

Spiritual Authority

The term, spirituality, is generally a vague one, meaning different things to different people. From the Islamic perspective, it may be said that the goal of all spirituality is to realise and manifest the already existing unity between the self and Allah. Allah is the goal and anything short of reaching Him is deemed a failure of existence. Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A) is narrated to have said, 'No drop is dearer to Allah than two: the drop of blood in the cause of Allah and the teardrop in the darkness of the night by which the servant wants nothing except Allah.'¹

Proximity to Allah as the essence of spirituality, is also reflected in the Supplication of Kumayl, wherein Imam Ali (A) cries, 'O the ultimate goal of the endeavours of the spiritual journeyers!'

On the night of Ascension, known as al-Mi'raj, Prophet Muhammad (S) reached the foremost peak of human spiritual potential. As Allah describes,

***'So he attained completion. He was in the highest part of the horizon. Then he drew near, then he bowed; so he was the measure of two bows or closer. And He revealed to His servant what He revealed.'* (Qur'an, 53:6-10)**

Everything the Holy Prophet experienced in his daily life, whether it was eating his meals, fasting, spending time with his family or his companions, his daily prayers, his night prayers or his patience in his struggles, was accompanied by the internalised presence of God, the result of which was a heart perfectly attuned to God's majesty and grace.

Imam Ali (A) has described the people of this station, saying, 'The greatness of the Creator is seated in their heart and so, everything else appears small in their eyes. Thus to them Paradise is as though they see it and are enjoying its favours and to them, Hell is also as if they see it and are suffering punishment in it.'²

As one's spirituality and thereby, unity with Allah increases, he lives for a loftier purpose, becoming oblivious to the minor difficulties faced by the body and mind. His godly intention and purpose directs his every action such that his life is in perfect obedience to Allah's command, ***'And strive hard in [the way***

of] Allah, such a striving as is due to Him.” (Qur’an, 22:78) The rewards from Allah reach such a servant in abundance and as in Paradise, he is not deprived of God’s favours in the world. He becomes what God intended all humans to be – a reflection of divinity.

Story 1

On Thursday night, 3rd Rajab 1414 AH, Shaykh Muhsin Qara’ati narrated a story in his weekly lecture on Iranian TV regarding one of the seminary students of Samarra in the time of Mujaddid Shirazi al-Kabir (died in the year 1312 AH).

He related that the student was very poor and on the verge of bankruptcy. He was in great financial distress. So he decided to perform the *ziyarah* of Imam al-Hadi and Imam al-Askari

(A). When he recited the *ziyarah*, he addressed the two Imams with a sorrowful and burning heart, saying, ‘You both know my situation; I am your guest and this is your home.’ He then left the shrine and sat in the corner of the courtyard of the shrine. Whilst he was sitting in the corner, he saw the great *marja’*, Mujaddid Shirazi enter the *haram* and visit the two Imams. He then returned and approached the student.

The student was very surprised and wondered why such a great scholar would approach him. When he reached the student, Sayyid Shirazi bowed and gave the student some money and then said, ‘Surely the guests should be patient and persevere much through difficulties, poverty, migration and other such trials!’³

Upon completing his statement, Sayyid Shirazi then left, leaving the student in deep thought and shock. He cried, ‘My Lord, what must be the relationship between him and these two Imams? And how did he know that I was in need? And that I described myself in that *ziyarah* as a guest and nobody knew I was so!’

Story 2

After the death of Ayatullah Abd al-Karim Ha’iri, Ayatullah Sayyid Husayn Burujerdi came to Qom to assume the leadership of the Islamic seminaries. He was considered very young at the time to take on the immense responsibility of being the grand *marja’* and so there was a meeting of the scholars to discuss the situation. Many teachers attended and many said that the seminaries should be under the auspices of Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Gulpaygani.

Hence, Sayyid Murtadha al-Ha’iri, the son of the Ayatullah Ha’iri, insisted that Ayatullah Gulpaygani should assume the role but he refused, saying, ‘I don’t have the resources to administer the running of the hawzah.’ However, when Ayatullah Burujerdi also insisted, he finally agreed.

The first issue that had to be dealt with was the distribution of monthly stipends for the students which

took place at the beginning of the month. Ayatullah Gulpaygani did not have the money and so was forced to borrow it in order to provide the students with the money for their living expenses.

When the time came to return the money, someone came to remind Ayatullah Gulpaygani about it but since he did not have the money to pay the debt, he said, '*Allahu akbar*.' Whilst he was still sitting in the same position, someone approached and put in the hands of Ayatullah Gulpaygani a *khums* payment, the amount of which was exactly the same amount he owed the man! Ayatullah Gulpaygani again said, '*Allahu akbar*!' Some people asked him about the reason for saying '*Allahu akbar*', but he responded only with a silent smile.⁴

The person who made the *khums* payment said to Ayatullah Gulpaygani, 'I was inspired to come to Qom just to give you this money, Your Eminence.'

Story 3

Ayatullah Muhsin al-Araki was a scholar who would not teach *tafsir* of the Holy Qur'an unless he was thoroughly prepared for the lesson. He would often teach by referring to the commentary, *Majma' al-Bayan*. One night, during his preparations for the following day's class, he read the verse, '**Allah will raise in ranks, those who have believed and are given knowledge.**' (*Qur'an, 58:11*). Reading further into the narrations associated with the verse, his eyes fell on a narration from the Holy Prophet, Muhammad (S), saying, 'Anyone who intends to search for knowledge, there is only one rank between him and the Prophets.'⁵

Surprised, Ayatullah al-Araki said to himself, 'It is very difficult for me to believe this narration. How can there be only one step between a student and a Prophet?'

To research the matter further, Ayatullah al-Araki assessed the chain of narrators and found the chain was *mursal*: some narrators were missing, reducing the narration's veracity. Ayatullah al-Araki narrates:

'This helped me to reject this narration and not believe in it. Thereafter, I closed the book and I slept.

'The next day, I went to the madrasah to teach the students and I saw someone very tall, sitting amongst the students. Just before we started my class, he greeted me and said, "I would like to talk to you." I thought he had a need so I told him I would fulfil it after the class as there was no need to cut my class short. "You can wait in that room; I will come after the class," I told him.

'The person replied, "Last night I saw the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) in my dream. He told me, 'Go tomorrow to the madrasah and tell [Ayatullah al-Araki] that the narration he read last night, the authenticity of which he doubted, came from me – so he should not doubt!'"

Story 4

Shaykh Mahmud Zanjazi narrates:

‘After the first World War, I travelled to Iraq for the holy visitations. I stopped to pray at a mosque in the city of Khaniqin and there I saw a white man praying like us. Surprised, I waited for him to finish his prayers and then approached so I could speak with him. I asked him about himself and how he had embraced Islam, to which he replied with the following story:

“I am from the city of Leningrad, Russia. I was the commander of the Russian army. We were stationed outside the city of Karbala, waiting for instructions to invade and occupy it.

“On that night, as I slept, I saw in my dream a glorious man emanating a divine light, the like of which I had never seen before. He spoke to me, saying, ‘Your soldiers will be defeated and each of them will be killed by the Muslims. Before this happens, save yourself and accept Islam.’ I asked him, ‘Who are you? I have never seen a person like you in your station or stature or glory or bravery.’ He replied, ‘I am Abul Fadhl al- Abbas, the one in whose name the Muslims take oaths.’

“In the dream, he taught me the statement to convert and witness that I am a Muslim and then told me to leave the camp and army. I asked him where I should go as I didn’t know anyone in this country. He told me, ‘Near your tent is a horse; ride on it and it will take you to Najaf, the city of my father and there will be our representative [Ayatullah] Sayyid Abul Hasan al-Isfahani.’

“So I awoke and immediately gathered my things and left. I rode the horse and an hour later, I arrived at Najaf and the horse took me to a particular house. As I stood there, a great and noble Sayyid with light shining from his face, opened the door and with him was a Shaykh. I spoke to the Shaykh in Russian and then I entered the house.

“I asked the Shaykh, ‘Who is this Sayyid?’ He replied, ‘He is the one Abul Fadhl al-Abbas directed you to. Abbas has already advised him about your coming.’ Shaking, I relayed the entire incident and repeated my testimony of faith to the Sayyid. Then Sayyid al-Isfahani asked the Shaykh to teach me the laws and basic principles of Islam.

“On my second day in Najaf, news reached us that the Russian government had ordered the attack on Karbala but that the army had been destroyed by the Muslims. I thank Allah for guiding me through that dream and sending me to the city of the father of Abul Fadhl al-Abbas.”

Story 5

A person came to Ayatullah Sayyid Husayn Burujerdi and said, ‘I have seen a dream in which there were three books; all were Qur’anic scriptures. One was big, one was medium and one was small. All three were being burned; the first two were on fire in my dream whilst the small one was being set on fire

and burned around the edges. What is the meaning of this dream?’

Ayatullah Burujerdi replied, ‘I cannot give you the meaning of this dream but if you go to [such and such] street, there is a scholar by the name of Ayatullah Sayyid Ahmad al-Qummi who is a great teacher and can explain this dream to you.’

So the person went to Ayatullah al-Qummi and related the dream and sought the explanation. Ayatullah al-Qummi replied, ‘In your house you have three daughters, represented in your dream by the three scriptures. Your eldest two, since joining a new school, have removed their *hijab* and so you saw these two Qur’ans engulfed in flames entirely. But your third and youngest daughter has also completed her junior school and is now going to a new school. She has also intended to remove her *hijab* and so this Qur’an has begun to catch fire and the edges are beginning to burn.

‘Is the situation with your daughters as I have detailed?’ asked Ayatullah al-Qummi. ‘Yes it is just as you said,’ replied the man.

Story 6

Shaykh Muhammad Sharif Radhi narrates:

‘I knew a policeman who resigned in the era of the Shah. I asked him what convinced him to resign from the post, to which he replied, “It was a meeting with Ayatullah Sayyid Najafi Mar’ashi who came to me and told me to retire from my position!” I asked him to tell me the story. The former policeman related:

“On the night in which I met Ayatullah Najafi, I was working a shift from ten thirty at night to three in the morning on the streets close to the shrine of Lady Fatimah Ma’suma. I was in need of performing *Ghusl al-Janabah* (Ghusl that becomes mandatory upon having sexual relations) but I did not have any money so that I may visit a public bath.

“As the end of the night approached, a bus from the city of Isfahan arrived and parked and many visitors disembarked. I took this opportunity to trouble the bus driver, demanding, ‘Why did you park here? Show me your driver’s license!’

“By intimidating the bus driver, I managed to obtain 5 tomans from him. Having the money in hand, I told him to drive on quickly. I said to myself, ‘Now that you have received this money, you can go the bath house.’

“I went to the bath house and performed my ablution for my prayers. Before the time for the morning prayer set in, I saw Ayatullah Sayyid Mar’ashi approaching the holy shrine. He called out to me, ‘Come here!’ I went to him and he extended his hand and gave me 5 tomans, saying, ‘With these 5 tomans, go to the bathhouse and perform your ablution. It would not be correct for you to perform your bath with that money.’ I was shocked and all I could repeat was, ‘OK Sayyid, OK Sayyid.’

“On that same day, I decided to leave my job as a policeman and find a job that gave me my independence. And since then, by the grace of God, I have had good jobs and have even managed to go for *hajj*.”

Story 7

Ayatullah Furqani narrates:

‘There was a speaker in Najaf who would spend time with Imam Khomeini. One night, this lecturer asked me, “There is an issue I am aware of; should I discuss it with the Imam?” I replied that there was no problem but he feared that as the Imam was in financial difficulty, relating the issue on his mind might burden the Imam further. He asked again “Do you think I should inform Imam or not?” I asked him what it was and he replied, “I know of an old scholar from [the town of] Shushtar; he was a reciter of the Qur’an and has six children. Three years ago, he became disabled and is now bed-ridden; his financial situation is very bad. I want to inform the Imam of his circumstances; perhaps he may be able to help him.”

‘I told him to go ahead and when the Imam came out, he approached and informed him of the situation. Imam Khomeini replied to him that he would certainly help and said, “Please tell Ayatullah Furqani to remind me of the matter tomorrow,” and so the lecturer returned, informing me what the Imam had said.

‘I walked with the Imam to the holy shrine and before he stepped inside, he turned to me and said, “Don’t forget to go at 9 p.m. tomorrow to the disabled gentleman in Shushtar and visit him on my behalf.” I wrote it down in my calendar so as not to forget and then we entered the shrine.

‘It was my habit to come to the house of Imam at 8 a.m. daily but the following morning I came at 7:30 a.m. When I came to the road, I saw a wave of clergy outside it and as I entered, I saw the same inside. I felt fearful and someone came to me and asked, “Do you know if they’ve taken Sayyid Mustafa’s [Imam Khomeini’s son] body to Karbala?” [Realising that Sayyid Mustafa must have died), my knees became weak and I had to sit down. I replied, “Yes, perhaps they took it to Karbala.”

‘I went ahead and reached the office door and saw Sayyid Ahmed [Imam Khomeini’s other son] in front of it, not wearing his *amamah* [as a sign of grief]. He was in a state of discomfort, sometimes sitting and sometimes standing because of the tragic situation. He was crying profusely, saying to himself, “Ah! I lost my brother,” and quietly asking others not to inform the Imam and to cry quietly so as not to reveal what had happened. Hence, I knew that the Imam had not yet received news of what had happened.

‘The office group and close family believed it was necessary not to tell the Imam of the incident so as not to make him sick through grief, but in reality, no one really knew the Imam at all, for as the narration says, “The believer is strong like the mountain; even if a hurricane was to strike it, it would not be moved.”

‘In this way, we agreed to go together to inform the Imam; we would discuss Sayyid Mustafa and break the news gradually. One would inform him there was a situation, another would tell him Sayyid Mustafa was in a critical state and then another would inform him he had passed away; this strategy was suggested by Sayyid Ahmed.

‘Sayyid Ahmed entered the room and informed the Imam that there was a group who wanted to visit him; he allowed them to enter and after exchanging greetings, he immediately enquired, “What is the news from the hospital about the health of Sayyid Mustafa?” As per the strategy, one began by saying, “We were informed it was necessary to move him to Baghdad immediately,” but Sayyid Ahmed was not able to prevent himself and began to cry loudly whilst trying hard to muffle the sound.

‘The Imam asked, “Why are you crying? Has Sayyid Mustafa died? Don’t you know the occupants of the heavens will die, those who reside on the earth will die; everyone shall die? Sayyid Ahmed, take care of your responsibilities and routine.”

‘We refreshed our ablution and sat in the back garden to recite Qur’an for Sayyid Mustafa; many scholars from Najaf came to express their condolences and the house was full of people crying. When 9 p.m. arrived, I asked myself, “Am I able to remind the Imam about the man in Shushtar at such a time?” I decided it was not the right time, so soon after the death of his son.

‘The Imam was sitting, greeting those who would come and go. Suddenly, he looked at me. He called me to him and asked, “Isn’t it 9 p.m.? Didn’t we agree that you should remind me about the person whom we discussed yesterday?” Unable to control myself, I began to cry, thinking to myself, how incredible it was that the Imam had remembered [the appointment] even in his hour of grief!⁶

‘The Imam got up and we walked through the people to the office. He brought out an envelope of money so that the money could not be seen and said, “Go now to Shustar and give him this; ask about his situation on my behalf.”

‘When I got to the house, the disabled man’s wife opened the door. I said, “I have come from the office of the Imam to ask about your situation on his behalf.” The man’s wife exclaimed, “Even on this day, he asks about our situation! Today, when I heard about the death of his son, I said to myself that no one will come from his office until after a year!”

‘After I returned, the Imam called me and asked me to tell him about the man’s health and situation. When I finished, he stood, refreshed his ablution and headed for the holy shrine.’

¹. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 100, p. 10.

². Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 192.

³. This incident is a manifestation of the noble verses, ‘As for those who say “Our Lord is Allah” and then continue in the right way, the Angels descend upon them, saying,

“Fear not, nor be grieved and receive good news of the Garden which you were promised. We are your guardians in the life of this world and in the hereafter and you shall have therein whatever your soul desires and you shall have therein what you

ask for.” (Qur’an, 41:30–31)

4. This incident is a manifestation of the noble verses,

‘Whoever believes in Allah and the last day and whoever is careful of his duty to Allah, He will make for him an outlet and give to him sustenance from where he thinks not. And whoever trusts in Allah, He is sufficient for him; surely Allah attains His purpose; Allah indeed has appointed a measure for everything.’ (Qur’an, 65:2–3)

5. من جاءت منيته و هو يطلب العلم، بينه و بين الانبياء درجة.

6. This action reminds us of the manifestation of the narration from the Holy Prophet when he said, ‘He who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement must fulfil his promise when he promises.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 149, hadith no. 77).

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