

Biography of the Author

Shaykh ‘Abbas b. Muhammad Ridha al-Qummi was born in 1877 ce in Qum, Iran. His father, Shaykh Muhammad Ridha was a merchant and renowned as a pious, religious man. His mother Zaynab was a virtuous lady who had made a pledge with herself to always be in a state of spiritual purity at the time of feeding her newborn. She practiced what she said and for two years she fed ‘Abbas while always being in a state of purity and it was because of this that later on in his life Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi was quoted as saying, “The main reason for my success was due to my mother’s blessings because that respected lady, within all possible limits, always fed me in a state of cleanliness and purity.”

Shaykh ‘Abbas progressed rapidly in acquiring religious education such that after a short period of time, he became well-known in Qum and was addressed as ‘Shaykh ‘Abbas’ and was described as a young religious person who had a vast amount of knowledge on Islam.

Apart from his sermons and lectures, he also kept busy compiling books. When he turned 21 years of age, his first major accomplishment was reached when he published his first book in the city of Qum. This was a great source of happiness for the Shaykh and his neighbours for which, he thanked Allah for this success and continued to work much harder and wrote many other books.^{[1](#)}

In Qum, he gained maximum benefit from the renown scholar, Ayatullah Mirza Muhammad Arbab al-Qummi (d. 1942) and made extensive use of his library. He also benefitted from the presence of Haj Aqa Ahmad Tabataba’i.

From his youth, Shaykh ‘Abbas had elegant handwriting and was fond of calligraphy and took time to learn the different styles of calligraphy such as the ‘Naskh’ and ‘Nastaliq’ from the art teacher, Aqa Shaykh Muhammad Husayn. He acquired skills in the art of calligraphy to such an extent that his first book, *Fawa’id al-Rajabiyah*, printed in 1897 was written in his own handwriting! In the same year, at the end of the month of Safar, he transcribed 220 pages of (the commentary of) Surah Yasin written by the well-known scholar, Mulla Sadra in the Naskh calligraphy style and at the end of the work, had the humility and humbleness to mention himself as a ‘student of the lowest grade and the lowest creature on the earth.’^{[2](#)}

After completing the preliminary studies at the Theological Seminary, Shaykh ‘Abbas realized that the knowledge which he had gained in the Hawzah of Qum would not satisfy him, and thus in 1898, he migrated to Najaf al–Ashraf (in ‘Iraq) to quench his thirst for more knowledge.

Since Shaykh ‘Abbas was very eager to know about the true narrators of the Islamic sciences, he mentions that from the time he entered Najaf, he was fascinated by the scholarly personality of Ayatullah Mirza Husayn Nuri Tabarsi (d. 1902) and began to attend his lectures. Within a short period, he gained vast amounts of knowledge from his teacher and due to his own zeal, became one of his most endeared students. Other scholars in the Hawza, such as Muhaddith al–Nuri trusted him to such an extent that he gave him the task of transcribing his book *Mustadrak al–Wasa’il*.

During this time, he gained official recognition of his studies from his teachers in the fields of the rational and traditional sciences, jurisprudence, exegesis, scholasticism and other religious disciplines.

He remained with his teacher in Najaf for four years and only returned to his hometown of Qum after the death of Muhaddith al–Nuri. In regards to the death of his teacher, he is quoted as saying, “His death was so difficult for me to bear, that I can still taste its bitterness.”³ Returning back to Qum, he remained engrossed in teaching and training students, writing and public speaking.

He then proceeded for Haj and shortly thereafter in 1904, he moved to Mashhad, Iran due to various personal and economic challenges. He continued his religious training and teaching and remained in the sacred city of Mashhad for a considerable period of time.

It was during this period that Ayatullah al–Uzma Shaykh ‘Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi (d. 1936) migrated from the city of Arak, Iran to Qum and was responsible for the revival of the Theological Seminary of Qum. Students from all over the world flocked to Qum to gain benefit from the teachers and classes being offered; and in order to strengthen and mobilize the Hawzah in Qum, Ayatullah Yazdi invited numerous scholars to settle there, and at this time requested Shaykh ‘Abbas al–Qummi to come as well. Shaykh ‘Abbas readily agreed and hastened back home to Qum and settled there.

He was passionately attached to books, and in this regard his son said, “From my early childhood, whenever I travelled with my father, I always saw him engrossed in studying from the early hours of the morning until late at night.”⁴

Once, he travelled to Syria with a group of businessmen and those with him narrate that while they would go sight–seeing, he would stay behind and remain busy in studying and writing, and whenever they invited him to accompany them, he would politely refuse. At night, while they would be fast asleep, he would be busy in his studies.

His love of books was so intense, that inspite being in financial difficulty, he would save his money to buy books and he was quoted as saying, “During my days while I was studying in Qum, I had become very indigent. I would gather each and every qiran (penny) to make some tuman (a dollar). I would then

walk from Qum to Tehran [which is approximately a 90 minute trip by car], buy the books I needed (from there) and then return back home.”[5](#)

In terms of his humility and humbleness, it is related that a man once requested Muhaddith al-Qummi to recite a majlis[6](#) and promised that he would give him fifty ‘Iraqi dinars, while at that time, the monthly expenses of Shaykh ‘Abbas were only three dinar. Hearing this, Muhaddith al-Qummi replied, “I mount the pulpit for Imam Husayn and not for anything else, therefore I cannot accept your offer.”

He led a very simple and sober life such that even an ordinary student lived a far better life than him. He had a cloak made of canvas that he ensured was kept neat, perfumed and clean. He spent many winter and summer months over the course of numerous years wearing it but never thought of changing it, and even the floor of his house was covered with a coarse carpet.

He was familiar with the Qur’an from early childhood, and when arriving at the verse,

“And I did not create the jinn and the humans but that they may worship (Me)”[7](#),

his entire body would tremble and he would be heard whispering, “How unaware and how far away we are from the Divine goal!”

He firmly believed that the performance of obligatory deeds alone was not sufficient to reach the peak of perfection, but rather performance of the supererogatory (Nawafil) and recommended (Sunnah) prayers, coupled with the remembrance of Allah, supplications and invocations will lead one to the ultimate position, and he himself was never ignorant of performing these acts. His son, Mirza ‘Ali Muhaddith Zadeh narrates, “As far as I can recall, my father never missed his night prayers (Salatul Layl) – even during journeys.”

With his lofty scholarly rank and level of piety and learning, he always showed humility and modesty, and was weary of pride and fame and desired to live a life of anonymity. He was respectful to all, but mostly he paid particular respect to the scholars who hailed from the Prophetic lineage (Sadat) and people who were in some way the propagators of the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt. When he entered a religious gathering, he would sit wherever he found a place and would not give priority to himself over others.

He has left behind a great treasure of books authored by him on various Islamic subjects. According to his son Mirza ‘Ali Muhaddith Zadeh, he wrote 63 books on prayers, ethics, history and biographies; however Muddaris Tabrizi has listed 30 books by the Shaykh in his work, Rayhanatul Adab. Ayatullah Sayyed Muhsin al-Amin lists 65 books authored by him[8](#) while at the same time, ‘Ali Dawani introduces about 85 large and small books penned by this great scholar.[9](#)

Some of these books include:

1. Mafatihul Jinan wa Baqiyatus Salihat – considered one of the best books on supplications and ziyarah;

2. Safinatul Bihar wa Madinatul Hikam wal Athar – a subject-wise compilation of the traditions found in Biharul Anwar of ‘Allamah Majlisi which took 20 years to compile;
3. Muntahal A’mal fi Tarikh al-Nabi wal Al – a comprehensive book investigating the lives of the fourteen infallibles;
4. Al-Fusulul ‘Aliyyah fil Manaqibal Murtadhawiyah – the excellences and ethics of Imam ‘Ali;
5. Kohlul Basar fi Sirate Sayyedul Bashar – a biography on the life of the Noble Prophet;
6. Nafasul Mahmum – a book focusing on the tragedy of Karbala and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn;[10](#)
7. Nafasul Masdur – a continuation of Nafasul Mahmum and published as an annexure to it;
8. Manazilul Akhirah – discussing the various stages of the hereafter;[11](#)
9. Baitul Ahzan fi Masaib Sayyidatun Niswan – the glorious life of Sayyidah Fatimah and the episode of Saqifah and Fadak.[12](#)

Ayatullah Aqa Buzurg Tehrani writes about this great personality, “I found him to be a perfect human being and a great scholar. He was an embodiment of all the laudable qualities, and possessed a praiseworthy character. He was humble and possessed utmost piety and abstinence (to the transient world). I was acquainted with him for a considerable time and my spirit gained utmost benefit from his divine spirit.”[13](#)

Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi died at the age of around 65 years on the 23rd of Dhul Hijjah 1359 ah (1940 ad) after a productive and full life in which he has left behind an enormous wealth of knowledge for humanity to benefit from.

Ayatullah al-‘Uzma Sayyid Abul Hasan Isfahani (d. 1978) recited the prayers upon his body and he was laid to rest beside his teacher, Muhaddith al-Nuri in the courtyard of the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful, Imam ‘Ali عليه السلام in Najaf al-Ashraf, Iraq.

“Allah will exalt (you in) ranks (unto Him), those who believe among you, and those who have been granted knowledge, and Allah is All-Aware of whatsoever you do.”[14](#)

[1](#) . ‘Ali Ma’sumi, Chehreha wa Qisseha

[2](#) . ‘Ali Dawani, Mafakhire Islam

[3](#) . Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi, Fawa’id al-Radhawiyah

[4](#) . At the end of the translation of Nafasul Mahmum, a book authored by Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi

[5](#) . Shaykh ‘Abbas al-Qummi, Marde Taqwa wa Fazilat

[6](#) . A religious gathering in which an orator relates the excellences of the Ahlul Bayt followed by their sufferings; also accompanied by enjoining the performance of good deeds and preventing from the evil ones, ornamenting them with evidences from the Qur’an and Prophetic traditions (ahadith).

[7](#) . Noble Qur’an, Suratul ariyat (51):56

[8.](#) . Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, A'yan al-Shi'a

[9.](#) . 'Ali Dawani, Mafakhire Islam

[10.](#) . The translator (of this current book) had the great privilege to translate this precious and informative book into the English language which has been published by Madinatul Ilm Islamic Center of Mumbai (India); and Ansariyan Publications of Qum (Iran).

[11.](#) . The translator (of this current work) also had the honour of translating this book into the English language and it has been published by Madinatul Ilm Islamic Center of Mumbai (India); and Imam 'Ali Foundation, Qum (Iran).

[12.](#) . The present book.

[13.](#) . Aqa Buzurg al-Tehrani, Tabaqat A'lam al-Shi'a

[14.](#) . Noble Qur'an, Suratul Mujadilah (58):11

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