

The Ways Of The Righteous Vol. 1: Inspirational Stories From The Lives Of Shi'a Scholars

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Jaffer Ali Ladak

**Inspirational Stories
From The Lives Of Shi'a Scholars**

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A collection of stories, mostly unpublished and unknown to the public, about several scholars, to allow people to know about these great personalities, their lives and ethics, and be a cue of reflection and practical role models on how to live a full Islamic lifestyle.

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Introduction

In the Name of Allah, the most Kind, the most Merciful

This series is dedicated to hastening the appearance of the Awaited Saviour of mankind, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ).

May the reward be dedicated to Marhum Mulla Asgharali M.M. Jaffer and all the scholars mentioned throughout the book.

Throughout the history of divinely revealed religions, Allah has entrusted scholars with the great responsibility of the protection and elucidation of the Holy Books and Prophetic practice. The Holy Qur'an confirms,

***'Indeed We revealed the Tawrah in which was guidance and light; with it, the Prophets who submitted themselves [to Allah] judged [matters] for those who were Jews; as [did] the masters of divine knowledge and the scholars because they were required to guard the Book of Allah and they were witnesses thereof.'* (Qur'an, 5:44)**

This devolution of religious authority continued when Prophet Muhammad (S) encouraged members of Muslim communities to become conversant with the depths of their faith. Again, the Holy Qur'an advises,

'Why then should not a party from each group among them go forward so that they may apply

themselves to obtaining a profound understanding of the religion and so that they may warn their people when they return.’ (Qur’an, 9: 122)

Allah also elevated their stations, stating,

‘Allah will exalt those of you who believe and those who are given knowledge in high degrees.’ (Qur’an, 58: 11)

In order to confirm the position of scholars in Islam, the Holy Prophet and his noble successors, the Ahlul Bayt, have extolled their virtues at length. The Holy Prophet is narrated to have said, ‘The scholars are the heirs of the Prophets.¹’ He has also stated, ‘On the Day of Judgement, the ink of the scholars will be weighed against the blood of the martyrs and the ink of the scholars shall outweigh the blood of the martyrs.’²

In addition, those who have not mastered the Islamic sciences are obliged to emulate the scholars in matters of jurisprudence. This injunction is mentioned by Imam Hasan al-Askari (A), when he states, ‘And as for him amongst the jurists who guards himself, protects his faith, opposes his illegitimate personal desires and obeys his Lord, it is necessary for the people to follow him.³’ Indeed the books of traditions are replete with narrations venerating the status of a scholar.

To be endorsed as the ‘inheritor’ of the Prophets levies a lofty responsibility. In order to expound on why this designation has been set, Ayatullah Shahid Murtadha Mutahhari writes:

‘By the period of the finality of Prophethood, humanity had developed to the extent that it was able to have a comprehensive plan of conduct and it was no longer necessary that they should receive guidance stage by stage. When his [man’s] ability sufficiently developed, a comprehensive scheme was put at his disposal and for this reason, the renewal of Prophethood also disappeared.

‘Today, the Muslim scholars who are specialists in this field can guide the Muslims in light of this scheme and can frame the rules and procedures to suit every occasion. The religious scholars of the age of knowledge, are capable of applying the general principles of Islam to the requirements of the time and place and can deduce the rules of religious law.⁴’

Whilst Ayatullah Shahid Mutahhari’s comments should be considered in the context of divine law, the first and last narrations above provide much insight into the responsibilities of the scholar beyond the deduction of principles of law, for being the ‘inheritor’ of the Prophets requires the practice of the Prophetic disciplines of morality, spirituality and wisdom. The scholar is required to refine his character, traversing the path of the Thaqalayn⁵ and becoming an exemplar for the community to observe. Allah praises such people, stating:

‘Those with Him are not proud to serve Him; nor do they grow weary. They glorify Him by night and day; they are never languid.’ (Qur’an, 21: 19–20)

The Shi'a Ithna Asheri community, characterised by its devotion toward its scholars, has reached a unique point in its history. The migration of Ayatullah Abd al-Karim al-Ha'iri⁶ to the holy city of Qom revitalised its seminaries whilst in the holy city of Najaf, Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Qasim al-Khoei⁷ supervised the tutelage of numerous senior students. The converging of these two events in relatively the same period produced what is arguably the greatest period of scholarly achievement in Shi'a history. Consequently, whilst in previous generations, there were primarily one or two outstanding scholars leading the community, presently there may be more than two dozen, all hailing from similar teachers and with similar credentials. This rise in scholarly calibre has been accompanied by an increase in the level of enquiry into various scholarly personalities, their religious standpoints, spiritual stations, political roles and social projects.

Today there is more demand for information about the activities of the scholars than at any other time in the past; there is a growing desire to interact with and learn from religious scholars. Moreover, the degree of enthusiasm and anticipation communities demonstrate when either visiting or being visited by scholars, is quite profound.

Many people, however, feel distanced from Muslim scholars due to barriers of geography and language. Moreover, whilst many Muslims have heard of various scholarly figures and have even read their works or watched videos about them, the scholars are still known very superficially, as revered figures attributed to a place or to a particular family. It is due to the general lack of knowledge about the character and achievements of Muslim scholars that I decided to compile a series of insightful stories from the lives of our scholars, in an attempt to bridge the gap between the Muslim community and these great personalities.

Inspired by the stories of Ayatullah Shahid Baqir al-Sadr's reaction when observing Saddam's thirsty guards (*Page 56*) encircling his house and that of a student asking Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Shirazi what he would do if he had one day left to live, (*Page 72*) I set about compiling stories from the various biographies and Arabic sources already in circulation. I contacted the offices of the scholars, their family members and numerous scholars from the community, requesting their personal experiences in order to collect stories directly from them and hence, this series also includes a large proportion of previously unpublished stories.

Amongst the primary goals of the series is to introduce the community to contemporary or recently deceased scholars, to remove the aforementioned barriers and encourage a deeper understanding and bond with the general scholarly elite and not a particular few. Thus, whilst there are some anecdotes from scholars of early generations, I have attempted to keep the majority of the stories centred upon contemporary scholars.

Due to the nature of the work and the intended audience, many of the stories have not been translated in their literal sense but rather, the translations convey the essence and objectives of the stories.

In addition to thanking all those who have contributed to the collection by submission, I would like to also extend my gratitude to Shaykh Mohammed Abu Ja'far Salih for his aid in translations, Sumayya Pirbhai for her review and editing assistance and the Islamic Education Department of The World Federation of KSIMC for their support and cooperation; your rewards are with Allah.

I pray to Allah that this small effort pleases Him and His representative, the Awaited Saviour of humanity, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ).

Jaffer Ladak

Karbala

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- [1.](#) Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, chapter 2, Chapter on the Quality of Knowledge, its Virtue and the Virtue of the Scholars, hadith no. 2.
- [2.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 16.
- [3.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 88.
- [4.](#) Mutahhari, Murtadha, Man and the Universe, pp. 141–142, Ansariyan Publications, Qom, 2003
<https://www.al-islam.org/man-and-universe-murtadha-mutahhari> [7]
- [5.](#) This refers to the famous saying of the Holy Prophet known as Hadith al-Thaqalayn: 'I leave behind me two weighty things, the Qur'an and my family, the Ahlul Bayt.'
- [6.](#) d. 1937.
- [7.](#) d. 1992.

During The Period Of Youth

In the system of creation, Allah has designated the birth, aging and death of everything, be it the stars, trees, humans or the universe in its entirety.

Regarding the human cycle, He says,

***'We created you from dust, then from a small seed, then from a clot, then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, so that We may make clear to you; and We cause what We please to stay in the wombs until an appointed time; then We bring you forth as babies so that you may attain maturity.'* (Qur'an, 22:5)**

This verse expresses how a human grows from one stage of its own existence to the next, arriving at a new state of his own self only to then depart from it to arrive at the next, in a trajectory of continuous development until Allah decides his time on Earth has come to an end. This stage-by-stage development is not confined to man's physical aspect but rather extends to his intellectual, moral and spiritual spheres of life.

Man's gradual development should reach a point of convergence between two paths: becoming *Al-Insan Al-Kamil* (the perfect and complete human being) and accepting Allah's invitation back to Him through death – and thus, they occur at the same time.

Within this cycle of development, the most critical period is the period of youth. During this stage, a person is gaining his intellectual and physical strength, obtaining independence and shouldering responsibility whilst also observing the world for himself and choosing which paths he wants to travel. This period of development is the most fruitful, as Imam Ali (A) has said, 'Surely the heart of the youth is like the uncultivated ground; it will accept whatever you throw upon it [and that is what will grow from it].¹'

For many, however, the period of youth is a time of play, relaxation and avoiding the burdens of responsibility; school, sports and social activities fill the days, which quickly become years and thus this opportune time for self-development and moulding one's character is lost. To counter this trend, Imam Hasan (A) addressed the youth of his community, saying, 'Surely today you are the youth of the nation, and tomorrow, you will be the leaders of the community. Thus, it is incumbent upon you to seek knowledge. So then if you are not able to memorise all that you learn, then you must write it down and preserve it [for safe-keeping] so that you can refer to it later on [when you need it].²'

And so to discipline oneself and commence the journey of intellectual and spiritual acquisition during one's youth, is of utmost importance. As Imam Ja'fer al-Sadiq (A) has stated, 'You should know that surely the young person who has good behaviour is the key to all goodness and is kept away from all evil, whilst the young person who has bad behaviour is kept away from all goodness and is the key to all evil.'³

Story 1

Aminah bint al-Huda, the sister of Ayatullah Shahid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr recounts:

'During our youth, as my brother and I grew up together, we had very little money. We used to save whatever money we received so that Sayyid could buy a book. After we read and studied it, Sayyid would return to the market and sell the book in order to buy another book with the money he received. This practice continued even after we moved to the holy city of Najaf.

'When Shahid al-Sadr was 10 or 11 years old, he found himself in conflict with his family with regards to his plans for the future. Shahid al-Sadr was adamant on pursuing studies in Islamic sciences but faced great opposition from members of his family who wanted him to continue his schooling and obtain a good job. Shahid al-Sadr's father advised him to avoid pursuing Islamic studies due to the poverty and hardship surrounding student life in the Islamic seminary. It was even proposed that Shahid al-Sadr leave the country to complete his academic studies.

‘One day, Shahid al–Sadr’s brother asked him to abandon his studies to work in the marketplace in order to earn some money; however, Shahid al–Sadr replied, “I am satisfied with a very small amount of food and sustenance but I cannot be satisfied with a very small amount of knowledge, so leave me be!”

‘Whilst others wanted him to follow the secular academic route, Shahid al–Sadr’s mother supported his plans to pursue Islamic education. In appreciation of her support, Shahid al–Sadr would say, “It was all thanks to my mother; she was the one who continuously encouraged me to go down the Islamic education route regardless of the hardships.”

‘Aware that his family opposed his pursuit of Islamic studies due to the poverty characteristic of student life in the hawzah, Shahid al–Sadr decided to prove his commitment to a life of austerity for the sake of his studies. To this end, Shahid al–Sadr sufficed himself with just a little piece of bread to sustain him through the day and night. After three days of following this simple diet, Shahid al–Sadr’s family asked him about the reason for his diet and so Shahid al–Sadr replied, “A person who is able to live on only a little for a few days is able to continue living like this until the end of his life. I wanted to demonstrate that I neither fear poverty nor am I scared of being hungry.”

Story 2

Sayyid Ni’matullah Jaza’iri narrates about his own youth:

‘At the age of 5 years, whilst I was busy like any other child, enjoying my time playing and sitting with my friends, my father approached. He said, “My son, come with me to the teacher so you can learn to read and write and rise to a degree of scholarship.” I cried at these words, protesting that it was impossible and I preferred to sit with my friends and play. My father replied, “Your friend can come too; we’ll take him so that he may study also.”

‘He brought us to the madrasah and I started to learn the alphabet. I would come home and complain to my mother that I did not want to learn but wanted to play with other children. She spoke to my father but he refused and so I lost hope and continued going to the madrasah. After only 6 months, I had learnt the alphabet, finished reading the entire Qur’an and had even read poems!

‘Thereafter, I returned to my mother and again asked to be able to return to playing with other children. My father responded, “My son, take this book to the teacher so you may master it.” I began to learn from a blind man well–versed in the book; I would guide him with a stick and serve him as payment for teaching me.

‘After I finished this book, I went to another teacher to learn a different book. In payment for this teacher’s efforts, I would mow his lawn, tie the grass in large bundles, carry it over my head and bring it back to his animals so they could feed on it. And after the summer passed, I would cut firewood and carry it on my head. Regularly carrying the firewood on my head resulted in my hair falling out and so

father gave me an ointment to rub on my head and my hair grew back again.

‘One day I went to another village to continue my studies. I went to the mosque and saw a grand scholar with a large turban. I immediately went to him and asked him a question about Arabic grammar; he remained silent and did not reply. I asked, “Why are you wearing this big turban if you don’t even know the answer to this simple question?” The people in the mosque began to laugh and he walked out. This incident persuaded me to memorise Arabic grammar formulas so that I would not be in this scholar’s position. I begged Allah to forgive me for asking a question that exposed the scholar’s ignorance whilst also thanking Him, for it was after this incident that I zealously attended to my Arabic studies, mastering Arabic grammar before I reached the age of maturity.

‘After many months of going to various villages and cities to learn, my brother and I joined a great scholar and some other students. We stayed in the madrasah and daily undertook our research until the afternoon prayers. Our poverty was so intense that we would gather the uneaten watermelon skins that had fallen to the floor, wipe off the dust and eat them. Due to the lack of light, we were forced to study and revise at night by moonlight. When I wanted to memorise a book, I would sit by the window and use the moonlight to read the text in the dark and when there was no moonlight I would use that time to recite back to myself what I had memorised, repeating the portions so I would not forget them.

‘It was in these conditions that we used to study as students.’

Story 3

Allamahh Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai recalls:

‘I was in the prime of my youth as a resident in Najaf, studying Islamic sciences. Sometimes I used to visit Ayatullah Qadhi Tabatabai; he was amongst the great scholars in those days. We were also related and so I also visited him to maintain good family relations.

‘One day, I was standing at the door of the madrasah when Ayatullah Qadhi passed by. When he approached me, he placed his hand on top of my shoulder and said, “O my son, if you want something from this world, offer your night prayers. And if you also want something from the hereafter, offer your night prayers.”⁴

‘These words left a deep moral and spiritual effect upon me. From this moment onwards, until I returned back to Iran, I spent as much time as possible with Ayatullah Qadhi so that I would not be deprived of the benefit of his company and guidance in the slightest way.’

Story 4

Ayatullah al-Akhundi Mulla Ali Hamadani narrates:

‘In the outskirts of the city of Isfahan, there was a boy born amongst the villagers who had a strong desire to be a student and join the seminaries. His father refused to allow him to do so, saying, “This path is full of poverty and hunger and difficulty.” However, after much insistence from his son, he permitted his son to join the seminary. Upon receiving his fathers’ permission, the son stood and kissed his father’s hand.

‘The boy was 14 years old and prepared his bags to leave. He took his mattress and whatever he needed to the madrasah in Isfahan. The madrasah was very old and he would sometimes stay there alone because students did not attend every day.

‘His father decided to visit him to check on his situation and bring him some things. It happened to be a very cold winter with heavy snowfall. When the father saw his son’s situation, he rebuked him, saying, “Did I not tell you this path brings nothing except poverty and hunger?”

‘The son was very hurt by these words and stood and faced the *qiblah* and began to cry. He addressed Imam al-Mahdi (AJ), saying, “Guide me so that they should not say I do not have you to support and assist me.”

‘The father sat with his son for awhile and then stood up to leave before sunset but found the door of the madrasah locked. The key was with the servant and nobody knew where he lived. Hence, the father was forced to stay until the following day. The night was very difficult, with no lamp in the room and one blanket that was not large enough for both father and son. Again the father rebuked his son, saying, “How awful is this life! Return with me to the house tomorrow for there is no need for this knowledge that brings so much suffering and tribulation.” The son again felt hurt by the words of his father.

‘All of a sudden, they heard a knock upon the door of the madrasah. The son went to see who had arrived at the door. The man behind the door said, “Open the door,” to which the son replied, “I’m sorry. I don’t have the keys and the caretaker is not here.” The guest replied, “Push the door; it will open by itself.” When the son pushed the door, it opened and the entire room was filled with light. The man who had knocked said, “Tell your father that he should not blame you. I have paid some money; tomorrow, they will bring coals for you. Also, in [such and such] a place in your room, there is a candle; take it and benefit from its light. And tell your father, ‘We are not alone, we have our Master.’”

The rest of the story is narrated by the son himself in the following way:

‘I returned to my room. My father asked, “Who was at the door?” I replied, “Firstly, I have to see if the candle which he mentioned is where he said it would be.” I went to the place the guest had mentioned and I found the candle! Then I related the incident to my father and he was shocked by it. He held and kissed me, saying, “Continue your studies, my dear son!”

Ayatullah Hamadani states, ‘Do you know who this boy was and what he became? The great *marja*⁵,

Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Hasan al-Isfahani!

Story 5

Shaykh Abd al-Adhim al-Bahrani relates:

‘One day, a person well known amongst the scholars and preachers told me of an incident that occurred more than 30 years ago when he intended to buy a house from his brother.

‘They went to see an estate agent to make a valuation. Whilst the general practice was that the agent would take 2000 Tomans as commission upon the agreement of the price, a dispute arose regarding the commission and the value of the belongings in the house. In order to resolve the argument, they decided to visit the agent and upon arriving, they found that he was reciting a prayer on behalf of al-Haj Sayyid Ali al-Sistani [the grandfather of the present day *marja*’, Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Husayni al-Sistani].

‘So they asked him, “Why are you praying and seeking forgiveness for this man?” He replied, “This person lived a miraculous life. I have witnessed many strange things from his life. One day, he told me that his own son al-Haj Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Sistani will study Islamic sciences and will reach a very honourable level and he will be a righteous scholar but he will not proceed beyond this station. However, a son will be born from him whose name will be the same as mine. He will study and reach the level of *ijtihad*⁶ and become a great *marja*’ for the Shi’a world. And now I have witnessed that he is the Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Husayni al-Sistani.”’

Shaykh Abd al-Adhim al-Bahrani continues, ‘And this was related to me whilst Ayatullah al-Sistani was only 7 years old!’

Story 6

Ayatullah Hafiz Bashir Najafi was very close to his grandfather, a very pious, well-known member of the community who had left a great impression on him during his formative years.

One night, Ayatullah Najafi received the news that his dear grandfather had passed away and that he would be buried the following day, at two o’clock in the afternoon. Ayatullah Najafi was woken up at this late hour to aid in the funeral preparations. In order to do so, he would need to take the first van in the morning to leave the madrasah to return home for the services.

The next day, however, Ayatullah Najafi attended his classes as normal from morning until noon without telling anyone about the funeral. After his morning lectures, he approached Shaykh Abdul Ghafur, to ask for time off from the madrasah to attend the funeral. Shaykh Abdul Ghafur was surprised and exclaimed, ‘Bashir! Your grandfather has passed away and you are attending your lectures here and you didn’t tell anyone?!’ Ayatullah Najafi responded, ‘Yes, my beloved grandfather has passed away. He cannot return and I will recite Surat al-Fatihah for him, read the

Holy Qur'an and fulfil my duties. However, if I had left today's classes, the loss could not be regained by reciting Surat al-Fatihah!

Story 7

Ayatullah Lady Zuhrah Sifati relates in an interview:

'I started my studies at the time of the Shah. Whilst studying for the final high school exams, I also started to go to the madrasah. Why? I noticed that many women did not understand Islam and going to the madrasah seemed the best way for me to get to know my religion better. It requires many years of study to understand the Islamic religion. My parents were both religious but there were no religious scholars in my family.

'At this time, Abadan was a city full of foreigners who worked in the oil industry and the atmosphere was not very Islamic. It was precisely this absence of religion which motivated me to choose the path of Islamic studies with the goal of helping women – primarily, Iranian women and then secondarily, women around the world – understand Islam.

'Since the birth of Islam and during our entire history, there have always been exceptionally accomplished women in the fields of religion, philosophy, literature and even poetry. And as a *mujtahidah*⁷, I want to draw attention to Banu Amin⁸, who was outstanding in her knowledge of philosophy and Islam at the time of the Shah.

'Around ten thousand women have gone through the seminary in the last couple of years. Why are there not more? No Islamic law and no restriction in Islam keeps women from entering the seminary. It is sometimes a lack of will and interest.'

¹. Al-Harrani, Tuhaf al-Uqul, p. 70.

². Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 2, p. 152, hadith no. 37.

³. Al-Tusi, al-Amali, p. 302.

⁴. This saying is the manifestation of the noble verse, 'Whoever desires the reward of this world, then with Allah is the reward of this world and the hereafter.' (Qur'an, 4:134).

⁵. A religious authority who derives rulings in matters of Islamic jurisprudence for others to follow.

⁶. A level of religious knowledge that exempts one from following a mujtahid in matters of Islamic jurisprudence.

⁷. A female mujtahid.

⁸. Renowned mujtahidah, Ayatullah Lady Nusrat Amin – d. 1983. In several biographical works, Lady Sifati cites Lady Amin as her inspiration.

Sincerity (Ikhlas)

The quality of sincerity is one that every Muslim should aim to possess. Acting with sincerity means to act according to the prescriptions of Allah purely for His sake, neither in expectation of personal gain nor the return of the deed. It is the pure intention behind any action that determines the worth of an action in the eyes of Allah. To seek God's pleasure through the best actions is one of the primary reasons for our creation, to which Allah refers when He states,

'He who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct.'
(Qur'an, 67:2)

A person cannot obtain the blessing of sincerity unless it is bestowed upon him by Allah Himself and is accompanied by continuous seeking and perseverance. Allah advises us to strive for sincerity in every action when He states,

'And remember Our servants Ibrahim and Ishaq and Yaqub, men of strength and deep insight. We purified their sincerity through sincere remembrance of the [final] abode. And indeed with Us, they are surely of the elect, the very best.' (Qur'an, 38:45-47)

As every action requires its own intention, the quality of each action can be assessed by the level of conviction and sincerity with which it is accompanied. Imam Ali (A) has explained his method of achieving the characteristic of sincerity, stating, 'I do not perform an action for the reward of Allah, lest I become a businessman with Allah; I do not perform an action out of the fear of Allah's punishment, lest I become a slave with Allah. I perform the action because I find Allah worthy of servitude.'

Our goal should be to improve each action until it is fully adorned with the perfect intention of being entirely for the pleasure of Allah.

Story 1

Shaykh Abd al-Adhim al-Bahrani narrates:

'On the 12th day of Jamadi al-Thani, 1413, I was listening to a lecture on Imam Husayn (A) in the holy city of Mashad and the topic of the lecture was sincerity. The speaker recounted the following story:

“Once, a lot of scholars were present before the grand Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Burujerdi and each scholar was presenting his scholastic achievements and social contributions before him. Ayatullah Burujerdi noticed that all did so except one scholar who didn't say anything. Ayatullah Burujerdi asked the scholar, 'Why don't you mention what you have done, like the others?' This scholar stood and replied with great respect, saying, 'O my master, I would like you to permit me to read just one

narration from your grandfather, Ali, the Commander of the Faithful.’

“Ayatullah Burujerdi gave his permission and so the scholar narrated, ‘Ali (A) is reported to have said, “Be sincere in your actions. Surely the Watcher [Allah] is All-seeing, All-seeing!”¹

As soon as the scholar finished speaking, Ayatullah Burujerdi appeared shocked and began to cry. Then addressing this scholar, Ayatullah Burujerdi said, ‘Thank you for reminding us of the matter of sincerity.’

“This incident affected Ayatullah Burujerdi so much so that on every occasion, be it with scholars and students or those around him, he would recount this narration.”²

Story 2

Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Qasim al-Khoei was once sitting with his students when he mentioned, ‘Indeed it is so easy for a man to see the action of another which he does not like and yet forget it so quickly that he performs the very same action or one that is even worse.’

He then related the following story:

‘One day I entered the shrine of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali (A), and saw a man praying opposite the door, blocking the path of many visitors and inconveniencing them when they tried to pass him. In my mind, I said to myself, “How ignorant this man is!”

‘The days passed and one day I found myself, without even realising it, praying in the same place! I too was placing the visitors in difficulty and people were even pushing each other because of me. I did not feel guilty as I had not realised my mistake and due to my forgetfulness and negligence, when a person tried to pass in front of me, I even asked myself, “Why did he not take another path around me?”

‘A person tends not to see his own mistakes so that he is not obliged to blame himself for them. We tend to open our eyes very widely to observe others and the defects they have whilst perhaps we might have greater defects ourselves. Thus I demand of you – whenever you see me committing a mistake, inform and remind me of what I have done!’³

Story 3

Shaykh Abdul Aziz al-Habib recounts:

‘Once a shaykh was invited to give a lecture in Nadwat al-Imam Ali (A), in the presence of the Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Shirazi. He introduced himself to Ayatullah Shirazi and began to list his many accomplishments. He mentioned that he was a graduate of a certain college, a member of the board of [such and such] a committee, the Imam of [such and such a masjid] and an important figure in several European centres. Unaware that he was speaking to Ayatullah Shirazi, he turned to Sayyid Shirazi after this long introduction, and asked, “And who are you, so I may get to know you?”

‘Ayatullah Shirazi replied, “I am Ridha.”

Story 4

At a time when the ideology of Communism had penetrated many spheres of Iraqi society such as politics, academia and Islamic seminary studies, many of the youth were attracted by its social philosophy and wanted clarification regarding Islam’s view towards Communist theories.

For these reasons, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim told his son, Sayyid Mahdi, that he felt there was a need for a book comparing Communism and Islam. He asked if Ayatullah Shahid Baqir al-Sadr could write this book.

After the widespread success of the book, *Our Philosophy*,⁴ Shahid al-Sadr recounts:

‘When I published this book, I did not know that it would attain such a great reputation in the world and impact the social spheres of the people, the result of which was that it brought great fame and renown to the author. Now I sometimes think, if I knew how much this book would give its author such a status amongst people, would I have been prepared to publish it under the name of a ‘group of scholars’ and not in my own name? I was prepared to do this prior to the book’s publication, but would I do so now? I cry in fear that I may not have the strength to publish it under a name other than my own.’⁵

Story 5

Allamah Majlisi had a close scholarly companion and each made a commitment to the other that, Allah willing, if he died before the other, he would enter into the dream of his friend to describe and explain what death and the hereafter was like.

It so happened that Allamah Majlisi was the first to die. One night, after many weeks had passed, Allamah Majlisi entered the dream of his friend. His friend asked, ‘So much time has passed; why has it taken so long to enter into my dream?’ The Allamah replied, ‘During the entire time that has passed, I was being questioned by the Angels!’ His companion asked, ‘How is it there? What happened to you?’ The Allamah replied, ‘It was very difficult but it is wonderful and blissful now that my questioning has been completed. Whilst I was being questioned, the Angel asked me, “What do you have to offer Allah? What have you done in His way?” I replied to the Angel that I had written and compiled the work, *Bihar al-Anwar*, which consists of more than 100 volumes of verses, narrations and comments on the Ahlul Bayt. The Angel replied, “Not this. What else do you have to present to Allah?” I was shocked as this was such an extensive and thorough work! I thought for a moment and this time said to the Angel that I had *Mir’at al-Uqul* to present but again the Angel rejected this offering before Allah. Again I was shocked as this compilation also included so many volumes. And so I continued to offer different books and accomplishments one after the other and each time the Angel rejected them.

‘So I began to think long and hard and then I remembered an incident in my life and presented this to the Angel. One night, as I was studying and writing, I noticed a fly was buzzing and circling around the room. He was circling all around and eventually landed near my pen and ink. I could have waved him away from my writing tools but I thought to myself, “Maybe the fly is thirsty or tired so I should not wave him away but rather I should let him take rest where he is sitting.” Anyhow, shortly afterwards, the creature flew around and away and I thought nothing more of this incident.

‘The Angel responded to my account, saying, “This pure moment of mercy in your life was the most accepted action before Allah.” And so, after presenting this incident to Allah, my questioning was completed.’

Story 6

Sayyid Jawad Gulpaygani narrates the following story that he had heard:

‘One day, a scholar requested a verdict from Ayatullah Burujerdi on an issue. The question was, “Which jurist do you want us to follow after you?” Ayatullah Burujerdi wrote the name of my father, Ayatullah Sayyid Ridha Gulpaygani. The scholar wanted to photocopy the reply of Ayatullah Burujerdi in order to distribute it to the people and make them aware of this great matter but Ayatullah Gulpaygani called him, took the letter, put it in a box and locked the box.

‘Surprised, the scholar said, “My master! I need that; it’s my paper. I would like it back.” Ayatullah Gulpaygani replied, “Yes, it is your paper but it concerns me! If you distribute this, you may close the door to people performing *taqlid* [following a *mujtahid* in matters of jurisprudence] of somebody else. Leave people to choose which *marja*’ they want to follow for *taqlid* is a matter of freedom in the school of the Ahlul Bayt!”

Story 7

The author had a discussion with Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarressi about his book of *tafsir* (Qur’anic exegesis), *Min Huda al-Qur’an*. In the discussion, other authors, their works and their methodologies were deliberated upon and the work, *al-Tamhid fi Ulum al-Qur’an*, by Ayatullah Hadi Ma’rifah, was mentioned.

Ayatullah al-Modarressi asked the author, ‘What do you think about this work?’ to which he replied, ‘I find it to be an outstanding work on Qur’anic sciences and Ayatullah Ma’rifah demonstrates his being a leading scholar in the field of Qur’anic commentary.’ Ayatullah al-Modarressi responded, ‘Let me tell you a story about him.’

‘One day, after I had published my book of *tafsir*, I was in Qom and whilst walking, I happened to cross paths with Ayatullah Ma’rifah. After exchanging greetings, I saluted his work and conveyed my view that

he has made a significant impact on the study of the sciences of the Qur'an. Ayatullah Ma'rifah then responded and said that of all the contemporary books of Qur'anic *tafsir* written, mine was the most outstanding because it addressed the social issues of the day in a way that offers practical solutions to the challenges faced by societies.'

Ayatullah al-Modarressi continued, 'Why I am I telling you this? Am I telling you this to boost my ego or because I want you to know that he praised me? Not at all! Let me ask you a question: What do *you* think about my *tafsir*?' The author replied by praising the work too.

Ayatullah al-Modarressi responded, 'No, I don't want you to praise the work to me; I want you to critique my work for me; I want you to tell me its flaws and where I can improve it. I wrote

the book to offer solutions to the problems of society and in my view, because society constantly changes and develops itself, its culture, its needs and so on, my book only offers a solution as long as it truly offers advice to reflect the circumstances. It might be that 10 years from now, the challenges of society have changed and therefore my words, in full or in part, have become redundant! In my view, in every decade there must be an updated socially informative book of *tafsir* to aid the society to fulfil its needs. This is why I told you this story.'

1. قال علي (ع): (أخلص العمل فان الناقد بصير 1.

2. This incident reminds us of the warnings in the Qur'an not to perform actions to receive praise and respect from others. (Qur'an, 4:142, 2:264)

3. This statement is the manifestation of the noble narration of Imam al-Sadiq (A), 'My most beloved brother is he who makes me aware of my faults.' (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 282)

4. <https://www.al-islam.org/our-philosophy-falsafatuna-sayyid-muhammad-baqi...> [8]

5. This action is a manifestation of the noble verses,

By the soul and Him Who fashioned it and inspired it [with discernment between] its virtues and vices; one who purifies it, is felicitous.' (Qur'an, 91:7-9)

Imam Husayn (A) and Karbala

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah states,

'For every nation We had appointed a rite [of worship] which they used to observe ...' (22:67) ¹

Some of these acts of devotion and worship observed by Muslims are shared with people of other revealed religions whilst some devotional rites are unique to Islam.

Fasting, for example, is a religious practice in Islam that is also observed by followers of other religions. Allah states,

***‘O you who have faith! Prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those before you...’
(2: 183)***

However, the *hajj* pilgrimage and its particular rites are specifically prescribed for Muslims, to which Allah refers when He states,

“Indeed Safa and Marwah are amongst Allah’s sacraments ...” (2: 158)

The question that arises is that if Allah calls for devotion towards two mountains (Safa and Marwah) which are amongst the ‘sacraments’ of His religion, what level of devotion should Muslims express toward Imam Husayn (A) who actually saved and reformed His religion?

Due to Imam Husayn’s steadfast servitude to Allah and martyrdom on the plains of Karbala, Prophet Muhammad (S) has honoured him by stating, ‘Husayn is the lamp of guidance and the ark of salvation.’ Moreover, Imam al-Sadiq (A) states, ‘Indeed if one of you goes for *hajj* a thousand times but does not visit the grave of Husayn ibn Ali, he has neglected one of his obligations towards Allah, the Exalted.’²

The event of Karbala is considered to be ‘the university of Islam’, meaning that the entire movement of Imam Husayn (A), from the dispatch of his ambassador Muslim ibn Aqil to Kufa, until the arrival of the captive family back to the city of Medina, is inclusive of every facet of Islam. It is a testimony to all matters of justice and freedom and is the ultimate template for revolution for any soul and the ultimate inspiration for reform for any community; it is for this reason, Imam Hasan (A) told his brother, ‘There is no day like your day, O Aba Abdillah.’³

Story 1

Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Jawad Mughniya wrote in the month of Ramadhan. 1387 AH:

‘I was in Bahrain to give sermons on the pulpit every night in the Husayniyyah Aal al-Uraydh. I would lecture on the topic which I thought would be understood and accepted by modern intellectuals and all others in the same way. I used to focus on achieving this goal each time I lectured and my success in doing so must be decided by the audience in Bahrain.

‘On one of these nights, I ascended the pulpit and just before I started speaking, I heard a person call out, “Peace be upon you, O Husayn, and curse be upon those who killed you!’ However, since the topic I had prepared was not connected with Imam Husayn (A) or Yazid in any way, I was taken aback and so I forgot about the topic I intended to discuss and spontaneously started the speech by explaining the meaning of ‘Husayn’ and the meaning of ‘Yazid’ and the significance of these terms to the followers of the Ahlul Bayt⁴. I said:

“The development of a thing is not contained by the boundaries of a matter but it may encompass many other matters due to their interconnectedness. In the beginning, the word ‘Husayn’ was the name of the

personality of Husayn, son of Ali. However, for the Shi'a, the term developed over time to symbolise bravery and great struggle for the sake of liberating humanity from oppression. And 'Husayn' now refers to the defence and struggle by men, women and children to revive the religion of Prophet Muhammad (S). This is clearly evidenced by the statement of Imam Husayn (A) himself at the point of martyrdom, when he said, 'I am following the religion of the Prophet.'⁵

“As for the word 'Yazid', it was the name of the son of Mu'awiyah but now, for the Shi'a, it serves as the symbol of corruption and oppression. 'Yazid' represents exiting the boundaries of morality and religion and entering the fold of heresy and paganism, the root of evil and corruption. Whenever there is goodness, truth and justice, it is connected to the name, 'Husayn'. Today, occupied Palestine, the Sinai desert and the Golan Heights symbolise Karbala for the Shi'a. As for the captured women and children of Imam Husayn (A), their example parallels the women and children expelled out of their homes in these places. And the martyrs who die fighting injustice in these lands are referred to by the poet who states, 'It is as if Karbala is every place to me. My eye and every time is the day of Ashura.'⁶

'As soon as I came down from the pulpit, one young man welcomed me very happily, saying, "This is the reality and this is how Islamic history and the events of Karbala need to be understood." When they introduced him to me I realised he was a Sunni and working as a high-ranking government official.'

Story 2

Sayyid Mustafa al-Modarressi narrates:

'My brothers, Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim and Sayyid Mahdi, were in Australia and walking together. My brother, Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim, had recently suffered from ill health and as they were walking, his health condition resurfaced and all of a sudden he collapsed, literally, in the middle of the street.

'They rushed to the hospital and Sayyid Mahdi called our father, Ayatullah Sayyid Hadi al-Modarressi to inform him of the situation. Sayyid Mahdi told his father that Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim was experiencing a violent seizure and his health had deteriorated so badly there was a grave risk that he may not survive. Calmly, my father told him, "Place some *khak al-shifa*⁷ on his tongue and he will be aided through the intercession of Imam Husayn (A), God-willing."

Sayyid Mahdi continues the story:

'It was not my practice to carry the *khak* of Karbala with me, but it so happened that on that day I had some *khak* with me! And it also happened that one of the staff attending to my brother in the hospital room was a Shi'a. So I asked if we could place some *khak* in his mouth. The nurse opened his mouth and was about to place it inside when the rest of the medical team objected and asked what she was doing. The nurse replied, "This is religious medicine. If he is going to die, it will ease his passing and if he is to survive, it will help him."

‘Although I had not heard this explanation, I did not say anything. None of the staff continued with their objections and allowed the *khak* to be placed in my brother’s mouth. My brother had been violently shaking throughout this time and we had lost hope of him surviving. The nurse opened his mouth and placed the *khak* in his mouth and as soon as she did so, my brother’s body began to calm down and after a short time he had completely stabilised! Later, the doctors came to me and asked what exactly had been placed in his mouth because they had never seen a recovery like this before.

‘My father says, “God gave us Muhammad Kadhim twice. The first time when he was born and the second was when He literally brought him back from death. And it happened because of two things: supplication and the holy dust of Imam Husayn’s (A) tomb.”’

Story 3

Sayyid Salih al-Modarressi narrates:

‘During the period of Saddam’s rule in Iraq, Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al- Modarressi had published a book under a pseudonym because printing it under his own name at that time would have only increased the oppression and difficulties he would face at the hands of the rulers⁸.

‘One day, a student excitedly came to him with this book, saying, “Sayyid, have you read this book?” and began extolling its virtues and describing its outstanding content. Sayyid, still unable to openly ascribe the book’s authorship to himself, listened to the student’s praise of the book and made a few comments as normal. It was only after the removal of Saddam that Ayatullah al-Modarressi could ascribe the book’s authorship to himself.⁹

‘In reference to the excellent quality and far-reaching impact of the book, Ayatullah al-Modarressi received many questions regarding its authorship, to which he replied, “Before writing every single page of the book, I first recited a two unit prayer at the shrine of Imam Husayn (A) and then began writing that page. This book is entirely a product of the blessings of the Master of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn (A).”

‘Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al-Modarressi has often been heard saying, “Just a glance from Imam Husayn (A) towards us is enough ...”’

Story 4

Kawther al-Kufi recounts:

‘Aminah bint al-Huda used to encourage us to focus on working hard for the sake of Islam and the Muslims as the main target for our lives. Once, Bint al-Huda came to me and asked why I had stopped attending the mosque and attending the lessons with the Shaykh, further questioning me as to whether it was not my obligation to study Islam.

'I hung my head in shame, saying, "You know the situation is difficult at the moment and I'm scared of being imprisoned. I worry that I may fall into the hands of Saddam's men and they don't respect the dignity of women when they imprison them." Bint al-Huda was disappointed by my response and replied, "This is the wrong perspective. Our honour *is* Islam. So only when we protect Islam, do we protect our honour and dignity. Why did Sayyidah Zaynab not leave her struggle? In her, we have the best example![10](#)"

'This statement had a great influence upon me. It motivated me to be more active and take more responsibilities, especially when I saw Bint al-Huda acting on her own statement when she accompanied her brother, bearing all the hardships of imprisonment, until she received the honour of martyrdom.'

Story 5

Sayyid Salih al-Modarressi relates:

Allamah al-Hilli was the most senior jurist of his time and presided in the city of Hilla in Iraq. He remains until today and will always remain, one of the giant scholars of our school of thought.

'One day, the Allamah left his city to perform the *ziyarah* of Imam Husayn (A). He travelled by mule, which was the mode of transport of the time. When he returned, his son suddenly stopped praying behind him in the congregational prayers. The Allamah asked him, "Why are you no longer praying behind me?" to which his son replied, "In my eyes you are no longer just. You left leading the seminary, which is a necessity, for a visitation of Karbala which is a recommended action whilst your responsibilities lie here. You preferred a recommended action over a necessary action.'[11](#)

'The Allamah replied, "What you did not know was that I used my time during my travels whilst on the mule, to write the book, *Kitab Alfayn*, a book of two thousand evidences on the divinely appointed leadership of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (A)."[12](#)

'After a period, Allamah Hilli died and appeared in the dream of his son. He told his son, "Had it not been for the visitation of Imam Husayn (A) and the book, *Kitab Alfayn*, a decree would have been given [by the Angels of punishment], to split your father's back open!"[13](#)

Story 6

Sayyid Hossein al-Qazwini narrates about his father, Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini:[14](#)

'My father had the honour of reciting the Muharram *majalis* (lectures) of Imam Husayn (A) every year; sometimes it would be in Iraq, sometimes in Kuwait and sometimes in other places.

'However, one year, after my father migrated to the States, he was without an invite to recite anywhere.

The month of Muharram approached and my father would sit in his house, depressed by the thought of not being able to serve Imam Husayn (A) as he had been doing each year; his heart was truly broken.

‘Literally, three days before the month of Muharram arrived, one Iraqi man came to him and said, “Sayyid, I hear that during this month of Muharram, you are not reciting anywhere. I have a place that I would like to offer you to recite *majalis* in, but it’s very run down and in a very bad state.” Of course, my father was delighted and he and the man went to view the building; it was an old bank, very dirty and in as poor a state as the man had warned.

‘My father immediately called several of his family members, colleagues and friends to inform them that he had found a place to recite and that he would need their help in tidying the place up and getting it ready. Of course, they all agreed, but for varying reasons, all were busy at that moment; some were at work and so they said they would come after 5 p.m., when the working day was finished.

‘Not wanting to lose any time, my father went to a local store and bought a broom; he removed his *amamah* [turban], his *aba* [cloak] and *jubba* [robes] and began sweeping the floor and moving things out of the dilapidated bank by himself and as he was doing so he recited the *maqtal* of the Imam [narration of the events of the day of Ashura that led to the killing of Imam Husayn(A)] to himself.

‘After a few hours, when his friends arrived, they found him dusty and busy cleaning the room. They said, “Sayyid, you should not be doing this yourself; we were coming to help you.” My father replied, “I’ve had the honour of reciting *majalis* for Imam Husayn (A), making people cry for Imam Husayn (A), but today, praise be to Allah, I had the honour of becoming a janitor for Imam Husayn (A)!”

‘The next day, an Iranian man came to the bank and saw the progress; people were bringing carpets and wall coverings. He said to my father, “I do not see a pulpit here. I am a carpenter; would you like me to make one?” And so, with only a few hours to go before the first night of Muharram arrived, my father even had a pulpit for the delivery of his *majalis*. My father said that this Muharram was one of the best he had ever partaken in.’

Sayyid Mothafar al-Qazwini continues the story:

‘The day the statue of Saddam was pulled down, my grandfather [Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini] decided to leave America and return to Iraq. Aware of the tense situation there, we all advised him not to return, but his ticket was booked that very day. We cried at the thought of losing our grandfather.

‘As soon as he came to Karbala, his first action was to immediately head to the shrine. When he first saw it and after sending his salutations to the Imam, his first supplication was, “O Imam, all I want is to be able to serve you, every day of my life.”

‘As my grandfather entered the *haram* of the Imam, there was *latmiyyah* [15](#) going on – I think it was

Bassim al-Karbalai who was reciting – and as soon as he saw my grandfather enter, he halted his recitation, announced my grandfather's arrival on the microphone and called for a Salawat.'

With tears in his eyes, Sayyid Mothafar concludes, 'And immediately my grandfather ascended the pulpit and gave his first lecture in the *haram* of Imam Husayn (A) since his return.'

Story 7

One of the senior students of the great scholar, Ayatullah al-Udhma Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Isfahani (commonly known as al-Wahid al-Behbahani), narrates that he was sitting beside the great scholar in the courtyard of the shrine of Imam Husayn (A), when a strange visitor arrived, embraced the hand of Ayatullah al-Behbahani and unwrapped a bag full of gold and women's jewellery, stating, 'Spend these in any way you view to be good and useful.'

The scholar asked, 'Where did you obtain these from and what's the story behind this?'

The visitor replied, 'My story is truly strange and if you permit, I can narrate it to you now.' The scholar replied, 'Please go on.' The visitor then narrated:

'I am from the Iranian city of Saravan. I used to travel to Russian lands for business and trade and I managed to earn a great amount of wealth. Once, during my travels, my eyes fell upon a Russian lady and I wished to seek her hand in marriage. She replied, 'I am a Christian and you are a Muslim and only if you join my religion, shall I permit this marriage.' I was very bewildered and confused as to what step I should take. Whilst I was very heartbroken and hurt to be obliged to sacrifice my religion, eventually a Christian marriage ceremony took place between us. After a very short time, I truly regretted my decision. I was very disappointed in myself and I began to criticise my past decision, thinking, 'It is now difficult to return back to my home country and I actually do not believe in the Christian faith.'

'As I was in this sorrowful state, I remembered the tragedy of Imam Husayn (A) and I started to weep, shedding tears as I remembered the oppression against our master. Even though I did not know a great deal regarding Islam, I was aware that Imam Husayn (A) was oppressed whilst defending the true teachings of Islam and was brutally murdered. My Christian wife looked at me and she was shocked to see me in such a distraught state, enquiring as to the reason behind my many tears. I placed my trust in Allah and decided to tell her the truth. I admitted, 'Deep down, I am a Muslim and wish to remain a Muslim and these tears are in remembrance of the tragic martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A).' Upon hearing the name of Imam Husayn (A), and listening to the tragedy of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A), her heart was filled with love of the Ahlul Bayt and Islam. She immediately embraced Islam and joined me in shedding tears for Imam Husayn (A).

'One day, I told my wife, 'Without informing others, let us head towards Karbala and visit the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (A) and you can announce your reversion to Islam within the holy shrine.' She agreed

with my suggestion and we started to arrange our necessary travel requirements. Then suddenly, my wife fell extremely ill and sadly passed away and her family buried her along with all her gold and jewellery in the Russian Christian cemeteries.

‘Her departure from this world was extremely painful for me and I decided to have her reburied in a Muslim graveyard. In the middle of the night, I went to her grave, and quietly started to dig it up, until I reached the coffin. When I opened the coffin, I was absolutely shocked to find that instead of my wife, there was a man with a moustache! What I witnessed was extremely strange and that same night, when I fell asleep, I saw a person in my dream who reassured me with these words, “Glad tidings to you, for the Angels have transferred the body of your wife to Karbala, in the holy place near the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (A) and they have replaced her body with that man’s as he was a man who used to always consume forbidden financial interest and so, the trouble and task of transferring her blessed body to the Muslim cemetery has been relieved from you.”

‘I was very joyful and immediately headed towards Karbala and after visiting the holy shrine of Imam Husayn (A), I approached the senior staff members and enquired as to who was buried in this specific place on this particular day. Their reply was that a man famous for consuming forbidden financial interest was buried there. I informed them of the intriguing events that had occurred and they opened the specific grave. I found that it was indeed my wife who was buried there near the shrine of Imam Husayn (A), with all the gold and jewellery that her family buried with her. I took the gold and jewellery and have now brought them here to you so that you may spend it on what you find beneficial and that which would bless her soul.’

The grand scholar, Ayatullah Sayyid al-Behbahani, took the gold and jewellery and all of it was used in aiding the poor residents of Karbala.

Story 8

The author narrates:

‘A group of youths and volunteers from the [United] States were given an audience with Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarressi during their visitation to Karbala.

‘Ayatullah al-Modarressi addressed them, by asking, “Why have you come to this land, Karbala? Are you here for tourism or a holiday? No; rather you must find the meaning and obtain the goal when visiting the shrines of Karbala.

“Know that there is only one piece of land from the entire earth that is raised on the Day of Judgement to be present on that Day and that is the land of Karbala. And so, if you want to be raised on the Day of Judgement from Karbala and to be considered as one of the people of Karbala, then you must have the attributes of those loyal to Karbala.

“The visitation to Imam Husayn (A) is a means to reform the soul and this takes shape in various stages of progression and development, all of which have the potential to be completed during the visitation to Imam Husayn (A).

“How do you achieve this? Let me ask you: have you ever seen a person covered in dirt, enter a shower and leave still dirty? Does a person who has just finished his shower, enter straight back in the dirt again? In the same way, coming to Imam Husayn (A) cleanses you thoroughly but one should not return to the dirt he was used to.

“Take examples from Hadhrat Hurr bin Yazid al-Riyahi who left the fires of Hell for the gardens of Paradise in a moment, by supporting Imam Husayn (A) and from Shimr bin Dhil Jawshan who was in the army of Imam Ali (A) in Siffin and thus on the verge of Paradise but ended up being Imam Husayn’s (A) killer and forever in the pits of Hell.

“And consider the land of Karbala and its events as a school. In every school, there are positions and teachers who teach various sciences. Take Hadhrat Abbas as your teacher and learn the lessons of loyalty and bravery; take Lady Zaynab as your teacher of chastity and patience. And just as in every school there is a principal, take Imam Husayn (A) [who embodies all moral values and principles], as the principal of this school.”

1. See also Qur’an, 22:34 for a similar verse.

2. Al-Qummi, Kamil al-Ziyarat, Ch. 78, p. 401.

3. Al-Saduq, al-Amali, p. 177.

4. This action is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘And whoever does good spontaneously, then surely Allah is Appreciative, Knowing.’ (Qur’an, 2: 158)

5. أمضي غلي دين النبي

6. لدي لكريلاء كان كل مكان، عيني و زمانى كل يوم عشوراء

7. Dust or earth from the land of Karbala, Iraq.

8. This action reminds us of the noble verse,

‘And if you hide it and give it to the needy, it is better for you. And this will do away with some of your evil deeds. And Allah is aware of what you do.’ (Qur’an, 2:271)

9. Islamic Leadership.

10. This statement is the manifestation of the supplication, ‘Guide us to defend Islam, to disapprove wrong and disparage it, to uphold the right and respect it, to guide the erring and aid the weak.’ (Supplication 6: ‘The prayer in the morning and evening’, Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah by Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin)

<https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-a...> [9]

11. It is, in fact, a spiritual obligation for a person to make the visitation to Imam Husayn (A) as often as possible and this indeed preceded Allamah al-Hilli’s responsibilities to the hawzah. For example Imam al-Baqir (A) is narrated to have said, ‘Order our Shi’a to visit the grave of Husayn. Verily, going to visit him is obligatory on every believer who testifies that Husayn is an Imam appointed by Allah, the Great and Almighty.’ (Kamil al-Ziyarat, ch. 43, p 244) and Imam al-Sadiq (A) is narrated to have said, ‘Go to the grave of Husayn, for verily the visitation of Husayn is obligatory on both men and women.’ (Ibid, p. 245)

12. In addition to demonstrating to his son that his time away from the hawzah was still dedicated to the benefit of the hawzah, Allamah al-Hilli wanted his son to realise that if leading the hawzah was a necessity (wajib) in his eyes, the visitation of Imam Husayn (A) was a greater necessity (awjab) in the eyes of Allah.

13. لو لا زيارة الحسين و كتاب الافين الفتوا ظهر ابيك القصمت نصفين

14. For many years, he led the Maghribayn prayers every evening in the haram of Imam Husayn (A), Karbala.

15. The practice of mourning Imam Husayn (A) through poetic recitations and other methods of remembrance, also known as matam or azadari.

Imam al-Mahdi (AJ)

Each of the revealed religions uphold the concept of an awaited saviour or messiah figure: the person vested with God's authority and will to fulfil the responsibility of establishing justice in the world.

From the Islamic perspective, there are two important factors to consider. The first is that whilst revelation culminated in the person of Prophet Muhammad (S), it is humanity's progress and completion that culminates in the arrival of the awaited saviour, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ). In this way, it means that all events and processes from the outset, including the process of creation itself, Prophet Adam's (A) expulsion from the Garden, the succession of revealed religions, the event of Karbala and so on, have formed the trajectory towards Imam al-Mahdi's (AJ) reappearance. In this regard, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A) has narrated, 'When our Qa'im rises and sets his authority over the heads of the servants, he will refine their intellectual development and complete their patience and insight.'

The second factor to consider is that Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) is the same awaited saviour of all the revealed religions and whilst his task is the same according to all religions, it is only his name and descent that may differ in the various religions. This is significant because Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) is the representation of all of humanity and not just a particular religion or sect and so this common belief in a messiah will unite humanity in support of the Imam's cause. Allah describes the state of the world at the time of Imam al-Mahdi's (AJ) reappearance, saying,

***'And the earth shall glisten with the light of its Lord.'* (Qur'an, 39:69)**

In order to establish this state of global justice, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) needs love, devotion and fervent support for him and his cause. Allah call us to this devotion, saying, 'O you who believe! Be supporters of Allah just as Isa, son of Maryam, said to the disciples, "Who are my supporters toward Allah?" The disciples replied, "***We are the supporters of Allah.***"' (Qur'an, 61:14) Allah then states that it is through such supporters that His religion will be established, describing them as ***'those whom if we were to establish them in the land, perform the prayers, pay the alms taxes, call towards good and forbid evil.'*** (Qur'an, 22:41)

Story 1

Shaykh Muhammad al-Hilli narrates:

‘I was with a group that had visited Ayatullah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani and people presented their questions and the Sayyid responded. One lady asked, “Have you ever met the Imam of our time, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ)?” Since I was translating, I apologised to the Sayyid, saying that the question just posed by the lady may be problematic but the Sayyid asked for the question to be presented to him.

‘Upon hearing the question, Ayatullah al-Sistani replied, “If I say that I have met the Imam, people will call me a liar. And if I say that I have not met the Imam, people will say, ‘What kind of scholar is this that does not meet the Imam!’” He then explained, “Throughout history, many people have falsely claimed to have met the Imam in order to seek worldly gains and motives ...”

Story 2

Ayatullah Shahid Sayyid Hasan Shirazi wrote a series of books comprising the sayings of Allah, the Ahlul Bayt and the Prophets. One of the volumes is called *Kalimat al-Imam al-Mahdi*¹ and the story behind it has been narrated by the Ayatullah himself to some of his friends, who include this story in the introduction of the book.

Shahid Shirazi relates:

‘When I was under severe torture in the Baathist prisons in Iraq, I sought the intercession of my master, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) to help me escape the oppression. I promised the Imam that I would compile a book comprising what has been narrated from him including his *ziyarah*, supplications, letters and some of his sayings. So days, nights and even months passed whilst I was still tortured in different prisons in Baghdad, until Allah had mercy upon me and brought me out of imprisonment by the supplication of the Master of the Affair, for which I thank God.

‘A short time later, one of my relatives told me, “I saw a man of great honour in my dream; his face was illuminated. He told me, ‘Tell Sayyid Hasan Shirazi the time has come for him to fulfil his promise to the Master of the Affair of writing the book.’” The person [who reported this to me] was unaware of my promise because I did not mention it to anyone! So I hastened to begin and started to collect the references I needed to write the book.

‘Then someone else came to me after a short time and told me something similar to what the first person had said, whilst he was not related to the other nor did he know him! He said, “I saw the Master of the Affair demanding that you must fulfil your promise regarding the book.”

‘I became more involved and started writing the book. When I started writing the main portion of the book, I also saw a dream. I saw an honourable person, very tall and very handsome, having the nature of the Prophets, the glory of the truthful and the great mannerisms^{2 3} that distinguish the humble. He wore a white garment. He approached me and I thought it was the Master of the Affair and so I stood up out of respect for him. I went toward him. When we approached each other, I took his hand to kiss it but

he himself kissed my hand before I could do so and when he kissed my hand I knew he was not the Imam. I asked, “Who are you?” He replied, “I come from the Friend of Allah.” I perceived that he was a messenger from the Master of the Affair. He came to me to thank me for having completed the writing of the book.[4](#)

‘It is the first time I saw a vision like this concerning what I have written. I ask Allah to whom belongs all glory, to accept it with His pleasure. And I seek my Master’s pleasure also, for his pleasure is my means to pleasing Allah.’

The friends of Shahid al-Shirazi report that Shahid al-Shirazi related this story to them whilst they were next to the grave of the Holy Prophet during the *hajj*.

Story 3

Ayatullah Sayyid Shahab al-Din Mar’ashi Najafi narrated to one of his students:

‘During my studying days in Najaf al-Ashraf, I greatly yearned to see the beauty of our 12th Imam and I made a covenant with myself that I would walk every Tuesday night to Masjid al-Sahlah for 40 weeks so that I could attain this great blessing [of meeting the 12th Imam].

‘I performed this act of servitude thirty-five or thirty-six times. One night, however, I was delayed in coming out of Najaf because it was cloudy and rainy. Near Masjid al-Sahlah there was a ditch and when I arrived to it in the middle of the night, I felt alone and afraid of highway robbers. I heard a sound behind me which only increased my fright and terror. I looked behind me and saw an Arab man wearing the clothes of a bedouin. He approached me and said in an eloquent tongue, “O Sayyid, peace be upon you!”

‘I felt my fear diminish and I became contented and at peace. But it surprised me that he knew I was a Sayyid in spite of the darkness of the night. Anyhow, we started talking and walking together. So he asked me, “Where are you going?” to which I said, “Masjid al-Sahlah.” He asked me, “For what reason?” and I replied, “With the goal of being honoured by a visit from the Wali al-Asr.”

‘After awhile, we reached the Masjid of Zayd bin Sohan which is a small mosque near Masjid al-Sahlah. The Arab said to me, “Why don’t we enter this mosque and pray in honour of the sanctity of the mosque?” So we entered and prayed and the Arab started reciting a supplication – and the walls and the stones started reciting with him! I felt a wonderful feeling[5](#) that I cannot even explain![6](#)

‘Upon completing the supplication, the Arab said to me, “O Sayyid, you are hungry. Why not have some dinner?” He brought out some food from under his cloak; there were three pieces of bread and two or three green cucumbers that looked as though they had been plucked fresh from the garden, although we were in the midst of a biting cold winter. It did not even occur to me to question where he brought the cucumbers from during this cold season. So we ate as the Sayyid suggested, after which he told me,

“Stand up so we can go to Masjid al-Sahlah.” We entered the mosque and the Arab performed various acts of worship at the different holy stations and sites and I followed him. He recited the Maghrib and Isha prayers and without a second thought, I followed and prayed behind him. I did not even stop to think, “Who is this man?”

‘After finishing our worship, the man said to me, “O Sayyid, would you like to go, as others do after finishing here, to Masjid al-Kufa or would you like to stay at Masjid al-Sahlah?” to which I replied, “I would like to stay in the mosque.” So we sat in the centre of the mosque at the Station of Imam al-Sadiq (A). I asked the Arab man, “Would you like to have tea or coffee or a smoke so I can prepare it for you?” and he replied in a concise way⁷, “These sort of things are unnecessary in life and we avoid them.”⁸ These words touched the core of my existence and now, whenever I drink tea, I remember that moment and these words echo in my mind.

‘Anyhow, we sat for around two hours and certain events happened that I will now relate:

‘One of the topics we discussed was about *istikharah* [seeking the best solution from God]. So the Arab said to me, “O Sayyid, how do you do your *istikharah* with the *tasbeeh* [string of beads used for counting *adhkar* (invocations)]?” So I said, “Three times Salawat and three times, ‘I seek the best of Allah with His mercy, the best in health.’ I then take the *tasbeeh* and I count it so that if it reaches an even number, it is negative outcome and if it reaches an odd number, it’s a positive outcome.” The Arab said, “This *istikharah* has its complete way but the conclusion of it has not reached you. So if you stop at an odd bead, one should not judge immediately that it is positive but rather he should pause and do it again. But this time with the intention that he does not want to do that thing. If it again reaches an even number, it shows that the first *istikharah* was good and if it remains at an odd number, it shows that the first *istikharah* was in between. So I said to myself, “According to the fundamentals of the precepts of knowledge, it is upon me to ask for proof for this matter,” and the Arab replied, “This is what has reached us from higher places.”⁹ And I found myself experiencing through these words, a great sense of submission and contentment. But with all this, I still did not ask, “who is this man?!”

‘And other points from that sitting included the Arab recommending and insisting upon reciting certain chapters of the Holy Qur’an after the compulsory prayers. These were the recitation of Surah Ya Seen after Salat al-Fajr, Surat al-Naba after Salat al-Dhuhr, Surat al-Nuh after Salat al-Asr, Surat al-Waqi’ah after Salat al-Maghrib and Surat al-Mulk after Salat al-Isha. Amongst his other teachings, he encouraged the recitation of the following supplication after each compulsory prayer:

“O Allah, free me from my depression and grief and the loneliness of my heart and the whisperings of Shaytan. By Your Mercy, O the most Merciful of the merciful.”¹⁰

‘He praised the book, *Shara’i’ al-Islam* by Muhaqqiq al-Hilli and he said, “Everything is accurate and true except some rulings.” He emphasised the recitation of the Holy Qur’an and gifting it to the Shi’as who do not have inheritors or the dead who are not remembered and prayed for by others. He

emphasised the visitation of the Master of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn

(A). He recited a supplication for me by saying “May Allah make you from the servants of the shariah.”

‘I said to him, “I do not know whether the end of my life will be good or whether I will be amongst those who will have illuminated faces in front of Allah,” so he replied, “Your ending is good and your work is appreciated and you are amongst those who have illuminated faces.” And then there were a lot of other teachings but I cannot mention them all now.

‘I needed to leave the mosque for my convenience and so I approached the toilets on the road but before I left the mosque, I thought to myself, “What night is this and what virtuous man is this? Maybe he is my goal?” And as soon as this thought crossed my mind, I returned to the place where we had been sitting and I could not find any sign of the Arab and there was no other person in the mosque. I knew I had found the person I was longing to meet but my heedlessness bothered me and I started wailing and crying like a madman, going round and round the mosque until morning, like a deranged lover who has been tested by being forsaken. Every time I remember that night, I lose myself and sadness overcomes me.’

Story 4

Ayatullah Sayyid Fadhil Milani narrates:

‘In 1972, prior to the time of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Hadi Milani recognised that whilst there were plenty of scholars in the towns and cities, there was a severe lack of scholars in the rural areas of Iran. So he gathered and trained a group of students for the purpose of disseminating them throughout the villages and distant places in the country so that the rural people too would have easy access to Islamic knowledge and guidance.

‘A total of 203 scholars were trained and when it came to the day of their graduation and their being sent to their places of service, Ayatullah Milani stood to address them. He said, “I give you two instructions and pieces of advice that must be adhered to. The first is that I have taught you the jurisprudence and legal opinion of other scholars. Although you may know my opinion, I have not trained you so that you may quote my opinion for I am not doing this for fame; rather I advise you to quote the opinions of another scholar when you are asked.

“And the second is that each night, before you sleep, sit and address the Imam of the time, Imam al-Mahdi (AJ). Tell him of your weaknesses; tell him of your troubles; tell him of the troubles in your village and place them in his hands to resolve. Ask him to change your situation for the better and to maintain your connection with him!”

Story 5

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim al-Qazwini narrates: ‘One of the *maraji*’ [plural of marja’] of Karbala gave me permission to pay *shahriyah* [11](#) to the students of the hawzah. The first pay day was a Friday but I didn’t have the money to give to the students. What was required was about 1000 dinars – which was a lot in those days. I asked myself if there was anyone from whom I could borrow the money and later pay back. However, I didn’t find anyone who would lend me the money without a guarantor to secure the loan.

‘I wrote an *aridhah* [12](#) to Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) stating, ‘If the story of Ayatullah Sayyid Mahdi Bahr al-Ulum in Makkah [13](#) is true and correct, then send this amount to me.’ I then threw the *aridhah* into the shrine of Imam Husayn (A).

‘Before sunrise, a businessman from Baghdad visited me at my house. We ate breakfast together and then he turned to me and gave me 1000 dinars exactly! Shocked and overjoyed, I immediately addressed the Imam and said, “My Master! You did not even wait until sunrise to reply to my request!”

‘This is how the Imam of the time responds to those who sincerely submit to his authority.’

Story 6

Allamah al-Hilli narrates:

‘One Thursday night, I went alone for the visitation of Imam Husayn (A). I was riding on my donkey and had my whip in my hand. On the way, an Arab man walking alone, passed by and

joined me on my journey. We began talking and we discussed various religious and spiritual issues. It turned out that I would ask this Arab man questions regarding many problems and unresolved issues I had, one after another, and he would provide satisfactory and correct answers each time!

‘Eventually, the discussion arrived at one particular issue about which I declared the opposite opinion. I said to him, “There is no narration to support this view.” The Arab man immediately replied, “The narration is found in [such-and-such] chapter of the book, *al-Tahdhib*, by Shaykh al-Tusi.” Upon hearing this, I fell into deep thought and asked myself, “Who could this man possibly be?”

‘The man then asked me, “Allamah, is it possible in the period of the long occultation, to see the Master of the Age or not?” At this question, I was overcome and dropped my riding whip to the floor. The man picked up the whip and returned it back to me, answering his own question by asking, “But how is it not possible to see the Master of the Age when his hand is in yours?” Involuntarily, I fell from my mount. I went to kiss the feet of the Imam but fell unconscious. When I awoke, I did not see anyone.

‘After I returned to my house I opened the book *al-Tahdhib* to the page [the Imam had mentioned] and

saw that the narration the Imam had referred to was present, exactly as he had said. And so I decided to write in the footnotes of the book, *al-Tahdhib*, “I was guided to this narration by the Master of the Affair.”

Story 7

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal al-Hayderi was sitting with his students and discussing the concept of witnessing Imam al-Mahdi (AJ). He asked his students the question, ‘What is the philosophy of the lengthy occultation?’ and then replied his own question, stating:

‘Allah intends for the Muslims and all of humanity, through the experience of the lengthy occultation, to reach their completion. If He had wanted for them to reach their completion through direct guidance, He would have done so through the Commander of the Faithful, Ali

(A). If Imam al-Hujjah (AJ) had wanted to intervene in every big and small issue, then even the Commander of the Faithful Ali (A) could have done so and guided mankind to reach their completion!

‘Let me give you a small example pertaining to medicine. Since mankind has been brought into existence, how many types of cancer have reached us? How many millions of people have died from cancer? Observing this, Allah could have inspired the Prophet with a cure for cancer and prevented people from dying in their millions. He could have done this and yet He didn’t. Why not? Isn’t Allah kind to His servants? Isn’t He merciful?

‘The answer is that if Allah had done so, there would be absolutely no need for striving and scientific research, no purpose behind trials at all; it is the same way with religious matters. Today, how many differences of opinion are there amongst our scholars? Are there very few or many? Can’t Imam al-Mahdi (AJ) by any means and any method intervene? Yes, he is able to intervene! He could make a *risalah* [14](#) and say, “O Shi’a, act according to this.” If someone asks you this, what would you say? If a Sunni or a teenager asks, “Why isn’t the Imam guiding us,” what will be your answer?

‘The answer is – where, then, would be your completion? Where would be your struggle? There would no need for the Hawzah Ilmiyyah [or other universities or research institutes]. Mankind’s completion lies in this! When Allah creates us as infants, does He make us from that first moment, intelligent, responsible, fully comprehending, or not? He could make us that way but Allah in his care for us, makes our completion gradual and over a period of time – forty years, for example. If it wasn’t this way, we would be more angelic than human.

‘In this way, the philosophy of the lengthy occultation is built upon the aim of mankind to strive for its own completion. Trial would have no meaning, purging our hearts of its evils by ourselves would have no meaning, deriving Allah’s laws through the exercise of comprehension and insight would have no meaning and so there would be no distinction between the knowledgeable and ignorant if everything was placed before us.

‘And so this is the course for mankind determined by the Divine and as the Holy Qur’an states, **“No change in the way of Allah will you find and no deviation in the way of Allah will you find.”**”
(Qur’an, 35:43)

1. كلمة الامام المهدي

2. وقار

3. Allah mentions this word and quality in the Qur’an, stating, ‘What is the matter with you, that you do not fear the greatness of Allah?’ (Qur’an, 71:13) and a hadith of Imam Ali (A) states, ‘The one who is known for his wisdom is regarded by the eyes with greatness and awe.’ (Tuhaf al-Uqul, hadith no. 97)

4. This insight is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘They shall have good news in this world’s life and in the hereafter.’ (Qur’an, 10:64)

5. Literally, ‘thawrah’ means revolution, transformation, change.

6. واحسست بثورة عجيبة في نفسي اعجز عن وصفها

7. فأجاب بكلمة جامعة

8. هذه الأمور من فضول المعش, و نحن نتجنب فضول المعش

9. وصلنا من مكان رفيع

10. اللهم سرحني من الهموم و الغموم و وحشة الصدري و وسوسة الشيطان برحمتك يا أرحم الراحمين

11. Monthly stipend and salaries.

12. A letter (The connotation of this word is that it is a petition, or a letter of plea).

13. The story Ayatullah Sayyid al-Qazwini is referring to is as follows:

Ayatullah Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum stayed for three years near Bayt al-Haram serving those in Makkah. He would convey religious knowledge and answer jurisprudential issues including replying to the Ahl al-Sunnah according to their own school of thought. He would also distribute funds and aid to people, students, the poor and those in need who knocked on his door requesting help. When his funds dried up, his servant complained, ‘We do not even have money to return to Najaf.’ After a while the money ran out entirely and again the servant complained, ‘Did I not tell you? Now what shall we do?’

Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum ordered the servant to go to the market and visit a particular shop with a letter. The servant narrates, ‘I went to that shop, gave the paper and was given bags full of money. I returned to the Sayyid, shocked at the event. The next day, I returned to the market so that I may find that person but there was no sign of him at all, nor of his shop. I even asked around at the other shops for him. I returned home and I was deep in thought when the Sayyid entered. He asked, “Where have you been?” to which I could only reply, “I had some work, Sayyid!” Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum replied, “No. You went to search for the man that you took the message to, yesterday. Did you think that we did not have our Master with us?”’

14. Book of comprehensive jurisprudential laws.

Ethics And Manners (Akhlaq)

The word ‘*akhlaq*’ is derived from the root ‘*khulq*’ meaning disposition. Disposition is nurtured by the regularity of an action or practice such that it becomes ingrained in the mind and heart of a person resulting in the innate tendency to revert to that action; the action becomes ‘second nature’ to him. It is the variety of these dispositions that ultimately compose the entirety of our character.

It is this character, forming the true image of a person – and not his or her physical qualities – that

interacts with the world. Whether one's character is aggressive, ill-tempered, foul mouthed, untrustworthy and mischievous, or God-centric, pleasant, courteous, humble and concerned with the well-being of others, indeed the nature of this character is the culmination of years of development of either negative or positive traits. For this reason, Imam Ali (A) stated, 'The distinguishing feature of a believer is his good character.'¹

Mankind's interactions are divided into three groups: his *akhlaq* with Allah, *akhlaq* with the world and *akhlaq* with his self. So if a person finds any flaw in his interaction or manners in any of these three areas, he must identify the reasons for its presence, how it became that way and what steps must be taken to rectify his disposition from a negative one to a positive and beautiful one. Allah promises His assistance to those who take on this endeavour, saying,

***'And as for those who strive hard in Our cause, surely We guide them in Our ways.'* (Qur'an, 29:89)**

The greatest and noblest character was that of Prophet Muhammad (S) about whom Allah confirms, 'And certainly, you have attained an exalted standard of character.' (Qur'an, 68:4). His moral perfection should be studied and encompassed into our lives so that we live up to his lofty values.

The Holy Prophet's character is also exemplified in Imam Zayn al-Abidin's (A) Supplication for the Highest Moral Character, wherein he prays, 'Make me worship You but do not let my worship be corrupted by conceit. Let good flow out from my hands for people but do not let me erase it by making them feel obliged. Grant me the highest moral traits but protect me from vanity. O Allah, bless Muhammad and his family. Raise me not a single degree with people unless You have lowered me an equal amount, within myself. Let there not occur any outward honour for me unless there has occurred an inner degradation of an equal amount within myself.'²

Story 1

Shaykh al-Nu'mani narrates that on a particular day during his house arrest, Shahid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was looking through a hole in the wall at the guards surrounding the house. When he saw one of them finding the heat difficult to bear and wiping his forehead in a state of distress, he recited the *Kalimat Istirja'ah*.³

He addressed Shahid al-Sadr, asking, 'Why do you have sympathy for these people? These people prevent you from leaving and stop those who love you from meeting you. Because of them, your children are scared and are prevented from having even the simplest of things.'

Shahid al-Sadr replied, 'This is not the right view to have. We must have sympathy for them. Know that when we wear this turban, we must change the way we look at people. We do not know whether they have deviated because of not having a good Islamic environment or not receiving the correct education

that nurtures sound belief. How many examples do we have of misguided people who have been guided and reformed!⁴ Maybe one day, they too will become guided. Please go and give them some water.’⁵

Shaykh al-Nu’mani went out and gave the guards water. He spoke with the captain of the guards, who sent a message back to Shahid al-Sadr, saying, ‘Don’t surrender to these cowardly people. They are shaking in fear of you.’⁶

Story 2

Al-Haj Ibrahim Lari recounts that one of his friends hired a group of Egyptian workers to carry out a certain project in his house and whilst praying, he saw that they prayed in the manner that the Shi’a pray.

Having assumed that the workers were Sunni, al-Haj Ibrahim asked them why they were praying in the Shi’a way. The workers replied, ‘Yes we are Shi’a and the reason for us converting and becoming Shi’a is that once we were working in Kuwait and there was a scholar in the mosque, close to where we were working. He used to live in a flat close to the mosque and he would regularly come holding a tray with food and drink on it.’⁷ He used to give us the water with his own hands. We became enamoured by his great character and we loved him and we loved his school of thought; we became Shi’a Muslims because of him. This person was Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Shirazi.’⁸

Story 3

Once, after the *hajj* season, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim held a large conference and invited Ayatullah Shahid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr to attend a lunch with many scholars and dignitaries from different sects in attendance. When Shahid al-Sadr came, he found a large meal with many varieties of food to cater to the varying palates of guests attending from many places around the world.

Shahid al-Sadr partook in the meal by only eating some vegetables and drinking water. He avoided that which his eyes preferred and his soul desired in a subtle manner so that others would not notice.

When he returned home, he asked his wife, ‘Do you have anything that can be eaten?’ a question that took her by surprise. She asked, ‘Did you not just return from a large lunch with those dignitaries?’ He replied, ‘Yes, but I would have not enjoyed any of the food whilst you are satisfied with just a piece of bread and cheese!’

Shahid al-Sadr and his wife had at that time already packed their luggage to travel and only had some travellers’ food with them and so they ate a few pieces of bread, a bit of cheese and some cucumber and drank tea. They had their lunch and were thankful to Allah for it.’⁹

Story 4

Sayyid Mahdi Imam Jamarani, a representative of the Ministry of Endowment, was told by one of the Communists in the organisation, 'I love only one person from amongst you scholars – Ayatullah Dastaghayb Shirazi.' Sayyid Mahdi asked the Communist why this was the case. He replied:

'I was sleeping in a jail in the time of the Shah and it was midnight. They opened the door of the prison so I raised my head and I saw a scholarly man, old and short and very weak; they brought him into my cell. I hid my head under the covers and I didn't bother with him and slept. A few minutes before the rising of the sun, a hand touched me politely and I opened my eyes and this very old man gave me salutations and said very politely, "O my dearest brother, stand up so that the morning prayer is not missed." In anger, I said in a raised voice, "I am a Communist, I do not offer prayers." The man replied, "Then please accept my apologies as I have troubled you; I desire that you forgive me." And so I went back to sleep.

'After I woke up, the old man continued to ask me to forgive him in a very humble way until I felt ashamed of what I had done in raising my voice to him. Regretting my past actions, I said, "No problem, Sayyid. Come sit on this bed comfortably and I will sleep on the floor as you are elderly," but he refused! He said, "You are the first into the cell so it is your right and you have also had more trouble in the prison, having been here longer, whilst I am fresh. You are more entitled to it than me."

'I became attracted to his personality and ethics and my admiration continued throughout my stay with him in the prison. This is why he is the best person, in my view, amongst all your scholars.'

Story 5

Sayyid Hadi al-Qazwini narrates:

'A few years ago I had the honour of going to Makkah to perform the *hajj*. Only a day or two after my return to the holy city of Qom, I received a phone call from the late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha al-Shirazi himself. After exchanging greetings and welcoming me back, he asked me when a good time would be for him to visit me in my home. Shocked at his proposal to come and visit me, I insisted that I would instead visit him at any time he asked me to. However, being the immensely humble scholar he was, he refused.

'Feeling extremely ashamed and embarrassed, I insisted again on being the one to come to his service. However, in the most respectful and compassionate tone, he refused, asking me, "Why would you deprive me of the reward of visiting a person who has just performed the *hajj*?" At this point, I had no choice but to accept. I was truly and greatly humbled when this honourable personality arrived at my home, taking time out of his most busy schedule to visit me, a young student of the seminary, after my return from the *hajj*.

‘May Allah bless his soul and grant him the rank of being amongst the most pious, in the vicinity of the Holy Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt.’

Story 6

Shaykh Muhammad Khalfan narrates:

‘We were with al-Haj Hasanain Rajabali and his family and they had asked for an audience with His Eminence, Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli; they had some questions regarding dreams and issues pertaining to the rights of women. And so we were granted an audience and travelled to Damavand outside Northern Tehran to his house, to meet him.

‘After the discussions, we prayed our Salah behind him and then he invited us to partake in lunch with him. Although we were all sitting together, Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli was constantly looking at us, vigilant that everybody should be comfortable and that they should eat properly. I remember that after each morsel of food he would eat, he would say, “*Al-hamdu lillah*”.¹⁰

‘After we had finished our meal, he wanted to rest but due to his excellent manners, he didn’t just say, “Now I’m going to rest,” but rather he said, “I am going to rest; why don’t you stay and take some rest as well?” However, we excused ourselves and left.

‘Before we departed, he noticed that I was unwell and had a cold. He asked me if I had taken any medicine, to which I replied I had not. Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli then brought me some medicine and gave it to me.

‘As he bade us farewell, he recited a supplication for us, saying, “May you be blessed wherever you may be.” This is from the speech of Prophet Isa (A) when he says,

“Indeed I am the servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and made me a Prophet. And He has made me blessed wherever I may be” (Qur’an, 19:30-31)

However, Ayatullah Jawadi used this phrase for us. This moment was very refreshing – it was the climax of the whole event, for when a sincere person supplicates for you, it is something very unique.’

Story 7

Sayyid Adil al-Alawi narrates about his teacher, Ayatullah Sayyid Shahab al-Din Mar’ashi Najafi:

‘I was sitting in his room next to him [Ayatullah Mar’ashi Najafi] when a very old man from the community entered the room. After exchanging salutations and welcoming him, he said, “My master, I would like to introduce myself to you. I was responsible for opening and closing the public bath houses and I want to remind you about an incident from your life.

“When I was responsible for opening the public baths, you were in the prime of your youth and you used to come with your small children to that place. One day you entered and you saw other children and you asked me about them and I told you that they were orphans. You turned to your children and said, “Do not call me by the name, ‘baba’ [father]’ so as to protect the feelings of those orphans who didn’t have a father¹¹. Then you gave me some money so that I should buy for them stationary for their school needs and I bought it for them.¹²”

Sayyid al-Alawi adds, ‘When I heard about this story I was moved by it. I said to myself, “God is great! What sympathy and feeling Sayyid Mar’ashi has for others!”’

¹. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 71, p. 392, hadith no. 59.

². Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah, supplication number 20 His Supplication on Noble Moral Traits and Acts Pleasing to God <https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-a...> [10]

³. Inna lillah wa inna ilayhi raji’un.

⁴. This action is the manifestation of the noble verses,

‘O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do? It is most hateful to Allah that should say that which you do not do.’ (Qur’an, 61:2–3)

⁵. This action is the manifestation of the noble verses,

‘Surely Allah will make those who believe and do good deeds enter gardens ... And they are guided to goodly words.’ (Qur’an, 22:23–24)

⁶. This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Imam Ali (A) says, ‘A person who teaches his own self and disciplines his own self deserves more reverence than a man who teaches others and disciplines them.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p 56, hadith no. 33)

⁷. This action is the manifestation of the noble verse,

‘Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation and have disputations with them in the best of manners.’ (Qur’an, 16:125)

⁸. This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Imam Ali (A) says, ‘Rehabilitate and reform the wrongdoer by your good deeds [toward him] and indicate towards good deeds through your good words.’ (Ghurur al-Hikam, hadith no. 2304)

⁹. This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Prophet Muhammad (S) says, ‘The heart bears wisdom when the stomach is empty and the heart throws out wisdom when the stomach is full.’ (Tanbih al-Khawatir vol. 2 p. 119)

¹⁰. All praise belongs to Allah ...’ (Qur’an, 1:2) This phrase from the Qur’an is used as the perfect expression of thanks to Allah for any blessing.

¹¹. This action is the manifestation of the noble verse,

‘And when they are present at the division of the relatives and the orphans and the needy, give them something out of it and speak to them kind words.’ (Qur’an, 4:8)

¹². This action is the manifestation of the noble verses, And they ask you concerning the orphans. Say: “To set right for them their affairs is good.” (Qur’an, 2:220) and ‘O you who believe! Spend out of what We have given to you.’ (Qur’an, 2:254)

The Holy Qur’an

The Holy Qur’an describes itself as the **‘Book, in which there is no doubt,’** (Qur’an, 2:2), **‘guiding to that which is most upright’**(Qur’an, 17:9) and as a **‘healing and mercy’.** (Qur’an, 17:82)

The Qur'an is an all-encompassing revelation, providing principles of theology, history, prophecy, jurisprudence, ethics, politics, business and other sciences. Allah states in this regard, **'And certainly We have explained for mankind in this Qur'an every kind of example; yet most people do nothing but deny.'** (Qur'an, 17:89)

The Qur'an was revealed so that people **'may ponder over its verses, so that those endowed with understanding may be mindful.'** (Qur'an, 38:29) When people read, ponder and grasp the deeper meaning of its verses, **'their skins and their hearts become compliant to the remembrance of Allah.'** (Qur'an, 39:23)

Although the Qur'an is a **'Book which makes things clear'** (Qur'an, 12:1) and its verses are **'easy for remembrance'** (Qur'an, 54:17), there are many people who will avoid reading it, neglecting its recitation for months on end, thereby **'reducing the Qur'an to shreds'**. (Qur'an, 15:91)

On the Day of Judgement, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) himself will complain about such Muslims, proclaiming, **'O my Lord! Surely my community have treated this Qur'an as a forsaken thing!'** (Qur'an, 25:30) Allah warns that if one is blind to the Holy Qur'an in this world, he will be so in the next world: **'He shall say, "My Lord! Why have you raised me blind whilst I was indeed seeing?" and the reply shall come, "Thus it is, Our communications came to you but you neglected them; hence, you shall be forsaken on this day."**' (Qur'an, 20:124-126)

The Ahlul Bayt were very attached to the Holy Qur'an; it was their first point of recourse for every matter; they lived by it, spoke through it, moulded their characters according to it and guided others by it. As their followers, it is our duty to do the same: **'And whoever submits himself wholly to Allah and he is the doer of good to others, he indeed has taken hold of the firmest thing that anyone can lay hold of.'** (Qur'an, 31:22)

Story 1

A lady came to interview Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlullah for an article. She asked many questions about his views and soon the discussion turned to the topic of philosophy. Ayatullah Fadhlullah was known for his expertise in philosophy and his study of the great philosophers and so the interviewer asked his opinion about them.

She asked, 'In terms of your philosophical outlook, which scholar have you gravitated towards? Are you Aristotelian in your views? Are you Hegelian in your views?'

To which Ayatullah Fadhlullah replied, 'Neither; rather, I am Qur'anian in my views.'

Story 2

The family and friends of Shaykh al-Tabarsi thought he had died. He was given his *ghusl* (religious bath) and *kafan* (shroud); the prayer of the dead was recited over him and he was taken to the graveyard and buried as normal. The difference between Shaykh al-Tabarsi and others who are buried is that whilst he was in his grave, he opened his eyes – he had been buried alive by accident!

Whilst he was in the grave, he made an oath that if Allah rescued him and he came out of his grave alive, he would write a commentary of the Holy Qur'an.

No sooner had a few minutes passed when a grave robber approached the grave to take the shroud of the Shaykh so he could sell it in the market. He began to dig through the grave until he reached the body. As the thief started to remove the shroud, Shaykh al-Tabarsi suddenly reached out and grabbed his hand, terrifying him! Trying to quickly calm the thief down, he said, 'Don't be afraid!' and explained what had happened, saying, 'Allah has answered my prayer and my vow through you¹. Go to my house, bring my clothes and I will give you more than this so that you do not go back to committing this crime for it is a forbidden action.'

Shaykh al-Tabarsi returned to his house to the surprise of everyone!² He then started writing a Qura'nic commentary in fulfilment of his vow. The commentary that resulted from Shaykh al-Tabarsi's promise is considered to be one of the great Shi'a commentaries.³

When Shaykh al-Tabarsi died, by the blessings of Allah, he died as a martyr. When he was buried, he was placed next to the body of Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha (A).

Story 3

In the time of Marhum Ayatullah Ali Kuni, Sultan Nasr al-Din Qajjar wanted to build a grand royal palace but there was a mosque next to where he wanted to build the palace. He wanted the scholars to pass a *fatwah* (religious ruling) to endorse the destruction of the mosque with the proviso that he would provide another area of land to rebuild the mosque.

Some of the corrupt⁴ scholars said it was permissible. Some of them came to Ayatullah Kuni to seek his approval but he told them, 'I will go to the King myself and I will sign the *fatwah* myself.' The King and the scholars were overjoyed to hear this response.

The King demanded the royal palace be decorated to welcome Ayatullah Ali Kuni. And so, on the day of the Ayatullah's arrival, the palace workers were very busy with preparations to ensure a grand welcome. When Ayatullah Kuni entered the palace, the King himself went to receive him, praising and honouring him. Having welcomed Ayatullah Kuni with lavish ceremony, the King put in front of Ayatullah Kuni a pen and paper so that he could write a *fatwah* permitting the demolition of the mosque.

Ayatullah Kuni raised his hand and recited something quietly and then wrote down what he said on the paper and signed it. He then stood up and left, with the King and those around him following him out. When they returned, the King very happily took the paper to view what Ayatullah Kuni had written and signed. When he read it, he saw that on it was written,

***'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the People of the Elephant?'*(Qur'an, 105: 1)**

The King was furious, his face reddening with anger. He did not destroy the mosque until the death of Ayatullah Kuni, beginning its destruction on the day of Ayatullah Kuni's death.

Story 4

Shaykh Muhammad Ali Salih recounts:

'I was sitting in the *tafsir* class of Ayatullah Sayyid Sadiq Tehrani, one of the great students of the Holy Qur'an, and Allamah Tabatabai.

'He [Ayatullah Tehrani] was addressing two issues at the same time. The first was regarding the people who do not allow for the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an beyond the exact sayings of the Ahlul Bayt and the second was regarding those who forbid any interpretation beyond the literal meaning of the text. Ayatullah Tehrani said:

“Those who confine themselves to the literal meaning believe that Allah is sitting on His throne or has a leg or will be seen on the Day of Judgement⁵. For example, they believe literally that Allah has two hands because the Holy Qur'an states,

***'He asks, "O Iblis! What prevented you from making obeisance to him whom I created with my own two hands?"'*(Qur'an, 38:75)**

We must reject and disprove this idea by using the very same Qur'an that clearly indicates its usage of metaphors. “For example, if we have to take literally the words of the Holy Qur'an in relation to Prophet Ibrahim (A), we will ask, 'Where did he go?' for Allah states Ibrahim (A) said ***'I will go to my Lord. He will guide me.'*** (Qur'an, 37:99)

So where did Ibrahim (A) go to? To Allah? How? Where is the direction of Allah? The fact is that when Ibrahim (A) said these words, he was going from the land of Iraq to the land of Palestine. Was the land of Palestine the place where Allah was? No, it means his migration was for the sake of Allah and the Holy Qur'an confirms this by saying, ***'To Allah belongs the East and West. Wherever you turn to, there is the presence of Allah.'*** (Qur'an, 2:115)

“Thus if we must believe that literally, Allah has two hands, then we must also believe, literally, that Prophet Dawud (A) had more than two hands! Why? For the Holy Qur'an says, ***'Bear patiently what***

they say. And remember Our servant Dawud, the man of many hands.’(Qur’an, 38: 17)

Is Dawud greater than Allah? Did Dawud (A) have more than two hands? In most commentaries the phrase, ‘many hands’ has been interpreted as ‘the man of strength’. In this way, we can use the Holy Qur’an to prove the reality of these matters.”

Shaykh Salih concludes, ‘Often when giving his *tafsir* lesson, Ayatullah Tehrani would cry and say, “Indeed the Qur’an has become a victim.”⁶

Story 5

Ayatullah Muhsin Qara’ati relates:

‘I remember well when the *mujtahid*, Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, was the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran and he was leading Friday prayers in the University of Tehran, when a bomb planted by Saddam’s spies exploded amongst the lines of the congregation. They planted the bomb under the carpet, not far from where Imam Khamenei was.

‘Some of the congregation were sitting on the carpet unaware [of what lay beneath it] when suddenly the bomb exploded, tearing their bodies apart. Many died whilst their souls were at peace, as Allah says in the Holy Qur’an,

“O soul that is at peace! Return to your Lord, well-pleased with him, well-pleasing him. So enter amongst My servants and enter into My garden.”(Qur’an, 89:27-30)

‘What is very strange is that when the bomb exploded, Ayatullah Khamenei was addressing the congregation and he did not move from his place – not even a single step!⁷ Rather, he continued to speak with full conviction and tranquillity of heart.⁸ Moreover, whilst all this was happening, Ayatullah Khamenei chose to mention in his speech, a verse of the Holy Qur’an which suited the occasion:

“[And when they went out against Jalut and his forces, they said,] ‘Our Lord! Pour down upon us patience and make our steps firm and assist us against the disbelieving people.’”(Qur’an, 2:250)

Story 6

Sayyid Ali Qadhi Tabatabai had a student in the days of his youth. He observed that his student appeared increasingly pale and sick, day after day and so he asked him, ‘What are you doing that makes you become like this?’ The student replied, ‘Every day, in addition to my work, I complete the recitation of the entire Qur’an and because of this, I do not even have time to sleep.’

Sayyid Qadhi responded by saying, ‘From tonight, I want you to imagine that I am sitting in front of you when you start reading the Qur’an.’ A few days later, the student came to Sayyid Qadhi and exclaimed,

‘I am unable to read even one part from the Qur’an now!’

A few more nights passed and thereafter, Sayyid Qadhi told the student, ‘Now imagine that when you’re reciting the Qur’an, amongst those observing your recitation is Imam al-Zaman (AJ) or the Prophet Muhammad (S) or Imam Ali (A).’ The next day the student returned, saying, ‘Again I feel unable to read more than a section of the Qur’an!’

A few more days passed, after which Sayyid Qadhi again approached the student and this time told him, ‘Now when you read the Qur’an, imagine you are reciting each verse before Allah.’ That night, the youth began to read the Qur’an from its beginning but due to him bringing the presence of Allah to mind, he was unable to exceed his recitation beyond ‘You alone do we worship and from You alone do we seek help,⁹’ as he was too overwhelmed and awed by this verse to continue.

Story 7

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Shirazi narrates:

‘I recall how my father, may Allah be pleased with him, advised me to sleep less [so as to make the most of the night]. He would regularly sleep an average of only 2.5 hours during the night and whenever he felt tired or lethargic and intended to relax, he would tell himself, “O Mahdi” –

that was his name – “O Mahdi, you can sleep in the grave!” And so in this way, he would strive to seek knowledge in the service of the Almighty.

‘One night, we went from Najaf to Karbala and I prayed the evening prayers with my father, en route. Whilst we were on the road, however, the car ran out of fuel. The driver turned to us and said, “We’ll be forced to stay here until morning.”

‘It was a biting cold night and no other cars happened to be on the road or passing by. Since no-one was able to help us, we remained in the car to protect ourselves from the cold. However, despite the cold weather, my father stayed out in the wilderness until the morning. When dawn arrived, he performed *tayammum* as we were without water.

When the sun came up, I said to my father, “You did not sleep, even though it was a long winter night?” He replied to me, “Correct. I decided I wanted to read some portions of the Holy Qur’an instead!”

‘It was through his continuous engagement with the Holy Qur’an that he memorised it entirely. It was because, no matter what the circumstance, he would read the Holy Qur’an after the morning prayer until the sun had fully risen. He would recite one *juz*’ (portion) per day in a melodious voice.

‘I asked him that morning, “During this night, how many *ajzaa*’ (portions) did you complete?” “Eight,” he replied.’

[1.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘So We responded to him and delivered him from his grief. And thus do We deliver the believers.’ (Qur’an, 21:88)

[2.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘Then We deliver Our Messengers and those who believe; it is binding on Us that We deliver the believers.’ (Qur’an, 10:103)

[3.](#) Majma’ al-Bayan

[4.](#) Imam Ali (A) was asked, ‘Who is the best of Allah’s creations after the Imams in terms of guidance?’ He replied, ‘The scholars if they do good.’ He was then asked ‘And who are the worst of Allah’s creation after Iblis, Fir’awn and Namrud?’ To which he replied, ‘The scholars if they are corrupt.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol 2, p. 89)

[5.](#) Historically, people who only accepted a literal interpretation of the Holy Qur’an were known as the Mujassimah; a literalist view of the Qur’an persists until today within many sects in Islam. This is known as anthropomorphism.

[6.](#) This statement is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘And the Messenger cried out, “O my Lord! Surely people have treated this Qur’an as a forsaken thing!”’ (Qur’an, 25:30)

[7.](#) This action is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘O you who believe! If you help the cause of Allah, He will help you and make your feet firm.’ (Qur’an, 48:7)

[8.](#) This action is a manifestation of the noble verses, ‘Allah has endeared the faith to you and made it beautiful in your hearts. And He made detestable to you disbelief and sins and disobedience. Such people are rightly guided.’ (Qur’an, 49:7) and ‘He it is Who sent down tranquillity into the hearts of the believers so that they might have more faith added to their faith.’ (Qur’an, 48:4)

[9.](#) Qur’an, 1:5.

Acts Of Worship And Servitude (Ibadah)

One of the reasons we were created was to worship and serve Allah; in this regard, Allah states, ***‘I did not create the jinn and mankind except that they should worship me.’ (Qur’an, 51:56)***

God’s worship has two primary definitions. The first is that worship is more than just the fulfilment of the compulsory actions; rather, it encompasses the entirety of one’s existence, from family life to even recreation. The Holy Prophet stated, ‘Worship consists of ten parts, nine of which are to do with earning a lawful living,^{[1](#)}’ whilst Imam al-Ridha (A) explained the intellectual dimension of worship, saying, ‘Worship is not found in copious amounts of fasting or praying but rather, worship is to reflect on the command of Allah.^{[2](#)}’

The second definition of worship stems from the principle that in reality, nothing in creation can ‘serve’ Allah as He is not in need of anything from His creation; Imam Ali (A) describes Allah, stating, ‘He is near things but not [physically] adjoining; He is far from them but not [physically] separate.’^{[3](#)} Indeed, if all of creation joined together to ‘serve’ Allah, it would not add an iota to His kingdom and indeed if all of creation joined together to reject Allah it would not detract an iota from His kingdom and therefore, to ‘serve’ Allah, in fact, means to serve His creation.

Allah describes this servitude in the covenant He made with the Children of Israel, saying, ***‘You shall not worship anyone but Allah and you shall do good to your parents, to the near of kin, to the***

orphans, to the needy [and] you shall speak to people in good terms, keep up the prayer and pay the alms taxes. (Qur'an, 2:83)

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A) unites both these forms of worship within his supplications, seeking divine opportunities to fulfil both: 'I pray humbly, for after all, I am the smallest of the small, like an atom or even inferior to it. Guide my heart to that in which You employ those that pray, by means of which You cause the devout to worship and whereby You save the lazy. Save me from that which would remove me from You and cause me to live a praiseworthy life.'⁴

Worship and servitude, therefore, entail a holistic, fulfilling and balanced life wherein neither the Creator nor the created are neglected, whilst everything is performed with the higher intention of proximity to Allah.

Story 1

Ayatullah Sayyid Sadiq Shirazi narrates:

'One day, one of my father's students went to his house before the lesson started and in a manner of urgency, said to him, "Sayyid, I have a question that I would like you to give me an answer to and I would like you to dedicate time to this question even if it sounds unimportant!" Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Shirazi replied, "Yes, go ahead and ask."

'So the student asked, "My master, if you knew that you would be leaving this world in one hour or one day, what would you do in this short time that is left for you of your life?"⁵⁶

'Ayatullah Shirazi had a habit of taking his time and thinking very hard before answering any question but this time he answered straight away without taking any time. This means that he had already thought about the question before and so the answer was ready in his mind! 'He replied, "I would not do anything other than what I am doing now."⁷⁸

Ayatullah Shirazi was sitting and reading the book, *al-Jawahir*, and he was preparing to teach his lesson to his students.

Story 2

Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Bahjat narrates that Ayatullah Shaykh Murtadha Taleqani was invited to partake in an iftar with a number of scholars, including the grand Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Qasim al-Khoei.

When the food was presented and everyone sat at the table, Ayatullah Taleqani said, "There is no salt on the table!"⁹ ¹⁰ and he did not stretch his hand towards the food, although the distance between the place where the food was served and the kitchen was quite long and it seemed that the food was coming from another house. Not only did Ayatullah Taleqani not stretch his hand towards the food until

salt was brought, the others too did not stretch their hands towards the food out of their respect for him, including Ayatullah Khoei.

After the sitting had concluded and all were ready to disperse, Ayatullah Khoei addressed Ayatullah Taleqani, saying, ‘O Shaykh, if you were tied to this Prophetic practice to such an extent, it would be better to carry with you a little salt so people would not have to wait for you like that.’

It was then that Ayatullah Taleqani took out a small bag of salt which he was carrying in his pocket and said, ‘I was carrying salt with me but I wanted this good Islamic tradition to be observed!’¹¹

Story 3

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Ridha Shirazi had a habit of refreshing his ablution exactly 10 minutes before the call to prayer set in. One of his grandsons asked him, ‘Why do you perform the ablution now whilst it’s not time yet time for the prayer?’ He replied, ‘It is from the etiquettes of the servant to prepare himself for what his Master commands from him and it is better to perform that act even before the Master would command the servant to perform it!’

Story 4

After the authorities imprisoned Shahid al-Sadr for the last time, his sister Shahidah Aminah bint al-Sadr went out of the house to see the situation and did not find any soldiers there; she considered this a bad sign.

She went back to her room and changed her clothes; she tied the dresses of her sleeves around her wrists, came out of her room and asked Shaykh al-Nu’mani, ‘O Shaykh, do you think this would protect my body from being shown whilst under torture?’ to which he replied, ‘God-willing, they will not take you to the prison.’

Aminah al-Sadr then said, ‘I swear by Allah that I am not scared; I have been waiting for this moment. How happy I would be if I was martyred with my brother and how miserable I would be if I stayed after him.’¹²

She returned to the room and brought out a bag with a collection of letters and pictures and said to Shaykh al-Nu’mani, ‘This is a life’s worth of memories. When they imprison me, I ask you to burn it in order to ensure they are not taken by the authorities.’

Story 5

Sayyid Hadi al-Qazwini narrates about his grandfather, Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini:

‘If there is a trait which I believe he is fully deserving of, it is that he was and continues to be extremely

humble.

‘After his immigration to the United States of America in 1987 and until his return to Karbala, Iraq, in 2003, Ayatullah al-Qazwini established a number of Islamic centres and institutions, including the first full-time accredited Islamic school (comprising Kindergarten to Grade 12) in southern California. Not only did he establish the school, he was also eager to teach the young Muslim students, Qur’anic recitation, Qur’anic *tafsir* and *akhlaq*. The Islamic school was also part of an Islamic centre that conducted weekly programs during which Ayatullah al-Qazwini would lead the prayers and conduct religious lectures and sermons.

‘As children, my cousins and I would frequently accompany our grandfather to the nightly programs at the Islamic centre. I clearly remember that Ayatullah al-Qazwini would leave the house to arrive at the Islamic centre at least an hour (and sometimes more) before the program commenced. He would open the front gate of the complex as well as the front door of the building himself. As children, we would sometimes wonder why we would go to the centre so early, when it was only a 10 minute drive from home.

‘When asked why he arrived so early, Ayatullah al-Qazwini would respond, “It is because I fear someone may come early and have to wait behind the closed doors of the centre.”

‘I have not forgotten this statement by His Eminence, a reflection of his humble nature as well as his utmost consideration for others, especially the believers.

‘Another incident I remember, which also expresses Ayatullah al-Qazwini’s immense humility and servitude, is more recent. After his return to Karbala, he made it a habit to visit the shrine of our holy 8th Imam, Ali al-Ridha (A) in the city of Mashad, Iran, on an annual basis during the highly recommended Al-Ziyarat al-Rajabiyyah season.

‘But unfortunately, more recently, Ayatullah al-Qazwini’s health has deteriorated and as a result, it has been difficult for him to perform any strenuous activities, although he still makes sure to observe his daily routine of visiting the numerous projects he has established in the holy city of Karbala, such as the orphanage and school for orphans, a large hospital project, an Islamic seminary, as well as others.

‘Nevertheless, even with his ill health, he has managed to visit the 8th Imam in Mashhad annually. During his trip to Mashad in Rajab 1431 AH, I had the honour to also visit the city at the same time. I decided to go primarily to visit the holy Imam as well as to be at Ayatullah al-Qazwini’s service as he had just performed a surgery and needed assistance, especially in moving.

‘The doctor had asked him to rest as much as possible and not to leave his place of residence until he was fully able to move. However, I remember His Eminence asking for help to go to visit the shrine of the holy Imam and saying that he needed to go, since the reason he was there was to visit the holy Imam on a daily basis. To prepare for His Eminence, I went ahead and prepared a wheel chair so that I

may push him and he would not have to exert energy and tire himself. Once Ayatullah al-Qazwini was ready to leave, I brought forth the wheel chair for him to use. However, he refused to use it. I inquired as to why and he responded, "My son, I do not want you to tire yourself whilst pushing me on this chair." I replied to him, "My dear grandfather, I am here at your service and this is the least I can do for you." However, His Eminence insisted, and did not allow me to push him at all. Instead, he walked, taking frequent breaks to rest for some moments and then continuing to walk towards the shrine of the holy Imam.'

Story 6

Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini recounts:

'The reason for the Imam's (Khomeini) migration to Paris goes back to certain events. The Iraqi government had made it known to him that he had two choices: to remain living in Iraq and refrain from his political activities or to continue his political activities elsewhere.

'In response, the Imam stated, "I take interest in both politics and religion and I shall never turn back or stand down from my political points of view." He faced me and said, "Bring both mine and your own passports."

'The situation in our house on the eve of our proposed departure was something to be seen. No one was his or her usual self. My undivided attention was focused on the Imam. As on previous nights, he slept at the usual hour, arising to perform the midnight prayer an hour and a half before sunrise, as always. I remember him gathering the family and saying, "Don't be at all upset. Surely there is no way one can remain here and keep one's silence. If we were to do so, how would we answer Allah? One's religious duty is of paramount importance; one cannot shirk the responsibility that this duty carries with it."

'The midday prayer, led by Imam, was performed along the Iraqi border as we headed for the Kuwaiti frontier. The officials told us to wait and it became apparent that Kuwait had been informed of our plans to enter their country. Eventually someone from the office came and spoke to us for one hour saying, in a nutshell, "no admittance!"

'We returned back. The Imam was suffering from extreme fatigue and this worried me greatly. He could tell by my facial expression that I was annoyed at his being kept waiting for such a long period and said, "Does this kind of thing upset you? We too must go through a bad time at the national frontiers as do others, in order to appreciate just one of the thousands of discomforts that are brought upon our brothers. Be strong!"'

Story 7

Shaykh Muhammad Salih narrates:

‘My roommate from Somalia and I had been studying in Qom for several years and our financial situation had become so bad that we could not even afford to buy books in which to study from and annotate. We had asked where we could be given books and were told to visit His Eminence, Ayatullah Sayyid Shahab al-Din Mar’ashi Najafi, as he was a great collector of books and known to distribute books from his collection.

‘So one day, we went to his house and knocked on the door. An assistant opened the door and said to us, “Sayyid is resting right now but he would not like it if he had visitors and I sent them away. He won’t be resting long; wait here and when he awakens, I will call you.”

‘It wasn’t long before the assistant announced that the Sayyid had awoken and was inviting us into his room. We walked in and what we saw shocked us. His room was bare except the mattress he was sitting on and around it were some books and notepads. Seeing his condition of poverty such that even his mattress was torn and tattered, whilst he was a grand scholar and we were merely students, we began to cry.

‘Having observed his situation, we felt very embarrassed to ask for any financial aid from him and so we began to excuse ourselves, saying, “We just came to give you salutations and regards.” He replied, “No, you came here with an intention, so ask what you intended!”

‘We stated our need for books and he responded, “Forgive me, I have nothing to offer you at the moment but if you go to [such and such street and such and such a person], he is a businessman. Tell him that I have sent you; take whatever money you want from him and tell him I will repay the debt.” And with that we took our leave.’

‘I still don’t know how Sayyid Mar’ashi slept on that mattress,’ Shaykh Muhammad Salih concluded, with tears in his eyes.

1. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 103, p. 18, hadith no.81.

2. Al-Harrani, Tuhaf al-Uqul, hadith no. 422.

3. Nahj al-Balaghah, sermon 178.

4. Al-Sahifa al-Sajjadiyyah, supplication no. 47. His Supplication on the Day of 'Arafa:

<https://www.al-islam.org/sahifa-al-kamilah-al-sajjadiyya-imam-ali-zayn-a...> [11]

5. This question may have been the manifestation of the noble narration in which Prophet Muhammad says, ‘Work for your life as though you will live forever and work for the hereafter as though you will die tomorrow.’ (Tanbih al-Khawatir, vol. 2, hadith no. 234)

6. It is necessary for every individual to keep an updated will and for it to be in accordance with the Islamic law as Allah says, ‘Bequest is prescribed for you when death approaches one of you. If he leaves wealth behind for parents and near relatives according to its usage, it is a duty incumbent upon those with piety.’ (Qur’an, 2:180); see also Qur’an, 5:106. Allah warns that death may come at any moment, leaving a person unable to make his will if it is not already completed. He

states, 'So they will not be able to make a bequest nor shall they be able to return to their families.' (Qur'an, 36:50). Also, Prophet Muhammad (S) is narrated to have said, 'Whoever dies without having made a will, dies the death of ignorance.' (Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 13, p. 186, hadith no. 5)

[7.](#) This answer demonstrates Ayatullah Shirazi's preparedness for death. He did not have to write a will, make up for any missed deeds (qadha), distribute any compensation (kaffarah), approach anyone to seek forgiveness, etc. This action is the manifestation of the noble verse, 'And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds until when death comes to one of them, then he says, "Surely now I repent."' (Qur'an, 4:18)

[8.](#) This action is the manifestation of the noble narration in which Prophet Muhammad (S) says, 'He who makes the hereafter his greatest concern from morning to night, Allah instils needlessness in his heart and mends his affairs for him; he will not depart from this life before having collected all his sustenance. But the one who makes this life his greatest concern from morning to night, Allah instils poverty between his eyes and disbands his affairs; he will not collect from this life more than has been allotted to him.' (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 151, hadith no. 104)

[9.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble narration of Prophet Muhammad (S), 'Begin your meal with a pinch of salt for it removes 70 diseases of the stomach.'

[10.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble narration of Imam Ali al-Hadi (A), warning people not to leave Prophetic practices, 'Had I said to you that the one who abandons the tasmiyah (writing or saying bismillah) is like the one who abandons the Salah, I would have spoken the truth.' (The Message of the Qur'an by Ayatullah Makarim Shirazi, p. 28)

[11.](#) This incident is a manifestation of the noble verse, 'Whoever joins himself to another in a good cause, shall have a share of it. And whoever joins himself to another in an evil cause shall have the responsibility of it.' (Qur'an, 4:85)

[12.](#) This statement is the manifestation of the noble verse, 'Whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them and nor shall they grieve.' (Qur'an, 2:38)

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 *haji*.”

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 جاءتة منيئة 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).

Advice

The construction of every society, from the nuclear family to the global community, is an interdependent process. We rely upon each other’s experience, expertise and insight in all our daily matters of education, health, law, business, family and religion. It is for this reason that Islam places the exchange of advice and encouragement of good actions as one of the primary auxiliaries of religion. Hence, Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (A) affirms, ‘The believer is in need of divine opportunities from Allah, a self-reproaching soul and access to good advisors.’¹

In order to understand and fulfil their responsibilities, members of the Muslim community came to Prophet Muhammad (S) both in public and private, seeking his counsel. Often, in response to a question, Allah would reveal a verse of the Holy Qur’an. This relationship between people, the Holy Prophet and Allah, is instructive to us in two ways. Firstly, it shows us that for any matter, our primary point of recourse in seeking guidance, should also be from the Holy Prophet, his Ahlul Bayt and the Holy Qur’an. The second is that, as God-centric people, we should be discerning and wise in selecting our sources of guidance and knowledge. There are many outlets, TV programmes, websites and people willing to offer advice, but not all of them provide God-centric counsel. This is why in the Holy Qur’an, Allah has clearly warned,

‘And amongst mankind there is he who disputes about Allah without knowledge. It is decreed that whoever takes him for a friend, shall be led astray and directed to the chastisement of the burning Fire.’ (Qur’an, 22:3-4)

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A), in his monumental work, *The Treatise of Rights*², detailed four types of rights related to seeking and giving advice, under the chapters, ‘The right of one who seeks advice’, ‘The right of one whose advice you seek’, ‘The right of one who asks your counsel’, and ‘The right of the counsellor’³. The Imam states that amongst the rights of the seeker of advice ‘is that you give him your counsel but you conduct yourself toward him with compassion and kindness.’

It is therefore necessary for every individual to equip himself with a wide range of Islamic knowledge, in the fields of history, ethics, law and family matters, so that as and when advice is sought from him, he is in a position to provide the seeker of guidance with the best knowledge possible in the area wherein guidance is required.

Story 1

Sayyid Adil al-Alawi narrates:

‘Ayatullah Mar’ashi Najafi was speaking to us about ethics and spirituality. One day, he spoke about envy. He said envy in its primary stage is like a black dot in the heart of the envious one. It is necessary for the envious person to cure himself through different methods mentioned by the scholars of ethics.

‘[Ayatullah Mar’ashi Najafi] narrated that firstly, the envious person should ask Allah to remove the envy from his heart and he should contemplate on restraining himself from indulging in this habit. And he should contemplate on why he wishes blessings should leave the brother whom he envies. He should consider that Allah is the One who gives and withdraws blessings and He is the source of both benefit and harm. He should seek to receive from his Lord the same blessings that have reached the person he is envious of. And through these methods he should cure himself. If the seed of envy is not removed from its inception, it will grow into a dark tree shadowing the whole existence of that person. He [Ayatullah Mar’ashi Najafi] then related:

“My father used to attend the lessons of al-Muhaqqiq al-Akhundi⁴ and I used to travel with him when he went to these lessons. On the road, he used to see somebody wearing scholarly garments. Whenever he used to see him, he used to pray against him saying, ‘O Allah, remain far from him in this world and the next.’ I heard this statement from him many times. So one day, I asked my father what the reason for this prayer was. My father told me, ‘This person you see used to attend the lessons of al-Akhundi with another Shaykh. Al-Akhundi used to praise his friend for his intelligence and understanding and so he became envious of his friend and the seed of envy began to grow in his heart. One day, his friend became sick and I went with him to visit his friend. When this Shaykh entered to meet his friend, he said, “I have your medicine,” and gave it to him to drink. After a little while, this poor man began

vomiting and his colour changed and after some hours he died and I realised that he had been given poison. That deed was motivated by his overpowering envy and because of that crime, four of his children became orphaned.⁵ This is what envy did to him; it [envy] will erase faith just as the fire consumes fuel.””

Story 2

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad al-Ha'iri narrates:

‘Sayyid Qadhi Tabatabai was a student of Mirza Shirazi in Najaf. The people of Tabriz insisted that he come to guide their town and when he decided to respond to them, he said to his teacher, “The time to learn from you has passed and now I need a programme to follow in order to develop myself.”

‘Mirza Shirazi responded, “Make a time every evening to think about what has happened in the day. Think of the blessings Allah gave you and thank Him for them. And think of the trials that Allah took away by His mercy and thank Him for them. Think of the sins you committed; perform repentance and return to Him so that you are able to proceed.⁶ God-willing you will achieve a connection with Allah. I don't have any practical guidance to give you that is better than this.”

Story 3

A renowned scholar relates:

‘When I was a young man studying as a student, some students were tested; they were backbiting about Ayatullah Sayyid Hujjati in a gathering whilst he was there. I heard the backbiting whilst the gathering was going on. The Sayyid was my teacher and I studied under him for quite some time and I even received a gift from him for my diligence.

‘After leaving this gathering, I sat down and blamed myself for having listened to and thereby participated in the backbiting of the Sayyid. I decided to look for an opportunity to meet him to apologise and seek forgiveness and eventually, I received the opportunity. Sayyid Hujjati was going for the *ziyarah* of Sayyid Abdul Adhim and so I went to the house in which he was staying, to meet him. When the door was opened for me, I said, “Tell Ayatullah Hujjati I am here at the door.” The Sayyid was in his room and told me to come in. When I saw him, he was putting his cap on his head and reclining against a pillow. He was unwell and tired in his old age.

‘I said, “My master, I came to tell you something. I did not backbite about you but I listened to other people backbiting and now I greatly regret it. I decided to meet you and have resolved never to listen to any backbiting again from now on. Thus, I came to ask you to forgive me.”⁷ Ayatullah Hujjati replied very politely, “Backbiting against us is of two kinds. Either it is a mockery against Islam⁸ or it is personal and against an individual.”

‘Because I knew by his statement that he was questioning me as to which type of backbiting I had listened to, I replied accordingly, “I did not mock Islam but it was personal, against you.” Ayatullah Hujjati replied, “If that’s the case, then I forgive you!”’

The scholar narrated this incident concerning his own mistake in a lecture about seeking repentance, saying thereafter, ‘Indeed when a person seeks repentance, he must return the right of the one he hurt. If the person has died, he must seek forgiveness from Allah for that matter and he should do something good on the person’s behalf until he achieves his pleasure.’⁹

The scholar who sought forgiveness from Ayatullah Hujjati was Ayatullah Shahid Murtadha Mutahhari.¹⁰

Story 4

Shaykh Faiyaz Jaffer says that Shaykh Abul Hasan al-Yemeni narrates:

‘On the night of Laylatul Qadr, Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al-Modarressi was giving a lecture, preparing the scholars for the night’s worship and etiquettes.

‘He said, “Tonight, when you go home and make your supplications, seek long and hard for whatever you want from this world. But tonight, do not forget to seek long and hard from Allah for the opening and flourishing of your intellect. For without intellect, we are worth absolutely nothing.”¹¹

Story 5

The author narrates:

‘I and three other students based in the West, came to the end of the year in the hawzah and sought an audience with Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi al-Modarressi to seek his advice regarding our duties when we returned to our respective countries to perform *tabligh* and other services.

‘Ayatullah al-Modarressi responded by asking each of us where we were based and about our family roots; two replied saying they were from the Khoja community, one living in the States and the other in the UK; the third, a convert, represented the third generation in his family to be living in the States whilst his family was originally from Austria; and the fourth, also a convert, lived in England but was originally from Scotland.

‘Ayatullah al-Modarressi explained, “The reason why I asked you where you’re from is because every people have their positive and negative attributes, specific to them. Once I knew your location and roots I could better cater this advice to the communities you’re going back to serve.

“I am very familiar with the Khoja community. They are very organised and have a good structure and administrative processes like elections and so on; I am also familiar with their challenges. All people

retain certain characteristics and so, whilst there will be qualities unique to the communities in East Africa, America or Europe, there are also some common attributes that you can all derive certain benefits from.

“Whilst I lack full familiarity with the Scottish community, I am aware that they have retained certain characteristics that have led to their modern day challenges. These traits need to be understood, restrained and moulded towards betterment. For example, in the Scottish community, there is often a lot of extreme factionalism. [12](#) The fact is that if you return to Scotland for services, you will primarily have non-Muslim communities around you and not immigrant Muslim communities. “Hence you should be looking to make a social change; a true scholar and intelligent person does this. He realises it is unrealistic to bring everyone into the fold of Islam and so works on bringing them to the morality of being a good human being. I would rather they be non-Muslims but non-Muslims who do not lie, do not drink alcohol, do not possess traits of an immoral nature. If you can change things on this level, relative to their situation, you will have achieved a lot.

“The true scholar and intelligent person is the one who leaves a positive effect on the people around him. It is narrated by the Ahlul Bayt that a community continues to receive blessings for forty days after a scholar passes away from the community.

“One day, a teacher of mine passed away. In his will, he had written that he wished to be buried temporarily in the graveyard known as Bustan al-Zahra and if after 10 years, the route to Karbala became open, he wished to be reburied in Karbala. The will continued, stating that if after another 10 years, the road to Karbala was still blocked, then he should be buried permanently in the graveyard in the area of Shaykhiyyah in Qom.

“The time passed and after 10 years, the road to Karbala was closed and after another 10 years, the time came to bury him in Qom. When the caretaker brought up the coffin, he asked, ‘How many days had he been buried?’ due to the weight of the body. We were shocked because this meant that after two decades, the body had not decayed for it to still weighed the normal weight of a man!

“Another of my teachers went to ensure the final burial rites were observed and noticed a large crowd around the coffin; some people were reciting Qur’an for him and others were giving out food on his behalf, but none of them had any direct connection with him. Upon enquiring why this was the case, he [my teacher] was directed to the lady who had organised the gathering and asked her why she was there.

“She replied, ‘My father was buried in this graveyard 40 years ago and I have been praying and begging to see him in a dream ever since; he never came until yesterday. I asked him why he had not visited until now, to which he replied, ‘I had been imprisoned by my sins until yesterday, when a light came and freed me from this imprisonment.’”

‘Ayatullah al-Modarressi concluded, “That light was this scholar buried here; his very presence had such

an effect on those around him. In the same way, when you go for *tabligh* and services, my advice is to be of benefit to people so that you may impact them in life and in death; a scholar should be like this.”

Story 6

Upon his departure from the Hawzah, one of the students sat with Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Shirazi to receive some parting words.

Ayatullah Shirazi asked him, ‘How many languages do you know?’ He replied, ‘Six: English, Swahili, Katchi, Gujerati, Urdu and Arabic.’

‘Good,’ Ayatullah Shirazi responded, ‘Then know that you’re responsible to each and every person who speaks these languages in the *ummah*. Go and translate and write books in these languages so that people read and benefit from them.’

Story 7

The author narrates:

‘A group of youths and volunteers from the United States were given an audience with Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Husayni al-Sistani during their visitation to Najaf.

‘Due to the size of the group, Ayatullah al-Sistani held the first session with the men and addressed them saying:

“I advise you to increase your *taqwa* [God-consciousness] and to consider the necessity of the constant acquisition of *ilm* [knowledge]. I advise you to have a strong relationship with the Holy Quran, by regularly reading it. To achieve this, you must intellectually interact and be open to its truths and reflect and ponder deeply on its verses. Maintain the highest of morals and good manners for it is expected that a Shi’a of the Ahlul Bayt is distinguished amongst the people by his lofty character.

“At present, there is a global economic crisis especially affecting Europe and North America. During these trying times, the most important thing is to remain God-conscious in our transactions and this will see us through this period.”

‘Thereafter, the brothers bade him farewell and left. When the ladies gathered, he reiterated his prayer for us all and his call for God-consciousness, acquiring of knowledge, whilst also emphasising the importance of the Holy Qur’an and good manners.

‘He then addressed the sisters with advice pertinent to them as he had done with the brothers and asked them, as primary care givers in the family, to pay special attention to how their children were raised. He emphasised their good training and attention to manners and ethics. He continued:

“I would like to remind you about the matters of our dress code and the sanctity of what we speak. It is necessary that we adhere to the best and modest ways of dress and we always say what is pure and free of evil; it is through our manners, our dress code and speech that we should be distinguished from others and recognised as the Shi’as of the Ahlul Bayt.

“Today, there are many extreme ideologies in the world and it is our duty to be balanced and walk upon the middle path in life, just as the Holy Qur’an says,

‘Do not become extreme in your religion.’ (Qur’an, 4: 171 & Qur’an, 5:77)

‘He spent more than twice as long with the sisters than with the brothers. As they departed, each person asked for his/her individual needs and that His Eminence should pray for him/her and he responded to each request by praying for each individual then and there. His Eminence thanked everyone for visiting and also conveyed his condolences on the martyrdom of Lady Fatimah (A).’

1. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 78, p. 358.

2. <http://www.al-islam.org/treatise-rights-risalat-al-huquq-imam-zain-ul-ab...> [12]

3. Treatise of Rights, Chapters 40–44.

4. Author of al-Kifayat al-Usul

5. This action is the manifestation of the noble verses, ‘And amongst men there is one whose speech in this life attracts you; he even makes Allah his witness as to what is in his heart; yet he is the most violent of adversaries.’ (Qur’an, 2:204) and ‘But if they give you the lie, then say, “Your Lord is the Lord of all-encompassing Mercy and His punishment cannot be averted from the guilty people.”’ (Qur’an, 6: 147)

6. This practice is the manifestation of the noble verses, ‘O you who believe! Take care of your souls.’ (Qur’an, 5:105), ‘Read your book; your own self is sufficient as a reckoner against you this day.’ (Qur’an, 17:14), ‘O you who believe! Be careful of your duty to Allah and let every soul consider what it has sent on for the morrow. And be careful of your duty to Allah; surely Allah is aware of what you do.’ (Qur’an, 59:18) and ‘Then let man look to his food.’ (Qur’an, 80:24).

7. This practice is the manifestation of the noble narration from Prophet Muhammad (S), ‘Backbiting is worse than adultery,’ to which he was asked, ‘How so?’ He replied, ‘A man commits adultery and then repents and Allah pardons him for it, whereas the backbiter is not forgiven until his victim forgives him.’ (al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib, vol. 3, p. 511, hadith no. 24) and ‘Whoever backbites a fellow Muslim man or woman, Allah neither accepts his prayers nor his fasting for forty days and nights unless the victim of his backbiting forgives him.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 258, hadith no. 53)

8. This statement is a manifestation of the noble verse, ‘Indeed He has revealed to you in the Book that when you hear Allah’s communications being disbelieved in and mocked at, do not sit with them until they enter into some other discourse, otherwise surely you would be like them. Surely Allah will gather together the hypocrites.’ (Qur’an, 4:140)

9. This practice is the manifestation of the noble narration from Prophet Muhammad (S) who was asked about the penance for backbiting, to which he replied, ‘You must seek Allah’s forgiveness on behalf of the one you have talked about every time you remember him.’ (al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 357, hadith no. 4)

10. This incident is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘As for him who repents and believes and does good, it may be that he will be among the successful ones.’ (Qur’an, 28:67)

11. This statement is a manifestation of the noble verses, ‘What! Do you ... neglect your own souls whilst you read the Book? Have you then no intellect?’ (Qur’an, 2:44) and ‘Whatever things you have been given are only a provision of this world’s life and its adornment. And whatever is with Allah is better and more lasting; do you not then apply your intellect?’ (Qur’an, 28:60). In this regard Imam al-Sadiq (A) is narrated to have said, ‘Much contemplation on matters of wisdom causes the intellect to flourish.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 78, p. 247, hadith no. 73)

12. Asabiyyah.

Death

The transition from one stage to the next is a universal phenomenon. We began our physical existence in the loins of our fathers, after which we were placed in the wombs of our mothers, given birth to and have, thereafter, grown stage by stage. (Qur'an, 22:5) The next phase is to move into the hereafter through the door of death which all of us must enter.

Whilst we had no control over who our family would be and the time, location or circumstances of our birth, what we do have control over is our intentions and actions whilst in this present phase of our existence. Our goal should be to attain the pleasure of Allah so that when we die, we 'shall be in the midst of gardens and fountains' and told by the Angels, ***'Enter them in peace, secure.'*** (Qur'an, 15:45-46) And how should we achieve this? By seeking our success from Allah, just as Prophet Musa (A) supplicated, ***'My Lord! You are our guardian; therefore forgive us and have mercy on us and You are the best of forgivers. And ordain for us good in the life of this world and in the hereafter, for surely we turn to You.'*** (Qur'an, 7: 155-156)

The death of any family member or friend is difficult to bear, but the death of a scholar is amongst the hardest trials. It not only affects the community but can be a loss for the whole of mankind. Prophet Muhammad (S) is narrated to have said, 'The death of a scholar is an affliction that cannot be compensated for and a void that cannot be filled, for he is like a star that has been obliterated. Indeed the death of a whole tribe is easier to bear than the death of a scholar.'¹

Story 1

One of the relatives of Ayatullah Sayyid Ridha Gulpaygani narrates:

'Sayyid [Gulpaygani] contacted us some hours before his death from his hospital bed. He said, "It seems that the doctors will not be successful in curing me. Go and search the earth opposite my teacher, Ayatullah Abd al-Karim al-Ha'iri in the *haram* of Lady Fatimah Ma'sumah al-Qom. You will find a space there for me.

'I replied, "You will live long, God-willing, and return to us in good health!"

'Ayatollah Gulpaygani responded, "No. Go to the place I have mentioned and prepare it; it may be something will happen."

'We went to the place and we dug the place and we didn't expect to find any space that was empty as we knew the spaces were all already occupied by great jurists and scholars. But to our surprise, we found a space never touched and it appeared exactly two meters long as if it had already been prepared! We touched the soil and found no evidence of anyone being buried there before.

‘This was a great miracle and demonstrated the lofty position of Ayatullah Gulpaygani.’

Story 2

Sayyid Hossein al-Qazwini narrates a story about his uncle, Ayatullah Sayyid Kadhim al-Qazwini, one of 17 brothers, all of whom died in infancy:

‘When he [Sayyid Kadhim al-Qazwini] was born, his father took him to the shrine of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (A) and asked the caretaker to open the shrine so he could place the baby in the shrine for a few hours in order to seek the blessing and intercession of Imam al-Kadhim (A) before Allah so that this child may survive and praise be to Allah, he did.

‘He [Sayyid Kadhim al-Qazwini] was a great scholar and in his will, he stated that when he died, he wanted to be buried in Karbala. However, due to the tyrannical rule of Saddam, when he died, his body could not be taken to Karbala and so they buried him under the pulpit of the mosque where he used to deliver his sermons and disseminate guidance.

‘Seventeen years later, Saddam was overthrown and died and so in accordance with his (Sayyid al-Qazwini’s) will, it was decided to rebury him in Karbala. When they brought up the body, they found it to be as fresh as if he was alive!

‘They first took his body to Najaf for the visitation of Imam Ali (A) and then to Kazmayn for the visitations of Imam al-Kadhim (A) and Imam al-Jawad (A). However, due to it being very late at night, it was decided to keep his body at the shrine for a few hours until we could continue onwards. It’s amazing that his life began with a few hours at the shrine of Imam al-Kadhim (A) and it ended with a few hours at the shrine of Imam al-Kadhim (A)!

‘When the body was brought to Karbala for reburial, my father [Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini] recited the *Talqin* (burial rites) over his body. He says that when it came to the part where he was to hold his shoulders and shake him to say, “Listen to me and understand me,” he found that his body was so fresh, as if he had not even died!’

Story 3

Sayyid Salih al-Modarressi narrates about his grandfather, Ayatullah Sayyid Kadhim al-Modarressi:

‘Amongst the things he was known for, was his impeccable timing and commitment to the prayers to the extent that it was known that he would never miss the recital of the 51 units per day.

‘He had a particular affinity to the entire process of prayers, from its ablution and its preparation; he used to take the water for his ablution from his garden so as not to waste any from the house.

‘A short while before his death, my grandfather had a severe heart attack. Before he went inside the ICU unit, he asked a relative if he could use his watch. The relative took off his watch and gave it to my grandfather. One of the doctors observed the exchange and asked my father, “Why does he want a watch?” to which the my father replied, “He wants it so that he knows the exact time and can wake up for his night prayers and thus morning prayers; he’s very attached to them and will not miss them at all.”²

‘The doctor started laughing and said, “We’re going to be giving him a very strong sedative – he won’t be able to wake up for any of those prayers.” And so they gave him the sedatives.

‘This made no difference to my grandfather and as normal, before the time of dawn, he awoke to pray his night prayers despite the heavy sedation! But there was something else. My grandfather would always pray standing up, never sitting, even after the heart attack.³ That night, he prayed his night prayers, began his morning prayers and as he was standing and performing his *qunut*, he died! All his life’s preparations and efforts for prayers lead him to that moment!

‘He was so beloved by everyone, especially by his student, the Grand Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayni Shirazi. Not only was Ayatullah Shirazi his student and family member, but also his close friend. Ayatullah Modarressi’s death affected him very badly; he cried so much for my grandfather, to the extent that he had to be picked up from the floor. My sister narrates that one night after his death, she awoke to the sound of loud wailing. She looked out of the window and saw Ayatullah Shirazi circling the courtyard of the house, crying for his loss.

‘After his death, he came in the dream of his son, my father [Ayatullah Sayyid Taqi al-Modarressi]. My father asked him about his death during the *qunut*. He replied, “It was like the word, ‘dhahab’ (‘go’); it was so quick, it was like between the letters ‘dh’ and ‘b’. Once I fell to the floor and the doctors rushed to me, I had left the world.”

Sayyid Salih concludes, ‘I miss him so much.’

Story 4

Allamah Tehrani narrates:

‘Our teacher, Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai had great love for his teacher Sayyid Qadhi Tabatabai. He saw himself as very small in front of him and considered Sayyid Qadhi to be a great scholar of glory and deep spiritual secrets of attaining oneness with Allah.

‘One day, I gave Allamah some *attar* [perfume] as a gift; he held it in his hand, looked at it and said, “Our teacher, Sayyid Qadhi, passed away two years ago; since then I have never worn any perfume.”

‘Until my last moments with Allamah Tabatabai, I used to regularly give him *attar* as a gift but he would

never use it due to his mourning for the loss of his teacher – and this mourning lasted 36 years! What’s strange is that both of them lived until the age of 81 years!’

Ayatullah Sayyid Husayn Hamadani narrates:

‘After the demise of Sayyid Qadhi Tabatabai, there were three days of commemoration for him in the holy city of Najaf and many of the grand scholars, including Ayatullah Khoei and Ayatullah Mahdi Shirazi, attended the gatherings.

‘During this period, Ayatullah Khoei narrated:

“A group of scholars visited me. Amongst them was Shaykh Husayn al-Qummi and he asked me, ‘What have you heard in relation to Qadhi Tabatabai?’ I replied, ‘Many scholars had close relationships [friendships] with him.’

“Shaykh al-Qummi pressed the matter and reworded his question, ‘How was Sayyid Qadhi in your eyes? How did you see him?’ I replied, ‘What aspect of him do you wish to know about? His spiritual station?’ to which Shaykh al-Qummi affirmed, ‘Yes.’ ‘If what we have seen is true and is a reality with Allah, then know that Sayyid Qadhi is the sky whilst you are the earth. If not, then it is the opposite,’ I answered.”

Story 5

The author asked Sayyid Hossein al-Qazwini about the assassination attempt on his father, Ayatullah Sayyid Murtadha al-Qazwini. He relates: ‘This was in 2006. He had just finished his nightly *majlis* at the *haram* of Imam Husayn (A) and we left together. Sayyid Mothafar [al-Qazwini] and I were in a car behind and he was in the car ahead – and at that time he did not have any bodyguards.

‘As we drove, two motorbikes passed us, one on each side; there were two on each bike, one to drive and one to shoot. As one approached in line with my father’s car, he opened fire. We heard it and thought that maybe a tire had popped, when the car ahead suddenly halted and did a U-turn, pulling level with us and told us that my father had been shot.

‘We didn’t know what had happened – where he had been shot, how bad it was. Our cars returned toward the Haram and when we arrived at the hospital, we found him [Ayatullah Murtada al-Qazwini] literally drenched in his own blood. The bullet had hit his wrist, shattered twelve of his bones, exited from his wrist and hit him again in his thigh, before exiting and hitting the door. What’s amazing is that neither at the time of being struck or at any time thereafter, did he cry out in pain but rather he was continuously reciting, “*La ilaha illallah.*”⁴

At this point, Sayyid Mothafar al-Qazwini said with tears in his eyes, ‘I remember seeing my grandfather in the hospital at this moment. He was covered in so much blood I thought he must have been shot in

the chest. He turned to me and said, “When I was shot, I thought Allah had accepted my supplication to die as a martyr,” and with these words, I lost it. Sayyid Hossein was calm but I broke down completely.’

[5](#)

Sayyid Hossein continues, ‘After his departure from the hospital, my father decided to go to Iran for the *ziyarah* of Imam al- Ridha (A). Due to the condition of his wrist, the doctor advised him not to leave his arm down as the blood would rush to it, causing it to swell. Rather, it should remain in a sling, upright. My father decided to perform an *istikharah* for this matter. He opened the Holy Qur’an and the verse read, “And do not keep your hand tied to your neck nor extend it to the full extent.”’[6](#)

Story 6

Sayyid Ahmad Khomeini narrates about the martyrdom of his brother:

‘It was early morning, about 5 a.m., when I stirred from my sleep, having felt someone shaking my legs. I opened my eyes to see that Imam [Khomeini] was standing there and he said, “Get up and go to Mustafa’s house; they have asked for you to go there.”

‘On entering the building, I saw my brother being held by the arms and legs in order to be carried downstairs. I placed the palm of my hand on his forehead and saw that it was still warm so we put him into the taxi; I held him in my arms until we reached the hospital. After performing a medical examination, the doctor said he had died.’

Sayyidah Ma’sumah Ha’iri Yazdi, Sayyid Mustafa’s wife explains, ‘That morning, when Mustafa’s breakfast was taken to him, he was found in a sitting position but his head had dropped down. I saw something crimson in colour, both on his hands and on his chest. When we took him to the hospital, we were informed he had died two hours earlier, from poisoning.’

Sayyid Ahmed continues:

‘I returned home not knowing what to tell the Imam but realised that I had no choice but to somehow tell him of what had happened to his son. The Imam saw me through a window of the room in which I was standing; he called out my name and I went to him. “Is Mustafa dead?” he asked me. I became deeply upset, broke down in tears and said nothing.

‘As the Imam sat there with his hands placed on his knees, he repeated three times, “Indeed we belong to Allah and unto Him we shall return.”

‘Even after hearing of his son’s martyrdom, the Imam never allowed his daily routine to be altered in any way. As his son’s corpse was being taken to be buried in Najaf, the Imam, in accordance with his daily routine, attended both the noon and evening congregational prayers, after which he went to the home of his deceased son, to console those there. Here, he enjoined everyone present, to be strong and in

addressing Sayyid Mustafa's mother, he said, "The Lord Almighty had once given us something in trust and now He has taken it back from us. I shall be patient and you are to do the same, your patience being for the sake of Allah."

'The scholars of the hawzah in Najaf had intended to hold a forty day long memorial for Sayyid Mustafa but the Imam told them, "Lectures must not be suspended. The honourable gentlemen of the clergy must resume work as normal." Then addressing the students, he advised, "You are to edify those who are still living and are not to show a lack of tolerance at these times. Attend to your lectures and your religious studies and concern yourselves with self-development and purifying your souls."

'On his first visit to his son's grave, whilst encircled by a large crowd of people, the Imam simply sat on the ground and placed his hands upon the grave to recite Surat al-Fatihah. He then turned to those present and suggested that they recite a prayer for the other scholars who were buried nearby.'

Story 7

On Saturday, 5 April, at around 8:30 p.m., the Chief of Security in Najaf and his workers, came to the house of Ayatullah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, saying, 'Our responsibility is to take you to Baghdad to meet with Saddam.' Ayatullah al-Sadr replied, 'If you're commanded to arrest me, then yes, I will come with you wherever you wish.' The Chief responded, 'Yes, it is an arrest.' To this, Ayatullah al-Sadr responded, 'Wait for me a while so that I can perform my *ghusl*, change my clothes and bid farewell to my family.' He was told, 'There's no need for this; either today or tomorrow, you will return.'

He insisted, 'And will you punish me if I bid farewell to my family?' The Chief gave in, saying, 'There's no need for that; but go ahead as you please.'

Ayatullah al-Sadr entered the room and performed the *ghusl* of martyrdom, changed his clothes and performed a two-unit prayer. He then came to his daughter who was clearly distressed and distraught by the situation; he took her by the hand and brought her to his chest and caressed her.

Then he turned to his mother and pleaded for her pleasure and supplications for him and requested her permission to depart.

Then he embraced all the members of the house collectively and kissed them goodbye and so they knew from his actions that this was to be the final farewell. However, when he went to embrace his second daughter, who was 15 years old at the time, she was unable to cope – unable to carry the burden – and she started to lament and began to slap her face and cry bitterly. Ayatullah al-Sadr addressed her, saying, 'O my sweetheart, my daughter. Indeed, every human dies and for death there are numerous reasons. So it is possible that a person dies due to illness or in his bed or for any other reason; but death in the way of Allah is the best and much more honourable.⁷ So if I would not be killed at the hands of Saddam and his group then I would die of illness or for other reasons. Certainly the

companions of Prophet Isa (A) spread their message and were hung upon wooden crosses and they were firm in death for the sake of their obedience to Allah.

‘So do not lament too much, O my small daughter, because every one of us shall die today or tomorrow and the best of deaths is martyrdom.⁸ And so, my two daughters, I am pleased with what befalls me. So if this martyrdom will bear fruits even after 20 years, I am content with that.’

And when the time came for the farewell to his wife, Sayyidah Fatimah, he stood before her, embodying his previous farewell so that she too knew what was about to happen. The blood ran cold in her veins and her eyes fixated upon him in that state.

He addressed her, ‘O sister of Musa! Yesterday it was your brother⁹; the organiser, the partner, the beloved. And today it is me, O my garden of paradise!

‘Bear patiently. Certainly this is the allegiance of Allah. We gave Him allegiance with that which cannot be taken back and He has bought it from us.

‘O the estranged from your family and homeland! You have carried a heavy burden and ahead of you is a steep path. I ask for you a solution! For indeed, those who are as dark as the livers are at your door, waiting. There is no escape; I am going. We will meet again at the place of the Mighty Sovereign.¹⁰

‘Wait here for three days and if I don’t return, then go with my mother and our children to my brothers’ house in Kazmayn.’

She faced him, ready for his departure and his sister, Aminah bint al-Huda, was there too; she held the Qur’an in her hands and Ayatullah al-Sadr walked under it, kissed it and then departed for the last time.

After the departure of Ayatullah al-Sadr and the security forces, Ayatullah al-Sadr’s mother who was 80 years old, went to the roof of the house. She refreshed her ablution and began to complain to Allah about what had befallen them; she would do this every time her son was imprisoned.

She sat on her knees and recited the ‘Supplication of a Mother to Take Away Tribulations from Her Son,’ from *Mafatih al-Jinan* seeking her son’s return and begging Allah for her supplication to be fruitful as previous supplications had been. She then went into prostration and cried, ‘O Allah! You have given me him [my son] and You have granted me him. Therefore, O Allah, renew your bounty for me today. Indeed You are Mighty, Capable.’

The story of Sayyid al-Sadr and Aminah al-Sadr’s martyrdom is narrated by one of Saddam’s soldiers, an intelligence officer and newspaper reports:

‘The guards brought Sayyid al-Sadr to the Intelligence Department building chained by iron fetters. Then Saddam came in and said mockingly, “What are you doing, Muhammad Baqir? Do you intend to make a government?” Saddam started to poke him with a stick aggressively, saying, “You’re an alien, a

foreigner to the land!”

‘Sayyid al-Sadr replied, “I leave the government to you,” and an argument ensued on this topic and about the Islamic revolution of Iran. Saddam became very angry and told his soldiers to torture al-Sadr and make him undergo severe persecution.

‘The torture lasted three days. Amongst other abuses, Saddam ordered Sayyid al-Sadr’s beard to be set alight and burnt, for him to undergo electrocution and suffer a nail driven into him.’

The intelligence officer narrates:

‘The elder brother of Saddam brought Aminah al-Sadr to Saddam’s palace. She was severely beaten and blood was gushing from her head and face. I heard her reciting this verse,

“Whatever mercy Allah opens for people, there is none to hold it back and whatever He withholds of it, there is none to get it after this. And He is the Mighty, the Wise.” (Qur’an, 35:2)

‘Then Saddam entered and she recited more verses, enraging Saddam, and so he beat her. Aminah al-Sadr was then brought into the room where her brother was. They brought her whilst she was unconscious, dragging her in.

‘When Sayyid al-Sadr saw her, he became very angry and wept bitterly. He called out to Saddam, “If you’re a man, untie me!”

‘Saddam then took a whip and started lashing Aminah al-Sadr himself whilst she was unconscious. Then he commanded something to be cut from her body which enraged and broke al-Sadr further.

“If you’re a man, leave me face to face with you and leave my sister. But you are a coward and you are around your soldiers!” al-Sadr cried.

‘Saddam held a gun to Sayyid al-Sadr, saying, “Make a *fatwah* to prohibit people from joining Hizb al-Da’wah and make a *fatwah* to permit people to join Hizb al-Ba’ath; if not I will tear off your head and cut your lineage.” Sayyid al-Sadr refused.

‘Saddam yelled at Sayyid al-Sadr, “What kind of death do you want?” He replied, “I should be slaughtered like Husayn (A) was slaughtered.”

‘Saddam commanded him to be shot. Sayyid al-Sadr removed his turban, ready to be executed and Saddam shot both of them and left the room whilst abusing them.’

Story 8

Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah was asked, ‘If you were to speak at your own funeral in

the future, may you live long, what would you say?’

He replied, ‘I would say:

“This man has lived his entire life open to the Message since the day he was brought to life and he worked in accordance with its principles, even during his early childhood and youth.

“He suffered a lot and bore many pains on the path of the Message, yet he always tried to be honest, sincere, and loyal. Despite his soul’s attempt to force him to do evil, he continued travelling the path of the Message according to his capacity, even though he faced much obstinacy and maltreatment, as missionaries usually face.

“Throughout his life, this man was open to Allah and always sought Allah’s mercy to be bestowed upon him.

“I would say to the people that they ought to study his experience for it was a vast and profound experience that encompassed the entire message. His experience was a history that possessed positive and negative aspects, yet all he did was for the sake of the Message and the Message only and perhaps people in any age would not meet a contemporary person facing such vast and prolonged strikes and shocks.

“Moreover, I would say to the missionaries, to understand me well, for some did not understand me during my life because of intimidation, irrational and emotional reactions and complications that may have obscured the clarity of their view. However, when one leaves this world and others feel safe from the impact of his existence on them, they would understand him better and benefit from his experience more.”

Ayatullah Fadlullah was then asked, ‘When you meet, if Allah wills, your great grandmother, Sayyidah Fatimah al-Zahra (A), what would you say to her?’ He replied:

‘I would say to her that I have lived with you throughout my life, with all the purity that you embodied as a woman, pure in every way.

‘I have lived with you along the lines of awareness embodied in you, being the first who lived with a progressive awareness of Islam, as a responsibility you have shouldered from the lofty position of infallibility.

‘I have experienced with you, the oppression inflicted upon you, as the representative of the truth persecuted by the forces of falsehood.

‘I have lived with you as the one who recognised your infallibility and increased people’s awareness about your high position and status of flawless purity, your brave sense of responsibility and unyielding courage, as well as your knowledge that is open to all the realities of Islam.

‘I have lived with you and talked about you in a way that no one else amongst the people has ever done, whether he be of those who talked about you in an exaggerated manner or amongst those who drifted away from you.

‘I have lived with you to portray to the people the true image of the Lady of the Women of the Worlds, such that the whole of humanity cannot but respect her in all places and times and before whom this world cannot but bow. For her personality embodied greatness and majesty and loftiness in every aspect of life.’¹¹

His Eminence, Ayatullah Sayyid al-Shahid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, stated:

‘The life of a person is not measured except by how much he gives to his *ummah*, by his presence, his life, his thought.’

^{1.} Al-Hindi, Kanz al-Ummal, hadith no. 28858

^{2.} This action is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘When you are secure, keep up the prayer. Surely the prayer is a time ordinance for the believers.’ (Qur’an, 4: 103)

^{3.} This action is a manifestation of the noble verse,

‘Attend constantly to the prayers and to the middle prayer and stand up truly obedient to Allah.’ (Qur’an, 2:238)

^{4.} Known as tahlil.

^{5.} According to Islamic thought, it is recommended to regularly supplicate for a noble death. For example, in the supplications of the month of Ramadhan, it is recited, ‘Grant me divinely appointed opportunity to be killed in Your way.’

Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A) supplicated, ‘And make the end of our lives praiseworthy and our return to You most noble.’

(Sahifat al-Sajjadiyyah, supplication number 33, ‘Soliciting Divine Advice on Important Affairs’) and Imam al-Sadiq (A)

supplicated, ‘O Allah, make me die in the manner that Muhammad and his family died.’ (Ziyarat Ashura) Imam Ali (A) is

narrated to have said, ‘How many days of my life have I spent in anxious search of this reality [martyrdom] but the Lord’s will preferred it to remain concealed until at last it was revealed to me.’ (Nahj al-Balaghah, Sermon 152)

^{6.} The first majlis recited by Ayatullah al-Qazwini in the haram of Imam Husayn (A) after the assassination attempt is available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGORI5X5S4Y> [13]

^{7.} This statement is a manifestation of the noble narration from Imam Ali (A) who said, ‘Indeed if you are not killed then you are going to die anyway, but I swear by the One who holds Ali’s soul in His Hand, a thousand strikes of the sword on one’s head is easier to bear than to die in one’s bed.’ (Irshad al-Qulub, vol. 1, p. 238)

^{8.} This statement is a manifestation of the noble narrations of Prophet Muhammad (S) who said, ‘The most dignified way to die is to be martyred.’ (Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 100, p. 8) and ‘Above every act of piety is yet a greater act of piety until a person is killed in the way of Allah and when he is killed in the way of Allah, there is no act of greater piety.’ (al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 348, hadith no. 4)

^{9.} Imam Musa al-Sadr, considered martyred after abduction in 1978.

^{10.} From the verses,

‘Certainly, the God-conscious will be in gardens and rivers, in an assembly of truth, in the presence of the Omnipotent Sovereign.’ (Qur’an, 55:54–55)

^{11.} This statement is a manifestation of the noble narration from Imam Ali (A) who said, ‘O my child, even though I have not reached the age which those before me have, I have looked into their behaviour and thought over the events of their lives. I walked among their ruins until I was as one of them. In fact, by virtue of those of their affairs that have become known to me, it is as though I have lived with them from the first to the last. I have therefore been able to discern the impure from the clean and the benefit from the harm.’ (Nahj al-Balaghah, letter 31)

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[12] <http://www.al-islam.org/treatise-rights-risalat-al-huquq-imam-zain-ul-abideen>

[13] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGORI5X5S4Y>

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