

Chapter 3

Mashhadi Rajab returned from his field, holding his shovel that seemed as his rival in height. As he was cutting the miry land, he addressed his neighbour Ghulam Husayn:

“Mustafa Khan’s canal will be digged toward our land tonight, it is inevitable to return at night for inspecting the water.”

“I don’t think so, they will dig it on the lower lands.”

“Look at that multitude of people... I think someone is dead?”

“Hold your tongue, man... why do you croak like a crow. He is Imam Quli. He drew nigh and said: “What are you doing here? Are you from another world?” “What happened?”

“Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-’Isfahani, the cousin of the late Muhammad Ridha, is arriving today.”

“Is he coming from Isfahan?” “No, from Najaf.”

“Najaf!”

“Yes, I was informed so by Mirza Tahir. Both Karbala’i Taqi and al-Hajj ‘Ali Jum’ah have gone for his reception, they may enter our village at any moment.”

Looking far-away, he added: “Look, Qurban ‘Ali has arrived. Send blessing upon the Prophet.”

“You said that al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-’Isfahani is to arrive, then you say: Qurban ‘Ali has arrived! Send blessings upon the Prophet!”

“Don’t you know that Qurban ‘Ali was in Najaf to accompany al-Sayyid while coming here? O Mirza Kazim, chant for us, please.”

Then Mirza Kazim started chanting and hymning with the blessings upon the Prophet and his Household. The space of the expansive fields was filled then with sweet heavenly melodies, adding to

the splendidness of the village nice sunset.

A Night at the Mosque

Karbala'i Yahya said:

"O our master! Our village is divided into two parts separated by a line; the first part is called "Qanawat," and the second is "Behbahan"."

"You mean, there is a line separating them?"

Karbala'i Yahya, who was a short thin man, playing with his imbued beard, said: "No, Sir, there is a long alley separating them, that was named as line."

Mirza Tahir interferred interruptingly: "The late Mulla Muhammad Ridha has done his best to reconcile between the two parties, but was not respited by death (may Allah's mercy be upon him). On one of Ramadhan's evenings we sat till midnight, but... without reaching any conclusion, the Behbahan magnates stood up and departed the mosque."

Mashhadi Murad, while fixing his hood, said: "O Sir, the dispute is in origin about Mustafa Khan Canal... water is the basis of the trouble. If this problem was solved, no conflict would be there and concord would prevail."

Thereat Karbala'i regrettably said: "There is no sense in this dispute at all. We all belong to the same village, we are all Muslims and we and them are neighbours too. If the Sayyid permits us to invite both the parties to be present at Khayrabad School for a lunch banquet, and then we can decide what to do."

Muhammad Baqir, listening with regret, said:

"Allah – the Exalted – said: ***'And hold fast, all of you together to the cable of Allah, and do not separate.'*** (3: 103). And in another place of His Holy Book, He said: ***'The believers are naught else than brothers.'*** (49: 10).

Aren't these Allah's words? Hasn't Allah commanded us toward fraternity and evading dispute? I hope that harmony be prevailing and felicity be established, so that the Owner of Time (Sahib al-Zaman) be pleased with us, and Allah blesses us."

Imam Quli, addressing al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir, said: "Some say that we should refer directly to the Imams' traditions (ahadith), applying all their precepts with no need to refer to a marji' taqlid (religious authority). That is, we have to imitate the Imams themselves with no need for any other person."

Muhammad Baqir was aware of the fact that the schools of the Akhbaris had its influence through these regions, so he said calmly:

“They are mistaken, how can we be sure of the veracity of these news, and that this was truly said by the Imams. As there are ahadith falsely ascribed to them, whose chain of transmission is weak, and some are contradictory to the Qur'an.

Who can differentiate between the scum from the good? Then there should be someone to undertake the task of investigating the narrations to recognize the weak and the authentic ones.

“This is the truth.”

Al-Hajj Qurban ‘Ali vainly said: “I remember I have said to one of them: If it be as you say, so it is not necessary to spend twenty or thirty years in learning and investigation at Najaf. As whoever is able to read and write can attain the position of giving fatwa (verdict), after reading some books containing the Imams’ traditions and biographies!

... May Allah's mercy be upon Mulla Muhammad Ridha; his words were exactly like yours!”

Behbahan

Al-Hajj Ghulam Ridha, who sat beside the Sayyid, whispered: “Our master! According to your orders, I have invited all the men of Qanawat for having lunch.”

“I seek God's forgiveness.”

“I hope that all events be kept to their course, and concord prevails again... your coming is a blessing and grace for Behbahan.”

Al-Hajj, addressing the banquet organizers, added: “O Mashad¹ Mustafa! Don't leave the dish of broth in this corner. And you, O Husayn, tell them that yogurt is little, and don't forget to bring Karbala'i the dish of butter.

After all the guests had had their lunch, Imam Quli rose, saying: “Our master, let's go.”

Addressing al-Hajj Ghulam Ridha, he added: “May Allah bless you, and shower mercy upon you. We seek your permission to go.”

“Why are you in a hurry? Behbahan people wish the Sayyid stay among them, leading them in prayers, and guide them. O Karbala'i, you can stay too.

“Thank you, O Hajj, I have to go. But in regard of al-Sayyid, he can stay if he wishes.”

Thus all the guests have left al-Hajj Ghulam Ridha's house, except al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir who stayed in Behbahan.

We Seek Allah's Protection...

What a Time Is It!

Khayrabad School seemed deserted as usual every Friday, with no one being there except Mashhadi Karam – the old school servant – who sat seeking warm under sun's ray of Adhar.[2](#)

Mirza Talib – a youth learning under al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir – entered (the school) and saluted the old man.

The old man raised his head, gazing the young knowledge- seeker before replying: "And peace be upon you."

"What happened?"

"They are still engaged in discussion, which has not ended since early morning till now. If you like to listen to their discussion, you can enter ... Murad 'Ali is there too."

Mirza Talib hesitated a bit before deciding to enter. Then he quietly opened the door, greeting his friends with low voice, and sat down listening to the conversation.

"We have reached the conclusion that non-other than the Book of Allah and the narrations reported from the Infallible Imams, can be a source for legislation. Even reason ('aql) cannot be a reliable source.

Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir was nodding his head while listening, then he raised his head saying: "Even if the case be explicit needing no proof, with no opinion related about it by the Prophet or the Imams. Or when adopting it being a common practice entailing that it has got concurrence of the Infallible Imams, what will be the ruling concerning this issue?"

"It will be rejected if not being supported by an authentic narration."

"Do you agree with what the linguists reiterate?"

"Certainly."

"Is there any narration commanding you to do so?"

"No."

"Do you follow the recommendations and prescriptions of the doctor?"

"Yes."

"Which narration is there that obligates following the doctors' prescriptions? Certainly nothing of this sort can be there. This fact is not confined to the doctor, but it includes the architect, engineer, merchant and all other specialists.

Nevertheless we see people adopt their opinions, why? Because reason determines this, despite the absence of any tradition or Qur'anic verse in this respect.

A murmur prevailed among the Akhbaris present there. One of them commented by saying: "This man is a sophist he mixes between fiqh and construction."

Another one shouted: "He intends to extinguish the truth light by his debate."

A middle-aged man, wearing a black clock, stood up, saying: "Let's go, O friends! This man is giving reason an unparalleled status. I heard Mulla Husayn Quli say: When reason dictates that what contradicts the dictation of shar' (Islamic law), the dictate of reason will be prior to the dictate of shar' – we seek Allah's refuge. What a time is it!?"

Thus the Akhbaris left the place, after which Mashhadi Murad entered holding sweet drink cups.

Mirza Talib asked: "O master, what were they saying?"

"I'll explain the matter for you later on, O son."

The 1st of Shawwal

As al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir was at the mosque, he

addressed Imam Quli thus:

"O Karbala'i! Tell people that today is the 1st of Shawwal, and we are going to establish feast prayer (Salat al-'Id)."

"But, our master, you informed us yesterday, that people should have daybreak meal and fast."

"Trustworthy men have testified the sighting of crescent (hilal) of the 'Id."

Karbala'i Imam Quli has ordered a number of youth to let people know about this. After a while, some people came carrying some dates and milk from the house of al-Hajj Ghulam Ridha al-Behbahani, for distributing them among the villagers who came to perform salat al-'id.

When the ceremonies of salat ended, one of the Akhbaris asked al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir: "For which reason you have broken your fasting?"

"I became sure after ten trustworthy men gave witness." "Bring me a narration proving this, and your certainty is confined to a specific respect."

"It is really a regrettable matter, O brother! Though the narrations certify the confirmation of seeing the crescent with the testimony of two trustworthy men, you wonder about the tradition proving this!"

His speech was interrupted by al-Hajj Sharaf, addressing al-Sayyid: “I hope you accept my invitation to have lunch together. Do not forget to bring your family too.”

The Doctor Is Not a Lord

“Peace be upon you, how are your Mirza Tahir? I was told that you are sick, so I came to visit you.”

With a shivering voice, Mirza Tahir replied: “Praise belongs to Allah, our master. Days pass so fast, and no one of those accompanied you in your trip from Najaf, has survived except me. Years have elapsed like days ... thirty years have gone. Imam Quli died three years ago, al-Hajj Qurban ‘Ali died in the last year, and it seems as it is my turn this time.

“O Mirza, what is that you utter? ... You will be well, God-willing.”

“O Sayyid, I got tired. I have been bedridden for ten days, I cannot even move my hands. I have become a burden for the family.”

“What does the physician say?”

“The physician is not a lord, the only thing he has is the “Taranjabin”. Please invoke Allah to take away His trust, I am fed up with life. (His words were mixed with sobbing).”

“Allah is merciful O Mirza ... He is more merciful than the parents. Recovery is at His hand – the Glorified.”

Then al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir departed him, mumbling with supplication and prayers.

After elapse of several days, Mashhadi Muhsin came to inform the Sayyid about the passing away of Mirza Tahir, whereat the Sayyid rushed to his house for consoling his family.

I Wish I Had Gone

“O ‘Abd al-Husayn, see who is knocking at the door,” said Sayyid Muhammad Baqir, calling his son.

‘Abd al-Husayn rushed to open the door, then he said: “Father! It is a man asking about you.”

The Sayyid stood up and went toward the door, saying: “Ma sha’ Allah ... You and Behbahan?! You may have missed the way, please (come in).”

Sayyid Muhsin entered saying: O Allah O Allah.” “Well O Sayyid! How are you?”

“You may forget your friends so soon, but I never forget.”

“O Sayyid, I am engaged in some occupations. But tell me, O Sayyid Muhsin, why have you turned to be

so old. Hoariness has invaded you and”

Sayyid Muhsin interrupted him with a smile: “But you haven’t remained as young as you used to be when being a knowledge-seeker learning wisdom (hikmah) under al- Sayyid Muhammad.

“Yes, this is the nature of life, all have to go on a travel, ending with death.

“Yes, we are all on a travel. I have also thought with myself that when I will be asked about what I have done, what shall be my answer? When saying I was seeking knowledge, I shall be asked: What have you done with your knowledge? There at I will stand perplexed, so I have made up my mind to return to my town hoping for rendering a service that can be of benefit for me on the Reckoning Day.

“What an excellent opinion is it ... people are in need of men like you. When I was at Isfahan, I heard too much about you, people speaking of you constantly. I was told that some people at “Chahar Bagh³” School were saying that Sayyid Muhammad Baqir did a great job in guiding the Akhbaris to the right path.

“I seek Allah’s forgiveness ... Muhammad Baqir is not in a position proper to guide people, Allah is the only One Who guides. He guides whoever He wishes, we are no more than mere means.

“Well, how could you manage to persuade them?

“They are truly good and simple people at the same time.

They are so fanatic for the Shari’ah (Islamic Law), the fact that caused them to slip, but when faced with a decisive argument they be convinced. They are of the opinion that it is not obligatory to imitate a mujtahid, and that imitation is confined only to the (Infallible) Imam, which is not possible; as deducing from reports can be done only by an expert man.

In the meantime, Muhammad ‘Ali, the elder son of al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir, entered holding cups of sweet drink and sweets (saying): “Peace be upon you.”

“And upon you, Thanks to God, you have become elder.

A short period of silence prevailed, that was interrupted by Sayyid Muhammad Baqir’s saying: “What news you have about Najaf?

“Everything is all right...but if you inquire about Karbala’, I tell you it has turned to be a den for the Akhbaris, who believe in unlawfulness of learning usul al-fiqh.

“How amazing! I heard about this, but not to that extent.

“It is better, O Sayyid, that you send to Karbala’ some copies of your book al-’Ijtihad wa al-’akhbar. They may be of benefit there.”

“The book may be useful, but what is more important is struggling and combating at the battlefield. I wish I could go.”

Thereat the call for noon prayer was raised, and Muhammad, Baqir stood up, saying: “I’ll go to the mosque ... you can stay and rest.” “Make yourself home, I will be back soon.”

“I am going too, let’s go together.”

Then they both set out to the mosque.

The Wonderful Judgement!

“Praise belongs to Allah... Allah has showered upon you of His bounties.”

“You haven’t eaten well, O Sayyid! The food might be untasty.”

“On the contrary, it was so good food, may the cook’s hands be healthy.”

Muhammad ‘Ali whispered at his father’s ears, while collecting the dishes.

“During your going to the mosque, Khayr Allah’s wife came asking your attendance to marry her daughter to ‘Abbas Quli Mirab.”

“Have you noticed O Sayyid? People here badly need you; this ‘Abbas Quli was married to his niece.”

“It is impossible!!”

“When ignorance prevails among people, they do whatever they like. But I have given orders to their urgent separation (divorce)”. “Did they respond?” “Yes, praise be Allah’s.”

“Praise be Allah’s...and if they were of the opinion that imitating the mujahid being unnecessary, they would have stuck to their foolish practices, everyone playing his drum.” “Have you heard that one of the judges has ordered to bury a man returning from travel, after some people testified to the judge, during the man’s absence, that he was dead? So the judge ordered to bury him as soon as he came back!”

“Have they buried him alive?! ”

“Yes ... the judge has ordered to bury him, considering him dead according to the testimonies of the witnesses, and Shar’ (Islamic Law) obligates the burial of the dead; so his burying is obligatory! Look, what have reports (akhbar) done to them!”

“For every field of knowledge there are its specialized men, and not whoever holds the plow becomes a farmer!”

“Even plowing and farming need one having expertise in these fields, being aware of their principles and

ramifications (furu').

"I have to go back to Isfahan."

"What? Have you grown tired of us so soon?"

"I seek Allah's forgiveness."

"Spend your night here then... to travel in the morning is much better."

I Said Nothing

"What is the matter our master! Please stay with us."

Khwajah 'Aziz Kalantar⁴ was vainly insisting on al-Sayyid (to stay), but the latter never paid attention to him, and set out returning home.

Mashhadi Sha'ban Hamami said: The Sayyid may feel unwell, as he is not supposed to leave people without leading them in afternoon prayers (salat al-'asr).

Mirza⁵ Yahya al-'Attar rushed toward Khwajah 'Aziz: "Let him go, he may be sick ... why do you insist on him so much?"

Khwajah 'Aziz, a bit disturbed, said" "What do you say?"

Ghulam Ridha worriedly said: "You may have told him something that angered him."

"I said nothing (of that sort)."

"No, I saw you whispering at his ear."

"Nothing, I have just told him: Look what are the consequences of my orders? How have they led to mobilizing worshippers behind you?

Al-Hajj Ghulam Ridha exclaimed: "O Mulla Murad, go forward to lead afternoon prayer...people are awaiting".

Then he added, mumbling: "Khwajah 'Aziz has angered al-Sayyid by his words. Al- Sayyid is not like the others, who are pleased by multiplicity of people."

Then the call for prayer was raised by Mashhadi Sha'ban. In the evening (asil), Khwajah 'Aziz Kalantar set out, accompanied by al-Hajj Ghulam Ridha and some of the village dignitaries, toward the house of al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir, for calling him to establish maghrib prayer at the mosque.

Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir quietly said: "Thanks to Allah, at Behbahan there is someone competent to

substitute me in leading people in prayer and giving verdicts. I think my responsibility has come to its end in this region, and I have to travel."

Khwajah 'Aziz sadly said: "O Sayyid, are you still angry with us?"

Al-Sayyid kindly replied: "Whatever happened has elapsed and it is finished with it. I determined to travel and returning to Najaf, the only thing I hope is you pray to Allah for me."

1. It is the abbreviation of Mashhad.
 2. It is the ninth month of the Iranian calendar year.
 3. Meaning the four gardens.
 4. Meaning a police officer.
 5. The Iranians give the title "Mirza" to whoever is born of a mother belonging to Banu Hashim, not the father.
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