



ḤALABI, MAḤMUD

ḤALABI, Shaikh MAḤMUD (b. Mašhad, 13 Rajab 1318/6 November 1900; d. Tehran, 26 Dey 1377/16 January 1998; [Figure 1](#)), a charismatic cleric and the founder of Ḥojjatiya Association (Anjoman-e Ḥojjatiya; q.v.). Shaikh Maḥmud Ḥalabi Ḳorāsāni was born in Mašhad to Ġolām-Rezā, who descended from a clerical family but made his living as a maker of tin samovars, hence his reputation as “Ḥalabi-sāz” (tinsmith). He was also a devotee of the Third Imam, Ḥosayn b. ‘Ali (q.v.) and bore the title of invocator of Ḥosayn (“Ḍāker-e Ḥosayn”). Maḥmud, the second son of the family, started his education in a traditional school (*maktab*; see EDUCATION v.). Upon completion of his preliminary education, he pursued the study of Arabic, logic, jurisprudence, and principles of juridical application (*oṣul*; q.v.) in a local seminary. His most significant mentor at this stage of his education was Adib Neyšāburi (q.v.), a notable poet and literary figure. Ḥalabi entered the highest level of seminary education (*kārej*) and simultaneously embarked on an elective course of studies in Mollā Ṣadrā’s philosophy and ethics (Goruhi az šāgerdān, pp. 19-22).

Ḥalabi’s later intellectual development was influenced by two seminal figures: First, a chance encounter with a clerical mystic, Shaikh Ḥasan-‘Ali Noḳodaki Eṣfahāni (1862-1942; Meqdādi; Ḥalabi, “Baḥṭi dar bāra-ye,” pp. 21-24) during which Ḥalabi was cured of a life-threatening illness, led him to choose the healing cleric as his mentor. In the following years, the otherwise rigorous philosopher undertook intense ascetic and mystical practices that involved prescribed cycles of seclusion and meditation (*čella-nešini*). This period coincided with an eight-year hiatus in the outskirts of Neyšābur at the height



of Reżā Shah's persecution of the clergy in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Although he later abandoned these esoteric practices, the experience left an indelible mark on his personality. Second, a series of debates with a renowned theosophist, Mirzā Mehdi Ġarawī Eşfahāni (1885-1945; Ḥalabi, *Yādi az*, pp. 21-26), during which Ḥalabi felt obliged to abandon his relentless defense of philosophy and to succumb to Mirzā Mehdi's interpretation of *kalām* theology that excoriated the Hellenistic influences on traditional Islamic philosophy and called for a separation of secular philosophy from religious thought as well as a more vigilant adherence to the Shi'ite approach to the interpretation of Islam. This encounter led to four years of instruction during which Ḥalabi transcribed and edited Mirzā Mehdi's teachings. The manuscripts of these lessons, along with Ḥalabi's other philosophical commentaries from this period (*Ḥa-wāši bar Manẓuma-ye La'āli, Šarḥ al-asmā'*, and *Šarḥ al-hedāya*) are extant in Ketāb-kāna-ye Āstān-e Qods-e Rażawī in Mašhad. Ḥalabi's lifelong devotion to this school of thought, which has come to be known as *Maktab-e tafkik* (Moḥammad-Reżā Ḥakimi, pp. 5-26) was a result of his apprenticeship at this stage of his life.

Although by the late 1940s Ḥalabi had emerged as an erudite seminarian and seemed destined for a quiet scholarly life that would ultimately lead to religious leadership, he also came to be recognized as a persuasive orator. Thus, rather than the quiet pursuit of advanced jurisprudence, he found himself steeped in a life of public involvement and instruction (author's interview with Ayatollah 'Ezz-al-Din Zanjāni, 1976). As an influential and popular orator, Ḥalabi joined Prime Minister Moḥammad Moşaddeq's struggle for the nationalization of the oil industry (1951-1952) and along with Moḥammad-Taqi Šari'ati (the father of 'Ali Šari'ati; q.v.) was nominated in the 1952 Majles election from Mašhad (*Nabard-e šarq*, 20 Esfand 1330 Š./11 March 1952). In the aftermath of this struggle, Ḥalabi endeavored to reconcile Moşaddeq with his erstwhile clerical ally Ayatollah Sayyed Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšāni. His failure in this mission and the subsequent 1953 coup d'état marked the end of Ḥalabi's political career (Gorūhi az šāgerdān, p. 51). His experience during this period may also explain his general disillusionment with, and disdain for, politics.

After the 1953 Coup d'état (q.v.), Ḥalabi moved to Tehran and dedicated himself to launching a highly disciplined, quietist lay organization known as Anjoman-e Ḥojjatiya (q.v.). The primary objective of this voluntary association was to meet the polemical challenge of the Bahai faith (q.v.) and the perceived



danger of its aggressive missionary activity in Persia. Ḥalabi characterized the mission of Ḥojjatiya as “the scientific defense of Islam” (Interview with the author, 1977).

Ḥalabi’s interest in the Bahai religion stemmed from a personal encounter during which a Bahai missionary (*moballeḡ*) converted a seminarian colleague of his, Sayyed ‘Abbās ‘Alawi, to their faith. Alarmed by this experience, Ḥalabi abandoned his classical studies and devoted himself to the study of the Bahai original texts with the intention of forging a comprehensive Islamic response. These studies yielded “Naqd-e iqān,” a sprawling critique of Bahai theology. Smaller manuscripts from this period include “Naqd bar estedlāliya-ye Mirzā Na‘im” and “Naqd bar mofāwezāt.” These works were later made available, in typed and bound volumes, to the higher echelons of his Ḥojjatiya Association. Throughout the next three decades Ḥalabi remained at the helm of this counter-reformation style messianic Shi‘i association.

The Islamic revolution of 1979 caught Ḥalabi by surprise. Initially incredulous and privately critical of the revolutionary process, Ḥalabi nevertheless arranged a meeting with Ayatollah Ruḡ-Allāh Khomeini within months of the success of the revolution, but he encountered a cold reception by the Ayatollah and a bold rebuke by his lieutenant Šādeq Kaḡkālī (p. 189). Four years later Khomeini, weary of the organizational prowess and ideological heterodoxy of the Ḥojjatiya, denounced it in thinly veiled words in a public address. Ḥalabi responded by publicly ordering all the activities of the Ḥojjatiya terminated (interview with Pahlavān).

Suffering from infirmities associated with a stroke in 1980, Ḥalabi now retired to his newly purchased house in the Za‘ferāniya district of Tehran. A group of his devotees and former students continued to frequent his house to hold debates on Islamic mysticism and philosophy (Author’s interview with Dr. Ḥosayn Tājeri and Dr. Maṣur Pahlavān, July 20, 2002). Ḥalabi died in Tehran on 26 Dey 1377 Š./16 January 1998). He is buried in the Ebn Bābuya cemetery, in southern Tehran. He is survived by four sons and two daughters.



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