

Part 1: Traits

Life

The pious man of God, Rajab Ali Nikuguyan known as the Reverend Shaykh and Shaykh Rajab Ali Khayyat was born in Tehran in 1262 S.H./1883 CE.¹ His father, Mashhadi Baqir was an ordinary worker. When Rajab Ali was 12, his father passed away and left Rajab Ali alone with no full-blooded brothers and sisters. There is no more knowledge at hand about the Shaykh's childhood. However, he quoted his mother himself as saying:

"One night when I was pregnant with you your father –who was then working in a restaurant –brought home some wholesome Kebabs. When I proceeded to eat, I found that you began to stir and beat my belly with your feet. I felt I should not eat from this food. I refrained from eating and asked your father why he had brought wholesome Kebabs that night, whereas the other nights he used to bring the customers' leftovers. He said he had actually brought these Kebabs without permission! So, I did not eat from that food."

This story indicates that the Shaykh's father did not have worth mentioning features. The Shaykh himself is quoted as saying:

"Doing good to and feeding a love of God by my father caused that God Almighty brought me to this world through his loins."

The Shaykh had five sons and four daughters. One of his daughters died in childhood.

The Shaykh's House

His simple brick house that was bequeathed to him from his father was located on Mawlawi Avenue, Siyah ha (presently Shahid Muntazari) Alley. He lived in this small house the rest of his life. His son says:

'Whenever it rained, the ceiling began to drip. One day, an army general, along with some other governmental officials, came to our house. We had placed some basins and bowls under the rain dripping from the ceiling. Having seen our condition of living, he bought two pieces of land and showed them to my father, and said he had bought one for himself and one for him. My father replied: What we have is sufficient for us.'

Another of his sons says: 'When my life condition changed for the better I said to my father: 'Dear father! I have got four *tomans* and this brick house can be sold for sixteen *tomans*. So let me buy a new house on Shahbaz Avenue.'

The Shaykh said: "Whenever you wish go and buy one for yourself; for me, this one is good enough!"

He goes on to say: 'After my marriage, we prepared the two rooms upstairs and said to our father: 'High-ranking people come to visit you; so, please arrange for your meetings in these two rooms.' He replied:

"No way! Whoever wants to see me, let him come to sit in this dilapidated room."

The room he was talking about was a small one carpeted with a simple coarse mat made of cotton with a table for tailoring.

Interestingly enough, several years later, the reverend Shaykh let one of his rooms to a taxi driver named "Mashdi Yadullah" for twenty *tomans* a month. Later on, when the latter's wife gave birth to a daughter, the late Shaykh gave the name "Ma'suma" to her. When he recited *adhan* and *aqama* into the baby's ears, he placed a two *toman* bank-note in the corner of her swaddling clothes, and said:

"Aqha Yadullah! Now your expenses have increased; from this month instead of twenty *tomans* pay only eighteen *tomans* (for rent)."

The Shaykh's Clothing

The reverend Shaykh's clothing was very simple and neat. The type of clothing he used to wear was a set of clothes like that of Ulama including a cloak, a skullcap, and a robe.

What was interesting about him was that even in his dressing too, his intention was to attain God's pleasure. The only time he put on a robe to please others; he was reproached for that in his spiritual state.

His account of this event is as follows: "*Nafs* (carnal desire) is a strange thing; one night I found I was veiled (in darkness) and was unable to achieve divine grace, like I attained before. I probed into the matter, and upon humble requesting, I found out that the previous afternoon, when one of the nobles of Tehran came to visit me, he said that he liked to perform the evening and the night prayers with me (as prayer leader). So, in order to please him, I put on my robe while performing prayers. ...!"

The Shaykh's Food

His reverence never cared for delicious meals. Most often, he used such simple foods as potatoes and puddings. At the tablecloth, he would kneel down facing the *qibla* and kind of bending over the food. Sometimes he would also hold up the plate in his hands while eating. He would always eat with full appetite. Sometimes he would put some of his food in the plate of a friend that he could reach out (as a sign of respect). While eating, he would not talk, and the others would also keep silent out of respect for him. If someone invited him to a feast, he would accept or reject it with some deliberation. Nevertheless, he would most often accept his friends' invitations.

He would not mind eating out; however, he was conscious of the effect of food on one's soul, and regarded some spiritual changes as a consequence of eating certain foods. Once, while he was traveling to Mashhad by train, he felt some spiritual contraction. He made an appeal (to Ahlul Bayt (a)), then after a while he was informed by intuition that the spiritual contraction had been the consequence of drinking of the tea served by the train's restaurant.^{[2](#)}

¹. S.H. Solar Hijra, the Iranian Solar Calendar that began at Prophet's (s) Hijra to Medina

². See "Threatened to a destiny like that of Balaam of Boer", Chapter Two, Part 2.

Occupation

Tailoring is one of the praiseworthy professions in Islam. "Luqman the Sage" had chosen this as his occupation^{[1](#)}. It is quoted from the Holy Prophet (s) who said:

عمل الأبرار من الرجال الخياطة، وعمل الأبرار من النساء الغزل

"The job of the righteous men is tailoring and the job of the pious women is spinning."^{[2](#)}

The reverend Shaykh had chosen this job as a means of livelihood. Hence, he was known as Shaykh Rajab Ali Khayyat (the tailor). Interestingly, his simple small house, as described before, was his tailoring workshop, too.

In this respect one of his children says: 'At first, my father had a room in a Caravanserai, where he pursued his tailoring profession. One day the landlord came to him and asked him to leave the place. The next day and without any arguing or demanding any due rights, my father packed up his sewing machine and sewing table, brought them home, and gave the room back to the landlord. Ever since, he worked at home in a room near the entrance as his tailoring workshop.

Perseverance in his Work

The reverend Shaykh was extremely serious and persevering in his work. He worked hard to the last days of his life to earn his living through his own endeavors. Although his devotees were wholeheartedly ready to provide for his simple livelihood, he would never accept.

The Holy Prophet (s) said in a *Hadith*:

من أكل من كد يده، كان يوم القيامة في عداد الأنبياء ويأخذ ثواب الأنبياء

"Whoever earns one's own living, they will be ranked among the Prophets and rewarded as Prophets."[3](#)

And in another *hadith*, he said:

العبادة عشر أجزاء تسعة أجزاء في طلب الحلال

"

Divine worship has ten parts, nine of which comprises earning lawful daily sustenance."[4](#)

One of Shaykh's friends says: I never forget the day I saw the reverend Shaykh in the market who was pale in the countenance out of fatigue. He was going home carrying some tailoring tools and material that he had bought. I told him: 'Agha have some rest, you are not feeling well.' He replied:

"What should I do with the wife and the children then?!"

The Holy Prophet (s) is quoted as saying:

ان الله تعالى يحب أن يرى عبده تعباً في طلب الحلال

"God likes to see his servant tired out in the way of earning his lawful sustenance."[5](#)

ملعون ملعون من ضيع من يعول

"Cursed is the one, cursed is the one who does not provide for his family's sustenance."[6](#)

Equity in Receiving Wages

The Shaykh received very equitable wages for sewing clothes. He used to get wages for exactly the

amount of stitching he had done and just for as much time as he had spent working on the clothes. By no means he would accept to be paid more than what he had worked for. Thus, if someone would say: 'Reverend Shaykh! Let me pay a higher wage.' He would reject.

The reverend Shaykh charged his customers on the basis of *ij'ara* (contract on hire and lease) according to Islamic law.⁷ But since he never tended to receive more than what he had worked for the customers, in case after finishing the work if he found that he had done less work than predicted, he would give back the money that he thought was extra to his real wages! One of the Ulama said: 'I took some cloth to the Shaykh to make a robe, a cloak, and a quilted cloak. I asked him how much I should pay.' "It needs two days work, so the wage will be forty *tomans*." He said.

A couple of days later when I went for the clothes, he said: "The wage is only twenty *tomans*."

I inquired: 'You said forty *tomans*?' He replied: "First I thought they needed two days work, but it just took one day to complete!"

Someone else also said: 'I took some cloth to him to make a pair of trousers. I asked him how much it will come to. He said: 'Ten *tomans*.' I paid him right away. When some time later I went to pick up the trousers, he placed a *two-toman* note on it and said: "The fee came to eight *tomans*."

The Shaykh's son said: 'Once he settled with a customer to make a robe for 35 Rials. Some days later the customer came for the robe. No sooner had he walked away with the robe than my father ran after him and gave him five Rials back, saying: "I thought it would take me longer time to make this robe, but it did not!"

A Reward for Equity

Equity in all tasks, especially in transactions is an important issue that has been highly stressed in Islam. Imam Ali (a) said:

الإنصاف أفضل الفضائل

"Equity is the best of virtues."⁸

And he further said.

ان أعظم المثوبة مثوبة الأنصاف

"The greatest reward is one granted for equity:"⁹

Just to know how equity in transactions is effective in self-building, and that God's favor with the

reverend Shaykh is not exaggerated on, it will be worthwhile to deliberate on the following account:

Equity Toward People and Meeting with Hazrat Wali 'Asr (aj)

A man of knowledge was longing for meeting with Hazrat Baqiyyat Allah Imam Mahdi (aj), and he suffered agonies of not being granted the chance and for a long time he underwent severe austerity and pursued spiritual seeking.

It is well-known among the *tullab* (Islamic seminary students) of *Hawza* in Najaf-i Ashraf and the scholars of the holy shrine of Imam Ali (a) that every one who finds the honor to go the Masjid-i Sahla to perform the evening and night prayers every Tuesday uninterruptedly for forty nights, they will be graced with meeting the Imam al-'Asr (aj) For a while, he struggled to this end but to no effect. Then he resorted to the occult sciences and numerical symbolism and started self-discipline and other ascetic and rigorous practices in seclusion, anxiously seeking to meet the Hidden Imam (aj) but all in vain. However, as a consequence of his nightly vigilance and lamenting and wailing at dawns, he had developed some kind of insight and intuition, and occasionally some illuminating flash would be graced on him. He would fall in ecstasy and rapture, often having certain visions and hearing some subtleties.

In one of these mystical states, he was told: "Your seeing and being granted an audience with Imam al-'Asr (aj) will not be possible, unless you make a trip to such and such a city. Quite difficult as it sounded at first, but for that sacred purpose, it appeared to be so convenient.

Imam al-'Asr (aj) in the Blacksmiths' Bazaar

After several days the above-mentioned man arrived in that city and yet even there he carried on his self-discipline and ascetic practices in seclusion that intended to last forty days long. On the thirty seventh day, he was told: "Right now Hazrat Baqiyyat Allah, Imam al-'Asr (aj) is in the blacksmiths' bazaar, in a shop belonging to an old locksmith; so, be quick to go now and seek his audience.

He stood up and, as he had already seen in his ecstatic vision, rushed the way down to the old man's shop where he saw the Holy Imam (aj) sitting there and talking amiably with the locksmith. When he greeted, the holy Imam responded and beckoned to keep silent, (implying) watching for a wonderful scene.

The Equity of the Old Locksmith

At this moment I saw a bent, fragile, old woman with a walking stick who showed us a lock with her shaking hand and said: "Will you, for God's sake, buy this lock from me for "three *shahis*"¹⁰ I need three *shahis*?

The old locksmith took a look at the lock and found it intact, and then said: "My sister! This lock costs

"Two *abbasis*"^{[11](#)} because its key will cost no more than "ten *dinars*"^{[12](#)}; so if you give me ten *dinars*, I will make a key to this lock and then it will cost ten *shahis*."

The old woman answered: "No, I do not need that, I only need the money; if you buy this lock from me for three *shahis*, I will pray for you."

The old man said with utmost naivety: "My sister! You are a Muslim, and I too claim to be a Muslim. So why should I buy a Muslim's property for a low price and deny someone's right? This lock already costs eight *shahis*; if I want to benefit from it, I'll buy it for seven *shahis*, for it is unfair to make more than a *shahi* profit in a deal of only two *abbasis*. If you are sure you want to sell it, I'll buy it for seven *shahis*, and I repeat again, the real price is two *abbasis*. Since I am a businessman I buy it for one *shahi* less.

The old woman perhaps would not believe what the man said. She was upset and complained that nobody had been willing to buy that price. She said she begged them to buy it for three *shahis*, because ten *dinars* would not have sufficed her. The old man paid seven *shahis* to the old woman and purchased it from her.

I will Visit him!

When the woman turned back to leave, the Imam (aj) said to me:

"My Dear! Did you watch the wonderful scene? You do likewise too, and become like that, then I will come to see you. There is no need for ascetic seclusion and resorting to *Jafr* (numerical symbolism). Self-discipline and various travels will not be required; instead show good action and be a Muslim so that I can interact with you. Of all people of this city, I picked out this old man, since this man is religious and knows God. And you observed the trial he went through: This old woman requested all in the bazaar, to fulfill her need and since they found her desperate and needy, they were all seeking to buy (her lock) cheap; and nobody bought it even for three *shahis*. This old man, however, bought it for its real price, i. e., seven *shahis*. Thus, every week I pay a visit to him and show kindness and amiability to him."^{[13](#)}

^{[1](#)}. Rabi' al-Abrar, II : 535.

^{[2](#)}. Mizan al-Hikmah, IV, 1628 : 5478.

^{[3](#)}. Ibid., V, 2058: 7209.

^{[4](#)}. Ibid., V, 2060: 7223.

^{[5](#)}. Mizan al-Hikmah, V, 2060: 7218.

^{[6](#)}. Ibid., V, 2058: 7202.

^{[7](#)}. See Mizan al-Hikmah, 1, 40: 16.

^{[8](#)}. Ibid. XIII, 6306: 20191.

^{[9](#)}. Ibid. XIII, 6306 20194.

^{[10](#)}. A shahi equals around a penny.

^{[11](#)}. An abbasi equals four shahis

^{[12](#)}. A dinar equals one-fifth of a shahi

Self –Sacrifice

One of the most outstanding features in the life of the Shaykh was his serving the needy people and making self–sacrifice even in his very poverty. From the viewpoints of the Islamic traditions, self–sacrifice and altruism are the most beautiful benevolence, the highest levels of faith, and the most superior ethical bounties^{[1](#)}.

In spite of the reverend Shaykh's meager re–muneration from his tailoring profession, he was highly generous and altruistic. The accounts about the self–sacrifices of this man of God is really amazing and instructive.

Self–Sacrifice toward other People's Children

One of the Shaykh's children quotes his mother as saying: "It was a famine period, Hasan and Ali^{[2](#)} were on top of the house roof making a fire. I went up to see what they were doing. I noticed they had taken a leather bag to roast and eat. Seeing such a scene, I burst into tears. I climbed down the roof, picked up some copper and bronze (utensils) took it to the small market nearby, sold it, and bought some cooked rice. On the way back, I ran into my brother, Qasim Khan, who was a rich man. He saw I was very disturbed; he inquired the reason for my disturbance. I told him the story. When he found about the issue, he said: 'What are you talking about? I saw Shaykh Rajab Ali handing out one hundred tokens for chelowkebab among the people! Charity begins at home! When does this man want to...? It is true that he is a devoted and ascetic man, but his acting this way (neglecting his own family) is not rightful.'

"Hearing these words I got even more frustrated. When at night the Shaykh came home I had an argument with him...and then went to sleep disturbed and agitated. In the middle of the night I heard I was called out to get up. I got up, I saw (in the dream) it was Mawla Ali Amir al–Mu'minin (a) who introduced himself and said: He has been looking after the people's children, and we have been looking after yours! When your children starved to death, then go on and complain!"

Self–Sacrifice toward a Bankrupt Neighbor

One of the reverend Shaykh's sons related: 'One night my father woke me up and together picked two bags of rice; he carried one and I carried the other. We carried the bags to the home of the richest man in our neighborhood. Handing the bags over to the owner of the house, my father said:” Dear fellow! Do you remember the British took the people to the doorstep of their embassy and gave them rice, and took back an ass–load^{[3](#)} of rice in return for each grain they had given to them, and they still do not let them

go?!"

With this joking, we handed the rice over and returned home. The next morning he called out to me and said: "Mahmud! Buy a quarter of a kilo half-broken rice as well as two Rials of fat oil and give it to your mother to cook some rice!"

At those times, such behavior of my father was too heavy and unintelligible, for why must he have to give away the rice we had at home, whereas for our lunch we had to buy half-broken rice?!

Later on, I found that fellow had been bankrupt and (meanwhile) he was going to have a large feast.

Self-Sacrifice on the New Year's Eve

The late Shaykh Abd al-Karim Hamid relates: 'I was working as an errand-boy at the Shaykh's shop for one *toman* a day. On the New year's eve, the reverend Shaykh had fifteen *tomans*; he gave me some money to provide rice and deliver to some addresses, and at last five *tomans* was left that he gave to me!'

'I thought to myself: Is he going home empty-handed on the eve of the New Year? And at the same time his son's trouser leg was torn. So, I left the money he had given to me in the counter's drawer and ran away. Whatever the Shaykh shouted I did not return. When I got home I found he had been chasing me. He said:

"Why did not you take money?" And he insistently gave the money to me! ,

[1.](#) Mizan al-Hikmah : 1, 22 : 1.

[2.](#) Two of the Shaykh's sons who have died.

[3.](#) A kharwar equals about 300 kilograms.

Acts of Selfless Devotion

The reverend Shaykh's spiritual seeking and devotion was principally different from that of pretenders of Sufi paths. He did not approve of any of the Sufi orders. His spiritual procedure was that of pure devotion to the guidelines by Ahl al-Bayt (a), hence he would not only take heed of the obligations, but also followed recommended practices.

At dawns he would stay up, and after sunrise he would go to sleep for about a half or a whole hour. Sometimes he would take a short rest in the afternoon.

Although being a spiritual seeker himself, he would say: "Do not trust in mystical intuitions and never rely

on them. We should always follow our Imams (a) in deeds and words, as our paradigms."

In public sessions, the reverend Shaykh would always resort to the holy verse:

(ان تنصروا الله ينصركم ويثبت أقدامكم)

(...If you make effort in Allah's Way, He will help you and make your feet firm and secures you from being Shaykh along His Path), (Sura Muhammad, 47: 7)¹ and he would say:

"God has no needs. Make attempts in Allah's way by acting according to His commandments and resorting to His Prophet's (s) tradition."

And he said:

"Nothing like acting according to the commandments causes man's prosperity and sublimation."

The Shaykh used to say time and again:

"The religion of Truth is the one preached on *Minbars* (pulpits), but it is lacking in two entities: Sincerity and love of God Almighty; these must be added in the preaching."

He said:

"The righteous are all doing well, but they should replace their 'egos' with 'God'."

And he said:

"If the believers give up the egotism, they will achieve something (i.e., high status)."

He also used to say:

"If man surrenders to God, abandons his own (biased) opinions and bigotry, and trust whole-heartedly in God, God will teach and guide him onto His own Path."

Taqlid

***Taqlid* (following the outstanding jurisprudents in Islamic laws)**

According to the principle of practical devotion, the Shaykh was a *Muqallid* (follower) in religious ordinances, and followed one of his contemporary *Marja' i.e.*, Ayatollah Hujjat. He says the way he chose this scholarly figure as his *Marja'* authority of imitation:

"I went to Qum, visited all *Maraji'*, and I found no one as self-less as Agha Hujjat."

He is also quoted as saying somewhere else:

"I found his heart was devoid of ambitions and love of positions."

The reverend Shaykh bewared his friends of the "orders" and circles that had deviated from the above undertaking. A friend of Shaykh says: 'I asked the Shaykh about one of these orders². The Shaykh replied:

"I was in Karbala, I saw a group passing by, with the Satan holding the reins of the one who was leading the rest. I asked who they are. They said:..... "

The reverend Shaykh believed that those who keep themselves at a distance from the Ahl al-Bayt (a) in their spiritual seeking, the gates to real Divine knowledge will be closed to them.

One of the Shaykh's sons relates: 'My father and I had gone to the "Bibi Shahrbanu" Mountain.³ On the way we encountered a so-called practicing ascetic who had some boisterous claims. My father asked him:

"What has come out of your ascetic practices so far?"

That person bent down, picked up a piece of stone from the ground, transformed it into a pear, and offered it to my father, saying: 'Here you are, have it!

My father said:

"Well-done, you did it for me; now tell me what do you have for God? What did you do for Him?!"

Upon hearing this, the ascetic (recluse) burst into tears.

Dedicating the Work for God

One of the Shaykh's friends quotes him as saying: "In the evenings, I used to sit in Masjid-i Jum'a of Tehran correcting peoples' recitation of Sura *al-Hamd* and Sura *al-Tawhid*. Once, two kids were quarrelling, one beating the other. The latter came sat next to me to evade being beaten any more. I took the chance and asked him to recite his *Al-Hamd* and Sura *al-Tawhid* and helped him to correct them. This took all my time that night. The next night, a dervish came to me and said: I know the science of *kimiya* (alchemy), *simiya* (the producing of vision), *himiya* (the subjugating of souls), and *limiya* (magic) and came here to impart them to you, in exchange for the reward of what you did last night.'

I answered to him: No! If these were of any use, you would have kept them for yourself !"

Refuting un-Islamic Mortification

The Shaykh believed that if someone really acts according to the explicit Islamic ordinances, they will achieve all perfection and spiritual stations. He was strongly opposed to all kinds of extreme asceticism and self-mortification that are contrary to the traditions and practices of religious creeds. One of his devotees related: 'For a while I was engaged in self-mortification, living in seclusion away from my *Alawiyya* (descendant of Imam Ali (a)) wife in a separate room where I did my supplications and *dhikr* and slept there too. After four or five months, a friend of mine took me to see the reverend Shaykh. At his doorstep, and as soon as the Shaykh saw me, he said to me outright:

"Would you like me to tell... ?"

I bowed my head in shame. Then the Shaykh continued:

"Why are you treating your wife like that and have abandoned her? ...Do away with these self-mortification and *adhkar* and recitals!

Go get a box of sweets and go back to your wife. Say your prayers on due time with the common *ta'qibat* (the supererogatory supplications after each prayer)."

Then the Shaykh stressed on the narrations from the Ahl al-Bayt (a) asserting that if a person acts sincerely and purely for forty days, the fountainheads of wisdom will spring up from his heart⁴, and pointed out:

"According to these traditions if a person fulfills his religious obligations, they will definitely acquire certain illumination."

Acting according to the Shaykh's recommendation, that person gave up self-mortification and returned to his normal life.

First Payoff Your Khums

Dr. Hamid Farzam⁵ –a disciple of the Shaykh–describes the Shaykh in his devotedness in religious matters as follows: 'The Shaykh was equally dedicated to Shari'a (religious practice), tariqa (spiritual wayfaring), and haqiqa (the Divine Truth); unlike the Sufis who somehow reject the Shari'a. The first thing he said to me was: "Go and payoff your *Khums*!" He, then, sent me to the late Ayatollah Agha Shaykh Ahmad Ashtiyani (ra) for this purpose. And what a person he was! A true man of God from whom I acquired so many blessings and saw so many wonders in...! Anyway, I went to him as the Shaykh had instructed and paid off my *Khums* for the mediocre house I had.

¹. Translations of the Qur'anic verses are adopted from the English translation of "The Holy Qur'an" by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, revised edition, 1989.

- [2.](#) The narrator has advised not to mention the name of the order.
- [3.](#) A mountain near Shahr-i Ray, in which Bibi Shahrbano is said to be buried.
- [4.](#) See Mizan al-Hikmah, III, 1436: 1040; and "Al-'Ilm wal-Hikmah fil-Kitab", Ch. IV, Part III: 4, 2, "al-Ikhlās".
- [5.](#) He is now a member of Academy of Persian Language and Literature and was introduced by his late friend Dr. Abdul 'Ali Goya to the Shaykh in mid-1333 S.H./1954 CE. He got deeply fascinated by the Shaykh's speech, and the same day of their meeting he was initiated among his disciples through being instructed a special dhikr by him. Dr. Goya believed the Shaykh specially favored Dr. Farzam and found him capable and talented.

Ethics

The reverend Shaykh was extremely kind, pleasant-faced, good-tempered, well mannered, and polite. He always sat in a kneeled position and never leaned back on a cushion, keeping slightly at a distance from it. Whenever he shook hands with someone, he was by no means the first to withdraw his hand. He was very calm and peaceful. While speaking, he was always cheerful and smiling. He rarely got infuriated; and when he did, it was the time when the Satan and the *nafs* (vain desires) would come toward him. At such times, he would be overwhelmed by fury and would usually leave home, until he would win over the *nafs*; then he would calm down and return home.

One point that he would always emphasize and recommend to others regarding "good disposition" was that one should always be good-tempered for the sake of God and be well behaved toward people.

In this respect, he would say: "Be humble and good-tempered for the sake of God, rather than for pleasing people and as hypocrisy."

The Shaykh was quite taciturn; his pensive look explicitly indicated that he was engrossed in deliberation, remembrance of and attention to God. The beginning and the end of his talk was always concerning God. Looking at him would remind one of God. When sometimes he was asked where he had been, he would answer:

"*Inda Malikin Muqtadir*—In the presence of a Sovereign Omnipotent."

In the supplication sessions (e.g., *Nudba* and *Kumayl*, etc.) he would weep a lot. Whenever the poetry of Hafiz and Taqdis was recited his eyes would turn tearful. At the same time of weeping he was also capable of smiling or stating something in order to soften the possible boring climate into a cheerful one. He felt a deep love toward the holy Imam Ali Amir al-Mu'minin (a), and was his staunch advocate and lover. Whenever he sat down or stood up he would very gently recite the *dhikr* of '*Ya Ali adrikni*' (O Ali! Hearken my pleading).

Humbleness

Regarding this feature of the Shaykh, Dr. Farzam says: 'His conduct toward others was very humble and respectful. He would always open the door to welcome and admit us in for the sessions we used to hold in his house. Sometimes even he would quite unaffectedly take us to his workshop where he used to do his tailoring.

Once in the winter, he brought two pomegranates, and gave me one and said in very selflessly and unaffectedly manner: "Help yourself, Hamid jan! (dear Hamid)." He was by no means snobbish, and never considered himself superior to others. If he ever gave advice to someone, it was merely to fulfill the duty of guiding and instructing others.

He would always sit next to the entrance and whoever entered the room he would welcome them warmly, and respectfully invited them to be seated. Another disciple of the Shaykh says: 'When he was going somewhere in the company of his friends, he would not go ahead of others to get in.' Another one says: 'We had a trip to Mashhad together with the Shaykh. When we were setting out for the Holy Shrine, Haydar Ali Mu'jiza—son of the late Mirza Ahmad Murshid Chilu'i¹—frantically dropped himself on the Shaykh's feet trying to kiss his feet. The Shaykh retorted: "You mean—spirited one! Beware of that disobedience of God! Be ashamed of yourself! Who do you think I am?!"

Reconciliation

One of the most important moral issues that the Shaykh was very concerned about was to reconcile people with each other. He would invite to his house those who were not on speaking terms with each other, and would reconcile them by means of quoting relevant verses from the Qur'an and Islamic *hadiths* (traditions).

Profound Reverence for the Sayyids

He was highly reverent to the descendants of Imam Ali (a), Hazrat Fatima (a), and the Sayyids. He was frequently observed to be kissing their (the Sayyids') hands and enjoined others to respect them too.

There was a noble Sayyid who often went to visit the Shaykh. He had the habit of smoking the hobble bubble. Whenever one was prepared for him, the Shaykh himself –although not in the habit of smoking it –would first take a couple of drags, pretending he was smoking, so that the Sayyid would not feel ashamed of smoking; then the Shaykh would offer it to him to smoke.

One of the Shaykh's friends related: 'Once on a winter day I had an audience with the Shaykh.

He said:

"Let's go to one of Tehran's old quarters."

We went to an old alley. There, we found a shabby store where an old respectful Sayyid –who was a bachelor –worked as a charcoal seller and lived and slept there as his residence.

It turned out that the previous night the *kursi*² had been set on fire burning his clothes and some of his belongings.

His living condition was so miserable that many people were even unwilling to enter such places as that. With utmost humbleness, the Shaykh went to him and after a warm greeting, he collected his unwashed and half-burnt clothes to wash and mend. Then the old man said to the Shaykh that his possessions had been lost and he had not been able to carry on his job. Hearing this, the Shaykh turned to me and said:

"Give him something to restart his business with!"

Respect for All People

The reverend Shaykh was respectful not only to the Sayyids but also to all other people. If someone made a mistake, he would not humiliate them in the presence of others. He never reproached someone for their flaws but treated them warmly and amiably instead.

Indifference to the Worldly Positions

During the later periods of his life, a number of elites gradually became familiar with the Shaykh who included not only some of the eminent figures of the *Hawza* and University, but also some political and military personalities as well who visited him for various purposes.

Despite all his humbleness and respect toward the poor, the oppressed, and particularly the Sayyids, the Shaykh was indifferent to the formal dignitaries and high-ranking officials.

When they used to visit his house, he would say:

"They have come to ask me for 'the hag'³; they are distressed, run-down, and they have someone (around among their relatives) ailing. They come to me for *du'a* (supplication)."

The Shaykh's son said: "One of the generals who was devoted to my father once said to me: 'Do you know why! I love your father? It is because when the first time I went to visit him he was sitting next to the door in his room. I greeted him, then he said: "Go sit down!" I did so. A while later a blind man arrived; I saw that the Shaykh stood up, embraced him respectfully, and seated him near himself.

"I was looking around the house to see what was going on when I noticed the blind man rose up to leave. At the same time the Shaykh went ahead of him to help him put on his shoes, and then placed

ten *tomans* in his hand and the blind man left.

When it was my time to say goodbye, however, he did not move from where he was sitting and just said: "Khuda Hafiz!"⁴

Traveling Ethics In his blessed and outshining life, the Shaykh had made trips to Mashhad, Kashan, Isfahan, Mazandaran, and Kermanshah. The only travel he had outside Iran was to Iraq in order to make pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines there. From these trips, which were usually made in the company of his friends, that part of the memories and instructive points which are related to the traveling ethics are selected and brought up in the present volume.

According to the Shaykh's co-travelers, he had been good-natured, unfeigned in sincerity, and pleasurable to travel with. He never differentiated himself from his disciples and devotees. If some luggage and provisions were supposed to be carried along the trip, he would carry his portion and also paid his share of the expenses.

¹. See "We sell on credit even to you", Chapter Three, part 1

². A square table covered with quilts and blankets with a brazier under it to heat the legs and the body.

³. The reverend Shaykh usually referred to the world as "the hag"; a term referred to in Islamic traditions as "ajuz". See also chapter three, part 3, "The Pitfall of Love toward God."

⁴. Meaning, "goodbye".

Awaiting the Faraj (Second Coming of Imam al-'Asr (aj))

One of the Shaykh's outstanding features was his profound devotion to Hazrat Wali 'Asr (may our souls be sacrificed for him) and awaiting his holiness' *faraj* (advent) and reappearance. He said:

"Many people state that they love Imam Al-'Asr (aj) more than they love themselves', whereas it is not so. For if we love him more than ourselves, we should work for him rather than for ourselves. Pray you all that Allah (s) may remove the obstacles and hindrances of his reappearance and maintain our hearts in line with his blessed heart."

The Shaykh's Significant Demand

One of the Shaykh's friends related: 'In all the years I was at the service of the Shaykh, I never sensed that he had any other wishes than the *faraj* of Hazrat Wali 'Asr (aj). He would remind the friends not to demand from God anything except the *faraj* of "the Imam of Time" as far as possible. The state of

awaiting was so strong in the reverend Shaykh that when someone would talk about the *faraj* of Wali 'Asr (aj), he would get extremely moved and wept.

How the Ant Strived to Reach the Beloved

The one important thing his reverence emphasized was the preparedness and being well-equipped by all those awaiting the reappearance of Imam al- 'Asr (aj), even though they do not live long enough to witness the time of that noble Imam's advent. He gave an account of Hazrat Dawood (a) as follows:

"While passing through a desert, His Holiness saw an ant picking some dust from a small mound and carrying it to put in another place. He asked Allah (s) to inform him of the secret of this ant. ...The ant began to speak: 'I have a beloved who has set as a condition for my union with her the carrying of all dust from that mound to this place!'

'How long will you be able to shift such big mound of dust to the required location? After all, will your life be sufficient for that?' The Prophet Dawood (a) asked the ant. To which he answered: 'I know all this! But my joy is in that if I die in this way I will have died in the way of my beloved!' Hearing this, Hadrat Dawod got quite overwhelmed and figured out this story as a lesson for himself."

The reverend Shaykh always insisted that:

"With all your being (whole-heartedly) be awaiting Wali 'Asr (aj) and carry on this state of awaiting while depending on Divine Dispensation. "

"Give my Regards to that Holiness (aj)"

One of his disciples said: 'He was always conscious of that noble Presence (aj), never saying the dhikr of *Salawat* without ending it with the phrase, "*Wa 'ajjal farajahum*. "(Hasten his reappearance)'

His sessions were never held without homage to the Imam al- 'Asr (aj) and supplication for his reappearance. In the latter years of his life when he felt he would die before the *Faraj*, he would say to his friends:

"If you would find the honor to witness his (Holy Imam's) reappearance give my regards to him."

The Purgatory State (*Barzakh*) of a Young Man Awaiting Imam Mahdi (aj)

During the burial of a young man, the Shaykh said:

"I saw Harat Imam Musa bin Ja'far (a) stretched his arms to embrace this young man. I asked (the people around) what his last word before dying was. They said it was this poem:

'The awaiting ones are parting with their souls in their last breaths, O King of the noble, grant us your Succor!'"

The Second Coming of some of the People Awaiting Imam Mahdi (aj)

The reverend Shaykh believed that those really awaiting Imam al-'Asr (aj) will return to the world after their death to accompany His Holiness (aj) upon his reappearance.¹ Among the ones he named as those who will return to the world at the time of Imam's (aj) return are: Ali bin Ja'far buried in "Dar-i Bihisht" cemetery in Qum, and Mirza Qummi in a Shaykhan cemetery in Qum.

A Cobbler in Shahr-i Ray

One of the Shaykh's disciples said: 'Once I was in his presence and we were talking about *the faraj* of Mawla Imam al-'Asr (aj) and the conditions of awaiting. He said:

"There was once in Shahr-i Ray a cobbler (apparently) named Imam Ali, an Azeri speaking man with no wife and children, who lived in his workshop too. He has been described as being in very outstanding spiritual state. He did not demand anything but the *faraj* of Mawla Imam al-'Asr (aj). He had specified in his will when he died to be buried at the foothill of Shahrbanu mount--on the outskirts of Shahr-i Ray. Whenever I directed my attention toward his grave, I saw the Imam (aj) was there!"²

¹. This reminds me (the author) of Imam Khomeini (ra) whose blessed life ended with regularly reciting the Du'a-i 'Ahd (supplication of the covenant), a supplication about which Imam al-Sadiq (a) said: "Whoever reads this covenant for forty mornings they will be ranked as our Qa'im's helpers and if he dies before reappearance of that Hazrat, God will raise him from his grave to be at the service of that Hazrat." See also Mafatih al-Jinan.

². See "The Heart with which everything is Present", Chapter Three, Part 3.

Poetry

The reverend Shaykh was very interested in mystical and ethical poetry. His sermons were, most often, given along with instructive poetry. He especially valued the *Ghazals* of Hafiz and the Mathnawi of Taqdis; he would cry when hearing their poetry.

He was very fond of Mathnawi of Taqdis and would say: "If there were only one copy of Taqdis in the market, I would give anything I had in order to buy that book"¹

Dr. Abul Hasan Shaykh, a close acquaintance of the Shaykh for many years, said: 'The Shaykh was an expert on Hafiz poetry and interpreted his poems quite well.

About the reverend Shaykh's viewpoint concerning poetry and poets, particularly Hafiz, Dr. Hamid Farzam had this to say: 'Since 1954, when I found the honor of friendship with the Shaykh through Dr.

Guya, rarely a session would have been held in which I would not hear relevant, timely, and beautiful poetry from him. He was really fascinated by Hafiz. Once I asked him why he was so deeply interested in Hafiz. He replied:

"In spiritual and mystical aspects, Hafiz has really done his best and expressed all spiritual truths and mystical-intuitive findings in his poetry."

The Shaykh was more dedicated to Hafiz than to other poets, and would always recite his poems even when he wished to warn or reproach someone.²

He always referred to the world as a "hag". Sometimes facing a disciple he would say:

"I see you have fallen again in the trap of this 'hag'!"

And then, he would recite this poem of Hafiz:

'There is none who is not entangled in that curling ringlet,

Who is there in the way of whom lies not such a snare of tribulation?'³

He would also say ironically:

"Most often they get entangled in it, and very few are the ones who are detached from this hag!"

He would recite this fine couplet in condemning self-conceit:

'Being self-conceited and self-opinionated is infidelity toward being a *dervish* recluse,

The command is what You (God) ordain, the opinion is what You think of.'

Reciting (singing) Poetry in a Delightful Voice

Dr. Farzam said in this respect 'The late reverend Shaykh would recite poetry in a pleasant melody, for instance, certain poems of the late Fayz-e Kashani, such as the following couplets which would highly impress the listeners.

'I seek Allah's forgiveness of whatever (I have done for) other than the Beloved,

I seek Allah's forgiveness for my fictitious existence

If a moment elapses without remembering his (beautiful) countenance,

I seek Allah's forgiveness myriad of times for that moment'

One afternoon we were in the company of the Shaykh in one of his disciples' house. It had a very large

guestroom and the Shaykh was sitting near the doorway singing the following couplet of Hafiz.

'Who is the one who, out of loving kindness, may practice sincerity to us?

(And) may do benevolence in lieu of ill-doing to such ill-doer as me'

He sang some couplets of this *ghazal* with a very beautiful and pleasant melody while weeping and making others extremely overwhelmed and tearful. It was so extraordinary! I said to Dr. Goya 'The reverend Shaykh has got such a lovely voice and sweet breath!

He replied. 'It is a pity you made such belated acquaintance with him He used to sing so beautifully that when he recited such poems in a mystical state, the doors and walls literally vibrated.'

A Poem by the Shaykh and Reminiscence

It seems that the Shaykh himself used to write poems occasionally. One of the contemporary *maraji'* who was a student of the great jurist and mystic, the late Ayatollah Qadi (Allameh Tabataba'i's teacher) answered to my inquiry about Shaykh Rajab Ali Khayyat as follows: 'I met him in a session with Ayatollah Qadi in Najaf. In that session, he recited some poems in praise of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (a) each couplets beginning with the letters of *abjad*.⁴ He then recited another of his poems as follows:

'Whatever Bounties You have granted to the whole Universe, All have You granted to me, plentiful and diverse.'

"I was thinking that this was the most sublime interpretation of Divine Bounties and thanksgiving to Him, until I came across this statement in al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya:"

شكري أياك من انعاماتك

*"Shukri iyyaka min in 'amatika (I am thankful to You for all Your Bounties)*⁵

An Amazing and Instructive Miraculous Act⁶

At the end of the weekly session of "ethics" lesson⁷, a young man came forward and, referring to what was mentioned at the footnote No. 1 of this page, stated: "I am coming from Yazd. This issue was brought up in a meeting where some of those present ridiculed and said it was because of the Shaykh illiteracy that he did not know this phrase is not found in al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya! At that night, I saw him in a dream. He said:

"What is quoted from me is not right. What I have said is as follows: 'And let my attitude to Thee for what Thou hast not granted me be more abundant than my gratitude to Thee for what Thou hast bestowed upon me!'⁸ And this content does exist in supplication number 35 of al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya!"

No doubt, this has been a true dream, since it is extremely important and essential to note that "it is a great blessing for man not to attain various worldly pleasures and luxuries which may divert him from sublime human goal; it is a great blessing that deserves much more gratitude and gratefulness than gratitude for the bounties that man has attained in the world." Also, finding such an issue from al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya in a dream without connection to the Unseen world is usually impossible.⁹

- ¹. One of Shaykh's devotees said: ' He recommended reading of "Taqdis" of Mulla Ahmad Naraqi and "Kimiyye Sa'adat" of Ghazali.'
- ². See "You Lose Temper too quickly!" Chapter Three, Part 2.
- ³. All the poems and ahadith in this volume are rendered into English by the translator, except the ones adopted from other translated works which are referred to in the footnotes.
- ⁴. An arithmetical arrangement of the Arabic alphabet.
- ⁵. Despite all the efforts made to identify this phrase in al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya. However, all the phrases in Supplication 37 and the "Whispered Prayer of the Thankful" of Imam al-Sajjad (a) do testify to this notion.
- ⁶. This title was later added to the eleventh edition of the Persian Version.
- ⁷. Weekly sessions of teaching ethics is held for a group of talabas (seminary students) from Hawzah 'Ilmiyya (Islamic Seminary) of Hadrat Abdul Azim al-Hasani (a).
- ⁸. The Psalms of Islam, (al-Sahifah al-Sajjadiyya), supplication 35, p. 121, translated by William Chittick, Muhammadi Trust, London, 1988.
- ⁹. It can be even said that this true dream somehow implicitly confirms other issues quoted from the reverend Shaykh in this book.

Politics

The Shaykh was not involved in politics; however, he was strongly opposed to the detested Pahlavi regime and the ruling statesmen. He was not only opposed to the Shah, but also disapproved Musaddeq. He praised, however, Ayatollah Kashani (ra) and said: "His inward aspect was similar to a fountainhead."

Two Political Predictions

One of the Shaykh's sons said: 'On 30th of Tir, 1330 S.H. (July 21, 1951) when the Shaykh arrived in the house, he burst into tears and said':

"Hadrat-i Sayyid al- Shuhada put out this fire and prevented this affliction; many people were intended to be massacred on this day. Ayatollah Kashani will not be successful (victorious), but there will come a Sayyid who will succeed."

Later on his prediction turned out to be about Imam Khomeini (ra).

The Future of the Islamic Revolution

Speaking of Imam Khomeini (ra), it is interesting to know his foresight concerning the future of the Islamic Revolution.

Mr. Ali Muhammad Bisharati-- former interior minister-- related that in the summer of 1358/1979, when he was in charge of the Intelligence Department of sipah-i pasdaran (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps), he received a report on Mr. Shari'atmadari (a then dissident cleric) who had said in Mashhad: 'I will eventually declare war against Imam Khomeini (ra).'

Mr. Bisharati said: 'I went to see Imam Khomeini (ra) and among other reports I informed him of what was said about him by Mr. Shari'atmadari. The Imam (ra) listened with bowed head, and when I ended my talk, he raised his head and said:

"What are they saying? Our victory is guaranteed by Allah. We will be successful, and set up an Islamic government and hand over the banner to the rightful banner-bearer (Imam Mahdi (a))."

I asked: 'Yourself (will hand it over)?'

Imam (ra) kept silent and did not answer.'

Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar in the Purgatory World

One of the Shaykh's disciples related the following from him about the condition of Nasir al-Din Shah Qajar in the Purgatory State:

"His soul was set free on Friday, the evening of which he was being forced back to his previous station. He was crying and begging the agents (who were escorting) him not to take him back. When he saw me he said: If I knew my place would be such as this I would never even imagine of having joy and pleasure in the world!"

Praising the Tyrannical Monarch

The reverend Shaykh would restrain his friends and disciples from collaborating with the ruling government (i.e., Pahlavi) particularly from praising and admiring them (the officials).

A disciple of the Shaykh quotes him as saying:

"I saw the soul of one of the pious people being tried in the Purgatory state, and all the indecent actions perpetrated by his contemporary despotic ruler were being ascribed to him. The man being tried protested:

'I have not done any of these crimes. He was replied: 'Did you not say in praise of him that he provided the country with such wonderful security?'

He answered: 'Yes.'

He was told then: 'You were satisfied with his actions; he made all these crimes to secure his kingdom'."

In Nahjul-Balagha, Imam Ali (a) is quoted as saying:

الراضي بفعل قوم كالداخل فيه معهم، وعلى كل داخل في باطل أثمان: أثم العمل به، وأثم الرضا به

"Whoever is content with conducts of some other people, he is like the one who has collaborated with them in those actions; and whoever perpetrates a falsehood two sins are recorded for him: One for doing it, and the other for being content with it."^{[1](#)}

Cooperation with the American Military Attaches

One of the Shaykh's friends whose son was working with American attaches said: 'On a trip to Mashhad I was in the company of the Shaykh. Together with him we went to the Holy Shrine for a pilgrimage. He stood in a corner to recite the *Ziyarat*, talking to Imam al-Reza (a) the same way as I talk to you. After finishing the *Ziyarat*, he made a *sajdah* (prostration). When he raised up his head from *sajdah*, he called me (near himself) and said:

"His Holiness (Imam al-Reza (a)) says: ' Prevent your son from pursuing that job, otherwise he will place a heavy burden on your back!'"

'We did not know that he had made arrangements with the Americans to go to the U.S.A. About twenty five years ago,^{[2](#)} one day my son came to me and said: 'I am going abroad and I have made –all the arrangements and even obtained my visa.' Whatever we did we could not avert his decision. When he finally left for the U.S.A., he wrote to us some time later that his wife was barren and that he was divorcing her. Since then we have gone through much trouble because of him.

^{[1](#)}. Mizan al-Hikmah, VIII, 3714: 12748.

^{[2](#)}. This interview took place on July 1, 1996.