

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

<u>Home</u> > <u>The Ways Of The Righteous Vol. 1: Inspirational Stories From The Lives Of Shi'a Scholars</u> > During The Period Of Youth > Story 7

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.

Source URL: https://www.al-islam.org/ways-righteous-vol-1-jaffer-ali-ladak/during-period-youth