in the sweeping, bitter castigations of Western values and metaphysics, and could not even recommend that all of humanity submit to the rigours of Islam.

Nevertheless I had to admit that the figure of the man before me in this hall was the figure of a man who enjoyed the total blessings of God, and because he had given up so much, because he had lived his life in absolute devotion to God, his stature seemed to participate in a glorious power, beauty, and dignity that I knew might quite well be denied the individual who achieved—if this were indeed possible—the same goal through means not as demanding and austere.

I knew that Khomeini was confronting all the evil in the world, and through Islam something was taking place that would forever alter the direction of the script: Imam Khomeini was the counterpoint to brutal secularism, indulgent hedonism, and obsessive egoism, traits that dominated the West. Whether one believed in Islam, however, or whether one agreed with Imam Khomeini's revolution or its policies, or whether one indeed even believed in God, one would have been impervious and crude indeed if one were unable to receive some of the overflowing love, strength, purity, and grace that was the very essence of the man of eighty-one years who began now to speak to us effortlessly, without the slightest harshness of voice, with an almost melodic tone, with all the stillness and vibrancy of the universe itself breathing itself through his being.

All the paradoxes I have described were there: the harshness, the serenity; the austerity of expression, the richness of compassion; the absolute rigidity of will yet an apparent infinite flexibility of suggested power; total concentration yet complete detachment. It grieved me to know that this secret-recognizing the nearness to or distance from God of another human being—was denied to virtually all politicians of the world, not to mention the Western media.

I was either hopelessly insane—or so were all the mystics, saints, sages, and prophets—for the experience here overwhelmingly declared the supreme integrity of life, of man, and of Imam Khomeini. Naturally it was also part of God's design to enable man to reject the more extravagant aspects of my description of Khomeini, to even come to the conclusion that I had come under the influence of something evil (as the Nazis did under Hitler, or as the followers at Jonestown did under Reverend

James Jones); however my own confidence in the organized, teleological tendencies of life to acquaint me with the design of what is true, or congruent with Plato's idea of The Good, emphatically declared the spectacle that I had witnessed this day was a spectacle of holiness and truth of the very highest order.

And as Khomeini spoke I simply listened to the rhythms, the sounds apart from the meaning of the words. There was not one point at which I experienced any diminution of the intensity of his consciousness, the fullness of his heart; his influence upon my own nervous system continued throughout the time that he was sitting on the stage, and throughout that time I felt that I had received the very highest gift that could be conferred upon me, given my own particular development as a human being.

Many a reader will wince at this account and may well dismiss this book, since it is clear that I have lost all my objectivity, an objectivity that was more intact up until the meeting with Khomeini. But for me, the analysis I have given of my experience is the most objective and objectifying part of this book. The final subjective experience: the encounter with what is absolute—this, and only this can give to the realm of subjectivity its objective reality. I would never become a Muslim; I would never consider all Western culture, philosophy, art, and values to be antithetical to life—as these Muslims did. I would even find myself unable to adopt the stance of hostility towards everything non-Islamic in the world.

But I would forever honour Ayatollah Khomeini as an absolutely pure and remarkable human being, a human being who exalted the vision of man's worth and man's destiny, a human being who demonstrated the glory of God as He manifested through the tradition of Islam. And this was the most important message that was given to my soul in Iran: Ayatollah Khomeini is hated, reviled, ridiculed in the West; it was much like the Pharisees persecuting Jesus, mocking his words.

Ayatollah Khomeini would survive this constant execration, and his Islamic Revolution, whether it spread to other countries or not, would be triumphant. Those unable or unwilling to weep the design of fate in lian—with its uncompromising allegiance to pure Islam— would have to suffer—either in exile, if one were an Iranian, or in the West, if one were opposed to mythological absolutism. One thinks of Moses, Mohammad, Christ, Buddha, or Confucius: would any of these beings compromise with the forces of secularism or materialist atheism? It was just not part of the mythic response to deny the supremacy of that religious structure, and the obedience to that structure was the only absolute.

How would Henry Kissinger fathom the author of the Sermon on the Mount or the author of the Bhagavad-Gita? Kissinger was perhaps the exemplar of the tradition of demystification, the tradition of statecraft built upon Realpolitik; such a demythologizing of the cosmos and the realm of political affairs was what had invited the rebirth of myth, the rebirth of scriptural, transcendental politics. The Islamic Revolution in Iran under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini announced to the world that God still liked the myths He had sent down to man in order that man might know his origin and his final destination. I was a witness to this fact on Wednesday, February 9, 1982.

The Specific Influence of the Imam on the Consciousness of the Author

The powerful concentration of compassion, vitality, and, yes, bliss that radiated from Imam Khomeini kept this writer bathed in a purifying energy and feeling that expressed itself in the most profound sense of vulnerability and gratitude. I felt I was being given more of the ocean of existence and within the form of that ocean (as flowing through the Imam) was the clarity of the divine; it was in these thirty minutes that the Imam was on stage that I experienced all the cells in my mind and in my heart bursting with healing love and appreciation.

I was being given everything that perhaps could be given to someone, just because it was only through another human being that God Himself could concentrate his intention, his presence, his most perfect meaning. I felt even that my whole life was being clarified, that knowledge about my own destiny, my own unused power and integrity was awakening, that I would henceforth be a better, deeper, and more expanded human being.

The feelings that surged through me had a strangely objectifying influence; this was not sentimental gushings; it was as if the Imam's wholeness was able to move towards everything in Creation in rivers of tenderness and meaning that opened up, refined, and glorified the heart. The Imam was—not out of any intention, but just because of his pure state of being—creating me in the image of what some day I might become, and the sense of something divine and absolute playing through me from the reality of the Imam was the most sublime experience of my life. I remember listening to Handel's *Messiah* when the Hallelujah chorus played, how that seemed as purely sublime an experience as I had had, given the circumstance of finding that music expressing the highest and most exalting emotion which one was capable of. I thought of the moments of extreme love and surrender to another person.

I thought of the moments when I as a father have touched the essence of my daughter's soul. I thought of the moments when I had triumphed in some athletic contest. I thought of the moments when I had received the benefits of prayer and the audiences I had had with some well-regarded saints. But this experience for its sheer power and purifying fires of feeling and meaning, coming at this point in my life, was the most beautiful experience I could imagine receiving from even God Himself.

When Imam Khomeini left the stage and the audience was filing out of the door, I just stood and watched the place where Khomeini had been sitting: it was radiant with the energy that was now inside my heart. The glow was still present and I simply moved in the waves of this aftermath of shining power. Inside I still felt the most perfect and purifying tears of my life. V. S. Naipaul could see the absurdity of a mythology that resisted the rational, resisted the blessings of modern, secular civilization.

He could even write brilliantly within his bias, perhaps more brilliantly than any mythologically-geized writer. Still his heart would not respond to the most innocent impulses which made Christ declare,

“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Naipaul would be denied entrance into heaven because he is anaesthetized to that feeling of life that through the Imam had so charged my whole being. He would not see the particular order in the air, the absence of negativity and deadness, the presence of total harmony and purity.

For me these facts were apparent on a physical level of perception . For Naipul they would be mere imagination. The degree to which a human being acts in accordance with the laws of Creation determines the degree of harmony and happiness that emanates from him—or so was the experience of the writer. But one had to be touched by that which takes away one's doubts about what Wallace Stevens calls the “deft beneficence” of the “actual”; Naipaul and Mike Wallace of CBS (who first interviewed Khomeini after the seizing of the hostages) had not touched that deft beneficence; that beneficence was deft enough to escape detection by many intelligent human beings. Just who was chosen to be touched by it remained—and would remain—a secret only to That which had created all this. Somehow one had to be shown what God was, and then the host advanced knowledge was how to recognize

His presence when He appeared –and when He disappeared. God was, according to the mystics, absolutely present everywhere, but within the dance of relativity He was present in varying and approximating degrees depending upon the amount of him that was able to manifest through a particular object or being, or environment.

A full realized man like the Imam could radiate God in perhaps his most potent and most intelligently articulated form. Even the Qur'an itself was one of those symbols of God's mystery, for many persons could read it and come to the conclusion that its poetry was surpassable, that its message was redundant, that its organization was disturbingly non-linear, and yet, if God so chose (or if one were willing to surrender to its Arabic cadences, its inner nature) one could find its power revealed. “The highest share is reserved for the one to whom it was revealed: 'The only person who truly knows the Qur'an is he who was addressed by it.'” Khomeini was like the Qur'an; and the recitation of the scriptures and verses of his heart was being performed spontaneously and continuously by Allah.

Obviously only selected creatures in this world were capable of knowing the Qur'an was divinely inspired; only selected creatures in this world were capable of knowing there was such a thing as God; only selected creatures in this world were blessed enough to know the integrity and the power that was embodied in this Islamic teacher, Time magazine's 1979 Man of the Year (Time of course giving this tribute as it would have given Hitler Man of the Year award at the point that he had established his Nazi rule in Germany just before the war).

One still, when leaving this impression, has to face the contradictions, the ambivalences of the revolution and the knowledge that there were many good, intelligent, and creative human beings on this earth who would, with all sincerity, oppose Imam Khomeini and has Islamic mandate. But this did not take away the fact that the reality of the Imam's person eloquently spoke of a final order, a final consummation that

made the opponents of Islam and himself much less eloquent and complete in their arguments, since they were opposing that which had been blessed by the Absolute itself, that which had created this universe—and, I hasten to add, the hate that now dominated the hearts of millions of people. I looked at the space previously occupied by the Imam and saw the invisible reality of this universe.

Since the remains of a human being (after he or she has left a room) who is pure and filled with the wholeness of life give light and energy to the atmosphere, it was relatively easy to find myself just lingering with what had happened to me and having my attention fall on the stage and the white sheet in the chair above me.

Before this experience of seeing Imam Khomeini I rather thought that I would find the law of the revolution, because somewhere Khomeini himself would reveal some form of narrowness, some form of restriction, some form of limitation.

However, despite the rigorous, adamant mould in which his face was cast, despite the firm, unyielding adherence to the absolute dogma of Islam, there was the benediction of Being, the benediction of the fullness of life; I was receiving what is called in the East darshan, the sacred energy and power that is given off by a saint, by a realized human being, only in this case, because of the tumultuous meaning of the revolution (the first time perhaps since the Prophet Mohammad himself that a gage, a mystic had brought about violent political change which led to revolution and war—and quite possibly a whole change in the design of international politics), because of the international consequences of the activities of Imam Khomeini there was an additional power and purpose in the presence of this man.

The guru or the saint most often does not disturb the secular order, the monk, the mystic has big followers, but their activities represent an apolitical process of purification and change; here, however, although beyond the grip of what was changing and relative (i.e. being established in the purity of Being) Ayatollah Khomeini was leading a revolution that touched the lives of everyone, a revolution that went smack into the world of Realpolitik, the United Nations, the CIA, and the maneuverings of Moscow until this point the only challenge to the West and capitalism had come from the doctrine of socialism, from the atheistic Marxist Leninist theories (and revolutions); now religious conservatism, indeed the very essence of “the opiate of the people,” had awakened people to the power of myth, of religious truth.

The fact that Khomeini stood at the centre of all this, the fact that he was the reason for all this, and the fact that his consciousness moved in the articulated unfolding of the intention of Allah, meant that his spiritual grace and power was that much more potent, that much more 'cosmic' in its significance; here was a Muslim holy man turning the world upside down, demonstrating that religion can and does play a vital role in the outcome of world events.

It was even a religious position to denounce the religiosity of this revolution, since such a condemnation was itself a statement that God Himself did not want to be mixed up with the most important affairs of the world, or else, of course, that God did not exist. Only Allah could vindicate the revolution, and this could

only happen by having the Iranian nation continue to defy the predictions of secularized oracles, who no doubt wondered about the threat of the Soviet Union, or thought in terms of a democratic socialist successor to Khomeini.

Naturally if my observations and biases are correct the Islamic Revolution of Iran would be triumphant in the most absolute sense: Iran would remain under the domination of Shi'a Islam, a whole nation would subscribe to the values, to the principles of a major religious system, and doing so, challenge the arrogance of Western humanistic ideology, as well as the levelling doctrine of scientific, dialectical materialism.

It was one thing to stand in the presence of a saint, a recognized Master or Guru; I had already done this on a number of occasions. It is quite another thing to stand in the presence of a religious personality who manifested the qualities of a saint, an ancient sage, but who at the same time was the apex of a whole transformation in the configuration of world politics.

Khomeini's revolution would forever alter the dialectics of world conflict; the superpowers would continue their ideological warfare, but one country would remain unattached to and autonomous of the world giants, and would create a fresh dimension to the debate about the 'free' world and the totalitarian world. Science and progress had driven God from the stage of world events; now it seemed that God wished to return; it was through the person and consciousness of Ayatollah Ruhullah Khomeini that this unexpected and mystifying process was taking place, a process that could only be understood in the utter calm at the centre of the Islamic storm: Khomeini's consciousness, which manifested as the Absolute as it, unimpeded and unresisted, passed through his nervous system.

After five minutes, apart from the presence of those Revolutionary Guards who were presently living on the premises of the Imam's sacred territory, I was the only member of the audience who remained in the hall; the rest of the delegates to the conference had gone back to their buses. It was the grace of the situation that had even allowed me to pause there for such a long time and to ignore the obvious momentum of the departing crowd, the obvious directive to return to the buses and leave this place of power and light. But standing in my own appreciation, or rather, standing in the protecting beneficence of Imam Khomeini's Spiritual remains, I was as if invisible until such time as my fulfillment was complete.

It so happened that the Revolutionary Guards noticed me throughout the speech of the Imam, and noticed the effect this experience had—and was continuing to have—as I stood in the almost empty hall and just gazed effortlessly, still with the lovely bumming bliss in my heart. My translator, Mohammad Abbaszadeh, conferred with the Revolutionary Guards and it became a source of some satisfaction for them to see a Westerner moved in the brilliance of their leader's hallowed presence.

I could see that they too understood and felt the absolute fact of Khomeini's real nature, that that nature had been sanctified by God, that this fact was at the source of the revolution; clearly Ebrahim Yazdi could not feel this fact, and thus his problems with the more irrational manifestations of the revolution.

The faces of the Revolutionary Guards glowed with the joy and rapture of having seen their beloved leader, and yet to find that someone (a non-Muslim) could participate in that love, this was a moment of vindication for the revolution, for Islam, for everything that was happening in Iran.

They expressed a desire to interview me, and I walked over to the wall and leaned there while they asked me—not, it so happened, about their Imam, but about the revolution. Well, there was a returning surge of pure feeling that welled up in my eyes and began again to cleanse my heart, and I found that, quite innocently (this was the purest emotion I had experienced since walking through Beheshte Zahra Cemetery two years before), that emotion took over my whole being, and my inarticulate reply was the most eloquent response I could give to the question. They could see what was still holding me, and they silently shared that sacred consensual validation of their leader. Finally, after these organic, I can even say objectifying, tears had stilled somewhat I began to gaze expression to my thoughts, all in terms of the experience I had just had.

The river of feeling was still moving through my heart, but it seemed possible to give expression to the idea of how my experience this day had revealed the sources of inspiration of the revolution. The inside of the revolution was now inside me, and although it was not in the destiny of things that I had been born in Iran, to become a Muslim fighting in the revolution (there were other revolutions, non-Islamic in their character, which were perhaps, on a smaller scale, as necessary as this revolution: God, it seems, expresses different tendencies in different places; even the pardon of the individual had some meaning in the script; Islam was not the only way God fulfilled Himself through man), I joined this revolution on the level of my heart, in so far as I knew its origin was pure, and that therefore it needed my modest prayers.

The complex issue was to discern where God perhaps was not about to support the universalizing of the revolution, but I was pretty certain I could experience the sanctity of this revolution, the sanctity of Islam, and the sanctity of Imam Khomeini, without however altering my sense of the very different destiny in store for the Western world.

And there were still challenges for these Iranian warriors; their inner jihad was not complete; therefore their vision was still subject to some distortions; they still, even in repeating the words of their Imam, could greatly oversimplify the forces of truth that sought articulation in the world, and particularly in the sphere of nationhood. They were, at least the great majority of them, probably incapable of the mercy, compassion, or wisdom that would enable them to understand how someone could be sincere and even highly developed and still resist this revolution. The revolution was for some; it was for Iran; it may have even been for the Middle East itself; this did not mean, however, that anyone who might oppose the revolution, or resist the Islamization of the world, was evil.

As far as I was concerned even God Himself might not lend absolute support to the attempt to make His Creation completely Islamic. One thing was certain, though it was through Islam and only Islam that he was reviving the power of one of his mythologies, subtly undermining the growing assumption that

secularism (Western and Eastern) had banished him from the stage of world events. This was the great dilemma for the sensitive observer of this revolution: to realize that it was a purifying miracle, a necessary miracle, a decisive force for the spiritual regeneration of mankind.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran would show that it was not subject to the cause and effect paradigm of modern international politics, where the sense of the divine was absolutely absent, where the notion of God was irrelevant to the analysis of events. Islam—through the Imam and this revolution—was the simplest and most adamant challenge to this idea, and its very intransigence, its refusal to play the game of politics according to the rules of Machiavelli was an important statement about the reservoirs of meaning and truth that had slipped from the consciousness of man.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran was the most efficient and powerful means to bring about this recognition, this confrontation, this awakening. Even the rise of conservative religion in America was itself part of the tendency in Creation at this time, although one did feel that the evangelical expression of Christianity was not sufficiently archetypal or richly mythological to be comparable to what was happening in Iran, and the difference in leadership between Jerry Falwell and Imam Khomeini demonstrated God's own opinion of that difference—and its significance.

What was important for many Westerners was to realize that yes, this revolution was not acceptable as a model for society in Europe or in North America; no, the individual in the West had become just too sophisticated, too knowing of the inexhaustible creative particularizes of subjective experience, of individual expression. Islam could have, perhaps, at the time of Mohammad, conquered the whole world; now, however, things had gone too far through the demythologizing of mankind; there was some truth that had to come out from the demythologizing, from that self sufficiency, from that fetish of the ego.

But whatever that truth was, it had not found its integrated system of argument that would amount to an answer to this revolution, in a primitive but fundamental sense, this revolution, under the beautifully realized leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was the purest uprising of the spirit in the world today. The criteria one had to adopt were of course different from those wed to assess, say, the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Cuban Revolution; nevertheless the demonstration that there was a non-material reality at the basis of existence needed to be proclaimed; Islam and this revolution was the means to demonstrate this truth, and all those born within the range where its influence was likely to predominate were themselves chosen to come to grips with its mythological power.

None of these things were of course repeated to the Revolutionary Guards. To declare there are many truths, that there are other ways to God besides through Islam, and that Islam is a universal truth but not a truth that would universalize its spiritual hegemony throughout the whole world is not the appropriate or useful truth to plead to someone who must see Islam as the only truth.

For a Muslim, and especially a Muslim in Iran, to spend his energy and thinking on the idea that truth is pluralistic, that his religion is relative to offer things, that he should adopt a moderate attitude with

respect to spreading the truth of Islam–this is to dilute the necessary power of his motivation and therefore the energy necessary to accomplish the goal for which Islam was given to the world.

That goal was the knowledge of surrender to That which had created this universe, that goal was the movement, the evolution of the self towards a greater harmony with the universe, that goal was the achievement–in its highest sense– that was now embodied in the Imam himself: the eternalizing of the individual through the expansion of the ego into the Absolute. One must, if one is to move efficiently towards such a goal, not doubt the supreme efficacy of the system of worship, purification, and action revealed by one religion.

Even Allah has willed it this way; on the other side, after one has touched the benediction of God, then one can intuitively recognize that there must be many ways to what is Absolute, as many ways as God has manifested in choosing His prophets, for each religion diverges at some point from every other religion; Islam was certainly no exception, but it was of some significance that God was choosing this religion through which to remind all men of the preeminent significance of the spiritual dimension of life; the Islamic Revolution happened because of the stature of Imam Khomeini. There was no other recognized leader of another major religion–even the Pope–who could match the intensity, nor the magnitude of holiness that radiated from the Imam.

What I did utter to the Revolutionary Guards was recorded, and I consider my statements to be the most spontaneously expansive and satisfying remarks I have ever been allowed to make after witnessing a spectacle of extreme aesthetic brilliance.

One could have just watched Rudolph Nureyev dance Swan Lake, one could have just watched a superbly coached North Carolina basketball team win the NCAA championship, one could have fallen in love with the most beautiful woman or man, one could have ascended to the top of Everest, or one could have heard Bach's Mass in B Minor while sitting in Westminster Abbey–but none of these experiences would have equaled what happened to me this day, for to be truly open to receive the grace of Ayatollah Khomeini was to receive the reflection of God Himself as He could only concentrate Himself through the nervous system of a human being.

I received that grace and all the attendant meanings that danced through my mind. My life was clarified–not through being imaged by Islam and not even by the intention of Khomeini himself– but through the fact that in something Absolute passing through– perpetually–the consciousness and personality of Imam Khomeini God Himself could instruct me in the lessons I still had to learn.

Those instructions inscribed themselves inside my heart, and I emerged from my encounter with Imam Khomeini even more individuated and integrated than I had been before coming to Iran. The truth of Khomeini – his state of consciousness, the magnificence of his personal integrity–went even beyond Islam; it was affecting Creation on the level of the actual molecules of life itself, and all of Creation was being healed, but especially those persons fortunate to be open to receive what he was. Somehow this

day had been prepared for me by all my previous experiences, but most especially by my association with the spiritual and intuitive side of life.

Carl Jung, were he alive today, would have been one of the few prominent Western intellectuals to have recognized and applauded the role and the integrity of Ayatollah Khomeini, for Jung knew the sickness that had descended into man's soul when modern man tried to cut himself off from the myths of the past. Jung would have seen this revolution as the attempt of the collective unconscious to assert some form of equilibrium after having been so unbalanced by the rationalizing of man's soul, by the exorcism of God from the universe.

Having made my comments, inspired as they were, the Revolutionary Guards offered to let me meet the Imam personally; now it may strike the reader as preposterous but after being filled up by the Imam, having in fact received the ocean of love and power that I had, to see him personally seemed superfluous; I had been given (or so I felt) all that which God would have wished for me to receive; to meet the Imam personally was to ask the Imam to focus on me personally; I knew his time was too precious for that; I knew that whatever questions I had about the revolution and his role in it had been answered.

It thus seemed almost unnatural to ask for a personal audience with the Imam. Nevertheless I could see with what eagerness this offer had been made and I realized that even though it might be just a formality, and even though I would not think of pressing my individuality upon the Imam, it would nevertheless add to my credibility in the West, and it would enable me to see whether there was anything different to the Imam when he was in a personal encounter with someone. I therefore agreed to the tentative meeting, which was eagerly sought by my translator and guide, Mohammad Abbaszadeh.

We were ushered through a gate into the pathway leading up to the house of the Imam. We waited there for some thirty minutes and then were invited to wait in a room within the house itself. Taking off our shoes we were asked to sit down, where tea was served to us (in Iran tea is served constantly), where various mullahs sat, also waiting for an audience.

Now here the atmosphere was again exhilarating, vibrating with freshness and purity; compared to the hotel it was as if one were breathing into the exhaust pipe of a car and then breathing the air on a Himalayan mountain, so much did the consciousness of Khomeini make a difference, so much did the reverence and perpetually charged ambience affect the environment. There was one crudely insensitive mullah who continued to draw the exhaust fumes into his lungs; apparently even in the house of the Imam, there was permission to persist with one's addictions. But even the polluting effect of the cigarette smoke was not sufficient to take away the dominant reality of the consciousness inside this house.

I closed my eyes and just experienced the serenity in the air, and then after about fifteen minutes (and there were some incredulous looks by the various mullahs who wondered how an obviously Western and non-Islamic journalist had been permitted inside the residence of the Imam: most Western

journalists had not even been allowed inside Iran for the past fourteen months; to be awaiting a personal meeting with the Imam, well that was past all reason—and I felt the miraculous fact of my situation) we were told, hastily, that the Imam had suddenly changed his schedule and was going into the hall once again to address a new audience of devotees, high school students and some of the poor from South Tehran; this would mean that we couldn't be received in his own private room, that we would (the interpreter and I) have to intercept him on his way into the hall.

We rushed to the passageway which joined the house with the hall, and were told almost immediately upon reaching our position, below the passageway, on the ground, that the Imam was on his way. Khomeini came through the doors of his house and again there was the whirlwind of divine energy, the swirling power of love and solemnity that carried its intention within a total sense of universality. He approached me, was told by Mohammad my name and where I was from, and his hand reached down as both my hands went up to receive him.

I held his hand for a few moments and he sent the thunderbolts of his immovable power into my eyes. It was as I had imagined it would be: there was nothing to say in those ten to fifteen seconds when in silence I received once again this unbounded ocean of supreme purposefulness. He was what he was inside the hall, only this time the universe was closer, but it was as if seeing the face of Jehovah in a moment when Jehovah took the form of the mask of the human being.

There was no wish, nor intention to disturb the wholeness of this moment of union with him, and my individuality seemed to form in a kind of non-anxious and harmonizing expansiveness that could bring about no needs. I had been filled before he touched my hand (or rather as I grasped his hand with both my hands); I was reminded of the sense of eternal replenishment that was the reality of himself as he was nearest to me. My trip to Iran seemed to have completed itself; I could have gone home after the Imam had left the hall; now, having seen him close up, I experienced that the answers had come in the form of a steady revelation.

The Imam never really personalized himself, and even all those who loved him and who were with him never expected him to personalize himself; he was universal and impersonal, and because of this he was capable of infinite compassion and devotion to all those who chose to follow the path of Islam. Even during the lecture I noticed his son, Ahmad, would turn in the direction of his father (he was seated just to the right of Khomeini) and gaze upon his father with the sense of knowledge that Khomeini was no longer his father; Khomeini was his Teacher, Khomeini was the source of living wisdom; Khomeini was the embodiment of Islam. Ahmad studied him as if to see the confirmation of this idea of the Imam's consistent appropriateness.

He, Ahmad, had gained, from the dispassionate equilibrium of his father, his own beautiful serenity, and by watching his father closely he registered the impulses of intelligence that served to show Ahmad the proper movements of the universe as they might embody themselves (and did) within a human being. It was the disciple looking up at his Master—the Master's closest disciple. His father had transcended the

status of father, he was the father to the whole nation of Iran and to devout Muslims everywhere. It was, then, this impersonal reality of Khomeini that gave to him the expression of supreme devotion to God and to Islam.

Mohammad kissed fervently the hand of the Imam as he passed on from me to extend his hand down (his left hand) to Mohammad. It was a beautiful hand, a hand that, however aged, still retained the vitality of life, and was no doubt covered with the impressions of the lips of thousands of Iranians. To kiss this hand was for a Muslim to receive a special kind of grace, and Mohammad told me eagerly after-wards that his own hand (he held it open to me) “would never touch anything evil or impure for the rest of my life.” And when I returned to the hotel many of the Muslims were amazed that I had seen the Imam personally, and they wanted to see my hand, to express their envy and their assurance that my hand was now considered holy!

We walked down through the alleys leading to a street where a taxi would take us back to the hotel; I felt the conspiracy of time and space trying to gradually diminish my experience; but with just the slightest turning of my attention I was able to hold the full meaning and intensity of it—at least as it now translated itself into my present circumstances. I felt how so much tension had gone out of me, the tension brought about by the apparent contradictions and excesses of the revolution. I knew that I had discovered and experienced the great secret of the revolution; I knew that somehow I would try to communicate that secret in my book on Iran.

That secret has been told; it is the truth about this revolution, but it is equally obvious that many people will assume I have exaggerated or that I have been deluded; others may even feel that I have betrayed the cause of freedom and democracy by writing as I have. (I have friends who now are in adamant opposition to the regime, having been close to individuals who have been executed or discredited or persecuted by the present regime.) But I insist that this is the reality that everyone must at least consider, it may be rejected, but still the argument must be made, and I have made it here.

And I readily confess that all my subsequent experiences in Iran carried with them the vision of the integrity of the leader of the revolution, and therefore I found a touchstone to measure and determine the meaning of various events to which I was exposed. While I was in presence of the Imam I had a yearning that all politicians of note take the time to visit Imam Khomeini. I still have that yearning. Imam Khomeini is the most charismatic political leader of the twentieth century—and he is much more besides. He is one of a handful of individuals I have met who have left me transformed. He is therein Iran supporting one of the precious pillars of God: Islam and the supreme truth of surrender to God.

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/al-tawhid/vol7-no4/a-meeting-with-imam-khomeini>

Links

- [1] <https://www.al-islam.org/user/login?destination=node/23015%23comment-form>
- [2] <https://www.al-islam.org/user/register?destination=node/23015%23comment-form>
- [3] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/robin-woodsworth-carlsen>
- [4] <https://www.al-islam.org/library/scholars>
- [5] <https://www.al-islam.org/journals/vol7-no4>
- [6] <https://www.al-islam.org/person/ayatullah-sayyid-imam-ruhallah-musawi-khomeini>