

# THE GREAT LIBRARY OF AYATOLLAH MARASHI NAJAFI IN QOM

**By: Huda Korani**

You cannot but be amazed when you see this library when you know about the patience of the man who had founded it and collected its books from different parts of the world.

Late Ayatollah Marashi dedicated himself for religious studies, he conducted researches, wrote books, taught, and collected books.

His Library is believed to be the third in the Islamic world, the one thousand mile journey begins with one step – with perserverence this library was established and is still growing bigger and bigger.

In This reportage, we tour this library to examine its buildings, departments and contents, we will also recall how it was founded. However, we first take a look at its founder's biography.

Imam Marashi is a great jurist, a grand Ayatollah and an Islamic cultural Keeper, a fundamental cleric, and a great researcher, historian and genealogist.

Ayatollah Al-Ozma Sayyed Shahab al-Din al-Hussaini Marashi Najafi was born in July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1897 in Najaf (a holy city in south of Iraq) in a religious family noted for its high knowledge and deep faith. He was taught by his father – Ayatollah Sayyed Shamsol Din Mahmood al-Husseini Marashi Najafi (passed away in 1338 Hejri Ghamari) who was one of the greatest clerics at that era. He also learned Qoran – Reciting and hermeneutic principles, fundamentals

of religious jurisprudence, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, Rejal Derayah and Hadith sciences, religious jurisprudence, inference principles and theology, with the assistance of a large group of well – known masters in Hawza in Najaf, which was one of the biggest religious scientific centers in the Islamic world.

He achieved Ejtehad ahead of schedule and became the most striking amongst his colleagues in studying and teaching religious sciences. Ejtehad is the greatest certificate degree in religious institutes' studies.

Some years later after attaining Ejtehad, Imam Marashi set off to Imam Reza's Shrine (Peace be upon him) in Mashhad in 1924 as a pilgrim. After returning, he stopped by in Tehran to continue his studying and researches.

A year late he decided to go to Qom and attended lectures as a student with the help of Ayatollah al-Ozma al-Sheikh Abdul Karim al-Haery al-Yazdi, the founder of Hawza in Qom. Just a day after his arrival he began teaching. He chose staying there for a certain time teaching in Hawza where he became one of the best teachers there afterwards.

After a short time he was titled as one of the Grand Ayatollahs. He had go millions of followers in Iran and in various Islamic countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Kuwait, Ihas, Ghatif in Saudi Arabic, Emirates, Behrain, Pakistan, India, Turkey and Zanjabar in the African Continent.

He went on teaching in Haqz in Qom for more than 67 continuous years, his class-meeting in each single day was nearly 10 ones. He was unceasingly Imam of pryasers in Masomeh Shrine more than half a century as well.

Sayyed Marashi Najafi did not spare his efforts towards did not spare his efforts towards the progress of Hawza even a wink. Graduating hundreds of students, who became the most famous masters in Hawza and University, was the result of those great efforts.

We can know about his knowledge and capability through the various and capability through the various kinds of his written matters and papers. Most of them are in Arabic. They came as the follows:

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- Malhaqat al-Haqaeq.
- Al-Hasheah Ala al-Orwat al-Wothqa.
- Menhaj al-Momenin.
- Taqirrat al-Qusas.
- Tabaqat al-Nassabeen.
- Al-Hasheah ala Kefayah al-Osule.
- Al-Hasheah ala al-Rasayel.
- Al-Mashahed wal Mazarat.
- Aayan al-Marasheian.
- Al-Moawal fee Amr al-Motawal.
- Olama al-Sadat.
- Masareh al-Afkar Wa al-Haseah ala Taqirrat al-Sheikh al-Mortaza al-Ansari.
- Al-Fawaed al-Rejaliyah.
- Kashf al-Ertiyab.
- Al-Mujdi fee Hayat Saheb al-Mujdi.
- Rafe al-Ghashiyah an Wajh al-Hashiya.
- Al-Rad ala Modaei al-Tahreef.
- Taleeqah ala Omdat al-Taleb.
- Moshajjarat al-Rasool Allah al-Akram.
- Rehalt Esfahan – Shiraz – Samera – wa Azarbayjan.

The most prominent people with whom Imam Marashi Najafi met with in his noble life were:

1. The famous Indian poet and philosopher Tagor.
2. The Egyptian author of Tafseer al-Manar, Rasheed Reza.
3. The great Egyptian author of Tafseer al-Jawaher, al-Sheikh al-Tantawi al-Jawhare.
4. the Priest cardinal and the great composer Enestans al-Kermily from Baghdad.
5. The French philosopher Henry Kerbin.
6. The great historian al-Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zebarah.
7. The Yemeni Minster of al-Hamid al-Din Yahya in Sanah.

One of the most important cultural services of Imam Marashi is establishing the library that became well known all over the world. It is verily the greatest Cultural Revolution in Iran's Islamic History. Imam Marashi was titled "The Greatest Cultural Keeper" in the world's scientific centers.

After about a century of learning, teaching and spreading Islamic culture, Imam Marashi passed away because of a heart attack on Wednesday 29 August, 1990. He was 96 years old.

Subsequent to this event, the Iranian government announced 3 days of mourning. The same process had been done amongst the Muslims in Pakistan and Lebanon.

On Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of Safar, Imam Marashi's corpus was carried and followed by millions of people including the Masters and Grand Ayatollahs in Hawza, their students, high rank government and military's managers, in addition to many figures from Islamic embassies in Tehran.

A piece of land had been specified for him in al-Rauzah al-Masumiah in Qom, but he requested to be buried near his books with one sentence in his will: "Bury me in my library's entry, so that the feet of researchers of Islamic sciences step on me".

### **Library's Progress Stages:**

The first step of constructing the library was achieved when the great founder was busy studying in Najaf and its institutes. He firstly indexed the manuscript book titles in addition to the scarce published books', an act that seemed out of ordinary at that time. Sayyed Marashi was renting or selling his clothes and his private items to continue gathering books and manuscripts. He bore lots of troubles and hunger. Imam Marashi Najafi cancelled one of his meals and tried to fulfill deceased peoples prayers and fasting accordingly. The books, which he inherited from his father, had verily and important role in providing the library with books at the primary stages. Imam Marashi migrated from Iraq to Iran in 1342H.G. and transported what he had bought and inherited, and kept them in his house. He started gathering and buying more books again. Because of space shortage, he presented some 278 of his scarce manuscripts -most of them were in Persian- to Tehran University's (College of Theology) Manghool and Maghool Library in 1959 (1338 according to the Iranian calendar). He subsequently and printed books to many large libraries in the third floor of the school. That had been done after transferring a collection of some written and printed books. The

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increasing number of researchers made the library's space too narrow to be used comfortably by the visitors.

So 1000 square meters were bought and attached to "Marashyah School" on 1390H.G. That was done under Imam Marashi's supervision. In Shaban 15<sup>th</sup> 1394H.G. the public section of Ayatollah Marashi Najafi's library was inaugurated with more than 1600 manuscripts and printed books, and after a while 500m were appended to the library.

A decade later they felt space shortage once again, because of unique and numerous researches' visits. That's why Imam Khomeini made a commandment in 1989, ordering the government to widen the library's space through cooperating and collaborating with Hojatol Islam Dr. Mahmood Marashi –the president of the library- and his guidance.

Subsequent to that command, Iran's National Insurance Agency presented the old neighboring building to the library, and the library's president bought the nearby houses, so the whole library's land became more than 2.400 square meters.

After checking the sketches of the great libraries in the world, the Iranian consuls and the foreign specialists designed the final library's building map. On 20<sup>th</sup> Thi al-Hejjah 1410H.G. Imam Marashi's hands started constructing the new library's building.

A decade later the final preparations of the new library's building with the most modern equipment came to an end with seven stories and a total area of 16.000 square meters. At the time being, both the old and the new neighboring buildings' total area is approximately 21.000 square meters.

Nowadays, the library has communications with more than 400 cultural centers and libraries in the world.

The staff officials are about 160 now. By inaugurating the new library's building the staff officials will be doubled.

### **The Aims:**

Gathering Islamic sources and establishing this great center by the library's Founder aimed to give a good help to all researchers and writers. The above approaches had been done for the following scores:

1. Creating a Great International Cultural – Islamic Center, which helps develop and enhance the he giant scientific achievements of the Islamic though within 14 centuries.
2. Spreading discussion and research cultures in the society, which is of an important necessity nowadays.
3. Acquainting all researchers of having valuable manuscripts in this great center and showing them the written Islamic culture in different sciences and arts. All these were hidden in the available and accessible sources, which can be discovered by writing and publishing various indexes everywhere.
4. Collecting the valuable Islamic manuscripts and preserving them in a great center to avoid smuggling them out of Islamic countries by international smugglers.
5. Preferring to congregate all old and original manuscripts – writers' handwriting-, which are trustful, creditable and confident for researches and arguments.
6. Preparing and gathering images and microfilms of the Islamic scarce valuable manuscripts, which had been taken out of Iran and the rest of the Islamic countries in the past century or before, and have been located in other nations' libraries and museums in the world now. Of course congregating these valuable manuscripts can be of much help to the researchers and writers.
7. Delivering these great humane treasures perfectly to the subsequent generations to let them know more about their past generations' cultures and sciences. They will share in keeping knowledge by using the papers of their great ancestors and being creators of civilization like their forefathers, not only transporters.
8. Preserving the Islamic manuscript treasures from different events and mishaps, such as: (Burning, ignoring and indifference by governments, attempts to demolish them, tribal or religious crises along the time, floods and earthquakes and so forth) in addition to that mending them and taking photos, slides and microfilms to put an end to the destruction of these valuable and human writings and papers.

### **Library's units and divisions**

This library contains various units and sections, which are under the library's head's hands. Imam Marashi gave the responsibility of managing the library to his son and will executor Hojatol Islam Wal Moslimeen Dr. Mahmood Marashi Najafi, 35 years ago.

#### **A. The Library's President Office:**

This section consists of the president's private office, reception room, a special secretary's room, his assistant's room and the manager of women section (his wife). The president in delivering commands and decisions concerning the library in all its affairs. The following divisions come subsequently.

##### **1. Present's Affairs:**

There are some residential and commercial buildings in Qom, Tehran and Isfahan presented to the library some years ago by some beneficent people.

##### **2. public relations and international Affairs: which should fulfill the following duties:**

This part manages and programs the invitations and receptions' timetables for Iranian and foreign guests, preparing the library's news making communications with international cultural centers, preparing and managing conferences, exhibitions, trips, scientific matches, looking up for visitors' ideas and opinions and also conducting monthly and annual statistics.

##### **3. Ceremonies and Receptions:**

This division has the responsibility of welcoming and receiving both Iranian and foreign guests, giving the necessary information about the library's different parts and divisions, presenting special gifts to guests, and so forth. There are up to 2.0000 visitors in each season, and there are 200 high-ranking foreign visitors amongst them.

##### **4. Secretariat:**

This part is asked to carry out all internal and external correspondences duties.

### 5. Women Section:

This sector takes the responsibility of helping women researchers to access scientific sources and library's references.

### 6. Correspondence:

This part has the responsibility to send, transport or exchange books, which are chosen and granted by the president to be sent to some organizations or individuals.

### B. Public Service Division

This section has the responsibility of giving services to the public hall visitors and researchers. It consists of:

**1. Ibn Sina's Hall:** which is for public usage with 2.200 square meters area and also with 750 seats situated on benches for four or six people. The total daily hall visitors, in both morning and evening sequences, are about 2.000, the number of members, both men and women reaches to 40.000 members.

**2. Private Hall for Hawza Religious Books:** which is designed to be used by clergy men and religion students. In this hall there is no necessity to have a membership card.

**3. Khawajah Naseer al-Din al-Toosi's Hall:** which occupies 200 seats for holding national and international congresses.

**4. Sheikh Mofid's Hall:** which is a special hall for local conferences and seminars held by the library.

**5. Books' Exhibitions:** Which is designed to exhibit library's publications.

### C. Special Service & Reference Section (Research Center)

This unit has the following divisions:

**1. Manuscript Store:** Manuscripts' number on October 2001 reaches 32.000 volumes with more than 60.000 titles. 65 percent are in Arabic and the rest are in Persian, A few Turkish, Urdu, Abyssinian, Syriac and Latin volumes are available too.

In addition to the above volumes 500 – 800 other valuable manuscripts are added to the library every year, either gifted or bought.

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It seems that the oldest and dateless manuscript in the store now is a part of Holy Quran in Kufic old script from the early beginning of the second H.G. century. There are also some samples from the 3<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> H.G. centuries. But the oldest dated manuscript is two parts of Holy Quran script, which was written by the well-known calligraphist Ali ibn Helal Baghdady who is famed as ibn Bawwab, dated on 1002.

Up till now 1.200 manuscripts from the store have been indexed.

There indexes have been published in 30 volumes.

The work is going on to publish the other index volumes. There are about 60 volumes left, which will be issued subsequently.

**2. Photographic Sheet Store:** Which contains more than 4.000 volumes of valuable and priceless manuscripts in different libraries in the world.

**3. Microfilm and Microfiche Store:** Which contains about 12.200 priceless manuscripts.

**4. Written Documents Store:** This division consists of more than 100.000 written documents, which belong to five centuries before.

**5. permanent Exhibition of the Valuable Manuscripts Samples.**

**6. The Store of the Oldest Published Books:** With their publication dating, dated back to the last five centuries.

**7. The Store of Scarce Petrographs.**

**8. The Center Store For Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Urdu Printed Matters:** distributed in three floors with a three million book-capacity.

**9. Newspapers And Periodical Magazines Store:** This store contains more than 2.500 newspaper and magazine titles in Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Urdu.

**10. Open reference Book Store.**

**11. The Store of Islamic Manuscripts** Index About the World Libraries.

**12. The Store of Foreign Printed and Periodical Matters.**

**13. Archives of Forbidden Books.**

**14. The Store of Maps and Geographical Charts.**

**15. The Store of Repetitive Printed Books.**

**16. The Great Hall.**

**17. Manuscripts and Documents' Researcher Section.**

**18. Qom Researches' Section.**

**19. The Genealogy Division.**

**20. The Indexing Part of Manuscript.**

**21. The Division of Organizing and Publishing the Founder's Written matters.**

**22. The Division of Investigating Islamic Manuscripts.**

#### **D. Administrative Section**

Including the financial, staff affairs and training departments.

#### **E. Center of Public Service Affairs**

Consists of 18 different parts, such as: Computing Services, telephone, wireless Connections, electronic mail (e-mail), publishing and distributing, congress and exhibition affairs, guesthouses and restaurants, buying and exchanging books and references, photo's part, office of civil technical advisors, mirath Shahab (periodical magazine), capitals office, translation, department, managing and programming office, library's subdivisions, technical support and building security.

#### **F. Center of Researches and Services for book Broadcasting.**

#### **G. Preserving Manuscripts and documents Unit:**

**1. Book Preserving Section (book's hospital):** which has the responsibility of getting through with books pests.

**2. The Section of Mending, Manuscripts and Documents:** This part is one of the most sensitive and important sections in the library.

**3. Micrographic Center:** which means minimized films (contains 50 million book titles in different languages). Recently, this section was supplied with optical cleaner which is connected to computer and through it to the Internet.

**4. The Modern Laboratory:** which is supplied with the most novel equipment, such as: Electronic Microscope that is connected to computer and then to the Internet.

#### **H. Store With Different Vision:**

Which has a Compass, Coins, Keys and etc.

## **Publications**

**1. Mirath Shahab:** The periodical magazine: which takes interest in with manuscript and book recongnizance besides relevant matters in Persian language. This magazine is issued under the charge of the president Dr. Mahmood Marashi Najafi. Till now 24 issues have been published.

**2. 165 books have been published in more than 405 volumes.**

## **Contents of the Library**

### **What Makes the Library Distinguished (Library's characterizations):**

In scarce old Islamic manuscripts, this is the first library in Iran and the third in the Islamic world.

The library has published the book "Mothaqat al-Ehqaq" written by Ayatollah al-Ozma Marashi Najafi. The number of published volumes reached 36 till now. This book has been granted the "Book Prize" in Iran (amongst religious books section) in 1994.

### **Explanations:**

Women can attend the library a couple of days each week, Friday and Saturday but the female scholars who are passing their Postgraduate or PHD studies can come to the library and use it throughout the week.

The library's doors are opened from 7 a.m. till 9.30 p.m. unceasingly.

The members are given an annual membership card for free by the secretariat.

Library's total member visitors are about 2.000 daily.



**Library of Imam Marashi – Ayatollah Marashi Najafi**  
**st. Qom – Islamic Republic of Iran – P.O.Box: 37157.**  
**Tel: +98 (251) 7741970-78, Fax: +98 (251) 774367**  
**Internet Site: [www.marashilibrary.com](http://www.marashilibrary.com) or .net or .org.**  
**E-mail: [sm-marashi@marashilibrary.org](mailto:sm-marashi@marashilibrary.org).**