

Al-Wahīd al-Behbahānī
Man of Intellect

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Publisher's Foreword

The Ansariyan Publications received many requests, through telephone contacts or readers' letters, all asking to publish books exposing biographies of those scholars having played a bright role in the world of thought and knowledge. So this subject was put under attentive perusal of our Foundation, in response to the sincere desires curious for Islamic culture and ensigns.

While Ansariyan Foundation presents the series of *Liqā' ma'a al-'Abrār* (A Meeting with the Righteous), it hopes for attaining approval and pleasure of all dear readers, and all success is only from Allah.

Ansariyan Publications

Preamble

Recording the conduct (*sirah*), morals and standpoints of the *Awliyā'* (Allah's friends), is verily considered one of the educationally effective means, as the biography of prophets, Imams and the upright is replete with thousands of lessons and examples that lay down for us the course of noble ethics.

The prophets have truly incarnated the heavens teachings through their stances and conduct, laying down thus the way of the pure life expressing humanity aspirations. They are vivid examples for all virtues and lofty attributes and morals.

The Holy Qur'ān has glorified the role of the prophets, calling all mankind to follow their guide, and take lessons from their stances and acts.

As Bāqir al-'Ulūm Research Foundation undertakes to publish this series of "A Meeting with the Righteous", it aims for shedding light upon the life of the '*ulamā'*', with introducing their biography and conduct to be glowing torches illuminating the way for generations.

*Bāqir al-'Ulūm
Research Foundation*

Translator's Introduction

The Akhbāri trend was destined to make of Karbalā' its centre, after *'ilm al-'uṣūl* suffered a severe setback that was about to destroy it totally. The sensitive intellect (*'aql*) played a role that excited the Akhbāris, prompting them to adopt an extreme position against it. All circumstances remained to be on the side of the Akhbāri trend, till the very Karbalā' witnessed the emergence of a new school in *fiqh* and *uṣūl*, under its great revivalist leader Muḥammad Bāqir al-Behbahāni (d. 1205 H.). Thereat a fierce struggle started between the two trends, that ended with the triumph of *'ilm al-'uṣūl*, and the defeat of the Akhbāri trend and its vanishment afterwards.

Al-Behbahāni's concerted efforts managed to lay down a separating boundary between the two eras, of the history of scientific thought in *fiqh* and *uṣūl*.

This book may not be more than an attempt to review the documentary aspect in the life of one of great dignitaries in our modern history, and the door is still open for exploring the unknown dimensions of that giant personality. Nevertheless, the dear reader will expressly witness three brilliant signs in his bright life:

First: His peerless curiosity for knowledge-seeking, as knowledge used to be his permanent concern and only solicitude wherever he be.

Second: His profound *zuhd* (asceticism) toward the world and its perishable means.

Third: His glorification for the humane reason, the essence of Divine creation for choosing the way, that leads man toward bliss in the two abodes — the world and Hereafter.

Further, we should never neglect that spiritual transparency which may sublimate al-Behbahāni the great, high to an elevated luminous world.

Hassan M. Najafi

Chapter One

City of Planets:

Işfahān, which was one of the big legendary cities, seemed within seven years after al-‘Allāmāh al-Majlisi’s demise, declining toward the pit of degradation. It appeared as being deserted after the passing away of its great ‘*ulamā*’, like Bahā’ al-Dīn al-‘Āmili, Mir Dāmād and al-Majlisi, while Sulţān Ḥusayn inclined toward the life of meekness and entertainment, letting rulership affairs and politics to be handled by others.

Muḥammad al-‘Akmal, who descends from al-Shaykh al-Mufid’s lineage, was the last of those stars that set from the sky of the Şafawid capital, which started to vanish away. He was living in one of the city corners, being a scholar that people used to revere, acquiring from his knowledge, and praying behind him.

His Birth:

The small house seemed that night so active... a group of women doing various works, one heating the water, another washing the dishes, and the other cooking the food, while an old woman was serving soft drinks. It was after midnight, and all those present there were sleeplessly awaiting (the birth). Also Muḥammad al-‘Akmal, as his usual habit, went to his small library, beseeching Allah.

O Lord, shower Your mercy upon us, protect the mother and her child against every evil. My wife keeps the memory of great

men like al-Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarāni and al-'Allāmah al-Majlisi, O Allah I swear by their status and beg You to safeguard her against every kind of harm, O my Lord.

Suddenly, the old woman approached him, tightening her *chādur*,¹ and so delightedly gave him the good tidings: It is a boy, O my master, may Allah bless him and make him of good augur for you. He is like a blossoming flower, and so healthy. Thereat Muḥammad al-'Akmal prostrated expressing his gratitude to the Almighty Allah for His bounty, the child.

He immediately responded to the old woman, taking out a money-purse, offering it to her saying: May Allah reward you good, O Karbāla'ī² Najmah.

The old woman, while leaving the room, replied: May Allah make you long-lived, summon me whenever necessary, and I will urgently be at your disposal.

After some moments, his sister came carrying the child to its father, who embraced it, uttering the *adhān* and *iqāmah* inside its ears, giving it the name of the Fifth Imam of Ahl al-Bayt (A) — Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

The Green Creed:

A portion of night elapsed, with nothing to break. The night's deep silence except the barking of remote dogs. Thereat, Muḥammad Bāqir was, with his family, on the house roof, gazing at the glittering stars, concerned about tomorrow. Thinking about his new life has snatched sleep from his eyes, while recalling his aunt's words resounding in the depth of his soul:

“O Muḥammad Bāqir! You have learnt a bit of the Qur’ān, Arabs’ manners, logic and the Persian disciplines... from now on your father will undertake your education.”

Then he began to mumble with himself, recalling his kind aunt’s face and her warm smile (saying): How poor is my aunt, she has become aged. In the meantime, drowsiness overcame his eyes, overshadowing his face, whereat he surrendered to deep sleep.

With the breaking of the dawn, Muḥammad Bāqir set forth to attend his father’s class eagerly, whereat a new phase started in the boy’s life... a stage replete with manners, wisdom, *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *uṣūl* (principles), exegesis of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* (tradition). Thereat a new door and wide horizons have opened before him that shaped his talents, where he began to acquire from those treasures, quaffing from those fountains, caring for nothing else. But fate (*qadar*) was of another opinion, as a horrible incident was lying in wait for him.

The Catastrophe:

For the last time he returned, contemplating the wet soil, mumbling with himself: Is it reasonable that earth can conceal such a bright face, warm heart and pure eyes? Is it credible that all this can be covered under earth? Ah O earth, how dare you to hide the sea?

He uttered this and went into tears.

In the meantime, his aunt called him. O Muḥammad Bāqir, aren’t you coming with us? These sad words brought him to his consciousness, where he came to his senses, and, while drying his teardrops, he whispered:

“Yes, I am coming... I am coming.”

After saying this, he joined all the family members, who, after gathering their sorrows, returned home.

His father’s demise meant a fatal blow for him, but this could not weaken his will at all, remaining as he used to be sublime in the domain of thought.

At one Autumn evening his mother said to him: O Muḥammad Bāqir, what is the matter with you my son? You go out in the morning and never return but in the evening. It seems as you have turned away from knowledge-seeking.

He replied, with touchy words, feeling as if they were coming out from the inmost of his heart (saying). Ah, my mother... I wish you could know how much I am looking here and there for a teacher competent to occupy my father’s position. But how can this be attained while tumult and chaos are prevailing all the metropolis, and everything has become so confused after being attacked by the Afghanis. Now its mosques are demolished, schools are destroyed, and all hopes and desires have vanished, so what to do?

Shall he forsake knowledge-seeking, secluding himself a safe place? Shall he follow the example of other knowledge-seekers? But Muḥammad Bāqir was never thinking that way at all.

Autumn of the Aunt:

At the last days of October, the aunt seemed at the end of her life... her face has shrunk into ridges, and she was inflicted with disease. So she came to her brother’s house, where Muḥammad Bāqir’s mother offered her some sweet and pomegranate, saying

I was so concerned about you... I know that you were so shocked with the calamity.

The aunt said: I wish I were dead as happened to my brother Muḥammad. Sometimes I think that my brother was lucky, since he passed away from the world before experiencing misfortunes, never witnessing all this devastation.

The mother said: Don't worry, the destined hour for these people shall come and they will perish. Have some sweets please.

The aunt said: where is Muḥammad Bāqir? What have I done to make him depart me, that I never see him but once a month? Does he ever ask about his aunt?

His mother said: What is that you utter? He owes you much favour... and only some days ago...

At this moment she heard the sound of door opening with Muḥammad Bāqir's footsteps breaking the silence of the place.

“Salām ‘Alaykum (peace be upon you),” said he.

The aunt, with a smile, replied:

“And peace be upon you.... I was about to forget you till I opened the door. You have become a man... a man who forgets his aunt.”

He interrupted her saying:

“O my aunt, we are living hard days.”

“She said: Really? Where are you studying these days?”

“Are there any more schools after the devastation caused by the Afghans.”

“What do you say? I heard that Mirzā Yahyā is teaching knowledge-seekers at this house vault, and so is Mullā ‘Alī, who is a *mujtahid* too.”

“I am fed up with this town O aunt.”

He added, while taking a piece of sweets, after sitting beside his aunt: I am thinking of departing this land.

“Where to? Qum or Kāshān? The sky has the same colour wherever you go.”

“Well, I will go to a cloudless sky, whose sun never sets.”

“The aunt laughingly said: The city of poets?”

He replied: “No my aunt, I mean the holy city of Najaf... the city of ‘Ali or I may go to Karbalā’.”

“I should travel there. Before some days, I saw in dream the Messenger of Allah (S), being annoyed by a group of his people. So I rushed to separate them from him, then I saluted him. He was holding a half-cubit scroll, which he handed to me. I took it running to the shrine of al-’Imām al-Ḥusayn (A).”

His mother, without hiding her concern, said:

“So you are determined to travel?”

“Yes mother, I have talked to Karbalā’i Naṣr Allāh al-Qāṭarchī, and he apprised me that the caravan will set out to Karbalā’ next Saturday.”

His aunt was listening with a smiling face, then she said:

“ You can go... I foretell that a hopeful future is before you. But as you reach there, do not forget to pray for your aunt at the holy shrine.”

Would You Delay Your Travel:

The big caravansary (*Khān*) was near to the bridge of *Sī wa seh pul*.³ The place was so busy with the travellers’ movements and grumbling, with Muḥammad being engaged in conversation with his mother in one of the caravansary corners.

His mother said to him.

“Would that you stay some other days!”

“What for, mother?” He asked.

“Karbala’i Ghulām Ḥusayn told me that your brother Muḥammad Ḥusayn will come back from Kāzerūn next week, may you postpone your trip for another week, so that you can meet your brother,” she said.

“I found travel-mates and it is improper to delay any more, mother. Give him my regards and apology.”

At that moment his brother Ḥasan Riḍā appeared, taking his little son’s hand. He approached them and saluted. Then the mother angrily said:

“Have you forgotten that your father is dead, your brother is at Kāzerūn, and your mother has turned to be a lonely woman, and that Muḥammad Bāqir may be needing you, as the elder brother being in the position of the father.

He asked: “What happened mother?”

“What is that you like to happen further? The caravan is about to set out.”

“O mother, I was busy.... Muḥammad Ibrāhīm is sick, so I was looking for a doctor and medicine for him.”

His eldest sister, being out of breath, said:

“Yesterday he was intending to talk to his brother, hoping to persuade him to give up the idea of travelling.”

(His mother said): “What do you say? Muḥammad Bāqir is not a lad. He knows well that life is so hard, and it is infeasible for anyone to send him the money he needs.”

Muḥammad Bāqir was silently listening to the conversation, but said then:

“Are you worried about me mother, regarding this aspect?”

The mother said:

“If you linger awhile, your brother Muḥammad Ḥusayn may do something. He may furnish you with a sum of money, or recommend any of the merchants to aid you in case of need.”

The mother was muttering these words, while drying her tears with the skirts of the *chādūr*. Handing Muḥammad Bāqir a bag, she added:

“Since the demise of your father, our situation is not all right... excuse me my son.”

“Don’t be concerned about me mother. Allah is present everywhere, and He never neglects His bondmen.”

Ridā Ḥasan smiled and said:

“It is no good to cry at the time of travel. O mother, laugh and delight the heart of your son. By the way, have you given him the address of al-Sayyid Muḥammad?”

“It was not an exact address. He lives in one of the houses surrounding the sanctuary, and further, he is widely known there.”

“Come on! All should get on, the caravan is about to set out. The voice of Karbāla’i Naṣr Allāh al-Qāṭarchi spread all over the caravansary, while calling the passengers to get on.”

Thus, the young knowledge-seeker bade his family farewell for the last time, and got on.

Mashhadi Murād’s Precepts:

The travellers got down at a caravansary on the caravans road for rest. Muḥammad Bāqir sat down with five of his fellows at a caravansary corner, having their supper around fire. Mashhadi

‘Abbās Quli was a merchant wearing a gray dress, with a black hood on his head. Swallowing the morsel, he said:

“Are you really the son of Muḥammad al-’Akmal, who died two years ago?!”

“Yes, I am.”

“May Allah’s mercy be upon him... for a long time I used to pray behind him. Why don’t you eat something, son?”

The aged man never moved, and while gnawing a hen’s leg, said:

“Eat, my son. O Mirzā Qāsim, hand me the jar, please.”

Then he said:

“There are some principles to be followed during travel; first he has to eat nourishing food, to be able to endure the hardships of the road.”

After having some water, he praised Allah, and as he intended to continue his speech, he was interrupted by a man called Qāsim, who said: Isn’t there other than Mashhadi Mūrād to cite these sage precepts?

Zulf’ali, who has just finished having his supper, laughed and said:

“Yea, and if you like to sleep in quietness you should take off your shoes. Third: When you intend to put on your shoes, you should check it carefully that there might be a thorn inside them that harms you. Fourth: If...”

Qāsim roared with laughter and resumed his speech saying: Fourth, if you pass by a bathroom, you should not take a bath before taking off your clothes, then... Mushhadi Murād’s wrinkled face was illuminated with a big smile, as he said:

“Let me complete my discourse.... I was to say: Second: which is more important, if your travel happened to be with ignorant people like Zulf’ali or Mirzā Riḍā Quli, turn away from them, endure and forbear as I did.”

All attendants burst into laughter, whereat Zulf’ali said:

“Now it is time to sleep, it is better to sleep early, and Karbalā’i usually travels early.”

Riḍā Quli broke his silence and said:

“Is this the time fit for sleep? Can we actually sleep now?”

“Let’s rest upon pillows and talk, and may Qāsim chant some poetry till we sleep.”

The travellers pillowed their heads, as Mashhadi laughingly said:

“O company, be cautious, al-Ḥājj Muḥsin, on returning from pilgrimage to the sacred shrines last year told me that this caravansary was assailed by hornless and tailless ghosts.”

‘Abbās Quli worriedly said:

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing... at midnight, for instance, we might be attacked by Afghāni soldiers, who are in fact responsible for prevalence of security here. After coordinating with the governor, they may embark on looting everything from the travellers, even their clothes.”

“Can this be reasonable? Highwaymen usually lie concealed in the lanes.”

Zulf’ali said:

“They are not highwaymen.”

“Who are they then?”

“It is obvious... highwaymen assail caravans on the roads not caravansaries, but these people are caravansaries burglars... ha ha!”

Mashhadi Murād angrily said:

“I am warning you, whereas you are only mocking and hallucinating?”

Muḥammad Bāqir, who used to be silent, said:

“This caravansary is not secure against thieves’ assailment then?”

Zulf’ali disapprovingly said: “What are you after, O Mashhadi Murād? Do you intend to snatch sleep from the youth’s eyes, making him stay up all night?”

“I just wanted to warn you, and excused is that who warned.”

Riḍā Quli said:

“O company, go to bed... nothing of the sort will take place. The Afghans were hungry at that time, but they have become satisfied now. O Qāsīm, chant... so Qāsīm commenced intoning with Ḥāfīz’s poems about night, love and loyalty.”

Chapter Two

*“Everything in existence is a trace for your steps
This sun too is a part of your prevalent shade
All friends have separated so I came seeking your shelter.”*

Hope:

As the caravan was approaching the City of Najaf, and after the appearance of the dome and minarets at sight, the blessings (upon Muḥammad and his Household) were raised loudly by the travellers.

Karbalā’i Naṣr Allāh al-Qāṭarchi emerged, being covered with dust from top of head to the foot sole, and merrily cried:

“Send blessings on Muḥammad... send blessings loudly. Then blessings were raised loudly spreading everywhere, as if a new life has emanated inside the hearts of the travellers while rushing toward the shrine of the everlasting champion of Islam — ‘Ali ibn Abi Ṭālib.”

Thereat Karbāla’i Naṣr Allāh — who took the leadership of tens of caravans before — started, as usual, chanting a ballad in praise of ‘Ali:

“Send blessings upon the charm of the assembly intercessor, the Kawthar water-bearer, the intrepid lion.”

After few steps cut by the caravan, the city ruins and traces of towers could be clearly sighted.

A murmur and mumbling prevailed among the travellers while being engaged in supplication and thankfulness. Muḥammad Bāqir felt as if his soul was hovering round about space of light, while looking at the everlasting dome... and

unwillingly teardrops flowed out from his eyes like rainy clouds.

He was in fact approaching the *wilāyah* (guardianship) tree. He started chanting a green *du ā* (invocation), whispering with himself: I wish I came here earlier... I wish I came with my father, mother and aunt to live in this shady paradise. No one was aware of what was the young knowledge-seeker thinking of. His rushness to caressing the walls and gates of the holy shrine, revealed his profound love... pure love whose roots grew and fountains spurted under 'Ali's patronage.

So the young man has paid homage to 'Ali (A), going here and there looking for a relative or friend, settling down at last in a simple school.

Don't Cry, Mother:

Muḥammad Bāqir spent the first night arranging his simple luggage at a corner of a small dark room; with swinging phantoms of dear faces appearing before his eyes... faces of his mother, father and aunt were striking his imagination. His aunt seemed to him with her white veil, smiling and saying: You have become a man, a man forgetting everything even his old aunt.

He saw his father with his bright face, trembling voice, recommending him. O son, I am about to depart this world, and I am recommending you with things never to be forgotten: seeking knowledge, doing kindness to your mother, as she is the offspring of great men.

But his mother's image remains more tormenting for him than others... with her weeping voice as bidding him farewell.

He murmured: She approved of my travel but departure was so difficult for her to bear... Do not cry mother, I won't remain poor for ever, verily I shall strive to bring you to Najaf.

Thus Muḥammad Bāqir kept on communing with his mother's image, till drowsiness overcame him, making the dreaming youth mount the winged sleep-horse, perambulating him through far-away worlds, infinite worlds.

With the dawn-fall, the young man got up from bed, despite his feeling tired, but he rose as if a call was inviting him to leave the warm bed.

He soliloquized to himself: Leaving night prayer, and sleeping like the dead, are not of the traits of man, so what about one living beside the everlasting history man. Thus he rose up ridding his face of the dust of "substance", being so diaphanous, stepping forward through Divine worlds.

The only thing that tied him to the factual world, was the sound of *adhān* (call for prayer) resounding loudly through the blue sky.

He felt as if magnetic waves attracting him toward the shrine (*ḥaram*), covering the entire city up to the farthest houses... attracting its people and attaching them to the holy shrine, at which they stay up till sunrise... the sun that never sets to include them with her warm lights.

Evening Ḥikmah School:

The mosque was filled with knowledge-seekers, who have attended the class of philosophy under al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Tabāṭabā'i al-Brūjerdi.⁶

A 35-year, thick-bearded, wide-eyed man has seated himself near the door, and whispered in the ear of his companion:

“O Shaykh Mahdi! Look at that youth sitting near the rostrum... have you noticed how did he give reply to the teacher?”

“Whom do you mean? Is it that light-bearded young man wearing (Oriental) cloak?”

“No, I mean the one sitting at the left of the rostrum.”

“Do you mean that youth putting his head between the two covers of the book, as if intending to devour its papers?”

“Yes, it is said that he has reached Najaf recently ... I was told by Mirzā Ḥusayn al-Kāshī⁷ that he is coming from your hometown. You are supposed to know him more than me.”

“Is he from Iṣfahān?”

“Yea... he claims to be the son of Muḥammad al-'Akmal and of having uterine kinship to the teacher.”

“If he really be the son of Muḥammad al-'Akmal, it is self-evident then to be so; since Muḥammad al-'Akmal's wife belongs to the teacher's family, and both being the grandsons of al-Mullā Ṣāliḥ al-Māzandarāni — the son-in-law of al-'Allāmah al-Majlisi. Or rather the teacher (*ustādh*) himself being the nephew of al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisi, so he is the grandson of al-Majlisi the first.”

“Surprising!”

Al-Shaykh Mahdi seemed as intending to say something of importance, but the mosque attendant's voice was raised announcing:

“O gentlemen! The teacher is sick today.”

A mumbling prevailed amongst the knowledge-seekers, who then embarked on departing the mosque in ones and groups.

Al-Shaykh Mahdi resumed his speech:

“This guy then is affiliated to an inveterate family?”

“Yes, on maternal side. And on paternal side he belongs to al-Shaykh al-Mufid. Now let’s go toward him, he may have some news about my family. As you know, I am so worried since the Afghans’ onslaught, not knowing what happened to them. This guy may deliver me of my anxieties.”

Then the two men sat after saluting Muḥammad Bāqir who was busy collecting his books and note-books.

Al-Shaykh Mahdi said to him.

“Welcome... I heard that you have come recently from Iṣfahān.”

“Yes, before about three months.”

“Were you present during the tumult of the Afghans?”

“Yea.”

“My family members are living behind the main mosque, I am worried about them, do you have any news about them?”

“I was not present there, but some friends have informed me that all that locality remained far from any aggression.”

“I praise Allah, I feel at ease now.”

The Good Tidings:

The Sun of Friday was gradually approaching the meridian... within two years after Muḥammad Bāqir’s coming to Najaf, and he is still cutting the distance between the *ḥaram* (shrine) and the (theological) school, so quietly. The peddlers’ voices were raised loudly, while advertising for their simple goods, offered

for sale on the pavements. The caravansary, close to the shrine, was so crowded with awaiting travellers.

As Muḥammad Bāqir was gazing at the caravansary, which seemed as an old remains amidst a town looking like ruins left behind from the old times, he whispered:

“The caravansary has become only ruins... the schools are improper... meat, wheat, barley and vegetables are so expensive, and people usually eat dates, milk and bread.”

In the meantime, Sayyid Muḥsin, who came to be acquainted with him during the philosophy lesson, said to him.

“Peace be upon you, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir. I see you so plunged in thinking.”

“And peace be upon you, he replied.”

“What is the matter? Have your ships sunk?!”

“I was thinking of the shrine of al-’Imām ‘Alī were in Iran, the city (Najaf) would have not been in such a situation.”

“Is there any trouble? We are all from one city, and the friend in need is the friend indeed — as it is said — so never be shy?”

“No, nothing happened... I was contemplating about the city, about these ruins, the caravansary, the schools, the cracking of the fence and towers, the drinking water. And an idea stroke my mind: had the shrine been in Iran, Najaf would have been like Mashhad.”

“You are right, the kings of Iran, despite their being corrupt and deviated from religion, try to fawn upon people through spending abundant money. The construction you witness here was only done by the King Ṭahmāsb.”

“Excuse me, I am in a hurry. My father is sick, and I am here to look for “Āwishan.”

Then he added with a smile.

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

“Thank you.”

“Farewell then, see you later.”

“May Allah protect you.”

After only very few steps, he returned saying:

“Have you ever heard of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Hamadāni?”

“To some extent.”

“He is one of Qum *‘ulamā’*. He came to Qum from Najaf after the Afghans’ onslaught, and he is engaged now in teaching *fiqh*. It is said that he is very accurate in his lessons. He has learned under Fādīl al-Hindī, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Khūnsārī and al-Shaykh Ja‘far al-Qāḍī.”

“I remember I was told about him by my father.”

“It is a good chance, or rather good tidings for you, and be under Allah’s protection now.”

“In no hurry! I also have a good, fat and sweet news. You are invited to a dinner.”

“Where, is it at al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir’s house?!”

“No, it is at al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṭabāṭabā’i’s house. Your lunch will be on next Tuesday, the thirteenth of Rajab.”

“What is the occasion?”

“A wedding ceremony.”

“Whose wedding? And who is the bridgroom.”

“Go now and buy “Āwishan.”, lest the children’s mother should be angry. I will tell you later on.”

Al-Sayyid Muḥsin interrupted him saying:

“At last you became a bridegroom.”

“Well-done.”

They both laughed and separated.

The Festival Reactions:

When the thirteenth of Rajab’s sun began to rise at the horizon step by step, Sayyid Muḥsin was crossing the streets and alleys to reach one of the alleys leading to the shrine. Before reaching half the alley, he heard the voice of ‘Alf al-Maddāh, chanting with sweet voice:

*With his perfection he reached highness,
With his prettiness he uncovered darkness,
All his traits being excellent,
Upon him and his Household send blessings.*

Then blessings (*ṣalawāt*) were raised spreading over all the alleys, and from time to time a guest would enter to find someone guiding him toward his place inside the muddy room. Muḥammad Bāqir was sitting at the room corner, feeling so shy, keeping his head down to the ground, while the syrup tray was distributed among the attendants.

While sipping the cup of sweet drink, Sayyid Muḥsin whispered with low voice.

“Welcome... welcome, well-done O Muḥammad Bāqir, you have made affinity with a reputed family.”

Then the table was spread, and those invited have had the food.

A Traveller from Işfahān

The school was filled with the students' murmur, and Sayyid Ṣadr al-Din al-Hamadāni was sitting amongst a group of his disciples.

Al-Sayyid Muḥsin arrived and placed his hand on Muḥammad Bāqir's shoulder, whispering at his ear saying.

"I have news of your interest."

"Why so speedily? I have important questions to put to the teacher."

"Is there an end for your questions? Postpone them for tomorrow."

"What happened?"

"Nothing... my brother Mirzā Kāzīm has just arrived from Işfahān."

"Well, then..."

"Let's go now, come with me."

They both departed the mosque, whereat Muḥammad Bāqir smilingly said:

"Do you mean Mirzā Kāzīm who fell captive at the hands of the highwaymen?"

"Yes, have I told you what happened to him?"

"You told me last year... and mentioned that the chief of the burglars has set him free, after finding the collection of his poems (*diwān*) and realizing his being a poet."

"I told you so to be safe from your tongue, informing you that poetry may be a means for delivering some people from perdition."

“What happened now? Have the highwaymen ignored his poems this time?”

“What is that you utter? I have sad news for you and I know not the extent of your forbearance.”

“Of course I’ll be patient, unless it be the news of your death — God forbid — as I cannot endure such a misfortune.”

“Leave jesting aside, I told you it is a sad news.”

“What is it?”

“I am sure you will be grieved.”

“There is no news more bitter and harder than the demise of my father (may God’s mercy be upon him).”

“My brother brought me the news of the death of your aunt, may Allah’s mercy be upon her.”

“May Allah’s mercy be upon all of our dead ones.”

“Let’s go to the shrine.”

Unknown Men:

The sun was effusing its burning beams over Najaf shanties. Despite it was close of day (*asīl*), the heat flame was suffocating, and Muḥammad Bāqir’s house — like other houses — was about to melt due to flame. So the young knowledge-seeker has resorted, with his wife and little son, to the crypt.

As usual, the father was engaged in reading. The silence was broken by the sound of consequent knocking at the door. Muḥammad Bāqir rushed to see who was the visitor. He saw three unknown men, one being so advanced in years, with white hair, and so thin to the extent that his bones were protrusive in some places of his body. The men were wearing Iranian costumes. They said.

“We are sorry for bothering you at this time. We are strangers looking for the address of al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-’Iṣfahānī.”

“Come in, please.”

“We are coming from ‘Qanawāt’ and ‘Behbahān’, and in need of something.”

“Make yourselves home, please.”

As they entered his house, Muḥammad Bāqir rushed and brought them sweet drinks. On taking their breaths, and resting for a while, the aged white-haired man said:

“My name is Imām Quli.”

Then he pointed at a mid-aged, frizzle-haired, tall-brown-faced man, saying:

“And this man is Mīrzā Ṭāhir.”

Then, introducing the third man who was bald, and seemed shorter due to having a paunch, he said.

“And he is al-Ḥājj Qurbān ‘Ali.”

Muḥammad Bāqir welcomed them with a smile, saying.

“Have you had your lunch?”

“Yes, at the caravansary.”

“What news you have about Behbahān?”

“All praise is Allah’s, everything is all right.”

“Was it attacked by the Afghans?”

“Are they able to do so?”

Al-Ḥājj Qurbān ‘Ali, who remained silent, interrupted them by saying.

“People there are unselfish and sympathetic. The Afghans, led by Āzām Khān, came toward us and...”

Imām Quli corrected him by saying:

“It is Āzād Khān not Āzām Khān.”

“Yea, Āzād Khān. They came, and halted behind the fences. They directed their cannons toward us, while we had but one cannon.”

Mirzā Ṭāhir said fervently:

“I myself have fed the cannon.”

“The defenders were of the opinion that al-Sayyid. ‘Abd Allāh al-Baḥraynī starts to shoot the first shell, for seeking blessing. Fortunately the shell fell near the camp of the commander Āzād Khān, who was inflicted with some wounds, causing him to draw an evil omen from that, giving his orders to retreat.”

“By the way, how is Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā? I hope he be well, he is my father’s cousin.”

A dull silence prevailed over the little muddy room, and the three men have exchanged glances. They said:

“For this purpose we are here... may Allah’s mercy be upon him, and he remembered you as he was dying. We came to be at your service for this reason, people are awaiting your coming.”

Mirzā Ṭāhir said:

“May God’s mercy be upon him, he was an upright man. After him we have turned to be like sheep whose shepherd has left them.”

Imām Quli stood up, put on his cloak and said:

“We shall return to the caravansary, our caravan will set out the day after tomorrow. I’ll pass by you at the dawn of Wednesday, to know your opinion. Think about the matter please.”

“What makes you be in great haste?”

“We intend not to detract your attention of your lessons. Concerning us, we may go to Karbalā’.”

The three men went out and closed the door, while Muḥammad Bāqir came back to see his wife gazing him with patience, saying.

“Who were your guests?”

“Men coming from Iran, asking me to go to their town.”

“What was your reply?”

“Are you worried?”

“No, at all.”

“I have not made up my mind, yet... but...”

“But what?”

“I made a mistake in not meeting their request. They have traversed long distances for my sake, their town may be badly needing someone to guide them and teach them religion rulings. I must go... yes... I must.”

The Joining Trip:

All the family members have gathered inside the house of al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṭabāṭabā’i, who has let his grandson sit on his lap, starting to banter with him (saying):

“Laugh, O Muḥammad ‘Ali, laugh for your grandfather.”

The wife (of Muḥammad Bāqir) said to him:

“Take the lad from his grandfather, to let him rest for a while.”

“Let him be on his grandfather’s lap... look how he laughs.”

The grandfather continues bantering with his grandson.

“O Muḥammad ‘Ali! Do you intend to leave your grandfather alone and go away?”

Turning his face toward his son-in-law, saying:

“Have you meditated well?”

“I am here to consult you in this regard.”

“It seems that the town people badly need someone to guide and teach them the principles of their religion. The Akhbāris — as you know — are so influential there, and people are in need for sound and proper thought. So I am duty-bound to go there.

“Since you believe this to be your duty, it is needless to consult, you can go and depend upon Allah.”

As Muḥammad Bāqir’s wife was preparing the supper table, she said:

“Does he go? Shall we depart you so easy!!”

“When duty necessitates, there should be no delay. Can you be answerable on his behalf on the Day of Reckoning?”

“Then we must have our dinner, and be ready for travelling and enduring the bitterness of separation.”

O Imām Quli! Farewell:

The sound of bells and travellers’ voices were prevailing all over the caravansary. Mirzā Ṭāhir and al-Ḥājj Qurbān ‘Alī were sitting, waiting for the return of Imām Quli, who were to al-Sayyid’s house.

As his eyes were stuck at the caravansary gate, Mirzā Ṭāhir said:

“To travel with this old man causes headache. Two hours have passed, and still he has not come back; the caravan may set out. What to do then?”

Thereat, al-Ḥājj Qurbān ‘Alī stopped his hymn (*tasbiḥ*), disapproving that by saying.

“O Mirzā, he is one of Allah’s friends... don’t be worried, he will verily arrive in due time.”

After few moments, Imām Quli appeared, saying:

“Salām ‘Alaykum (peace be upon you).”

“And peace be upon you, why are you late?”

“But, as you see, I’ve reached in due time.”

“What news you have, is al-Sayyid coming or not?”

“Yes, he is coming, next month.”

Qurbān ‘Ali moved his woolen hood, mumbling:

“Then we have to return to Najaf again.”

“It is better that one of us informs town people of this news, and the other two remain to accompany al-Sayyid in his trip.”

Mirzā Tāhir, being perplexed, said:

“I don’t know what to do; shall we stay or leave?”

Imām Quli, angrily, said:

“You are always in a haste... you can go and we shall stay here.”

Mirzā Tāhir became displeased, saying:

“I am not a halfway comrade.”

Qurbān ‘Ali said:

“It is not as you believe, one of us should go to the town and apprise its people of al-Sayyid’s coming. O Imām Quli, you can go... the caravan is about to move.”

Imām Quli, mounting his came, said:

“Farewell, is there any recommendation?”

“Only peace... May Allah protect you.”

Chapter Three

Mashhadi Rajab returned from his field, holding his shovel, that seemed as his rival in height. As he was cutting the miry land, he addressed his neighbour Ghulām Ḥusayn:

“Muṣṭafā Khān’s canal will be digged toward our land tonight, it is enivtable to return at night for inspecting the water.”

“I don’t think so, they will dig it on the lower lands.”

“Look at that multitude of people... I think someone is dead?”

“Hold your tongue, man... why do you croak like a crow. He is Imām Quli. He drew nigh and said:

“What are you doing here? Are you from another world?”

“What happened?”

“Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-’Iṣfahāni, the cousin of the late Muḥammad Riḍā, is arriving today.”

“Is he coming from Iṣfahān?”

“No, from Najaf.”

“Najaf!”

“Yea, I was informed so by Mirzā Ṭahir. Both Karbalā’i Taqī and al-Ḥājj ‘Ali Jum’ah have gone for his reception, they may enter our village at any moment.”

Looking far-away, he added:

“Look, Qurbān ‘Ali has arrived. Send blessing upon the Prophet.”

“You said that al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-’Iṣfahāni is to arrive, then you say: Qurbān ‘Ali has arrived! Send blessings upon the Prophet!”

“Don’t you know that Qurbān ‘Ali was in Najaf to accompany al-Sayyid while coming here? O Mirzā Kāzim, chant for us, please.”

Then Mirzā Kāzim started chanting and hymning with the blessings upon the Prophet and his Household. The space of the expansive fields was filled then with sweet heavenly melodies, adding to the splendiddness of the village nice sunset.

A Night at the Mosque:

Karbālā’i Yaḥyā said:

“O our master! Our village is divided into two parts separated by a line; the first part is called “Qanawāt,” and the second is “Behbahān”.”

“You mean, there is a line separating them?”

Karbālā’i Yaḥyā, who was a short thin man, playing with his imbued beard, said:

“No, Sir, there is a long alley separating them, that was named as line.”

Mirzā Ṭāhir interferred interruptingly:

“The late Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā has done his best to reconcile between the two parties, but was not respited by death (may Allah’s mercy be upon him). On one of Ramaḍān’s evenings we sat till midnight, but... without reaching any conclusion, the Behbahān magnates stood up and departed the mosque.”

Mashhadi Murād, while fixing his hood, said:

“O Sir, the dispute is in origin about Muṣṭafā Khān Canal... water is the basis of the trouble. If this problem was solved, no conflict would be there and concord would prevail.”

Thereat Karbāla’i regrettably said:

“There is no sense in this dispute at all. We all belong to the same village, we are all Muslims and we and them are neighbours too. If the Sayyid permits us to invite both the parties to be present at Khayrābād School for a lunch banquet, and then we can decide what to do.”

Muḥammad Bāqir, listening with regret, said:

“Allah — the Exalted — said: “And hold fast, all of you together to the cable of Allah, and do not separate.” (3:103). And in another place of His Holy Book, He said: “The believers are naught else than brothers.” (49:10). Aren’t these Allah’s words? Hasn’t Allah commanded us toward fraternity and evading dispute? I hope that harmony be prevailing and felicity be established, so that the Owner of Time (Ṣāhib al-Zamān) be pleased with us, and Allah blesses us.”

Imām Quli, addressing al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, said:

“Some say that we should refer directly to the Imams’ traditions (*aḥādith*), applying all their precepts with no need to refer to a *marji’ taqlid* (religious authority). That is, we have to imitate the Imams themselves with no need for any other person.”

Muḥammad Bāqir was aware of the fact that the schools of the Akhbāris had its influence through these regions, so he said calmly:

“They are mistaken, how can we be sure of the veracity of these news, and that this was truly said by the Imams. As there

are *aḥādīth* falsely ascribed to them, whose chain of transmission is weak, and some are contradictory to the Qur'ān. Who can differentiate between the scum from the good? Then there should be someone to undertake the task of investigating the narrations to recognize the weak and the authentic ones.

“This is the truth.”

Al-Ḥājj Qurbān ‘Alī vainly said:

“I remember I have said to one of them: If it be as you say, so it is not necessary to spend twenty or thirty years in learning and investigation at Najaf. As whoever is able to read and write can attain the position of giving *fatwā* (verdict), after reading some books containing the Imams’ traditions and biographies! ... May Allah’s mercy be upon Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā; his words were exactly like yours!”

Behbahān:

Al-Ḥājj Ghulām Riḍā, who sat beside the Sayyid, whispered:

“Our master! According to your orders, I have invited all the men of Qanawāt for having lunch.”

“I seek God’s forgiveness.”

“I hope that all events be kept to their course, and concord prevails again... your coming is a blessing and grace for Behbahān.”

Al-Ḥājj, addressing the banquet organizers, added: “O Mashad¹⁰ Muṣṭafā! Don’t leave the dish of broth in this corner. And you, O Ḥusayn, tell them that yogurt is little, and don’t forget to bring Karbalā’i the dish of butter.

After all the guests had had their lunch, Imām Quli rose, saying:

“Our master, let’s go.”

Addressing al-Ḥājj Ghulām Riḍā, he added:

“May Allah bless you, and shower mercy upon you. We seek your permission to go.”

“Why are you in a hurry? Behbahān people wish the Sayyid stay among them, leading them in prayers, and guide them. O Karbalā’i, you can stay too.

“Thank you, O Ḥājj, I have to go. But in regard of al-Sayyid, he can stay if he wishes.”

Thus all the guests have left al-Ḥājj Ghulām Riḍā’s house, except al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir who stayed in Behbahān.

We Seek Allah’s Protection...

What a Time Is It!

Khayrābād School seemed deserted as usual every Friday, with no one being there except Mashhadī Karam — the old school servant — who sat seeking warm under sun’s ray of Ādhar.¹¹

Mirzā Ṭālib — a youth learning under al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir — entered (the school) and saluted the old man.

The old man raised his head, gazing the young knowledge-seeker before replying:

“And peace be upon you.”

“What happened?”

“They are still engaged in discussion, which has not ended since early morning till now. If you like to listen to their discussion, you can enter ... Murād ‘Ali is there too.”

Mirzā Ṭalib hesitated a bit before deciding to enter. Then he quietly opened the door, greeting his friends with low voice, and sat down listening to the conversation.

“We have reached the conclusion that non-other than the Book of Allah and the narrations reported from the Infallible Imams, can be a source for legislation. Even reason (*‘aql*) cannot be a reliable source.

Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was nodding his head while listening, then he raised his head saying: “Even if the case be explicit needing no proof, with no opinion related about it by the Prophet or the Imams. Or when adopting it being a common practice entailing that it has got concurrence of the Infallible Imams, what will be the ruling concerning this issue?”

“It will be rejected if not being supported by an authentic narration.”

“Do you agree with what the linguists reiterate?”

“Certainly.”

“Is there any narration commanding you to do so?”

“No.”

“Do you follow the recommendations and prescriptions of the doctor?”

“Yea.”

“Which narration is there that obligates following the doctors’ prescriptions? Certainly nothing of this sort can be there. This fact is not confined to the doctor, but it includes the architect, engineer, merchant and all other specialists. Nevertheless we see people adopt their opinions, why? Because reason determines this, despite the absence of any tradition or Qur’ānic verse in this respect.

A murmur prevailed among the Akhbāris present there. One of them commented by saying:

“This man is a sophist he mixes between *fiqh* and construction.”

Another one shouted:

“He intends to extinguish the truth light by his debate.”

A middle-aged man, wearing a black clock, stood up, saying:

“Let’s go, O friends! This man is giving reason an unparalleled status. I heard Mullā Ḥusayn Quli say: When reason dictates that what contradicts the dictation of *shar‘* (Islamic law), the dictate of reason will be prior to the dictate of *shar‘* — we seek Allah’s refuge. What a time is it!?”

Thus the Akhbāris left the place, afterwhich Mashhadī Murād entered holding sweet drink cups.

Mirzā Ṭālib asked:

“O master, what were they saying?”

“I’ll explain the matter for you later on, O son.”

The 1st of Shawwāl:

As al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was at the mosque, he addressed Imām Quli thus:

“O Karbalā’i! Tell people that today is the 1st of Shawwāl, and we are going to establish feast prayer (*Ṣalāt al-‘Īd*).”

“But, our master, you informed us yestereve, that people should have daybreak meal and fast.”

“Trustworthy men have testified the sighting of crescent (*hilāl*) of the ‘Īd.”

Karbalā’i Imām Quli has ordered a number of youth to let people know about this. After a while, some people came

carrying some dates and milk from the house of al-Ḥājj Ghulām Riḍā al-Behbahāni, for distributing them among the villagers who came to perform *ṣalāt al-‘id*.

When the ceremonies of *ṣalāt* ended, one of the Akhbāris asked al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir:

“For which reason you have broken your fasting?”

“I became sure after ten trustworthy men gave witness.”

“Bring me a narration proving this, and your certainly is confined to a specific respect.”

“It is really a regrettable matter, O brother! Though the narrations certify the confirmation of seeing the crescent with the testimony of two trustworthy men, you wonder about the tradition proving this!”

His speech was interrupted by al-Ḥājj Sharaf, addressing al-Sayyid:

“I hope you accept my invitation to have lunch together. Do not forget to bring your family too.”

The Doctor Is Not a Lord:

“Peace be upon you, how are your Mirzā Ṭāhir? I was told that you are sick, so I came to visit you.”

With a shivering voice, Mirzā Ṭāhir replied:

“Praise belongs to Allah, our master. Days pass so fast, and no one of those accompanied you in your trip from Najaf, has survived except me. Years have elapsed like days ... thirty years have gone. Imām Quli died three years ago, al-Ḥājj Qurbān ‘Ali died in the last year, and it seems as it is my turn this time.

“O Mirzā, what is that you utter? ... You will be well, God-willing.”

“O Sayyid, I got tired. I have been bedridden for ten days, I cannot even move my hands. I have become a burden for the family.”

“What does the physician say?”

“The physician is not a lord, the only thing he has is the “Taranjabin”. Please invoke Allah to take away His trust, I am fed up with life. (His words were mixed with sobbing).”

“Allah is merciful O Mirzā ... He is more merciful than the parents. Recovery is at His hand — the Glorified.”

Then al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir departed him, mumbling with supplication and prayers.

After elapse of several days, Mashhadi Muḥsin came to inform the Sayyid about the passing away of Mirzā Ṭāhir, whereat the Sayyid rushed to his house for consoling his family.

I Wish I Had Gone:

“O ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, see who is knocking at the door,” said Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, calling his son.

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn rushed to open the door, then he said:

“Father! It is a man asking about you.”

The Sayyid stood up and went toward the door, saying:

“Mā shā’ Allāh ... You and Behbahān?! You may have missed the way, please (come in).”

Sayyid Muḥsin entered saying: O Allah O Allah.”

“Well O Sayyid! How are you?”

“You may forget your friends so soon, but I never forget.”

“O Sayyid, I am engaged in some occupations. But tell me, O Sayyid Muḥsin, why have you turned to be so old. Hoariness has invaded you and”

Sayyid Muḥsin interrupted him with a smile:

“But you haven’t remained as young as you used to be when being a knowledge-seeker learning wisdom (*ḥikmah*) under al-Sayyid Muḥammad.

“Yea, this is the nature of life, all have to go on a travel, ending with death.

“Yes, we are all on a travel. I have also thought with myself that when I will be asked about what I have done, what shall be my answer? When saying I was seeking knowledge, I shall be asked: What have you done with your knowledge? There at I will stand perplexed, so I have made up my mind to return to my town hoping for rendering a service that can be of benefit for me on the Reckoning Day.

“What an excellent opinion is it ... people are in need of men like you. When I was at Iṣfahān, I heard too much about you, people speaking of you constantly. I was told that some people at “Chahār Bāgh” School were saying that Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir did a great job in guiding the Akhbāris to the right path.

“I seek Allah’s forgiveness ... Muḥammad Bāqir is not in a position proper to guide people, Allah is the only One Who guides. He guides whoever He wishes, we are no more than mere means.

“Well, how could you manage to persuade them?

“They are truly good and simple people at the same time. They are so fanatic for the Shari‘ah (Islamic Law), the fact that caused them to slip, but when faced with a decisive argument they be convinced. They are of the opinion that it is not obligatory to imitate a *mujtahid*, and that imitation is confined

only to the (Infallible) Imam, which is not possible; as deducing from reports can be done only by an expert man.

In the meantime, Muḥammad ‘Ali, the elder son of al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, entered holding cups of sweet drink and sweets (saying):

“Peace be upon you.”

“And upon you, Thanks to God, you have become elder.

A short period of silence prevailed, that was interrupted by Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir’s saying:

“What news you have about Najaf?

“Everything is all right...but if you inquire about Karbalā’, I tell you it has turned to be a den for the Akhbāris, who believe in unlawfulness of learning *uṣūl al-fiqh*.

“How amazing! I heard about this, but not to that extent.

“It is better, O Sayyid, that you send to Karbalā’ some copies of your book *al-’Ijtihād wa al-’akhbār*. They may be of benefit there.”

“The book may be useful, but what is more important is struggling and combating at the battlefield. I wish I could go.”

Thereat the call for noon prayer was raised, and Muḥammad Bāqir stood up, saying:

“I’ll go to the mosque ... you can stay and rest.”

“Make yourself home, I will be back soon.”

“I am going too, let’s go together.”

Then they both set out to the mosque.

The Wonderful Judgement!

“Praise belongs to Allah... Allah has showered upon you of His bounties.”

“You haven’t eaten well, O Sayyid! The food might be untasty.”

“On the contrary, it was so good food, may the cook’s hands be healthy.”

Muḥammad ‘Ali whispered at his father’s ears, while collecting the dishes.

“During your going to the mosque, Khayr Allāh’s wife came asking your attendance to marry her daughter to ‘Abbās Qulī Mirāb.”

“Have you noticed O Sayyid? People here badly need you; this ‘Abbās Qulī was married to his niece.”

“It is impossible!!”

“When ignorance prevails among people, they do whatever they like. But I have given orders to their urgent separation (divorce)

“Did they respond?”

“Yes, praise be Allah’s.”

“Praise be Allah’s...and if they were of the opinion that imitating the *mujtahid* being unnecessary, they would have stuck to their foolish practices, everyone playing his drum.”

“Have you heard that one of the judges has ordered to bury a man returning from travel, after some people testified to the judge, during the man’s absence, that he was dead? So the judge ordered to bury him as soon as he came back!”

“Have they buried him alive?!”

“Yea ... the judge has ordered to bury him, considering him dead according to the testimonies of the witnesses, and *Shar‘* (Islamic Law) obligates the burial of the dead; so his burying is obligatory! Look, what have reports (*akhbār*) done to them!”

“For every field of knowledge there are its specialized men, and not whoever holds the plow becomes a farmer!”

“Even plowing and farming need one having expertise in these fields, being aware of their principles and ramifications (*furū*’).

“I have to go back to Işfahān.”

“What? Have you grown tired of us so soon?”

“I seek Allah’s forgiveness.”

“Spend your night here then... to travel in the morning is much better.”

I Said Nothing:

“What is the matter our master! Please stay with us.”

Khawājah ‘Aziz Kalāntar¹³ was vainly insisting on al-Sayyid (to stay), but the latter never paid attention to him, and set out returning home.

Mashhadi Sha‘bān Ḥamāmi said: The Sayyid may feel unwell, as he is not supposed to leave people without leading them in afternoon prayers (*ṣalāt al-‘aṣr*).

Mirzā¹⁴ Yahyā al-‘Aṭṭār rushed toward Khawājah ‘Aziz:

“Let him go, he may be sick ... why do you insist on him so much?”

Khawājah ‘Aziz, a bit disturbed, said”

“What do you say?”

Ghulām Riḍā worriedly said:

“You may have told him something that angered him.”

“I said nothing (of that sort).”

“No, I saw you whispering at his ear.”

“Nothing, I have just told him: Look what are the consequences of my orders? How have they led to mobilizing worshippers behind you?”

Al-Ḥājj Ghulām Riḍā exclaimed:

“O Mullā Murād, go forward to lead afternoon prayer...people are awaiting. Then he added, mumbling:

“Khwājah ‘Aziz has angered al-Sayyid by his words. Al-Sayyid is not like the others, who are pleased by multiplicity of people.”

Then the call for prayer was raised by Mashhadi Sha‘bān. In the evening (*aṣīl*), Khwājah ‘Aziz Kalāntar set out, accompanied by al-Ḥājj Ghulām Riḍā and some of the village dignitaries, toward the house of al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, for calling him to establish *maghrib* prayer at the mosque.

Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir quietly said:

“Thanks to Allah, at Behbahān there is some one competent to substitute me in leading people in prayer and giving verdicts. I think my responsibility has come to its end in this region, and I have to travel.”

Khwājah ‘Aziz sadly said:

“O Sayyid, are you still angry with us?”

Al-Sayyid kindly replied:

“Whatever happened has elapsed and it is finished with it. I determined to travel and returning to Najaf, the only thing I hope is you pray to Allah for me.”

Chapter Four

The Locality Mosque:

“Why have we departed Najaf and come to Karbalā’, O father?”

“Don’t you like this town?”

“I never meant this, but when we were at Behbahān we decided to travel to Najaf.”

“My son, you know I am after knowledge, and I have never attained my wish there, so I came to Karbalā’ hoping to find someone to learn under.”

“You won’t find what you seek, at this town, father, as herein someone forbidding learning *uṣūl al-fiqh*.”

“So our mission will be more difficult, we have to fight such perverted thoughts.”

“Is this possible?”

“Yea, I have been attending classes of al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Bahrāni for five days, and I have noticed a desire for learning *uṣūl* among his disciples. I am teaching them now this lesson at the crypt as you see.

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn said:

“There are guests awaiting at the door, father.”

His brother Muḥammad ‘Alī rushed to their welcome. Middle-aged men entered, taking their seats in the muddy room, saying:

“This locality people, our master, desire that you lead them in prayer.

“But where is the mosque *imām* (leader).”

“May Allah’s mercy be upon him.”

“You mean he is dead...so there should be no delay.”

Shadows of Horror:

“Brothers! Today is the fifteenth of Sha‘bān, the blessed birthday of the Owner of Time (Ṣāhib al-‘Aṣr), may Allah hasten his reappearance. It is really nice to talk about this great day.

“At the outset, we have to recognize that there is a Divine convenience behind his occultation. So it is improper for anyone to inquire about the reason why the Imam is not appearing, as he is alone knows the due time for appearance.

It is narrated that he (will appear) wearing rough clothes, and eating simple food, and his occultation being a grace from Allah.

A murmur prevailed among the attendants, each commenting as he wishes. Then al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir descended the pulpit, feeling regretful for his hastiness.

Mirzā Ḥasan al-‘Aṭṭār inclined upon a man sitting beside him, whispering angrily:

“We have made a mistake in inviting this man...a mosque without an imam is more preferable than an enemy to the Imam.

‘Abd al-Riḍā al-Baqqāl mockingly said:

“This man dislikes the appearance of the Imam, fearing the loss of his leadership.”

Mirzā Ḥabīb Allāh, who took part in calling al-Sayyid to be the mosque *imām*, regrettably commented:

“They are consuming the bounties of Ṣāhib al-Zamān, and unsheathing their swords at him! What a wondrous time!”

Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir realized the waves of anger that prevailed among those present at the mosque, feeling sorry for his hastiness, returning home then.

After a few minutes, his house door was knocked violently, in a way breaking the silence that overshadowed the house.

“Who is at the door?”

“It is Muḥammad Ḥusayn Misgar, who spreads out your prayer rug every day.”

Al-Sayyid Muḥammad opened the door, being terrified at seeing Muḥammad Ḥusayn with his furious frightening complexion. He was taken by surprise with the man throwing the rug at his face, shouting:

“Take your rug, O the apostate ... my prayer behind you is invalid outright.”

That night al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir stayed up restlessly, without being able to sleep at all. He never felt so frightened before, expecting being assailed by some fanatics at any time.

Suddenly the strong sound of knocking was heard. Al-Sayyid, feeling terrified, cried:

“Who is at the door at this late time of night?”

He went out to the house yard:

“Who is it?”

“It is me, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Misgar! Please, open the door, Sir!”

“What else you want from me? Haven’t you be sufficed with that you did for me?”

“I have erred, and I came to apologize.”

Al-Sayyid cautiously opened the door.

The man fell down on al-Sayyid's feet, intending to kiss them. Al-Sayyid said:

"I seek Allah's forgiveness! What are you doing? Stand up O brother."

"Don't blame me Sir ... as soon as I slept that night, I saw in dreaan Ṣāhib al-Zamān reprimanding me for what I did (for you); so I rushed asking you to forgive me."

"May Allah pardon all of us."

We Stay Then:

"We are to be ready for travelling again, mother."

Muḥammad 'Ali mumbled, as all the family members gathered for having breakfast.

The mother, seemed totally dejected, replied:

"Have you grown tired of Karbalā' so soon?"

"How can one be wearied of the city of al-Ḥusayn? But this is the nature of life, mother."

Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was listening, then he turned his face to his wife addressing her gently:

"We are not going, we will never leave Karbalā'."

Muḥammad 'Ali opened his mouth surprisingly:

"But, father, you have ordered me to be ready for travel."

"Yes, that is right."

"What happened then?"

"O son! I saw in dreaan my master al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) addressing me admonishingly : "Why are you departing me? I am displeased with you on doing this." So I have made up my mind to stay.

A Call for Starting:

Muḥammad ‘Alī exclaimed questioning:

“Why have you hastened to go father?”

“I have a mission ... I have to visit al-Shaykh Yūsuf.”

“But father, aren’t you fearing being ventured by his disciples? The atmosphere is alarming of danger:

“No time is there for thinking ... in fact I am commanded to do so.”

“Let me accompany you, father.”

“No need for this ... al-Ḥusayn won’t let me alone, he shall verily help me overcome these Akhbāris.

I will confer with them with that which is the best.

Thus a chapter of debate started between al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir and al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī.

Al-Ḥājj Karim:

Al-Ḥājj Karim, addressing the pilgrims’ shoe-keeper at the holy shrine, said:

“Do you know that man?”

“Who?”

Al-Ḥājj Karim pointed at a middle-aged man.

That man said:

“Not much, but I heard Mullā ‘Alī al-Wā‘izī talking well of him, telling of his being among the upright men. Seemingly he is the son-in-law of the late al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī.

“He seems to be among the *‘ulamā’*.”

“How came you to know?”

“He is debating all the time with al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Bahrāni at the shrine. They continue their discussion after *maghrib* and ‘*ishā*’ prayers, up to the end of night. After closing the shrine gates, they move to the portico, and when closing its doors, they move to the courtyard. On closing the courtyard doors, they betake themselves out of it, whereat we leave them and go home. The next morning, as we come to open the courtyard doors, we find them engaged in debate. When the dawn call (for prayer) he raised, the Shaykh goes to perform the prayer, going home then; while this man — as you see — remains standing here after prayer.

Since the Day:

Muḥammad ‘Ali picked up the last morsel of his food, saying (to his father):

“For a long time, you come home so late, father, and sometimes you stay out till morning ... are you still debating with al-Shaykh?”

“Yea.”

“But father, al-Shaykh — seemingly — never intends to submit to truth; otherwise, what is the use of this?”

“Yes, I think that the debate was sufficient, but seemingly he is aware of what are the Akhbāris feeling of fanaticism, since he is Akhbāri to the bone. But I think too that al-Shaykh is convinced now with the arguments and proofs I cited for him.

“Why doesn’t he show this?”

“He is afraid of the ignorants.”

“What to do then?”

“You will soon realize the fruits of this long debating with him.”

“At what time?”

“Today, at the holy shrine, at the end of al-Shaykh Yūsuf’s class.”

“Let me come with you father.”

“I never mind if you wish.”

“Me too father.”

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn voiced his readiness.

O son, you too can come.

What Do You Want O Man?

It was the first hour of afternoon (*‘aṣr*), when Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir entered the courtyard (*ṣaḥn*), with his two sons. Muḥammad ‘Ali asked:

“What do you intend to do, father?”

“Nothing actually, we will wait in this place.”

“What then?”

“(We wait) till al-Shaykh Yūsuf finishes his lesson, and all knowledge-seekers depart the place.”

“O ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, go and have a look ... the class may be finished now.”

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn set out to the holy shrine, and soon returned, saying:

“The lesson is over, father and the disciples are leaving.”

Thereat al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir rose and loudly shouted:

“O people, I am Allah’s trustee over you.”

People turned their paces toward the voice with astonishment, and soon they gathered around him, looking up for information.

One of the knowledge-seekers exclaimed:

“What are you after, O man?”

“Nothing...I just ask al-Shaykh Yūsuf to vacate the lesson seat for me, and order his disciples to learn under me.”

A shaykh, advanced in years, sadly said:

“May Allah make your end well!”

One of the knowledge-seekers whispered to his friend.

Let’s go, I supposed him to be a sane man, he is unsatisfied with the lesson chair, but asking to have the disciples even!

A middle-aged man, on whose forehead there were traces of prostration, raising his head up to the sky, murmured with the supplication:

“My God, shower Your mercy upon us and protect us against the mischiefs of our souls, enjoining unto evil. Look how loving the high rank and headship, and jealousy have changed people.”

Yūsuf Gives His Regards:

Al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Baḥrānī’s house was swarming with the disciples, among whom appeared Sayyid Mahdī al-Brūjerdī and Mirzā Muḥammad Mahdī al-Shahristānī.

Sayyid Mahdī said to his teacher:

“Have you heard what is uttered by al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir at the courtyard?”

Al-Shaykh Yūsuf smiled:

“What has he said?”

“He said that he being Allah’s trustee over us.”

“The man said the truth, what was your reply?”

“Some of us have uttered meaningless words, and Sayyid ‘Ali questioned him: What do you want?”

“What was he after?”

“He said that he demanded al-Shaykh Yūsuf’s (teaching) rostrum, and to order his (Shaykh’s) students to learn under him.”

“You, O Sayyid Mahdi, and Sayyid Muḥammad, both are my most outstanding disciples ... go away toward him and announce: From now on he will be the teacher. Then he turned his face toward the multitudes of the knowledge-seekers exclaiming:

“Dear students, he (Sayyid Bāqir) will be your teacher.”

One of the students nervously disapproved:

“Do you retreat fighting so soon?!” We can dismiss him from Karbalā’, if you command us to do so.”

“I am undertaking what I see to be my duty. He is a knowledgeable man and competent for teaching. I am duty-bound, as I said, to leave my place for him, so you have to be under his disposal and benefit from his knowledge.

What Do You Say Sir?

“Yea, as I told you, one should never retreat the battle-field, as by doing so he will give his foe a good opportunity for defeating him, causing him to feel having strength and self-confidence.

Mirzā Kamal al-Rashti, surprisingly, inquired:

“O Sayyid Taqī, what happened? I haven’t attended the class, has any accident occurred?”

“Accident?! You can say it is a disaster. This man who came from Behbahān to Karbalā’, and al-Shaykh Yūsuf has been kind to him by granting him the teaching seat, is daring to forbid attending the classes of al-Shaykh Yūsuf or praying behind him. I would like to reciprocate him the twice of his act, and that we expel him from Karbalā’ so violently.

In the meantime, al-Shaykh Yūsuf entered with water drops falling down from his face due to taking ablution.

They preceded him in salutation and receiving him, and Sayyid Taqi immediately said to him:

“O Shaykh, you have previously said:

Retreating the (battle) field is an improper act:

Al-Shaykh interrupted him with a smile:

“I have heard whatever you uttered while taking ablution. Why do you talk so loudly that your neighbours can hear you? Truly, al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir is a man of a lofty rank.

“That who refuses to be thankful for good (*ma’rūf*), forbidding then praying behind that who did him good, how can be counted noble?!”

“He has his own proof for this, I have talked to al-Sayyid, never sensing his following the desire, and his verdict is quite justifiable.”

Mirzā Kamāl, who kept silent all that time, put forth this question:

“What are you saying, our master? Shall we learn under him?”

Sayyid Taqi angrily said:

“Or rather say: Is prayer behind him counted valid?”

“On my part, I permit my disciples to attend his classes and pray behind him.”

“But, our teacher, he considers praying behind you to be unlawful (*ḥarām*).

“He has exposed his legal judgement, and me too.”

Each one of us has undertaken his duty.

The Congratulations:

After finishing his lessons, al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, on his way home, was asked by ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn:

“Should I extend congratulations, father?”

“What for?”

“For this triumph.”

“Was there any war, or triumphant?!”

“What do you say, father? I myself have heard today Sayyid Muḥammad Mahdī al-Shāhristāni, the most notable disciple of al-Shaykh Yūsuf, telling of your being an *‘allāmah*, or rather all the disciples believe you to be so too.”

“There is no difference between fulfilling the duty and victory. Do you think all that which took place, was done by me?”

“Certainly, this is the product of those long nights of investigation.”

“You are quite mistaken, my son; there are hundreds of men resembling Muḥammad Bāqir in being unable to attain this position. All this was with Allah’s help and al-Shaykh Yūsuf’s support, or rather Allah alone has showered this bounty upon us.

“O father, you show much modesty, and only Allah has knowledge of the praiseworthy act you have done.”

“My son, if congratulations should be given, the only one deserving them is al-Shaykh Yūsuf, who has overcome his desires, being unbeguiled by the temptation of owning a high post and other worldly lusts.

The Plague:

As al-Ḥājj Karīm, the attendant at al-Ḥusayn’s shrine, sighted a new funeral procession, he sadly murmured:

“We are Allah’s own and unto Him we return.”

Addressing his companion, he added:

“Look at the results of the epidemic ... this is the fifth hearse arriving here.”

“Rather, it is the sixth one, O Ḥājj.”

“What difference it makes? It is the plague. About its symptoms, I heard Mirzā Muḥammad al-Ḥakīm say: It starts with a headache, followed by a fever, an intense shiver, and then hallucination. Finally a swelling protrudes at the thigh or armpit or neck as big as an orange. Fortunately this kind of plague differs with the black plague, otherwise the tragedy would have been greater.”

“Whose bier is this? A large number of scholars are seen behind it!”

“I think it to be of al-Shaykh Yūsuf, I heard Mullā Ibrāhīm announce his death.”

“So let’s perform prayer (*ṣalāt al-mayyit*) upon him!”

They rushed toward the place.

Al-Ḥājj Karīm asked:

“What are you waiting for? Aren’t you going to pray upon him?”

Mullā Ibrāhīm replied:

“He has willed that al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Behbahāni perform prayer upon him.”

In the meantime, it was announcement about the arrival of al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, who immediately began the prayer.

Bright Visions:

It was the fifteenth of Sha‘bān, and the house of al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was filled with his disciples.

On this occasion al-Sayyid said:

“Increase your provision of knowledge as much as you can, today is the anniversary of the blessed birthday of Ṣāhib al-Zamān who is continuously watching our deeds. So do not postpone for tomorrow that which you can do today, don’t be afraid of poverty, and strive toward doing good.”

Al-Sayyid Mahdi Brūjerdī inquired:

“Our master, how does Ṣāhib al-Zamān watch our deeds?”

Al-Sayyid (Bāqir) replied:

“Some days ago, I was honoured with visiting al-Najaf, meeting there some of its magnates, at the head of whom was al-Shaykh Mahdi al-Futūni. He put before me a question worth mentioning for public interest. He said: If someone travels to Qum intending to stay there for ten days, is it permissible for him to move through the nearby gardens, which are commonly considered a part of it?

One of the knowledge-seekers replied:

“Verily he cannot do so, since he has intended to reside at the town for ten days.”

“By coincidence, al-Shaykh al-Futūni holds the same opinion, what do you say then?”

“There should be some meditation, and right might be on the side of al-Futūni.”

“As long as I am concerned, I told al-Shaykh Mahdi that this person has no option to depart the town for even one step.

Sayyid ‘Ali al-Ṭabāṭabā’i questioned:

“Could you prove this (ruling) for al-Futūni?”

“Proving! I continued debating these issues with him for long hours of night, with each one sticking to his opinion till the problem was solved by Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Māzandarāni.

“How?!”

“He came in the morning without any knowledge of the matter, saying: I saw — in dream — the Owner of Time (Ṣāhib al-Zamān) [A] addressing me: O Bāqir! “Tell al-Futūni that the right opinion regarding the question is that of al-Bāqir”. Thus al-Futūni withdrew his opinion.

“How wonderful! Is al-’Imām concerned with us to this extent?”

Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir touched upon his beard, and solemnly said:

“More wonderful than this is that the spirits of the upright men are also watching our deeds.

Once I was busy writing commentaries on the book *al-Madārik*, refuting sometimes some of the author’s opinions. As my work was about to conclude, on the same night I saw (in sleep) the author of *al-Madārik*, and I shamefully said to him: I have misbehaved in writing some refutations, my master, if you

like to delete them, I certainly shall do. He replied: I am pleased with you, may Allah be pleased with you.

Based on this, when the author of *al-Madārik* being pleased, undoubtedly the Imams are pleased too.

Meanwhile, Muḥammad ‘Ali whispered: The time of *adhān* (call for prayer) is due.

Al-Sayyid rose for taking ablution, betaking himself then to the shrine, accompanied by his disciples.

Presage of Tomorrow:

The disciples performed the prayer and returned home, with no one left except Muḥammad ‘Ali, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn and Sayyid ‘Ali al-Ṭabāṭabā’i (who has recently got married to ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn’s sister), who have returned with al-Sayyid. Sayyid ‘Ali asked:

“A long time elapsed, but Mirzā Abū al-Qāsim is never attending the classes; has he departed Karbalā’?”

“Yes, as told by Sayyid Afḍal: He came from Iran to Karbalā’ a short time ago, leaving it then toward Jābliq. From Jābliq he went to Qal‘ah Bābū, then to Shirāz, and after it to Iṣfahān, at last he settled down at Qum. So you can call him now by the name al-Qummi!

‘Abd al-Ḥusayn, looking at him with admiration, said:

“The world used to turn its back at you, then it has come unto you with all its good, but you are still, father, wearing your ragged clothes, aren’t you intending to replace them with new ones?”

The father has knitted his brows, pretending heedlessness, saying:

“Your mother asked me to purchase some yogurt.”

‘Abd al-Husayn, resuming the topic from another corner, said:

“O father, your body cannot endure the continuous prayer and unending fasting. Isn’t it the time yet for being relieved of hire prayer? What is the use of all this, while you distribute all its fees among your disciples? Isn’t it the time to be careful of yourself?

The Sayyid bent down, picking up a stone from the middle of the road, pelting it aside in order that no one might stumble down by it, said:

“In fact, I am only concerned with myself, thinking that fasting in deputation for the dead, and distributing its fee then among the wretched who are unable to afford for purchasing their sustenance to satisfy their hunger, are things not far from taking care of the self. All my concern is about my future, which lies in the hereafter; whatsoever you spend, you will find near Allah. It seems we have reached al-Sayyid Ḥaydar’s stores...go and buy us some yogurt, as we have guests today: your sister and her husband.

Chapter 5

Mirzā Shams al-Dīn:

Al-Sayyid Mahdi al-Ṭabāṭabā'i al-Brūjerdī, Mirzā Muḥammad al-Majlisi al-Shahristāni, and al-Sayyid 'Ali al-Ṭabāṭabā'i, with other disciples were sitting in the house of al-'Ustādh awaiting his arrival, whereat Sayyid Mahdi said:

“Do you know what for al-'Ustādh has asked us to come here?”

As Muḥammad Mahdi intended to comment on the question, al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir arrived, so all the disciples stood up to welcome him. He said:

“Salām 'Alaykum (peace be upon you).”

“And peace and Allah's mercy be upon you.”

“My dear sons, I summoned you to tell you that I have become an aged old man, unable to give lectures, or undertaking much reading, so I intend to commit to you some affairs for relieving me of some of my burdens.”

“Does that mean you are going to suspend your lessons?”

“Nearly ... I will, everyday, read one line from *Sharḥ al-Lum'ah* for bless-seeking only.”

“Only *Sharḥ al-Lum'ah*?”

“Yea, and O Sayyid Mahdi, you have to go to Najaf for teaching there, while Mirzā Muḥammad Mahdi stays here, with Sayyid 'Ali and some other brothers for administering the affairs here.

Sayyid Mahdi asked:

“Where will the lessons of *Sharḥ al-Lum‘ah* be held?”

“In this house at the early morning. Now go and prepare yourselves for teaching.

After the disciples had left the house, Muḥammad ‘Ali asked his father:

“So you have stopped everything, aren’t you?”

“No, my son, I am of the opinion that the youth should undertake teaching, so that I can devote all my time for conducting the *Ḥawzah* (theological school). Further, their academic level is encouraging, as some days ago I went through a book authored by al-Mirzā al-Qummi named: *Qawānin al-‘uṣūl*, that deserved my admiration.

Also, never forget Sayyid Mahdi, who has become scholar (*‘ālim*), and Sayyid ‘Ali, your brother-in-law, who has turned to be a great *faqih* (jurisprudent). You also are in need of a teacher, while I — as you see — have almost reached my end, and it is time to sit and review all my writings, as some of them need revision and modification, lest I should cause others to deviate.

“O father, you are still in the best condition, and it is early for such an utterance.”

“Don’t be courteous, for every human being there is a destined hour (*ajal*), and I became an old man and a father of a 50-year old son. Bring me the books please.”

“They are all inside this box, numbering more than seventy books and treatises.”

“I have revised some of them, you can only read me their titles to see whether they need revision or not.”

Muḥammad ‘Ali opened the box and started taking out the books.

“This box needs to be repaired too, father.”

Then the son began to read the books’ titles:

“*Sharḥ Mafātīḥ al-Fiḥ*, by al-Fayḍ al-Kāshāni, from “*kitāb al-ṭahārah*” up to “*al-khums*”, in eight volumes; *Hāshiyah ‘alā Mafātīḥ al-fiḥ*; and *Hāshiyah ‘alā Dibājah* of the same book.

“I have finished revising them.”

“*Al-Fawā'id al-Ḥā'iriyyah fi fuṣūl al-fiḥ.*”

“I have reviewed most of it.”

“*Hāshiyah ‘alā al-Madārik*, from “*kitāb al-ṭahārah*” up to the end of “*al-ṣalāt*” (prayer).

“Put *Sharḥ al-'Irshād* aside, as it should be revised.”

“There is someone knocking at the door, father.”

“You keep on your work, I’ll open the door.”

Al-Sayyid stood up, holding his pen, and went toward the door.

“Who? Mirzā Shams al-Din? Welcome!

“Peace be upon the teacher ... there is a delegation coming from the King of Iran.”

“What do they want?”

One of the delegation members respectfully addressed him:

“Peace be upon you (*al-salām ‘alaykum*). Then, asking another one to approach al-Sayyid, he added:

“This is a royal gift sent to you from the King Muḥammad Khān al-Qājār, with his wishes. Look, Sir, it is a unique Qur’ān, decorated by precious stones adding to its splendidness and nicety, with the lines being inscribed with liquid gold.

“My sons, why do you place the Holy Books inside boxes away from people. You had better sell these stones and distribute their earnings among the poor and needy.

“What to do now, my master?”

“The holder of the Qur’ān may keep it to read Allah’s words ... you may go under Allah’s protection.”

After closing the door, he returned to his place.

“Who were they, father?”

“A delegation from the King of Iran, with a present.”

“What was the present?”

“A Qur’ān (*muṣḥaf*), set with precious stones and gold.”

What a misguidance is it! They claimed that they (stones) elevate one’s status and position, adding to his worth.

“Where is it?”

“With the delegation.”

“Haven’t you accepted it?”

“Yes, I have a Qur’ān from which I recite Allah’s holy verses, I told them to keep it with its holder to read from it. Let’s go back to work.

Ḥāshiyah ‘alā al-Wāfi, Ḥāshiyah ‘alā al-Kāfi; al-Tahdhīb; Sharḥ al-Qawā‘id and al-Masālik.

“Put it aside, I mean *Ḥāshiyat al-Masālik.*”

“*Al-’Ijtihād wa al-’akhbār, Rasā’il fi wujūb al-taqlid fi zamān al-ghaybah* (Treatises on obligation of imitation during Occultation), and *Risālah fi istiḥālat ru’yat Allāh* (impossibility of sighting Allah). Isn’t this the text of debate between you and a scholar from Ahl al-Sunnah, father?”

“Yes, it is.”

“*Risālah fi al-jabr wa al-’ikhtiyār, and Risālah fi al-’istiṣḥāb, and one on al-barā’ah.*

“Keep them aside, they should be reviewed.”

“The call for prayer is raised.”

“Be ready for prayer then, people are awaiting.”

Come Back Soon Tonight:

The last days of Sharivar¹⁶ have passed, as al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was engaged in reading, while his wife being busy in mending an old dress, saying:

“Aren’t you going to Behbahān?”

“Behbahān in these days ... have you missed your relation?”

“Terrible dreams are frightening me.”

“Don’t be afraid, haven’t we received good tidings some days ago?”

While looking at one side, he added:

“Who is that woman?”

“Who? No woman is there.”

“That one wearing a rosy dress.”

“What do you mean? This is our daughter-in-law, the wife of ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn ... you engage yourself in reading to the extent that you forget your daughter-in-law too. I will prepare supper food ... by the way, come back soon tonight, we have guests.

“Who are they?”

“Your daughter with her husband.”

“They are not guests ... tell ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn to come . After some seconds, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn entered and was surprised when seeing his father look gloomy, saying:

“What happened father? Have I done a mischief?”

“I don’t like to see your wife with such clothes.”

“What for? Our purchases are like those of other people, which are not unlawful (*ḥarām*). Allah — the Glorified — said in His holy Book: “Say: Who hath forbidden the adornment of

Allah which He hath brought forth for His bondmen, and the good things of His providing?”

“Yes, I too have heard this verse. But look at the way your neighbours are living ... our clothes and food should be like theirs, so that life hardships can be easily endured by them.

“You said the truth.”

“Now go back to your work.”

“By the way, father, I saw Mirzā Yahyā on my way.”

He intends to travel to Tabrīz, wondering about an opportune time to see you. I told him he can come two hours before sunset.

In the meantime, the door was knocked, ‘Abd al-Ḥusayn said:

“I think it is him.”

The Heavens Garment:

A cold wind blew, foretelling of a biting winter. Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir with his sons were going toward the *ḥaram* (shrine), whereat Muḥammad ‘Ali, feeling the chilly cold, murmured:

“We have never experienced such a cold throughout the 27 years we have been residing at Karbalā’.

“They are thirty-two years; you are right, we have never suffered such cold, though I am not feeling cold.”

“Why?”

“Your mother has woven me a warm overcoat, for which I am so grateful.”

“My master! My master! A pitiful voice came from a bare-footed bony-faced man, wearing worn-out clothes, saying:

“O master, it is too cold, and I have nothing to protect my head against the bites of cold.”

Al-Sayyid asked him:

“Have you got a knife?”

“Yes, Sir. The man said this and inserted his hand into his pocket.”

“O Muḥammad ‘Ali, help me cut the coat sleeve ... We have no other alternative.

“Do you cut the sleeve of this new overcoat, father? Isn’t there any other solution?”

“Cut it, my son ... you should be pleased with such a deal: the overcoat sleeve against thousands of Divine graces and Paradise.

Muḥammad ‘Ali has cut the sleeve and handed it to the beggar, while Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir was gently addressing him:

“It is too warm, and will safeguard your head against the cold.”

When his wife saw the overcoat deformed, she felt sorry, saying:

“Where is its sleeve?”

“I have donated it to a needy man.”

“Do you know how much I toiled in weaving it?”

“It is not so considerable against its reward, one day we shall die whereat the overcoat be worn out, but that sleeve will be turned into one of heavens dresses.”

Never Do It Again:

In the morning of a Spring day, Sayyid Zayn al-‘Ābidin was going through the alleys on his way to attend the class of

al-Sayyid. He said to himself: I will attend the lesson first, then I'll go to the bathhouse for taking a ritual bathing, afterwhich I'll perform morning prayer as *qada'* (out of time). What had I to do as it was Spring and sleeping being so pleasant?

He opened the door, entered and saluted.

Mirzā Hasan al-Ṭabīnī and Mullā 'Alī al-Ṭabrizī were waiting for al-'Ustādh.

Mullā 'Alī with Āzari¹⁷ dialect, said:

“You have arrived at due time, al-Sayyid is busy conferring with Sayyid Mahdi al-Briḡerdi, otherwise you might have reached late as usual.”

After some seconds, al-Sayyid entered smiling, betaking himself to his place, moving his sight over his disciples. Suddenly his smile disappeared, in place of which frowning appeared ... keeping down his face for a while, then he raised it saying:

“Today is off, go home.”

Mullā 'Alī al-Ṭabrizī wondered:

“Are you all right, our master?”

“Yes, but no lesson will be given today, go home ... but you have to stay here, O Zayn al-'Ābidīn.”

The disciples have all left the room. (Except Zayn al-'Ābidīn).

Al-Sayyid sadly murmured:

“O Sayyid! Lift the (straw) mat edge, take the money under it, go soon to the bathhouse, and have a ritual cleansing. Never do it again, and never attend any meeting when being ritually impure (*junub*).

“It was late, Sir, and I was interested in attending the lesson.”

“Never forget what I told you.”

Thereat Sayyid Zayn al-‘Ābidīn rose, feeling too ashamed, walking, with stumbling steps, toward the door.

Study, My Son:

The sun of Mordad¹⁸ was too scorching, and al-Sayyid was wearing his white dress, resting in bed. He got up and rose, walking toward the door after hearing a consecutive knocking at the door.

“Al-Salām ‘Alaykum.”

“Wa ‘Alaykum al-salām, what is the matter, O Mullā Muḥammad Riḍā? What caused you to come in such heat?

“Our master! Look there beside that tree. That man is an Iṣfahānī merchant, who has brought with him a piece of cloth, intending to gift to you.”

“I thought that your coming was for asking about a scientific issue.”

As al-Sayyid uttered this, he intended to close the door.

“I beg you Sir, to accept it.”

“What for?”

“Since he promised me to offer me a similar gift on your accepting it. Please accept it Sir.”

Al-Sayyid smiled, saying:

“You seem badly needing it, I’ll accept it on condition that you never be a medium for (exchanging) gifts, and never forget your lessons, as learning is more important than all these things.

The Dream That Comes True:

The Autumn sun was gradually cutting its way toward the horizon, and al-Sayyid's sons were busy making the room ready for the reception of the disciples. The students were coming in ones and twos for spending the thirteenth of Rajab with their great master.

The Ustādh, entered with a curved back, and a halo of light on his face. All those present there rose up as a sign of veneration.

Some moments elapsed, during which he was sitting, Mirzā Maḥmūd, the eulogist, rose chanting with his sweet voice:

Peace be upon al-Muṣṭafā Aḥmad,
Guardian of intercession in the Hereafter,
Peace (*salām*) be upon al-Murtadā al-Ḥaydari,
And his sons, the bright stars.
I have five with whom I extinguish,
The Hellfire's smashing heat,
Al-Muṣṭafā and al-Murtadā,
And their two sons and Faṭimah.

Thereat *ṣalawāt* (blessings upon Muḥammad and his Household) were raised, filling all the corners of the muddy room with fragrance and spirituality, with the glasses of sweet drink (*sharbat*) being distributed among the attendants.

Al-Shaykh Ja'far has approached al-'Ustādh, asking:

"I have read the book *Sharḥ al-Wāfiyah* of al-Sayyid Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Hamadāni, finding in it two different trends: in the first one he follows the course of *al-mujtahidūn*, while in the second one he adopts the trend of the Akhbāris.

Al-'Ustādh replied:

“I used to attend his lessons, closing before him the door of the Akhbāris in the first section, but I haven’t attended his lessons in the second section.”

Mirzā Muḥammad Mahdī al-Shahristāni inquired:

“He is known to be Akhbāri, how could you influence him?”

Al-Sayyid smiled as usual, saying:

“Who told you that I have influenced him?”

“It is obvious, your acts are explicitly indicating your position.”

“The fact is not as you say. I too, at the outset of my learning, was influenced with the Akhbāris’ thoughts, but with the passage of time I recognized their wrong way; as the proofs of *ijtihād*, are irrefutable, beside being not easily confronted.

Sayyid Mahdī inquired: You have held protracted arguments with al-Shaykh Yūsuf al-Bahrāni; how could you recover him to the straight path?

“I haven’t done so but I found him disinterested with the Akhbāri school, criticizing them saying: They never bother themselves to think, or rather they never act according to their belief. They blindly imitate (their leaders).

One of the disciples, stood in awe of him, exclaimed:

“Our master, how have you attained this lofty rank?”

Al-Sayyid kept his head down modestly, saying: I am nothing, and rather I can never consider myself in the position you have. The same question reached me from another one, and I answered him: If for every question there should be an answer, I have never desisted for even one moment from extolling knowledge and ‘*ulamā*’, making knowledge-seeking at the top priority over all other matters in my life.

A disciple, sitting beside Mirzā Muḥammad, mumbled:

“If he truly extols the ‘*ulamā*’, so why did he behave with al-Shaykh Yūsuf in that way?!”

Mirzā Muḥammad, with a low voice, whispered:

“It is said that whatever occurred was with the concurrence of both sides. Let me ask him: Our master, Mirzā Muḥammad al-Muṭṭalibi has a question.”

“No, Sir.”

Al-Sayyid then resumed his utterance:

“Watch yourselves in every act or saying, for attaining Allah’s pleasure. Never feel tired or be bored of knowledge-seeking, may Allah support you. I remember that one night at Iṣfahān, I saw in dream the Messenger of Allah surrounded by men who were annoying and harming him. I rushed toward him to keep them away from him, saluting him afterwards, whereat he reciprocated my greeting, wiping my head, handing me a half-cubit roll. I took it and set out toward Karbalā’, passing through the courtyard and portico reaching the tomb. The wonderful point here that on being honoured with visiting Karbalā’, I saw the courtyard and portico being exactly in the same image I saw in dream. More wonderful is that when I have compiled *Sharḥ al-Mafātiḥ*, its cover was similar to the roll handed to me by the Messenger of Allah in the dream.

I am almost finished, but you should be careful and strive for attaining the blessingness of the Infallible (*Ma‘ṣūmūn*).

Chapter Six

The Hard Days:

The days of Shawwāl were passing away, and cold winds were blowing through Karbalā' alleys foretelling of hard days to come. Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir, leaving behind eighty-nine winters, has been laid up at the bed of disease, surrounded by Sayyid 'Alī al-Ṭabāṭabā'i, his elder son Muḥammad 'Alī, and Sayyid Mahdī al-Ṭabāṭabā'i al-Brūjerdī, his most eminent disciple, and his envoy to the holy City of Najaf, with others. Clouds of grief and concern were overshadowing all those present there.

"Have you called in the physician?"

"Some of the doctors can identify the useful medicine and some may be mistaken. On last Saturday the physician came and prescribed a medicine that was of no effect."

"Shall we stand pinioned up in this way?"

"Abd al-Ḥusayn went to call upon one of the physicians, and he may be on his way back now."

In the meantime, al-Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir opened his eyes and uttered vague words, whereat Muḥammad 'Alī rushed for giving ear to what he would say.

The tired lips moved, bringing out feeble tired words:

"Turn my bed to the *qiblah* direction."

Muḥammad 'Alī, dispirited, came toward Sayyid Mahdī and Sayyid 'Alī, informing them of the approaching of the destined fate.

Silence prevailed all over the muddy room, to the extent that the lying patient's moaning could be clearly heard.

Sayyid Mahdi asked: Hasn't the doctor arrived yet? Muḥammad 'Ali opened the Qur'ān, embarking on reciting some holy verses, with low voice.

At that moment his daughter entered carrying a tray of herb, as prescribed by the physician. Al-Sayyid opened his eyes, while Allah's verses were spreading all over the house, whereat Muḥammad 'Ali seemed trying his best to keep off the overshadowing spectre of death.

On the Wings of Verses:

"Hurry up please, the medicine was of no effect, and my father's condition is deteriorating."

These words were desperately exclaimed by 'Abd al-Ḥusayn. The doctor scrubbed his white hair, saying:

"Has he had the combination?"

"Yes."

"You may have left mixing it to the women?"

"On the contrary, I myself have mixed it. Come with me."

As the physician and 'Abd al-Ḥusayn intended to enter the alley, they heard a loud wailing raised from al-Sayyid's house, mixed with Allah's verses. The grieved son rushed to throw himself upon the laid body, while the Qur'ānic verses were loudly recited holding with them the pure spirit up toward the Malakūt (Sovereign Power).

Notes:

1. *Chādur*. is an aba (oriental cloak) with which the woman in Iran covers her body. (Translator).
2. It is a name usually given to whoever visits the shrine of al-'Imām al-Ḥusayn (A) at Karbalā'. (Translator).
3. It is a monumental big bridge at Iṣfahān (Iran), consisting of thirty-three pillars. (Translator).
4. It is a small town at the west of Shirāz.
5. Al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Shirāzi is a well-known Iranian poet.
6. He was one of the great *fuqahā'* of his time, having his own opinion on the rational sciences. He has authored numerous books, the most known of which are: *Sharḥ Mufātiḥ al-fiqh*; *Risālah fi taḥqīq al-'imān wa al-'Islām*; *Ḥayāt al-Ma'sūmin wa amākin dafnihim*; *Risālah fi ḥukm man yaṣūm yawm 'Āshūrā'*; and *Risālah fi asrār al-'ashkāl al-khāṣṣah bi alif bā' al-ḥurūf*.
7. Belonging to the town of Kāshān.
8. It is a scented desert plant, with small leafs and short stalk, which is useful for indigestion.
9. He was an eminent *muḥaqqiq* (investigator) at his era. He has authored *al-Shurūḥ al-wāfiyah*, consisting of more than 15 thousand lines. About him al-Sayyid Ni'mat Allāh al-Shūshtari said: He is the best man I have ever seen in Iraq, and was usually visited by Najaf people for seeking blessing and asking the solutions of judicial questions.
10. It is the abbreviation of Mashhad.
11. It is the ninth month of the Iranian calendar year.
12. Meaning the four gardens.

13. Meaning a police officer.

14. The Iranians give the title "Mirzā" to whoever is born of a mother belonging to Banū Hāshim, not the father.

15. He was later known with the name Bahr al-'Ilm, and considered one of his age outstanding 'ulamā'. He spent two years in the two holy shrines teaching *al-Fiqh 'alā al-madhāhib al-'arba'ah*, giving solutions for their hard judicial questions, with which he embarrassed the Iijāz 'ulamā', to the extent that some of them said: "If the Shi'ah be right in their claim about the reappearance of al-Mahdi Ṣāhib al-Zamān, he is verily non-other than this man."

16. It is the sixth month of the Iranian calendar year.

17. According to Azerbaijan country.

18. It is the fifth month of the Iranian calendar year.