

Chapter 1: A Glance at Al-Mirza's Biography

Ayatullah al-Mirza Abu al-Qasim al-Gilani, is the son of Akhund Mulla Hasan or Muhammad Hasan known as 'al-Mirza al-Qummi', and one of the great '*ulama*' of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) during the 13th Hijrah century. He lived during the reign of Fath 'Ali Shah, holding the post of Shi'ah leadership and religious high authority (*marji'iyah*), being of a great status during his time.

In origin, he is from "Shaft" [1](#) which belongs to Gilan, but he was born and grown up in Jabliq.[2](#) The title alQummi is ascribed to him due to spending a long period of his life in the holy town of Qum. His great honour, broad knowledge, and all-inclusive researches and treatises were so influential, and played a great role in making him among the eminent '*ulama*', so he was called al-Fadil al-Qummi, and al-Muhaqqiq al-Qummi, or Sahib al Qawanin (Owner of laws), after authoring his precious book *Qawanin al- 'usul*.

His Father

His father is Akhund Mulla Hasan, from the people of Gilan, who departed it during his youth toward Isfahan in the first half of the 12th Hijrah century, which was at that time a big centre for Islamic sciences. There he acquired knowledge under two of its '*ulama*': al-Mirza Hidayat Allah and his brother al-Mirza Habib Allah. After a short time, the two tutors prepared to travel to Jabliq for undertaking adjudication and administration affairs in that region.

So, no choice was left for the young knowledge-seeker, but to accompany them to that region, hoping for quenching his thirst for knowledge, being pleased with their lofty conduct. So, he has departed Isfahan and emigrated to that distant region, where he persevered on acquiring from their abundant knowledge. Then it was destined for him to get married to the daughter of his tutor, al-Mirza Hidayat Allah, who was a venerable lady known of piety and chastity.

His Birth

Shortly, the product of that blessed marriage, was a sweet and pure fruit, being a candle that illumined the hearts of the two young spouses, with love and hope, in the year 1151³ of the Prophetic migration (Hijrah). Then the Little child, who held the name Abu al-Qasim, has proceeded and was reared up on warm laps, full of piety, faith (*iman*), chastity and love.

Under an extreme patronage of his father, the boy began to learn the first lessons in shaping his future character, that was lately formed, whose foundation was faith, piety and knowledge.

Hence, his character was formed on two solid pivots, which are: inheritance and education, which enabled him to undertake heavy responsibilities in future, which began to spring forth gradually.

The Beginning

Allah has bestowed upon Abu al-Qasim numerous abilities and talents, reflected through his striving to attain the aspired perfection, and his bright forehead used to augur of a blooming future before him.

He has excelled his companions by his smartness, acumen, understanding and perception. And from the very first days of his age, he used to show keen interest for seeking knowledge, and striving for reaching the perfection. So, he started to get principles of science from his father, who never spared any effort to teach him various branches of knowledge, starting with preliminaries and Arabic literature. On attaining puberty, he asked his father's permission to travel to Khunsar,⁴ to learn *usul* (principles), under its outstanding '*alim* – al Sayyid Husayn al Khunsari.⁵

His Marriage

Al-Mirza Abu al-Qasim's acute wit, genius, full acquaintance of '*ilmi* issues, and sublime personality auguring well of a bloomy future, have impressed his tutor's heart, to the extent that he (tutor) brought him nearer, giving him special position. Then he gave him in marriage his sister, the woman of chastity, purity and virtue, the scion of the honorable 'Alawi household, whose marriage was regarded as a pattern. Because Islam gives great importance to moral aspect in selecting the spouse, as the criterion being piety and faith, not wealth or prettiness.

Based on this, whoever looks at marriage as a project, subject to void considerations, like dignity, opulence, and superficial charm, is greatly mistaken, as all of these are but speedily vanishing things. Whereas nobility, profound faith, piety (*taqwa*), chastity and purity are stable pillars never wavering with time changes.

Thus, the ethical characteristics enjoyed by Abu al Qasim have prompted al-Sayyid al-Khunsari to offer him marrying his sister, in an episode similar to that of the marriage of our master Moses (A) with

Shu'ayb's daughter. Shu'ayb came to recognize the lofty merits that distinguished Moses from others, on meeting him, so he offered him to marry his daughter saying to him – as stated in the Holy Qur'an:

“He said: Lo! I fain would marry thee to one of these two daughters of mine...”(28:27).[6](#)

Migration to Iraq

After passage of many years, Abu al-Qasim realized that Khunsar could no more quench his thirst for knowledge, or satisfy his eagerness for more learning. Therefore, he made up his mind to migrate to Iraq, after bidding his tutor al-Sayyid Husayn al-Khunsari farewell, betaking himself then to Karbala', the metropolis of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (A).

There (at Karbala') he joined the disciples of the great Ustadh al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Behbahani, who was then a torch of knowledge and learning, and an abundant fountainhead outpouring *fiqh*, culture and light. Then he managed to get school certificate in *ijtihad* and narration, from him.[7](#)

Through some of his poetic verses, al-Mirza mentions the year 1174 (H) in which he migrated to Iraq, as was a usual custom among some poets and literary personages, concerned with chronogram by counting the sentences, according to the numbers opposite to the alphabet.

During his stay in migration house, he learnt under its teachers and scholarly dignitaries, such as al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Mazandarani, al-Shaykh Muhammad Mahdi al-Futuni, beside his teacher al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Behbahani, who have all granted him permission to narrate

Return to Homeland

After spending long years in learning and investigation, al-Mirza al-Qummi felt quenched of knowledge, realizing then the necessity to shoulder a great responsibility, that he had to return to his homeland as ordained by the holy verse:

“Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth, that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that they may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware” (9: 122)

Thus al-Mirza started his return trip to his birth place Jabliq, residing then in one of its villages called “*Durrah Bagh*” where he lived with his parents. Then he, in response to the insistence of one of his disciples (al-Hajj Muhammad Sultan, who was a wealthy, benevolent and religious man) shifted to another adjacent village called “*Qal'ah Babu*”, where he settled down and started his activities of preaching, guiding and teaching. This village was at that time, drowned in a darkness of ignorance (*jahl*), as his class was only attended by two disciples: al Mirza Hidayat Allah, and the aforementioned disciple alHajj Muhammad Sultan, beside another one whose name was 'Ali Dust Khan, the son of al-Hajj Tahir Khan. He was teaching them *nahw* (grammar) and *mantiq* (logic).

Al-Mirza faced bitter experiences at the hands of this village inhabitants, due to their unawareness of his status and sublime position. So, they embarked on vexing and annoying him, preferring to him one of day-school ignorant teachers, or rather they could never distinguish between him and Mulla Shah Murad, who was much lower in rank than Sabz 'Ali.

The Village-Mulla's Intrigue

The village Mulla has never missed any chance to conspire against al-Mirza al-Qummi, gazing him with envying eyes, laying for an opportune time to launching an onslaught against him, benefiting from the utter ignorance prevailing over the whole village. The opportunity presented itself, when the villagers gathered at an occasion, so he exploited this chance, claiming before all people that al-Mirza being only an ignorant man, having no bit knowledge of anything, and rather he was illiterate unable to write.

For proving his claim before all, he asked al Mirza to write "snake" for him. The great *mujtahid* never disdained from this silly demand, so he took the pen and nicely wrote the word "snake". Thereat, the Mulla prepared to direct his blow, so he took the paper and embarked on showing it to the people in a mocking way. Then he drew a sketch like a snake with its triangle head and twisted tail, exposing it then to the villagers, who judged that what was written by al-Mirza had nothing to do with the snake, while what was sketched by their Mulla was the truth!

This caused al-Mirza to have bitter feeling, due to living amongst ignorant people, that are deceived easily by the foolish tricks of Sabz 'Ali and Shah Murad. So, he resorted to implore the Almighty Allah to deliver him of this town of which the people are oppressors.

Travel to Isfahan and Shiraz

The earth, vast as it is, was straitened for al-Mirza, besides his being unable to tolerate staying there, and feeling suffocated in that atmosphere of ignorance and plots, so he made up his mind to travel to Isfahan.

Then he settled down in "*Kasah Giran*" School, engaged in the profession of teaching. Soon many disciples and knowledge-seekers gathered around him, to get from his abundant knowledge. But this could not last long, due to presence of many jealous people who envied him, and soon many rumours were gossiped here and there, with the aim of poisoning the atmosphere and degrading the status and sublimity of his position.

Then he thought that it was for his convenience to depart this region toward Shiraz, during the reign of Karim Khan Zand. He lived there for about three years, suffering very straitened circumstances, with severe Poverty and destitution; whereat the late al Shaykh Abd al-Nabi sent him a sum of money. Then al Mirza returned to Isfahan to purchase a collection of books to the fields of *fiqh*, linguistics and *hadith*, which were badly needed by him, after which he decided to go back to Jabliq again.

Migration to Qum

Al-Mirza could not settle down in Jabliq, or in “Qal’ah Babu” in particular, the village that was plunged in darkness of ignorance (*jahl*), being displeased to live there, due to the absence of knowledge-seekers, or anyone concerned with (Islamic) rulings (*ahkam*). So, he felt of distress, that led him to migrate this time to the holy town of Qum, where lies the shrine of the pure ‘Alawi “Fatimah” the daughter of al-‘Imam Musa ibn Ja’far, the Seventh Imam of Ahl al-Bayt(A). He sought refuge at the sacred shrine, solemnly reiterating Allah’s verses:

“Lo! He who wardeth off (evil) and endureth (findeth favour); for lo! Allah loseth not the wages of the kindly.” (12:90)

“But lo! With hardship goeth ease. Lo! With hardship goeth ease.” (94:5- 6)

Then the doors of heaven began to open for him, and God has showered abundantly over him out of His plentiful sustenance, and at the same time people would recognize his worth, with his status being sublimated among them. His arrival coincided with the conflict going on between Muhammad Khan al-Qajar and Lutf ‘Ali Khan Zand, which ended with the defeat of the latter, followed by decline of the Zandi Dynasty forever.

This holy town witnessed shining of a new star in the world of Shi’i *marji’iyyah* (religious authority), and alMirza al-Qummi’s attaining worldwide fame. There at the great *marji’* embarked on compilation, classification, teaching, issuing *fatwas* (verdicts) and preaching, beside undertaking the leadership of Muslim worshippers (imamah) at the town mosque.

During the visit of Fath ‘Ali Shah who has recently assumed the kingdom throne to Qum, he got acquainted with al-Qummi, appreciating his status and knowledge, with praying behind him. After performing the noon and afternoon prayers, the King⁸ advanced forward for presenting his affection and appreciation to al Mirza al-Qummi, making him then to ride his mount, while the King walked along with his procession till reaching his house.

This step taken by the Qajari King did impress the souls, having much influence over hearts, rendering al Mirza a worldwide fame.

Though Qum (the small town) was not so important at that time, but al-Qummi’s eminence prompted a large number of men of honour and knowledge, to make pilgrimage to it for acquiring from the *‘ilm* of the grand *marji’*. Knowledge-seekers also rushed toward him like butterflies flying around the candles, longing for the abundance of knowledge whose fountains have gushed out at Qum.

Ever since, the town star glared at the sky of Islamic sciences, turning to be a centre of radiance that began to dazzle the eyes. Within a short time, Qum proved to be the metropolis of knowledge, whereas Isfahan, which used to hoist that banner, started to decline gradually. Then Qum became the *Ka’bah* for

knowledge-seekers who used to visit it from all directions and quarters. So, al-Mirza alQummi can be considered the real founder of the Theological School (*al-Hawzah al- 'Ilmiyyah*) at Qum, which kept, through his concerted and relentless efforts, on occupying the priority position till the contemporary time.

Turning Toward Iraq

Most of al-Mirza's life was spent at the sacred town of Qum, during which he made several journeys and trips to different places. They included his travel to visit the sanctuaries at the land of Iraq, before his compiling the book *Qawanin al- 'usul*, which he completed in 1205 (H), containing his own opinions and theories on *'ilm al- 'usul*. He betook himself first to pay homage to the holy shrine of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him).

The 'ulama' of Najaf availed themselves of that visit, offering him to hold a debate regarding his opinions, nominating for this task al-Sayyid Husayn al-Husayni al 'Amili, who was the most eminent scholar in *'ilm al- 'usul*. The debate took a long time, and numerous suspicions regarding al-Mirza's theory were introduced there, for which it was infeasible for him to give answers thereat, so he promised the questioners to give replies afterwards.

All those suspicions and questions were cited by al Mirza in his book *Qawanin al- 'usul*, in his discussions about *ijtihad* and *taqlid* [9](#) (imitation).

Pilgrimage to the Old House

It was one of his trips he made from Qum, betaking himself toward Makkah, with a keen desire for making pilgrimage to Allah's sanctified House, after long waiting.

This, since he could not find opportune time before, due to his shouldering great responsibilities, like the leadership of *al-Hawzah al- 'Ilmiyyah* and undertaking the administration of Muslims' affairs. So, in the year 1212 (H), he betook himself toward the hearts fascinator: Allah's Sanctuary. After performing the *haji* rituals, he made his way toward al-Madinah to visit the tomb of the holy Messenger and the graves of Ahl al-Bayt (A) at al Baqi'.

During his stay there, he met al-Sayyid Bahr al- 'Ulum, with whom he held significant discussions. It is noteworthy to point out that al-Mirza al-Qummi, during his residence at Najaf, has granted one of its scholars – al Shaykh Asad Allah al-Tustari– a school –certificate (*ijazah*) in narration, with a signature dated “Monday 17th of Rajab, in 1212 (H)”.

His Trip to Kazzaz

His Trip to Kazzaz: [10](#)

He travelled to this region from Qum too, where he got married to the sister of al-Hajj al-Mulla Muhammad al Kazzazi; who joined afterwards the disciples of al-Mirza al-Qummi.

His Trips to Khunsar

Al-Mirza has made several visits to Khunsar, due to the fact reported by the author of *Rawdat al-jannat*, being that two Sayyids from Khunsar, who were al-Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi al-Khunsari and his nephew al-Sayyid 'Ali al Khunsari, the grandsons of al-Sayyid Husayn al-Khunsari – the tutor of al-Mirza, as mentioned before have become among the disciples of al-Mirza. So, as a gratitude for his great tutor, he showered special care upon them, being too kind to them, preferring them over his own sons, loving them to the extent that he made several visits to Khunsar.

1. It is at the south-eastern part of the town of Foman.
2. It is a region at Loristan Province.
3. Some narration state that he was born in 1153 or 1150 H.
4. It is a town situated between Isfahan and Golbaygan and known with its moderate weather.
5. He passed away in 1191 (H), and regarded among the 'ulama' of the 12th Hijrah century, leaving numerous works.
6. It is reported that the late al-Mulla Muhammad Taqi al Majlisi has offered al-Mulla Salih al-Mazandarani to marry his daughter, due to the knowledge, piety and uprightness he enjoyed, despite the latter's severe destitution.
7. Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Behbahani, known with the title al- 'Ustadh al-Wahid. He is one of the great Shi'ah fuqaha' and Imamiyyah prides. He was born in 1118 (H) at Isfahan, and dead in 1205 (H), and his tomb lies now in one of the porticoes of al- 'Imam al-Husayn's (A) shrine.
8. This step taken by the king may be interpreted as an attempt to show toadyism toward people, who used to hold the 'ulama' in high status.
9. Some are of the opinion that it is al-Mirza who has introduced to the Najaf 'ulama' the notion of that debate.
10. It is a district related to Arak Province, famous with growing cereals, beet and grape.

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