

Chapter 5

Mirza Shams al-Din

Al-Sayyid Mahdi al-Tabataba'i al-Brujerdi, Mirza Muhammad al-Majlisi al-Shahristani, and al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Tabataba'i, with other disciples were sitting in the house of al-'Ustadh awaiting his arrival, whereat Sayyid Mahdi said: "Do you know what for al-'Ustadh has asked us to come here?"

As Muhammad Mahdi intended to comment on the question, al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir arrived, so all the disciples stood up to welcome him. He said: "Salam 'Alaykan (peace be upon you)."

"And peace and Allah's mercy be upon you."

"My dear sons, I summoned you to tell you that I have become an aged old man, unable to give lectures, or undertaking much reading, so I intend to commit to you some affairs for relieving me of some of my burdens."

"Does that mean you are going to suspend your lessons?" "Nearly ... I will, everyday, read one line from Sharh al-Lum'ah for bless-seeking only." "Only Sharh al-Lum'ah?"

"Yes, and O Sayyid Mahdi, you have to go to Najaf for teaching there, while Mirza Muhammad Mahdi stays here, with Sayyid 'Ali and some other brothers for administering the affairs here.

Sayyid Mahdi asked: "Where will the lessons of Sharh al-Lum'ah be held?"

"In this house at the early morning. Now go and prepare yourselves for teaching.

After the disciples had left the house, Muhammad 'Ali asked his father: "So you have stopped everything, aren't you?"

"No, my son, I am of the opinion that the youth should undertake teaching, so that I can devote all my time for conducting the Eawzah (theological school). Further, their academic level is encouraging, as some days ago I went through a book authored by al-Mirza al-Qummi named: Qawanin al-'usul, that

deserved my admiration.

Also, never forget Sayyid Mahdi¹, who has become scholar ('alim), and Sayyid 'Ali, your brother-in-law, who has turned to be a great faqih (jurisprudent). You also are in need of a teacher, while I – as you see – have almost reached my end, and it is time to sit and review all my writings, as some of them need revision and modification, lest I should cause others to deviate.

“O father, you are still in the best condition, and it is early for such an utterance.”

“Don't be courteous, for every human being there is a destined hour (ajal), and I became an old man and a father of a 50-year old son. Bring me the books please.”

“They are all inside this box, numbering more than seventy books and treatises.”

“I have revised some of them, you can only read me their titles to see whether they need revision or not.”

Muhammad 'Ali opened the box and started taking out the books. “This box needs to be repaired too, father.”

Then the son began to read the books' titles:

“Sharh Mafatih al-Fiqh, by al-Faydh al-Kashani, from “kitab al-taharah” up to “al-khums”, in eight volumes; Eashiyah 'ala Mafatih al-fiqh; and Eashiyah 'ala Dibajah of the same book.

“I have finished revising them.”

“Al-Fawa'id al-Ea'iriyah fi fusul al-fiqh.”

“I have reviewed most of it.”

“Eashiyah 'ala al-Madarik, from “kitab al-taharah” up to the end of “al-salat” (prayer).

“Put Sharh al-'Irshad aside, as it should be revised.” “There is someone knocking at the door, father.”

“You keep on your work, I'll open the door.”

Al-Sayyid stood up, holding his pen, and went toward the door.

“Who? Mirza Shams al-Din? Welcome!

“Peace be upon the teacher ... there is a delegation coming from the King of Iran.”

“What do they want?”

One of the delegation members respectfully addressed him: “Peace be upon you (al-salam 'alaykum).

Then, asking another one to approach al-Sayyid, he added:

“This is a royal gift sent to you from the King Muhammad Khan al-Qajar, with his wishes. Look, Sir, it is a unique Qur’an, decorated by precious stones adding to its splendiddness and nicety, with the lines being inscribed with liquid gold.

“My sons, why do you place the Holy Books inside boxes away from people. You had better sell these stones and distribute their earnings among the poor and needy.

“What to do now, my master?”

“The holder of the Qur’an may keep it to read Allah’s words ... you may go under Allah’s protection.”

After closing the door, he returned to his place. “Who were they, father?”

“A delegation from the King of Iran, with a present.” “What was the present?”

“A Qur’an (mushaf), set with precious stones and gold.”

What a misguidance is it! They claimed that they (stones) elevate one’s status and position, adding to his worth.

“Where is it?”

“With the delegation.” “Haven’t you accepted it?”

“Yes, I have a Qur’an from which I recite Allah’s holy verses, I told them to keep it with its holder to read from it. Let’s go back to work.

“Eashiyah ‘ala al-Wafi, Eashiyah ‘ala al-Kafi; al-Tahdhib;

Sharh al-Qawa’id and al-Masalik.

“Put it aside, I mean Eashiyat al-Masalik.”

“Al-’Ijtihad wa al-’akhbar, Rasa’il fi wujub al-taqlid fi zaman al-ghaybah (Treatises on obligation of imitation during Occultation), and Risalah fi istihalat ru’yat Allah (impossibility of sighting Allah). Isn’t this the text of debate between you and a scholar from Ahl al-Sunnah, father?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Risalah fi al-jabr wa al-’ikhtiyar, and Risalah fi al-’istishab, and one on al-bara’ah.

“Keep them aside, they should be reviewed.” “The call for prayer is raised.”

“Be ready for prayer then, people are awaiting.”

Come Back Soon Tonight

The last days of Sharivar² have passed, as al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir was engaged in reading, while his wife being busy in mending an old dress, saying: “Aren’t you going to Behbahan?”

“Behbahan in these days ... have you missed your relation?” “Terrible dreams are frightening me.”

“Don’t be afraid, haven’t we received good tidings some days ago?”

While looking at one side, he added:

“Who is that woman?” “Who? No woman is there.” “That one wearing a rosy dress.”

“What do you mean? This is our daughter-in-law, the wife of ‘Abd al-Husayn ... you engage yourself in reading to the extent that you forget your daughter-in-law too. I will prepare supper food ... by the way, come back soon tonight, we have guests.

“Who are they?”

“Your daughter with her husband.”

“They are not guests ... tell ‘Abd al-Husayn to come . After some seconds, ‘Abd al-Husayn entered and was surprised when seeing his father look gloomy, saying:

“What happened father? Have I done a mischief?

“I don’t like to see your wife with such clothes.”

“What for? Our purchases are like those of other people, which are not unlawful (haram). Allah – the Glorified – said in His holy Book: “Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of Allah which He hath brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing?”

“Yes, I too have heard this verse. But look at the way your neighbours are living ... our clothes and food should be like theirs, so that life hardships can be easily endured by them.

“You said the truth.”

“Now go back to your work.”

“By the way, father, I saw Mirza Yahya on my way.”

He intends to travel to Tabriz, wondering about an opportune time to see you. I told him he can come two hours before sunset.

In the meantime, the door was knocked, ‘Abd al-Husayn said:

“I think it is him.”

The Heavens Garment

A cold wind blew, foretelling of a biting winter. Al-Sayyid Muhammad Baqir with his sons were going toward the haram (shrine), whereat Muhammad ‘Ali, feeling the chilly cold, murmured:

“We have never experienced such a cold throughout the 27 years we have been residing at Karbala’.

“They are thirty-two years; you are right, we have never suffered such cold, though I am not feeling cold.”

“Why?”

“Your mother has woven me a warm overcoat, for which I am so grateful.”

“My master! My master! A pitiful voice came from a bare-footed bony-faced man, wearing worn-out clothes, saying:

“O master, it is too cold, and I have nothing to protect my head against the bites of cold.”

Al-Sayyid asked him: “Have you got a knife?”

“Yes, Sir. The man said this and inserted his hand into his pocket.”

“O Muhammad ‘Ali, help me cut the coat sleeve ... We have no other alternative.

“Do you cut the sleeve of this new overcoat, father? Isn’t there any other solution?”

“Cut it, my son ... you should be pleased with such a deal: the overcoat sleeve against thousands of Divine graces and Paradise.

Muhammad ‘Ali has cut the sleeve and handed it to the beggar, while Sayyid Muhammd Baqir was gently addressing him:

“It is too warm, and will safeguard your head against the cold.”

When his wife saw the overcoat deformed, she fell sorry, saying:

“Where is its sleeve?”

“I have donated it to a needy man.”

“Do you know how much I toiled in weaving it?”

“It is not so considerable against its reward, one day we shall die whereat the overcoat be worn out, but

that sleeve will be turned into one of heavens dresses.”

Never Do It Again

In the morning of a Spring day, Sayyid Zayn al-’Abidin was going through the alleys on his way to attend the class of al-Sayyid. He said to himself: I will attend the lesson first, then I’ll go to the bathhouse for taking a ritual bathing, afterwhich I’ll perform morning prayer as qadha’ (out of time). What had I to do as it was Spring and sleeping being so pleasant?

He opened the door, entered and saluted.

Mirza Hasan al-Tabini and Mulla ‘Ali al-Tabrizi were waiting for al-’Ustadh.

Mulla ‘Ali with Azari³ dialect, said:

“You have arrived at due time, al-Sayyid is busy conferring with Sayyid Mahdi al-Brujerdi, otherwise you might have reached late as usual.”

After some seconds, al-Sayyid entered smiling, betaking himself to his place, moving his sight over his disciples. Suddenly his smile disappeared, in place of which frowning appeared ... keeping down his face for a while, then he raised it saying:

“Today is off, go home.”

Mulla ‘Ali al-Tabrizi wondered:

“Are you all right, our master?”

“Yes, but no lesson will be given today, go home ... but you have to stay here, O Zayn al-’Abidin.”

The disciples have all left the room. (Except Zayn al-’Abidin).

Al-Sayyid sadly murmured:

“O Sayyid! Lift the (straw) mat edge, take the money under it, go soon to the bathhouse, and have a ritual cleansing. Never do it again, and never attend any meeting when being ritually impure (junub).

“It was late, Sir, and I was interested in attending the lesson.”

“Never forget what I told you.”

Thereat Sayyid Zayn al-’Abidin rose, feeling too ashamed, walking, with stumbling steps, toward the door.

Study, My Son

The sun of Mordad⁴ was too scorching, and al-Sayyid was wearing his white dress, resting in bed. He got up and rose, walking toward the door after hearing a consecutive knocking at the door.

“Al-Salam ‘Alaykum.”

“Wa ‘Alaykum al-salam, what is the matter, O Mulla Muhammad Ridha? What caused you to come in such heat?”

“Our master! Look there beside that tree. That man is an Isfahani merchant, who has brought with him a piece of cloth, intending to gift to you.”

“I thought that your coming was for asking about a scientific issue.”

As al-Sayyid uttered this, he intended to close the door.

“I beg you Sir, to accept it.” “What for?”

“Since he promised me to offer me a similar gift on your accepting it. Please accept it Sir.”

Al-Sayyid smiled, saying:

“You seem badly needing it, I’ll accept it on condition that you never be a medium for (exchanging) gifts, and never forget your lessons, as learning is more important than all these things.”

The Dream That Comes True

The Autumn sun was gradually cutting its way toward the horizon, and al-Sayyid’s sons were busy making the room ready for the reception of the disciples. The students were coming in ones and twos for spending the thirteenth of Rajab with their great master.

The Ustadh, entered with a curved back, and a halo of light on his face. All those present there rose up as a sign of veneration.

Some moments elapsed, during which he was sitting, Mirza Mahmud, the eulogist, rose chanting with his sweet voice:

Peace be upon al-Mustafa Ahmad,

Guardian of intercession in the Hereafter,

Peace (salam) be upon al-Murtadha al-Haydari,

And his sons, the bright stars.

I have five with whom I extinguish, The Hellfire's smashing heat,

Al-Mustafa and al-Murtadha

And their two sons and Fatimah.

Thereat salawat (blessings upon Muhammad and his Household) were raised, filling all the corners of the muddy room with fragrance and spirituality, with the glasses of sweet drink (sharbat) being distributed among the attendants.

Al-Shaykh Ja'far has approached al-'Ustadh, asking:

"I have read the book Sharh al-Wafiyah of al-Sayyid Wadr al-Din al-Hamadani, finding in it two different trends: in the first one he follows the course of al-mujtahidun, while in the second one he adopts the trend of the Akhbaris.

Al-'Ustadh replied:

"I used to attend his lessons, closing before him the door of the Akhbaris in the first section, but I haven't attended his lessons in the second section."

Mirza Muhammad Mahdi al-Shahristani inquired:

"He is known to be Akhbari, how could you influence him?"

Al-Sayyid smiled as usual, saying:

"Who told you that I have influenced him?"

"It is obvious, your acts are explicitly indicating your position."

"The fact is not as you say. I too, at the outset of my learning, was influenced with the Akhbaris' thoughts, but with the passage of time I recognized their wrong way; as the proofs of ijihad, are irrefutable, besides being not easily confronted.

Sayyid Mahdi inquired: You have held protracted arguments with al-Shaykh Yusuf al-Bahrani; how could you recover him to the straight path?

"I haven't done so but I found him disinterested with the Akhbari school, criticizing them saying: They never bother themselves to think, or rather they never act according to their belief. They blindly imitate (their leaders).

One of the disciples, stood in awe of him, exclaimed:

“Our master, how have you attained this lofty rank?”

Al-Sayyid kept his head down modestly, saying: I am nothing, and rather I can never consider myself in the position you have. The same question reached me from another one, and

I answered him: If for every question there should be an answer, I have never desisted for even one moment from extolling knowledge and ‘ulama’, making knowledge-seeking at the top priority over all other matters in my life.

A disciple, sitting beside Mirza Muhammad, mumbled:

“If he truly extols the ‘ulama’, so why did he behave with al- Shaykh Yusuf in that way?!”

Mirza Muhammad, with a low voice, whispered:

“It is said that whatever occurred was with the concurrence of both sides. Let me ask him: Our master, Mirza Muhammad al-Muttalibi has a question.”

“No, Sir.”

Al-Sayyid then resumed his utterance:

“Watch yourselves in every act or saying, for attaining Allah’s pleasure. Never feel tired or be bored of knowledge-seeking, may Allah support you. I remember that one night at Isfahan, I saw in dream the Messenger of Allah surrounded by men who were annoying and harming him.

I rushed toward him to keep them away from him, saluting him afterwards, whereat he reciprocated my greeting, wiping my head, handing me a half-cubit roll. I took it and set out toward Karbala’, passing through the courtyard and portico reaching the tomb. The wonderful point here that on being honoured with visiting Karbala’, I saw the courtyard and portico being exactly in the same image I saw in dream. More wonderful is that when I have compiled Sharh al-Mafatih, its cover was similar to the roll handed to me by the Messenger of Allah in the dream.

I am almost finished, but you should be careful and strive for attaining the blessingness of the Infallible (Ma’sumun).

1. He was later known with the name Bahr al-’Ilm, and considered one of his age outstanding ‘ulama’. He spent two years in the two holy shrines teaching al-Fiqh ‘ala al-madhahib al-’arba’ah, giving solutions for their hard judicial questions, with which he embarrassed the Hijaz ‘ulama’, to the extent that some of them said: “If the Shi’ah be right in their claim about the reappearance of al-Mahdi Wahib al-Zaman, he is verily non-other than this man.”

2. It is the sixth month of the Iranian calendar year.

3. According to Azerbaijan country.

4. It is the fifth month of the Iranian calendar year.

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