

Chapter 4

The Locality Mosque

“Why have we departed Najaf and come to Karbala’, O father?”

“Don’t you like this town?”

“I never meant this, but when we were at Behbahan we decided to travel to Najaf.”

“My son, you know I am after knowledge, and I have never attained my wish there, so I came to Karbala’ hoping to find someone to learn under.”

“You won’t find what you seek, at this town, father, as herein someone forbidding learning usul al-fiqh.”

“So our mission will be more difficult, we have to fight such perverted thoughts.” “Is this possible?”

“Yes, I have been attending classes of al-Shaykh Yusuf al- Bahrani for five days, and I have noticed a desire for learning usul among his disciples. I am teaching them now this lesson at the crypt as you see.

‘Abd al-Husayn said: “There are guests awaiting at the door, father.”

His brother Muhammad ‘Ali rushed to their welcome. Middle-aged men entered, taking their seats in the muddy room, saying:

“This locality people, our master, desire that you lead them in prayer.

“But where is the mosque imam (leader).” “May Allah’s mercy be upon him.”

“You mean he is dead...so there should be no delay.”

Shadows of Horror

“Brothers! Today is the fifteenth of Sha’ban, the blessed birthday of the Owner of Time (Wahib al-’Asr),

may Allah hasten his reappearance. It is really nice to talk about this great day.

“At the outset, we have to recognize that there is a Divine convenience behind his occultation. So it is improper for anyone to inquire about the reason why the Imam is not appearing, as he is alone knows the due time for appearance.

It is narrated that he (will appear) wearing rough clothes, and eating simple food, and his occultation being a grace from Allah.

A murmur prevailed among the attendants, each commenting as he wishes. Then al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir descended the pulpit, feeling regretful for his hastiness.

Mirza Hasan al-’Attar inclined upon a man sitting beside him, whispering angrily:

“We have made a mistake in inviting this man...a mosque without an imam is more preferable than an enemy to the Imam.

‘Abd al-Ridha al-Baqqal mockingly said: “This man dislikes the appearance of the Imam, fearing the loss of his leadership.”

Mirza Habib Allah, who took part in calling al-Sayyid to be the mosque imam, regrettably commented: “They are consuming the bounties of Wahib al-Zaman, and unsheathing their swords at him! What a wondrous time!”

Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir realized the waves of anger that prevailed among those present at the mosque, feeling sorry for his hastiness, returning home then.

After a few minutes, his house door was knocked violently, in a way breaking the silence that overshadowed the house.

“Who is at the door?”

“It is Muhammad Husayn Misgar, who spreads out your prayer rug every day.”

Al-Sayyid Muhammad opened the door, being terrified at seeing Muhammad Husayn with his furious frightening complexion. He was taken by surprise with the man throwing the rug at his face, shouting:

“Take your rug, O the apostate ... my prayer behind you is invalid outright.”

That night al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir stayed up restlessly, without being able to sleep at all. He never felt so frightened before, expecting being assailed by some fanatics at any time.

Suddenly the strong sound of knocking was heard. Al- Sayyid, feeling terrified, cried:

“Who is at the door at this late time of night?”

He went out to the house yard:

“Who is it?”

“It is me, Muhammad Husayn Misgar! Please, open the door, Sir!”

“What else you want from me? Haven’t you be sufficed with that you did for me?”

“I have erred, and I came to apologize.”

Al-Sayyid cautiously opened the door.

The man fell down on al-Sayyid’s feet, intending to kiss them. Al-Sayyid said: “I seek Allah’s forgiveness! What are you doing? Stand up O brother.”

“Don’t blame me Sir ... as soon as I slept that night, I saw in dream Wahib al-Zaman reprimanding me for what I did (for you); so I rushed asking you to forgive me.”

“May Allah pardon all of us.”

We Stay Then

“We are to be ready for travelling again, mother.”

Muhammad ‘Ali mumbled, as all the family members gathered for having breakfast.

The mother, seemed totally dejected, replied: “Have you grown tired of Karbala’ so soon?”

“How can one be wearied of the city of al-Husayn? But this is the nature of life, mother.”

Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir was listening, then he turned his face to his wife addressing her gently:
“We are not going, we will never leave Karbala’.”

Muhammad ‘Ali opened his mouth surprisingly: “But, father, you have ordered me to be ready for travel.”
“Yes, that is right.”

“What happened then?”

“O son! I saw in dream my master al-Husayn (peace be upon him) addressing me admonishingly: “Why are you departing me? I am displeased with you on doing this.” So I have made up my mind to stay.

A Call for Starting

Muhammad ‘Ali exclaimed questioning: “Why have you hastened to go father?”

“I have a mission ... I have to visit al-Shaykh Yusuf.”

“But father, aren’t you fearing being ventured by his disciples? The atmosphere is alarming of danger:
“No time is there for thinking ... in fact I am commanded to do so.”

“Let me accompany you, father.”

“No need for this ... al-Husayn won’t let me alone, he shall verily help me overcome these Akhbaris.

I will confer with them with that which is the best.

Thus a chapter of debate started between al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir and al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani.

Al-Hajj Karim

Al-Hajj Karim, addressing the pilgrims’ shoe-keeper at the holy shrine, said:

“Do you know that man?” “Who?”

Al-Hajj Karim pointed at a middle-aged man. That man said:

“Not much, but I heard Mulla ‘Ali al-Wa’izi talking well of him, telling of his being among the upright men.
Seemingly he is the son-in-law of the late al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Tabataba’i.

“He seems to be among the ‘ulama’.”

“How come you to know?”

“He is debating all the time with al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani at the shrine. They continue their discussion after maghrib and ‘isha’ prayers, up to the end of night. After closing the shrine gates, they move to the portico, and when closing its doors, they move to the courtyard. On closing the courtyard doors, they betake themselves out of it, whereat we leave them and go home.

The next morning, as we come to open the courtyard doors, we find them engaged in debate. When the dawn call (for prayer) be raised, the Shaykh goes to perform the prayer, going home then; while this man – as you see – remains standing here after prayer.

Since the Day

Muhammad ‘Ali picked up the last morsel of his food, saying (to his father): “For a long time, you come home so late, father, and sometimes you stay out till morning ... are you still debating with al-Shaykh?”

“Yes.”

“But father, al-Shaykh – seemingly – never intends to submit to truth; otherwise, what is the use of this?”

“Yes, I think that the debate was sufficient, but seemingly he is aware of what are the Akhbaris feeling of fanaticism, since he is Akhbari to the bone. But I think too that al-Shaykh is convinced now with the arguments and proofs I cited for him.

“Why doesn’t he show this?”

“He is afraid of the ignorants.” “What to do then?”

“You will soon realize the fruits of this long debating with him.”

“At what time?”

“Today, at the holy shrine, at the end of al-Shaykh Yusuf’s class.”

“Let me come with you father.” “I never mind if you wish.”

“Me too father.”

‘Abd al-Husayn voiced his readiness.

O son, you too can come.

What Do You Want O Man? It was the first hour of afternoon (‘asr), when Sayyid Muhammad Baqir entered the courtyard (sahn), with his two sons. Muhammad ‘Ali asked:

“What do you intend to do, father?”

“Nothing actually, we will wait in this place.” “What then?”

“(We wait) till al-Shaykh Yusuf finishes his lesson, and all knowledge-seekers depart the place.”

“O ‘Abd al-Husayn, go and have a look ... the class may be finished now.”

‘Abd al-Husayn set out to the holy shrine, and soon returned, saying:

“The lesson is over, father and the disciples are leaving.”

Thereat al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir rose and loudly shouted: “O people, I am Allah’s trustee over you.”

People turned their paces toward the voice with astonishment, and soon they gathered around him, looking up for information.

One of the knowledge-seekers exclaimed: “What are you after, O man?”

"Nothing...I just ask al-Shaykh Yusuf to vacate the lesson seat for me, and order his disciples to learn under me."

A shaykh, advanced in years, sadly said: "May Allah make your end well!"

One of the knowledge-seekers whispered to his friend.

"Let's go, I supposed him to be a sane man, he is unsatisfied with the lesson chair, but asking to have the disciples even!

A middle-aged man, on whose forehead there were traces of prostration, raising his head up to the sky, murmured with the supplication:

"My God, shower Your mercy upon us and protect us against the mischiefs of our souls, enjoining unto evil. Look how loving the high rank and headship, and jealousy have changed people."

Yusuf Gives His Regards

Al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani's house was swarming with the disciples, among whom appeared Sayyid Mahdi al-Brujerdi and Mirza Muhammad Mahdi al-Shahristani.

Sayyid Mahdi said to his teacher: "Have you heard what is uttered by al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir at the courtyard?"

Al-Shaykh Yusuf smiled: "What has he said?"

"He said that he being Allah's trustee over us." "The man, said the truth, what was your reply?"

"Some of us have uttered meaningless words, and Sayyid 'Ali questioned him: What do you want?

"What was he after?"

"He said that he demanded al-Shaykh Yusuf's (teaching) rostrum, and to order his (Shaykh's) students to learn under him."

"You, O Sayyid Mahdi, and Sayyid Muhammad, both are my most outstanding disciples ... go away toward him and announce: From now on he will be the teacher. Then he turned his face toward the multitudes of the knowledge-seekers exclaiming: "Dear students, he (Sayyid Baqir) will be your teacher."

One of the students nervously disapproved: "Do you retreat fighting so soon?!" We can dismiss him from Karbala', if you command us to do so."

"I am undertaking what I see to be my duty. He is a knowledgeable man and competent for teaching. I

am duty-bound, as I said, to leave my place for him, so you have to be under his disposal and benefit from his knowledge.

What Do You Say Sir?

“Yes, as I told you, one should never retreat the battle-field, as by doing so he will give his foe a good opportunity for defeating him, causing him to feel having strength and self-confidence.

Mirza Kamal al-Rashti, surprisingly, inquired: “O Sayyid Taqi, what happened? I haven’t attended the class, has any accident occurred?

“Accident?! You can say it is a disaster. This man who came from Behbahan to Karbala’, and al-Shaykh Yusuf has been kind to him by granting him the teaching seat, is daring to forbid attending the classes of al-Shaykh Yusuf or praying behind him. I would like to reciprocate him the twice of his act, and that we expel him from Karbala’ so violently.

In the meantime, al-Shaykh Yusuf entered with water drops falling down from his face due to taking ablution.

They preceded him in salutation and receiving him, and Sayyid Taqi immediately said to him:

“O Shaykh, you have previously said: Retreating the (battle) field is an improper act: Al-Shaykh interrupted him with a smile:

“I have heard whatever you uttered while taking ablution. Why do you talk so loudly that your neighbours can hear you? Truly, al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir is a man of a lofty rank.

“That who refuses to be thankful for good (ma’ruf), forbidding then praying behind that who did him good, how can be counted noble?!”

“He has his own proof for this, I have talked to al-Sayyid, never sensing his following the desire, and his verdict is quite justifiable.”

Mirza Kamal, who kept silent all that time, put forth this question:

“What are you saying, our master? Shall we learn under him?”

Sayyid Taqi angrily said:

“Or rather say: Is prayer behind him counted valid?”

“On my part, I permit my disciples to attend his classes and pray behind him.”

“But, our teacher, he considers praying behind you to be unlawful (haram).

“He has exposed his legal judgement, and me too.”

Each one of us has undertaken his duty.

The Congratulations

After finishing his lessons, al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir, on his way home, was asked by ‘Abd al-Husayn: “Should I extend congratulations, father?” “What for?”

“For this triumph.”

“Was there any war, or triumphant?!”

“What do you say, father? I myself have heard today Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi al-Shahristani, the most notable disciple of al-Shaykh Yusuf, telling of your being an ‘allamah, or rather all the disciples believe you to be so too.”

“There is no difference between fulfilling the duty and victory. Do you think all that which took place, was done by me?”

“Certainly, this is the product of those long nights of investigation.”

“You are quite mistaken, my son; there are hundreds of men resembling Muhammad Baqir in being unable to attain this position. All this was with Allah’s help and al-Shaykh Yusuf’s support, or rather Allah alone has showered this bounty upon us. “O father, you show much modesty, and only Allah has knowledge of the praiseworthy act you have done.”

“My son, if congratulations should be given, the only one deserving them is al-Shaykh Yusuf, who has overcome his desires, being unbeguiled by the temptation of owning a high post and other worldly lusts.

The Plague

As al-Hajj Karim, the attendant at al-Husayn’s shrine, sighted a new funeral procession, he sadly murmured: “We are Allah’s own and unto Him we return.” Addressing his companion, he added:

“Look at the results of the epidemic ... this is the fifth hearse arriving here.”

“Rather, it is the sixth one, O Hajj.”

“What difference it makes? It is the plague. About its symptoms, I heard Mirza Muhammad al-Hakim say: It starts with a headache, followed by a fever, an intense shiver, and then hallucination. Finally a swelling protrudes at the thigh or armpit or neck as big as an orange. Fortunately this kind of plague differs with the black plague, otherwise the tragedy would have been greater.”

“Whose bier is this? A large number of scholars are seen behind it!”

“I think it to be of al-Shaykh Yusuf, I heard Mulla Ibrahim announce his death.”

“So let’s perform prayer (salat al-mayyit) upon him!”

They rushed toward the place. Al-Hajj Karim asked: “What are you waiting for? Aren’t you going to pray upon him?”

Mulla Ibrahim replied: “He has willed that al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Behbahani perform prayer upon him.”

In the meantime, it was announcement about the arrival of al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir, who immediately began the prayer.

Bright Visions

It was the fifteenth of Sha’ban, and the house of al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir was filled with his disciples.

On this occasion al-Sayyid said:

“Increase your provision of knowledge as much as you can, today is the anniversary of the blessed birthday of Wahib al-Zaman who is continuously watching our deeds. So do not postpone for tomorrow that which you can do today, don’t be afraid of poverty, and strive toward doing good.”

Al-Sayyid Mahdi Brujerdi inquired:

“Our master, how does Wahib al-Zaman watch our deeds?”

Al-Sayyid (Baqir) replied:

“Some days ago, I was honoured with visiting al-Najaf, meeting there some of its magnates, at the head of whom was al-Shaykh Mahdi al-Futuni. He put before me a question worth mentioning for public interest. He said: If someone travels to Qum intending to stay there for ten days, is it permissible for him to move through the nearby gardens, which are commonly considered a part of it?

One of the knowledge-seekers replied:

“Verily he cannot do so, since he has intended to reside at the town for ten days.”

“By coincidence, al-Shaykh al-Futuni holds the same opinion, what do you say then?”

“There should be some meditation, and right might be on the side of al-Futuni.”

“As long as I am concerned, I told al-Shaykh Mahdi that this person has no option to depart the town for even one step.

Sayyid ‘Ali al-Tabataba’i questioned:

“Could you prove this (ruling) for al-Futuni?”

“Proving! I continued debating these issues with him for long hours of night, with each one sticking to his opinion till the problem was solved by Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al- Mazandarani.

“How?!”

“He came in the morning without any knowledge of the matter, saying: I saw – in dream – the Owner of Time (Wahib al-Zaman) [A] addressing me: O Baqir! “Tell al-Futuni that the right opinion regarding the question is that of al-Baqir”. Thus al-Futuni withdrew his opinion.

“How wonderful! Is al-’Imam concerned with us to this extent?”

Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir touched upon his beard, and solemnly said:

“More wonderful than this is that the spirits of the upright men are also watching our deeds.

Once I was busy writing commentaries on the book al- Madarik, refuting sometimes some of the author’s opinions. As my work was about to conclude, on the same night I saw (in sleep) the author of al-Madarik, and I shamefully said to him: I have misbehaved in writing some refutations, my master, if you like to delete them, I certainly shall do. He replied: I am pleased with you, may Allah be pleased with you.

Based on this, when the author of al-Madarik being pleased, undoubtedly the Imams are pleased too.

Meanwhile, Muhammad ‘Ali whispered: The time of adhan (call for prayer) is due.

Al-Sayyid rose for taking ablution, betaking himself then to the shrine, accompanied by his disciples.

Presage of Tomorrow

The disciples performed the prayer and returned home, with no one left except Muhammad ‘Ali, ‘Abd al- Husayn and Sayyid ‘Ali al-Tabataba’i (who has recently got married to ‘Abd al- Husayn’s sister), who have returned with al-Sayyid. Sayyid ‘Ali asked:

“A long time elapsed, but Mirza Abu al-Qasim is never attending the classes; has he departed Karbala?’”

“Yes, as told by Sayyid Afdhal: He came from Iran to Karbala’ a short time ago, leaving it then toward

Jabliq. From Jabliq he went to Qal'ah Babu, then to Shiraz, and after it to Isfahan, at last he settled down at Qum. So you can call him now by the name al-Qummi!

'Abd al-Husayn, looking at him with admiration, said:

"The world used to turn its back at you, then it has come unto you with all its good, but you are still, father, wearing your ragged clothes, aren't you intending to replace them with new ones?

The father has knitted his brows, pretending heedlessness, saying:

"Your mother asked me to purchase some yogurt."

'Abd al-Husayn, resuming the topic from another corner, said:

"O father, your body cannot endure the continuous prayer and unending fasting. Isn't it the time yet for being relieved of hire prayer? What is the use of all this, while you distribute all its fees among your disciples? Isn't it the time to be careful of yourself?"

The Sayyid bent down, picking up a stone from the middle of the road, pelting it aside in order that no one might stumble down by it, said:

"In fact, I am only concerned with myself, thinking that fasting in deputation for the dead, and distributing its fee then among the wretched who are unable to afford for purchasing their sustenance to satisfy their hunger, are things not far from taking care of the self. All my concern is about my future, which lies in the hereafter; whatsoever you spend, you will find near Allah. It seems we have reached al-Sayyid Haydar's stores...go and buy us some yogurt, as we have guests today: your sister and her husband.

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