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Glimpses of the Life of Grand Ayatullah Bahjat

Grand Ayatullah Muhammad Taqi Bahjat Fomani was born in late 1334 A.H. to a God-fearing family well known for its piety in the conservative city of Foman in the Gailan governorate. He was not yet sixteen months old when fate claimed his mother so he would taste the bitterness of being an orphan while still a suckling baby.

There is an interesting incident to narrate about why Ayatullah Bahjat was named "Muhammad Taqi" which was narrated by one of those close to him, and I think that narrating it here is not without a nicety:

The father of Sheikh Bahjat passed away while his son was 16 – 17 of age after falling sick to an epidemic. He became bed-ridden, and his condition of his health deteriorated to the extent that his family lost hope for his recovery from the disease. The father of the sheikh narrates that he heard in this state a call as if it was saying, "Leave him! You have nothing to do with him. He is father of Muhammad Tagi".

Then he lost consciousness as he was in that state, so much so that his mother thought he died. But after a short while, the father of the Sheikh woke up and stood up and after that recovered his health fully. After the passage of a few years, the Sheikh's father decided to get married after having completely forgotten the incident of his falling sick and the call which he then heard.

When he was blessed with his first son, he called him "Mehdi" after his own father (grandfather of Sheikh Bahjat). After that he was blessed with a daughter then with a son whom he named "Muhammad Husayn". He did not remember this incident except after he had been blessed with his fourth son; so, he decided to call him "Muhammad Taqi". But this son fell in a water pool and drowned. The father of the Sheikh again named his fifth son with whom Allah blessed him with this same name, "Muhammad Taqi", which later became Grand Ayatullah Bahjat.

Mahmoud Bahjat al-Karbalaai, father of Sheikh Bahjat, was one of the most highly respected of Foman's men. He always looked after the affairs of its people, providing for them all sorts of services such as endorsing their marriage contracts and transactions.

He had a high poetic and literary taste, composing poems of praise and eulogy for Ahl al-Bayt, peace be with them, especially Imam al-Husayn. In this field, he has to his credit many elegies which remain recited by orators and lauders for more than half a century. Below is a *munajat* (address) in honor of Ahl al-Bayt, peace be with them, which he had originally written in Persian:

Lord! By the Seal of the Messengers,

The Light of the Great Lord, His Honored Messenger,

By his broken molar teeth and wounded lips,

And by what he offered for the Qur'an,

By the signs of the chest of the oppressed al-Zahra,

By the tears of the eyes of the Prophet's daughter,

By her broken rib that was crushed behind the door,

By her child, Muhsin, the infallible one,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

By the chosen one, the oppressed Imam,

By his heart and insides that were poisoned,

Do not deprive us of Your mercy, O Lord,

Do not burn us with the fire of Your might and ire,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

By the ailing one, al-Sajjad, the best of those who adore,

By the tears of that ailing one,

By that neck that was chained by the evildoers,

By what he had suffered in the Karbala tragedy,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

By the knowledge of al-Bagir, that divine light

For whom the Chosen One had testified:

Darkness is lit by the light of his knowledge,

His knowledge and clemency personify the meaning of the Qur'an,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

By Ja'far al-Sadig who was the symbol of righteousness,

The one who increased Islam in power and greatness,

Opening the gates of knowledge and good deeds to all beings,

And struggled in disseminating knowledge, the creed and the conviction,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

Lord! By the sanctity of Musa ibn Ja'far,

By the status of that purified light,

By his deprivation and oppression in the purified progeny,

By the right of his *munajat* and *ibtihal*,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

Lord! By Your clear light,

And by Your honored servant,

By his mouth full of poison and heart full of grief,

By the ladies of the ruler of Khurasan,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

I am a slave of al-Tagi, the pious one,

One of those who love that Imam among the people,

Aimlessly roaming because of the fragrance of the drink of his love,

So, by the right of that slain, poisoned, Imam,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

By the greatness of al-Naqi, that Imam of the creed,

Who was grieved by the oppression of the foes,

The apple of the eyes of Taha and Ya-Sin,

The oppressed, the grieved, Imam,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

Lord! By the right of the master of Askar,

The seeing eye of the Messenger,

By the Imam who was killed by al-Mu'tamid's pison,

And by his pure and purified soul,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

By the ladies of the Seal of wasis,

The one in charge, the light of the eye and of the creed,

The fair Imam, the victorious ruler,

And by his dear soul and honorable self,

Do forgive us, O Living, O Praiseworthy One!

Yes, indeed, Ayatullah Bahjat was reared in the laps of a man whose heart was filled with the warmth of loving Ahl al–Bayt (as) and grief for their tragedies, particularly the tragedies of Abu Abdullah (as). He grew up in the environments of the mourning *majalis* for Imam al–Husayn, drinking of their springs. Since his early life, he avoided playing and having fun like other children. The signs of genius showed on him, and his face was painted with the marks of conviction and uprightness. It was obvious this child would have a glorious future in the field of knowledge and attainment.

He finished his elementary studies at the city's traditional study circles (known as *katatib*), then he started his theological studies in the same city. Anyhow, his soul, that was thirsty for perfection, did not quench its thirst by what he had received of branches of knowledge in Foman; therefore, he left it after having finished the preparatory stage of religious sciences in it and left for Iraq where he was honored by residing in sacred Karbala in 1348. He was then almost fourteen.

According to what was transmitted by one of his close students, Ayatullah Bahjat had told him that he

had come of age and became a man of responsibility one year after his stay in Karbala. Yes, the hand of the divine mercy remains caring for the righteous servants since their birth up to their youth, the lights of love and kindness being compassionate to them so they would become in the future torches emitting light along the path of those who seek the most Kind One, the most Exalted, the most Great.

Thus, Ayatullah Bahjat spent four of his honorable lifespan in sacred Karbala, inhaling the closeness to Abu Abdullah (as), the fragrance of the purity of his soul, cultivating himself thereby. During that period, he studied the largest portion of the books of *fiqh* and *Usul* taught to him by the great scholars in that holy city.

In 1352 A.H., he went to Najaf al-Ashraf to continue his studies and acquire the theological branches of knowledge. He attended the courses of the *Sutooh* stage [an equivalent to a study for a Master's degree] under the tutelage of a number of Ayatullahs including Ayatullah mentor Murta a Taleqani. Despite that, his determination was not confined to continuing his studies but he focused most of his attention on looking for the men of Allah, His righteous servants, so he could satisfy his thirst from their fountainhead, the thirst of his soul which was eager to turn the phases of perfection and reach the most sublime objective.

One of the students of the mentor says the following: "During two years which I spent under the pulpit of his lessons, I never heard him talk about himself except on very rare occasions. One of those occasions is that he talked about the process of lauding the moral status of his mentor, Naeeni the critic. He said, 'I used to participate during my young days in the congregational prayer services led by our mentor, al-Naeeni, and I sometimes used to realize some of his spiritual conditions during the prayers."

In The Courtyard of the Geniuses of Figh and Usul

Having completed the Sutooh stage and realized the lessons of great professors, such as Sayyid Abul–Hasan al–Isfahani, Agha Mirza al–Naeeni, he entered in the courtyard of knowledge and virtue so he could complete his higher studies at the hands of the great `allama al–Hajj Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al–Gharawi al–Isfahani who is known as al–Kampani.

Through his piercing intellect and sound judgment, he was able to follow the waves of deep intellectual waves and precise pursuits which `allama al-Kampani used to dictate to his students through his swift and roving intellect, seeking help from Allah, relying on Him, the most Great One, the most Sublime.

Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Misbah says the following in this regard, "Ayatullah Bahjat studied most of his fiqh with the late Sheikh Muhammad Kadhim al-Shirazi, student of the late Mirza Muhammad Taqi al-Shirazi, who is one of the prominent professors of al-Najaf al-Ashraf. He started studying the *Usul* at the hands of the late Naeeni and finished the greatest portion in the presence of the late Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Kampani al-Isfahani whether in the science of *Usul* or in other aspects and dimensions."

Biographies, Conduct and Gnosticism

During his studies, and shortly before reaching adolescence, Ayatullah Bahjat paid attention to self-cultivation and moral perfection. He, therefore, kept since residing in Karbala looking for a professor of manners to embrace and cultivate him. He heard about Ayatullah Sayyid al-Qadi being in Najaf al-Ashraf, so he felt honored to reside in this city so he could be inspired in manners by keeping company with his prominent mentor, the late al-Hajj Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Isfahani al-Kampani.

Sheikh Misbah al-Yazdi says the following in this regard: "The impact of the late Sheikh Muhammad Husayn al-Isfahani was obvious on the conduct of the mentor, Ayatullah Bahjat. He used to quote some of his pursuits with admiration. We used to see samples of his conduct which reminded us of his citing the mentor. It was quite obvious that this mentor had a great impact on building his moral character."

The mentor also attended lessons in manners by Sayyid Abd al-Ghaffar in al-Najaf al-Ashraf before being tutored by the spiritual scholar and famous Gnostic, Ayatullah Sayyid Ali al-Qadi, may Allah Almighty be pleased with him. He started his studies with him and drank of the spring of his niceties and care when he was eighteen of age; therefore, the mentor took long strides in the stages of Gnosticism even when he was in the prime of his youth.

Sheikh Musban al-Yazdi says the following: "The mentor benefited from his being in the presence of the late al-Hajj Mirza Ali al-Qadi in as far as manners and morals are concerned and directly, and he was tutored by him for long years. Ayatullah al-Qadi was specialist in cultivating persons morally. Each of the late `allama Tabatabai, the late Ayatullah Sheikh Muhammad Taqi al-Amuli and the late Ayatullah Sheikh Ali Muhammad Burujardi as well as a large number of other great men of knowledge and even some religious authorities from his lessons in manners and Gnosticism."

Ayatullah Bahjat quotes some pursuits from other individuals such as Ayatullah Sheikh Murta a Taleqani. He says, "During those days, someone was trying to find out the number of those who were committed to reciting the supplication by Abu Hamzah al-Thumali during the *qunoot* of the *witr* prayer rite during the eves of the month of Ramadan and in the shrine of Imam Ali, peace be with him. When this person made a count of these individuals, he found out their number exceeding seventy men.

The number of people who were committed to rituals and to spirituality at that time was a lot more than it is in our time, and this is regrettable. Of course, we do not know the unknown. Perhaps people undertake these forms of worship at their homes nowadays, but we can say for sure that the commitment for acts of adoration has seen a decline in our times. This is quite regrettable, indeed."

In his memoirs, one of the students of Bahjat the mentor has written the following: "Someone heard that more than seventy men were reciting the supplication by Abu Hamzah al-Thumali in their *witr* prayer and in the shrine of Imam Ali, peace be with him, so he decided to verify the number of those who have committed themselves to so doing during his time. He found out that their number did not exceed fifty

men, as I remember, and the person speaking was the Tehrani."

Philosophy

Ayatullah Bahjat studied the signals of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and the travels of the most highly spiritual persons with professor Ayatullah Sayyid Husayn Baduba-Ay.

Migration to Holy Qum

Ayatullah Bahjat returned to his homeland, Foman, after having completed his studies in the lunar year 1363. He stayed in that city for few months then he decided to return to the theological seminary in al-Najaf al-Ashraf. But prior to his departure for al-Najaf, he decided to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Lady of Ahl al-Bayt, Fatima the infallible one, peace be with her, in the city of holy Qum and to familiarize himself with the conditions at the theological seminary in this city. He stayed there for few months. But those days coincided with the demise of senior professors of al-Najaf al-Ashraf who passed away one after the other, something that prompted him to decide to stay in the holy city of Qum.

In this city, the mentor attended the classes of Grand Ayatullah the late Hujjat Kuwah–Kamrah–Ay and distinguished himself among his students. Then he attended the classes of the late Ayatullah Burujardi in the company of great Ayatullah such as imam al–Khomeini, Gulpaygani and others.

Sheikh Misbah says the following in this regard: "Ayatullah Bahjat was one of the distinguished students who maintained regular attendance of the classes offered by the late Ayatullah Burujardi. It is customary in reference to the Kharij researches that some students are more distinguished than others in fixing the pursuits and submitting confusing matters than others. These students are more precise than their fellows, and their confusing issues take sometimes a great scholarly shape, making answering them a matter that needs more precision and depth than other confusing issues. Ayatullah Bahjat had thus a status in the classes of the late Ayatullah Burujardi."

Teaching

Ayatullah Bahjat used to teach the high Sutooh in Najaf al-Ashraf when he was attending classes of major Ayatullah such al-Isfahani, alKampani and al-Shirazi. In other words, he used to teach and study at the same time, and this was his habit even after his migration to the holy city of Qum.

As regarding teaching the Kharij research, we can say he started teaching Kharij al-Fiqh and the *Usul* for more than forty years, and he used to teach this subject at his house in order to avoid fame. Many men of virtue benefited from him during those long past years.

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