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The Correspondence Between the Degrees of Unveiling and Witnessing and the Stages of Adam's Error in the Thought of Imam Khomeini

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ABSTRACT

SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: This study examines Imam Khomeini's interpretation of Adam's error in relation to graded divine manifestation and the arcs of descent and ascent. It asks how the levels associated with Adam's error may be compared with stages of unveiling and witnessing in spiritual wayfaring.

METHOD & FINDING: Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the study examines passages in Imam Khomeini's works concerning Adam's error, the Divine Names, the Garden, and spiritual ascent. These passages are organized thematically, and the article reconstructs a sequence extending from attention to the multiplicity of the Divine Names to the corporeal manifestations associated with the forbidden tree. It then proposes a structural comparison between this sequence and the wayfarer's progressive purification from corporeal, imaginal, intellectual, and name-related attachments. The comparison is presented as an interpretive synthesis, rather than as a one-to-one scheme explicitly set out in a single passage by Imam Khomeini.

CONCLUSION: In Imam Khomeini's mystical framework, Adam's error can be interpreted not only in ethical or narrative terms but also in relation to the graded structure of existence and the possibility of spiritual return. The article's principal contribution is to make explicit a possible correspondence between Adam's descending trajectory and the wayfarer's ascending process. The strength of this interpretation depends on the textual support for each proposed correspondence and on maintaining a consistent order of the stages discussed.

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Introduction

The question of Adam's error occupies an important place in Quranic exegesis, Islamic theology, and theoretical and practical mysticism. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Adam's departure from the Garden has been interpreted not only as a narrative about an event in sacred history, but also as a way of thinking about the human condition. In mystical interpretations, the narrative may signify a movement from unity toward multiplicity, the descent into increasingly determinate modes of existence, and the possibility of return to God (Chittick, 1998; Corbin, 1998). However, these interpretations should be distinguished from readings that treat the Quranic account primarily in theological or ethical terms.

In Imam Khomeini's writings, Adam's error is discussed within a multilayered metaphysical and spiritual framework. His treatment draws on concepts associated with Ibn ʿArabī and Mullā Ṣadrā and reflects the influence of his teacher, Ayatollah Shahābādī. In this framework, the narrative is connected with the self-disclosure of the Divine Names, the arc of descent (qaws al-nuzūl), and the corresponding arc of ascent (qaws al-ṣuʿūd) (Knysh, 1992; Ridgeon, 2014). The present study examines how these concepts are related in Imam Khomeini's account and how far they support a structured comparison between Adam's descent and the wayfarers' spiritual ascent.

Within this framework, human existence is marked by tension between the primordial orientation toward God (fiṭrah) and involvement in a world experienced through multiplicity, determination, and attachment. The spiritual journey can therefore be described as movement from dispersion toward concentration and from attachment to created things toward awareness of their dependence on God. Adam's error is relevant to this journey because Imam Khomeini interprets it in relation to both the descent into the natural world and the possibility of spiritual return (Algar, 1981). The language of annihilation in the Divine Essence is used here in its technical mystical sense, not to imply the literal destruction of the human person.

Classical Sunni and Shiʿi exegetes and theologians have sought to reconcile the Quranic language of Adam's disobedience (Quran 20:121) with the doctrine of prophetic infallibility (ʿiṣmah). Some understand the prohibition as non-obligatory, while others classify the act as a lapse from what is more fitting (tark al-awlā) (Atrak, 2022). Mystical interpretations place greater emphasis on the narrative's metaphysical significance. In the Akbarian tradition, Adam's relationship with multiplicity is discussed in connection with the manifestation of the Divine Names and the realization of human vicegerency (Chittick, 1998). Imam Khomeini develops a graded interpretation in which the relevant orientations extend from the multiplicity of the Names to the corporeal manifestations associated with the forbidden tree (Hanaei Nejad & Hosseinpour, 2025). Although related, these approaches should not be considered interchangeable without textual evidence.

This study argues that Imam Khomeini's account can be read as presenting Adam's error at several interconnected levels rather than as a single, undifferentiated event. It then examines a proposed correspondence between these levels and the wayfarer's progressive removal of veils. The correspondence is treated as an interpretive synthesis of Imam Khomeini's

discussions, not as a ready-made sequence explicitly formulated by him in a single passage. The aim is to clarify how the narrative may illuminate both the graded structure of existence and the possibility of spiritual return.

Imam Khomeini's thought draws upon Islamic mystical traditions and emphasizes the spiritual journey as a significant dimension of his understanding of religion, society, and human life (Solano-Urrutia et al., 2023).

Accordingly, this study addresses two related questions: How does Imam Khomeini interpret Adam's error in relation to the graded manifestations of the Divine? On what textual and conceptual grounds can the stages of this error be compared with stages of unveiling and witnessing along the path of spiritual wayfaring?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive analytical approach. It examines relevant passages in Imam Khomeini's works concerning Adam's error, the Divine Names, the Garden, and spiritual ascent, and organizes them thematically around the levels of manifestation discussed in those passages. The analysis proceeds in two steps: first, it reconstructs Imam Khomeini's account of the successive orientations associated with Adam's error; second, it compares these orientations with the stages of purification and unveiling described in his writings on spiritual wayfaring. The proposed correspondence is therefore an interpretive synthesis rather than a claim that Imam Khomeini presents a single, fixed table of one-to-one equivalents. Its strength depends on the consistency of the conceptual parallels and primary text references cited for each stage.

Conceptual Framework

For Imam Khomeini, mysticism has an ethical, formative, and theoretical function: it is intended to transform the way human beings understand reality and orient their lives (Solano-Urrutia et al., 2023). Within this tradition, unveiling (kashf) and witnessing (shuhūd) describe related but not identical aspects of spiritual realization.

In Imam Khomeini's mystical vocabulary, unveiling and witnessing are not simply unusual perceptual experiences. They involve the removal of veils associated with corporeal attachment, imaginal and intellectual orders, and—in the more advanced stages—the luminous manifestations of the Divine Names. This account draws on the distinction between discursive knowledge and knowledge realized through direct spiritual experience. In this context, annihilation (fanāʾ) refers to the effacement of self-centered awareness before the Divine, rather than the literal disappearance of the human subject (Algar, 1981; Knysh, 1992).

Thus, the wayfarer's task is described as a process of purification through which primordial orientation toward God becomes less obscured by attachment. The article compares this process with the stages of Adam's error in reverse: orientations toward increasingly differentiated manifestations are relinquished as the wayfarer advances. This reversal is the study's analytical proposal and must be understood as a structural analogy, not as proof that the two sequences are identical in every detail.

Within theoretical mysticism, existence is understood not as a collection of wholly independent entities but in terms of the self-disclosure of the Real. In the Akbarian framework drawn on by Imam Khomeini, the

Most Holy Effusion (fayḍ aqdas) is associated with immutable entities (aʿyān thābita) in the domain of divine knowledge, while the Holy Effusion (fayḍ muqaddas) is associated with their manifestation in external existence (Chittick, 1998). These technical terms describe distinct moments within a particular metaphysical framework; their precise use in the article should follow the cited primary texts.

From this perspective, the arc of descent can be described as movement through increasingly determinate levels of manifestation, culminating in the natural world. Each level can be understood both as a manifestation and, from the wayfarer's perspective, as a potential veil when attention becomes attached to it. Therefore, spiritual ascent does not require denying the reality of manifestations; rather, it requires recognizing their dependence on the Real and not treating any limited manifestation as the final goal (Corbin, 1998; Knysh, 1992).

The doctrine of the two arcs provides the broad conceptual framework for this comparison. The arc of descent describes the movement from the Divine through successive levels or Presences (ḥaḍarāt) toward the natural world; the arc of ascent describes the wayfarer's return through the overcoming of attachment and the realization of dependence on God (Corbin, 1998; Hanaei Nejad & Hosseinpour, 2025). This article uses this framework to organize its reading of Imam Khomeini, while recognizing that the cosmological arc and an individual's spiritual progress are related analogically rather than being identical processes.

Adam's story is read here as an expression of the descending arc, while the wayfarer's path of unveiling and witnessing is read as an ascending movement. The proposed correspondence rests on the shared language of graded manifestation and the removal of veils. It is therefore a conceptual interpretation supported by the passages discussed below, rather than an independently established identity between every stage of cosmological descent and every stage of spiritual practice.

In Imam Khomeini's mystical interpretation, Adam's error is not simply equated with ordinary moral wrongdoings. Drawing on Shahābādī, Imam Khomeini describes it as a "natural error" associated with Adam's turning toward the multiplicity of the Divine Names after the station of annihilation in the Divine Essence. These turning initiate a sequence of determinations that culminate in the natural world, where human vicegerency and the development of spiritual capacities become possible (Atrak, 2022; Hanaei Nejad & Hosseinpour, 2025). This metaphysical reading should not be taken to erase the ethical meaning of the Quranic narrative; rather, it explains how Imam Khomeini interprets the event within his account of prophetic status and the structure of existence.

In this reading, descent is both the occasion of separation and the condition under which the human journey of return becomes possible.

Exegetes and mystics have differed over the nature of the Garden from which Adam was expelled, interpreting it as an imaginal or intellectual realm or a spiritual station, among other possibilities. Imam Khomeini's account can be read as treating the Garden in a graded way, in relation to levels of manifestation. The stages discussed in this article include the Garden of Essential annihilation, the Garden of the Names, the Garden of the Immutable

Entities, the Intellectual Garden, the Imaginal Garden, and the Natural Realm. The article interprets Adam's descent as movement across these levels; the sequence should be understood as a reconstruction from the cited passages rather than assumed to be a universally fixed taxonomy.

This graded interpretation may help explain why different accounts locate aspects of the Adamic narrative at different ontological levels. For example, the article reads the prostration of the angels and Iblīs's refusal in relation to an intellectual level, and Satan's whispering in relation to an imaginal level. These specific placements require support from the primary texts cited in the analysis and should be presented as Imam Khomeini's position only where the sources explicitly warrant such attribution (Chittick, 1998; Ridgeon, 2014).

Literature Review

Exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Ṭūsī, and al-Ṭabarsī sought to preserve Adam's prophetic integrity while accounting for the language of disobedience in the Quranic narrative. Interpretations include treating the prohibition as non-obligatory or understanding the act as a lapse from what is as more fitting (tark al-awlā). Later discussions also considered forgetfulness, Satan's deception, and the timing of the event in relation to Adam's prophetic mission (Atrak, 2022). These approaches primarily address the theological problem of infallibility, whereas this study focuses on the metaphysical structure Imam Khomeini assigns to Adam's error.

Studies of Ibn ʿArabī and the Akbarian tradition interpret Adam's story through such concepts as the Perfect Human, the self-disclosure of the Divine Names, and the relation between unity and multiplicity. In this context, Adam's descent can be understood as enabling manifestations that would not be disclosed through an undifferentiated account of unity alone. This broad interpretive context is relevant to Imam Khomeini's thought, but similarities between Imam Khomeini and the Akbarian tradition do not by themselves establish that every element of the present stage-by-stage mapping is explicitly stated by Imam Khomeini.

Other studies have examined the relationship between Imam Khomeini's anthropology and Ibn ʿArabī's doctrine of creation "in the image of God," as well as the centrality of the arcs of descent and ascent in his ontology of wilāyah (Hanaei Nejad & Hosseinpour, 2025).

Western scholarship on Imam Khomeini's mystical thought has gradually moved beyond exclusive political interpretations. Examples include the following:

- Algar (1981) was among the first to draw attention to the mystical dimension of Imam Khomeini's intellectual development.

- Knysh (1992) demonstrated the deep imprint of Ibn ʿArabī and Mullā Ṣadrā on Imam Khomeini's early metaphysical writings, particularly Miṣbāḥ al-Hidāya.

- Chittick (1998) has shown how later Sufi authors, building on this framework, understood Adam's descent not primarily as punishment but as the necessary condition for the manifestation of certain Divine Names and for the human journey of love and return.

- Corbin's (1998) pioneering studies of Islamic theosophy further illuminate the imaginal and hierarchical dimensions of such narratives, situating the Adamic drama within a broader visionary cosmology of descent and ascent.

- Ridgeon (2014) examined the tension between Imam Khomeini's theoretical

engagement with mystical union in the 1930s and his later public reticence, while also situating his poetry and wilāya doctrine within the broader Iranian mystical tradition. - More recent studies, such as those by Farhosh-van Loon (2023), have focused on Imam Khomeini's mystical poetry as a window into the integration of the Perfect Man doctrine with Shiʿi and political themes.

Despite scholarship on Imam Khomeini's mystical formation, his engagement with Ibn ʿArabī, and the doctrine of descent and ascent, the specific relationship between the graded levels of Adam's error and the stages of unveiling and witnessing has received less systematic treatment. This article addresses that question by bringing together passages that are usually discussed in relation to cosmology and spiritual practice separately. Its contribution is not to claim a wholly new doctrine on Imam Khomeini's behalf, but to offer a structured comparison and make explicit the interpretive steps through which the comparison is developed.

Imam Khomeini's Interpretations of Adam's Error

Imam Khomeini presents Adam's error as different in kind from ordinary human wrongdoing and, drawing on his teacher Ayatollah Shahābādī, describes it as a "natural error." In this account, Adam was drawn toward the unseen and the station of sanctity; yet remaining in that state of attraction would not have allowed the particular journey of perfection associated with the arc of ascent to realized. The point is not that spiritual attraction is intrinsically blameworthy, but that Adam's role in the divine economy required a movement into the differentiated realm of human existence.

Imam Khomeini's account suggests that, had Adam remained in the initial state of spiritual attraction, the conditions for the perfection associated with his Adamic mission would not have unfolded in the same way. The descent is thus interpreted in relation to the wider manifestation of divine mercy, rather than solely as punishment for a discrete moral offence.

Within this interpretation, divine will encompasses the manifestation of mercy and blessing in the created realm and the opening of the way for created beings to develop their capacities.

Imam Khomeini therefore connects Adam's departure from the Garden of encounter and annihilation (fanāʾ) with the transition to sobriety (ṣaḥw) and the manifestation of determinations and multiplicities (Imam Khomeini, 1999, pp. 46–61). The terminology is technical and should be read within the mystical framework of the cited work.

Because multiplicity is associated with the differentiated manifestations of the Divine Names, the article identifies Adam's turning toward the Names as the first level of the error. In Imam Khomeini's account, attention to the differentiated Names marks a departure from the undifferentiated station of annihilation in the Divine Essence, in which no independent "other" is attended to (Imam Khomeini, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 544–545).

In this account, the manifestation of the Names in differentiated form is associated with the emergence of Adam's inner faculties and the external Satanic power. These faculties direct Adam toward the

tree, which the article interprets as a source of the unfolding of created perfections and the opening of the divine effusions. The precise relation among the Names, the faculties, and Satan's role should be understood in accordance with the primary passage cited by the author.

1. The Difference between the Good Tree, the Evil Tree, and the Forbidden Tree

Imam Khomeini distinguishes two aspects of the Divine Names. From the perspective of unity, the Names are considered in their common orientation toward the Lord and are not separated from one another. From the perspective of multiplicity, attributes such as power, knowledge, and life are differentiated (Imam Khomeini, 1990, p. 19). This distinction is central to the article's interpretation of the good, evil, and forbidden trees.

The differentiation of Names constitutes nominal multiplicity. In the article's reading, Adam's turning toward this differentiated aspect leads to the implications of the Names and Attributes, including the "mothers of quiddities" or immutable entities (aʿyān thābita), understood as forms associated with the Names.

The argument then proceeds from the immutable entities to the multiplicity of the created order, extending across the levels of intellect, imaginal existence, and nature. This sequence is presented as the article's reconstruction of the levels implied in Imam Khomeini's account; it should not be taken to mean that these levels are interchangeable or that their relation is merely chronological.

In this interpretation, the good tree signifies the Names considered from the perspective of unity, without the isolation of any particular Name. Adam's error begins when, as a created being, he attends instead to the differentiated and limited aspect of the Names.

The evil tree signifies this limited perspective on the differentiated Names. The article calls it the "mother of evils" because, within this framework, the determinations associated with the Names lead toward the immutable entities and the quiddities manifested in the external world. This is a metaphysical use of "evil" and should not be confused without qualification with moral wrongdoing in the ordinary sense.

Adam's error is therefore interpreted as turning toward the aspect of multiplicity and otherness within the Names. In the account presented here, this orientation makes Adam susceptible to Satan, identified with "universal imagination," and directs the narrative toward the natural world.

The natural world is identified with the forbidden tree because it is the level at which quiddities appear to possess relative independence and multiplicity becomes most pronounced. This description belongs to the metaphysical framework of the article; it does not imply that the created world is evil in itself.

Within this ontology, multiplicity is attributed primarily to quiddities and secondarily to existence. The human tendency to treat differentiated forms as independent can thus become a veil that obscures their dependence on the Real and draws the wayfarer away from the station of sanctity (maqām quds).

2. The Degrees of the Forbidden Tree

When God taught Adam the Names, Adam's turning toward their multiplicity is interpreted as a descent from the Garden of annihilation to the Garden of the Names. His awareness of his essential poverty and servitude is then associated

with the Garden of the immutable entities. As Adam witnesses the realities of created beings, his inner and outer malakūtī faculties become manifest. The article identifies the external Satanic faculty with universal imagination. This development is linked to Adam's vicegerency, which entails an orientation toward governing the realm of dominion; in the sequence reconstructed here, this marks a further descent toward the intellectual Garden.

The orientation toward governance is then associated with the manifestation of multiplicity in the created order. The imaginal forms of beings mark a further level, identified in the article with the Garden of the Imaginal World (mithāl) and the malakūt. The appearance of natural corporeal forms—including Adam's descendants and the fruits of the earth—represents the final stage of the forbidden tree in this sequence.

- Nominal Multiplicity

The secret of Adam's error lies in turning toward the multiplicity of the Divine Names. This is the first level of multiplicity and is regarded as the spirit of the forbidden tree (Imam Khomeini, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 119–120).

Imam Khomeini describes nominal multiplicity as the first level of the forbidden tree (Imam Khomeini, 1991, vol. 3, pp. 119–120). In this reading, the tree is "divine" insofar as it concerns the Names, yet its differentiated aspect is incompatible with Adam's highest station. Adam attends to the sign—the Names that point to the Beloved—rather than to the Beloved without attention to the sign as a separate object. Imam Khomeini relates this turning to the Quranic statement, "*Thus Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray*" (Quran 20:121; Imam Khomeini, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 83–84).

- The Contingent Psychic Aspect of the Vicegerent and His Essential Humility

When Adam turned toward the Names, he is described as emerging from effacement in the ocean of pre-eternity and becoming aware of his contingency, createdness, servitude, humility, and essential poverty before God. He recognizes himself as wholly dependent on the Truth. In the article's interpretation, this awareness constitutes one of the stages of Adam's error because even attention to one's own servitude remains a form of self-reference when compared with complete effacement. This is distinct from Satan's self-exaltation and arrogance.

This orientation is considered an error only relative to the highest station attributed to Adam in this mystical account: exclusive attention to the Truth without turning toward the self, even under the description of humility or servitude. The claim concerns a subtle metaphysical orientation, not a denial that humility and servitude are virtues in ordinary religious practice.

With Adam's turning toward his psychic aspect, Adam's inner and external faculties became manifest, among them the "imagination of the whole", which represents the reality of Satan. Likewise, the "glorification of the whole" appeared, which represents the reality of the angels: "They said: Glory be to You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, You are the All-Knowing, the All-Wise" (Quran 2:32).

- Vicegerency and the Compelling Orientation toward Governing the Realm

Within this interpretation, the error also becomes a condition for the unfolding of divine mercy in this world and the Hereafter. The Quranic theme of vicegerency provides a framework for explaining how Adam's

descent is related to the emergence of human capacities. In the case of Adam's descendants, however, the same orientation toward the world does not automatically have the same status or consequence; the article distinguishes Adam's natural error from ordinary human wrongdoing.

- The Turning Away of Particular Intellects and Their Orientation Toward Multiplicity

When Adam turns toward the multiplicity of the natural world in connection with vicegerency, the article extends the analysis to the particular intellects of his descendants, who also engage with the world in pursuit of knowledge, perfection, and spiritual growth. This is presented as one further dimension of Adam's error in Imam Khomeini's account (Imam Khomeini, 2009, p. 33).

Therefore, this article distinguishes Adam's orientation toward the natural world for the sake of vicegerency from the corresponding orientation of his descendants. The two are related, but they should not be equated: Adam's role in the narrative is prophetic and paradigmatic, whereas the descendants' engagement with the world is evaluated in terms of their own intentions and spiritual condition.

- The Progeny

In the article's reading of the Quranic narrative, Adam's entry into the realm of determinations is also related to the task of guiding his descendants (Imam Khomeini, 1992, pp. 354, 546). This interpretation connects the metaphysical account of descent with the ethical and pedagogical functions of human vicegerency.

Adam's condition here resembles that of the ring-dove in the story of Kalīla wa Dimna: When that dove saw a flock of its kind fall into the hunter's net, it cast itself into the net in order to teach them the way of deliverance. It commanded them all to fly in the same direction in the sky so that they might escape from the hunter, and indeed the doves flew together in one direction and were able to tear apart the net (Monshi, 2004, ch. 2).

The article compares Adam's role to the ring-dove in Kalīla wa Dimna, which enters the hunter's net to show other doves how to escape (Monshi, 2004, ch. 2). The analogy illustrates the idea that engagement with the conditions of worldly existence can serve a salvific or pedagogical purpose. Imam Khomeini's account, as interpreted here, nevertheless requires a distinction between Adam's prophetic role and the ordinary person's attachment to the world. The ideal is to attend to both unity and multiplicity without treating created things as independent of God (Imam Khomeini, 1991, vol. 3, p. 544; Imam Khomeini, 1990, p. 14).

The article treats the inability to maintain a perfect balance between unity and multiplicity as one aspect of Adam's error. This claim is specific to the metaphysical interpretation advanced here and should be read alongside the cited discussion of the distinctive station of the "spiritual Adam," identified in the source with the Prophet Muhammad (Imam Khomeini, 1990, p. 14).

When the internal and external faculties of Adam, the father of humankind, became actualized, the faculties of his progeny were likewise actualized. This constitutes one of the preliminaries for the human world so that vicegerency may be realized on earth.

However, the earth must be expanded for human life, and spiritual, intellectual, and sensory pleasures must be generalized so that progeny may reach their required

perfection. Thus, the malakūtī forms of various kinds of created beings appeared.

- The Malakūtī Form of the Forbidden Tree in Its Various Types

The article argues that the forbidden tree has different manifestations in the natural world, including forms associated with knowledge, wilāyah (spiritual authority), and the fruits of the earth (Imam Khomeini, 1992, p. 70). Within this interpretation, the tree's malakūtī reality encompasses the forms of created goods and blessings. The wording should not be read as identifying all such goods with moral evil; rather, the "forbidden" character concerns the way they are approached in the narrative's metaphysical framework.

It is reported in ʿUyūn Akhbār al-Riḍā, that a narrator asked Imam Riḍā about Adam's eating from the forbidden tree: "We have received differing reports regarding it; some say it was wheat and others say something else." The Imam replied:

"*The food of Paradise contains the taste of all foods*." (Ṣadūq, 1964, vol. 1, p. 306).

- The Natural Corporeal Form of the Forbidden Tree and Its Aspects

This level concerns Adam and his descendants in different ways and according to their respective stations. In the interpretation developed here, Adam's turning toward multiplicity marks a departure from the station of essential annihilation and culminates in descent to the natural world, understood as the lowest level of manifestation. Imam Khomeini's reading of the Quranic statement "*Adam disobeyed his Lord and went astray*" (Quran 20:121) is thus situated within a metaphysical account of separation and return (Imam Khomeini, 1992, pp. 70–72).

Imam Khomeini discusses Adam's turning toward the tree of nature as one level of the error. In the article's reading, Adam's orientation toward nature is bound up with the divine command of vicegerency and the task of guiding humanity. This interpretation differs from the account of ordinary human wrongdoing: for human beings who are not infallible, attachment to the self and the world may become sources of sin. The distinction between Adam's role and the moral responsibility of his descendants is essential to the argument.

The Relationship between Unveiling, Witnessing, and Adam's Error according to Imam Khomeini

Imam Khomeini's discussions of unveiling and witnessing emphasize purification from attachments and the removal of veils associated with corporeal existence, the imaginal or malakūtī realm, and even the luminous manifestations of the Divine Names (Imam Khomeini, 1992, p. 27). The article uses this account as the basis for comparing spiritual purification with the levels of Adam's error.

Imam Khomeini also connects the levels of Adam's error—from attention to the multiplicity of the Divine Names to the final stage associated with the forbidden tree and the forms of the malakūt and nature—with corresponding stages of purification. Prayer and fasting are described as practices that help Adam's descendants move beyond the inherited condition represented by the narrative, and these practices are related to the stages of error (Imam Khomeini, 1992, pp. 70–72). The passage provides the principal textual basis for the comparison developed in this article.

This passage supports a comparison between the levels of Adam's error and the stages of unveiling and witnessing. The following section develops that comparison by aligning the stages thematically. Because the source does not necessarily present a one-to-one chart of equivalent stages, each proposed alignment should be understood as an analytical interpretation supported by the cited discussion.

1. The Object of Unveiling and Witnessing

In the cited discussion of Junūd al-ʿAql wa-l-Jahl, Imam Khomeini presents the noble primordial nature as a basis for human felicity (Imam Khomeini, 2009, p. 83). The article takes this primordial nature as the object of spiritual purification: the wayfarer's task is to remove what obscures it, rather than to acquire an entirely unrelated nature.

In this account, the primordial disposition becomes obscured to the extent that outward or inward impurities take hold. At the extreme, the human person's orientation is described as satanic; between this condition and the horizon of prophethood lie many intermediate degrees.

Imam Khomeini describes these intermediate degrees in terms of proximity either to the horizon of prophethood or to a satanic disposition (Imam Khomeini, 1992, p. 6). The article interprets spiritual wayfaring as movement toward the former horizon, while recognizing that the passage describes a graded moral and spiritual orientation rather than a simple binary division.

The wayfarer is therefore called to approach the Muhammadan horizon. The article connects this process with the notion of the Universal Intellect and with the report addressed to Jābir concerning the first creation, while the exact status and provenance of that report should be evaluated through the cited source (Majlesi, 1983, vol. 25, pp. 21–22).

"*The first thing God created was the light of your Prophet, O Jābir*" (Majlesi, 1983, vol. 25, pp. 21–22).

Within the article's framework, effacement in the Muhammadan vicegerent at the intellectual level prepares the wayfarer to move beyond the luminous veils of the Divine Names. This is a stage in the proposed sequence, not a claim that all wayfarers attain the same experiential station.

2. The Degrees of Unveiling and Witnessing

- Corporeal Purification and Conforming to the Divine Sunnah and Obeying God's Command

The article interprets Adam's story as a descent from the Garden of annihilation to the lowest level of divine manifestation, the natural world. Correspondingly, the return journey begins with acts of worship and bodily discipline, which establish the conditions for further purification. The correspondence proposed here is structural: bodily purification addresses attachments associated with the corporeal level, but does not by itself exhaust the meaning of unveiling and witnessing.

External purification corresponds, in the article's mapping, to the natural and corporeal manifestations of the forbidden tree. If the wayfarer treats ritual observance as an end in itself and does not pursue its ethical and spiritual implications, the process of wayfaring remains incomplete. This formulation should not be taken to diminish the religious significance of ritual practice; it distinguishes outward observance from the further inward transformation to which it is directed.

The article describes the deeper impurity as attachment to nature when it produces heedlessness of spiritual reality. The wayfarer is therefore called to turn toward divine mercy and to illuminate the heart through worship and remembrance. In this sense, the "ritual impurity of the heart" is metaphorical language for inward attachment and heedlessness, not a replacement for the legal category of ritual impurity.

To move beyond attachment to the natural world—including self-love and excessive love of worldly life—the wayfarer must seek inward purification through repentance and the cultivation of divine-oriented dispositions (Imam Khomeini, 1992, pp. 76–77). The argument links outward practice to inward change without treating the two as identical.

This is the first stage in the article's proposed sequence of unveiling and witnessing: obedience and avoidance of prohibitions establish a foundation of piety and certainty, while deeper spiritual realization requires the transformation of inward attachments.

- Purification from the Malakūt of the Forbidden Tree through Adornment with Virtues

At the next stage, the article describes a shift from exclusive reliance on sensory perception toward inner insight into the imaginal world. The wayfarer recognizes that moral dispositions are represented in the soul's imaginal form. This stage is mapped onto the malakūtī forms of the forbidden tree and is associated with cultivating virtues and noble moral qualities.

The wayfarer must therefore work to overcome fundamental vices that obstruct spiritual progress. The discussion gives particular emphasis to arrogance, associated with Satan's fall, and to attachments involving status, honour, self-regard, family, and offspring. These attachments are not necessarily evils in themselves; the argument concerns the possibility that they become dominant and displace orientation toward God.

The article notes that some wayfarers may stop at experiences associated with the imaginal world and mistake them for the final goal. In the proposed sequence, further progress requires that such experiences not become objects of attachment and that the wayfarer continue toward the intellectual and spiritual levels described in the cited mystical framework.

- Purification of the Heart from Attachment to Offspring

The article next considers attachment arising from concern for one's descendants and the task of guiding others. It argues that guidance can become a veil if the guide becomes attached to authority or self-importance. The wayfarer must instead act from humility and understand created relations in the light of divine mercy. The cited tradition linking the womb (raḥim) with the Divine Name al-Raḥmān is used to frame kinship as a relation that should lead back to mercy, not self-assertion.

"*I am Allah, and I am the All-Merciful. I created the womb (raḥim) and derived its name from My Name*". (Abu Dawud Sijistani, 1999: Hadith No. 1694).

Imam Khomeini holds that among the inner meanings of this tradition is the return of the womb to divine mercy. Safeguarding kinship is accomplished by returning it to its original source—the station of servanthood

before God—and coloring it with the divine hue (Imam Khomeini, 1996, pp. 102–103).

- Purification from the Turning Away of the Intellect and Its Inclination toward Multiplicity

For the wayfarer to move toward the world of the Universal Intellect, the article argues, attachment to multiplicity must be progressively relinquished. This includes recognizing that outward forms of worship point toward deeper inward realities. Imam Khomeini's discussion of worship and the teachings of the Infallible Household is cited to support this interpretation (Imam Khomeini, 1999, pp. 6–7). The claim is not that outward worship is dispensable, but that its full significance is realized through inward transformation.

At this stage, the wayfarer understands the self as dependent and as a manifestation rather than an independent source of being. The article presents the signs encountered at this level as pointing beyond themselves toward the One to whom they refer. This prepares the way for a more complete relinquishment of self-centred awareness.

- Purification from Vicegerency and the Governance of the Kingdom, and the Dissolution of the Egoic Aspect

The article describes a further stage in which the wayfarer must move beyond attachment even to the self understood as worshipper. In its technical mystical language, the removal of the veil of servanthood allows the manifestation of divine lordship to become apparent within the human realm. This should be read as a claim about spiritual realization, not as a literal collapse of the distinction between God and the human being.

At this stage, vicegerency and the governance of the realm of dominion may themselves become veils if the wayfarer identifies them with personal agency. Conversely, when the world is seen as dependent on God, it may be loved without being treated as independent of the Divine. The article interprets this as a recognition that the wayfarer's agency is derivative rather than autonomous.

The text associates the disappearance of self-centred attention—even under the description of servanthood—with the station known as the proximity of supererogatory acts (qurb al-nawāfil). The following report is cited to express this mystical idea: "*I become his hearing and his sight*." (Kulayni, 1407, vol. 2, p. 352).

In the sequence proposed by the article, purification reaches a further culmination when the wayfarer passes beyond attachment to the multiplicity of the Divine Names, which is identified as the inner reality of Adam's error (Imam Khomeini, 2009, p. 33).

- Spiritual Purification

At this stage, the article describes the wayfarer as attending to the Manifest rather than becoming attached to individual manifestations. The heavens, earth, realm of dominion, imaginal world, and intellectual and spiritual orders are understood as disclosures associated with the Divine Names. This language describes the article's mystical interpretation and should not be confused with the claim that created entities are literally identical to the Divine Essence.

The article distinguishes majestic manifestations, associated with the realization of purification, from beautiful manifestations, associated with the purposes of worship. This distinction organizes the discussion of

spiritual experience but requires careful attention to the terminology of the primary source in any final citation check.

If the wayfarer stops at the multiplicity of the Names, the article argues, attention remains directed toward manifestations rather than the unity of the Essence. Progress therefore requires moving beyond particular Names toward the all-encompassing Name and, ultimately, beyond attachment even to that encompassing manifestation (Imam Khomeini, 2016, p. 14). In this framework, transcendence does not mean that the Names are false or irrelevant; it means that no manifestation is treated as the final limit of divine reality.

This reality is indicated in the fifth verse of Sūrat Fātiḥa: "You alone we worship". The word "You alone" (Iyyāka) leads the human being to essential unity, which is the ultimate goal of spiritual wayfaring. (Imam Khomeini, 1996, p. 60). This is what the Imam Ali (peace be upon him) expressed in his saying:

"The perfection of His unity is sincerity toward Him, and the perfection of sincerity toward Him is the negation of attributes from Him" (Nahj al-Balagha, Sermon 1).

Likewise, Imam Sajjad (peace be upon him) said:

"*Attributes are lost in You, descriptions collapse before You, and the subtle intellects are bewildered before Your majesty*" (Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya, Du'a 32).

In the article's proposed sequence, the wayfarer ultimately passes beyond the stages associated with Adam's error and returns to the Garden of essential annihilation, understood as the realization of divine unity. The language of the Great Resurrection describes an inward transformation in which the wayfarer's attention is no longer confined to separate manifestations. This conclusion follows from the mystical framework presented in the cited texts and should not be read as an independently verifiable claim about a uniform experience shared by all wayfarers.

Overall, the results of this research are illustrated in the diagram below:

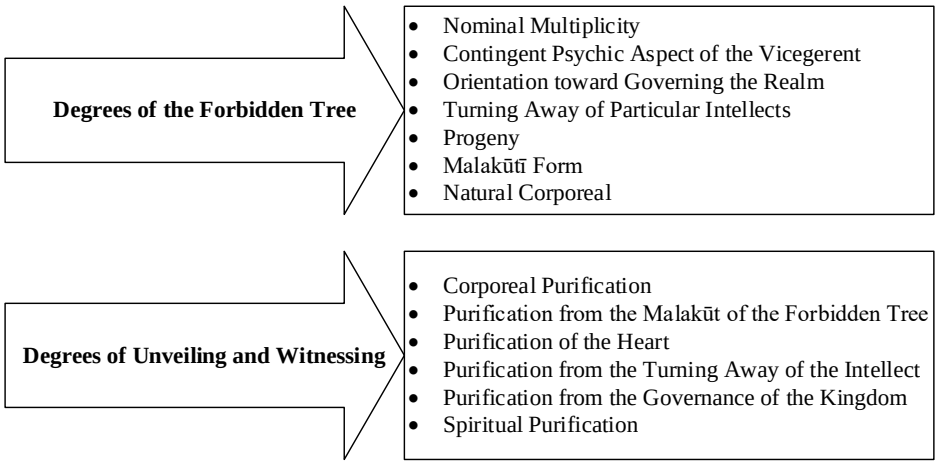


Figure 1. Research findings

Conclusion

This study has examined Imam Khomeini's interpretation of Adam's error as a graded process, beginning with attention to the multiplicity of the Divine Names and extending to the corporeal manifestations associated with the forbidden tree in the natural world.

In the sequence reconstructed here, Adam's turning toward the Names marks a movement from the Garden of essential annihilation to the Garden of the Names. His awareness of servitude and dependence is then associated with the Garden of the immutable entities, understood as forms or implications of the Names. These stages are presented as an interpretive ordering of Imam Khomeini's discussions, not as a claim that every transition is explicitly enumerated in a single source.

The article next links Adam's witnessing of the immutable entities with the manifestation of inner and outer malakūtī faculties, including the power identified with universal imagination. These developments are related to the task of divine vicegerency and governance of the realm of dominion. In the sequence proposed here, this marks a further movement toward the intellectual level; the exact placement of each Garden should be kept consistent with the primary passages and Figure 1.

The argument then associates governance in the realm of dominion with the manifestation of further multiplicity: first in imaginal or malakūtī forms, and then in natural corporeal forms, including Adam's descendants and the fruits of the earth. These are interpreted as successive manifestations of the forbidden tree, not as separate moral offences in the ordinary sense.

On this reading, descent into the natural world creates the conditions for human vicegerency and the unfolding of human capacities. The argument is metaphysical: it interprets Adam's error in relation to the

manifestation of existence and the possibility of return. It does not, by itself, establish that the Quranic narrative has no ethical or historical dimension.

The article's second main finding is a proposed correspondence between these descending levels and the wayfarer's stages of purification. The return begins with loosening attachment to corporeal existence and proceeds toward the imaginal and intellectual levels. The comparison is based on the shared structure of graded manifestation and the removal of veils.

The wayfarer must not become attached to experiences of the imaginal realm or to the authority associated with guidance and vicegerency. The relevant distinction is between fulfilling these responsibilities as forms of service and treating them as grounds for self-importance or independent agency.

As the wayfarer progresses, manifestations at lower levels are understood as signs of the Divine Names rather than independent realities. The proposed path then requires moving beyond attachment to particular manifestations and avoiding the assumption that any intermediate unveiling is the final goal.

The study's contribution is to make explicit a possible structural correspondence between Imam Khomeini's account of Adam's error and his discussions of unveiling and witnessing. Because this correspondence is an interpretive synthesis, its validity rests on the primary passages cited for each stage and on the consistency of the proposed sequence. Further work should verify the wording and page references in the editions used and ensure that the order of the Gardens is represented consistently in the text and Figure 1.

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In the present study, the first author was responsible for developing the research design, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the findings, and drafting the article. The second and third author supervised and guided the overall research process and was responsible for preparing and finalizing the revisions to the article. Overall, the conclusions drawn from the findings, as well as their elaboration and interpretation, were developed jointly.

Conflict of Interest

The authors of this article declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Negative AI Statement

The author(s) declare that no AI tools or services were not used or not highly applied during the preparation of this work.

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