

Divine Training

Spiritual stations and virtues of the reverend Shaykh are quite evident to all those who knew him closely or those who had listened to him in his sessions.¹

The major question regarding the life of this great charismatic figure is that how he achieved such high human status. How a person, who lacked formal academic education and had no experience in *Hawza* (Islamic seminary), attained such high spiritual achievements that not only the general public but also educated scholars from *Hawza* and university enjoyed the blessings of his guidance? What was the secret of the reverend Shaykh's leap forward in his achievement? And finally: Who has trained him and who was his spiritual instructor?

The Shaykh's Masters

Although the reverend Shaykh was lacking in formal knowledge commonly acquired at universities and *Hawza* centers, he had actually enjoyed the company of some great dignitaries in scholarship and spirituality. Some great scholars such as the Ayatollah Muammad Ali Shah Abadi –Imam Khomeini's (ra) teacher² –and the late Ayatollah Mirza Muhammad Taqi Bafqi and the late Ayatollah Mirza Jamal Isfahani,³ were as his teachers. He also enjoyed the teachings of two other noble scholars: Agha Sayyid Ali Mufassir and Sayyid Ali Gharavi –the interpreter of the Qur'an and the prayer leader at a Masjid in Salsabil neighborhood of Tehran.

As a result of the same informal education, he (the Shaykh) had become quite familiar with the Holy Qur'an and *Ahadith*, and would translate and interpret the Qur'an, the *Ahadith*, and supplications, presenting very fine and accurate comments of them that others were less aware of.

Thus, the reverend Shaykh's familiarization with the Islamic knowledge was due to his benefiting from the presence of such great dignitaries and their like. However, the beginning of his leap forward and spiritual development must be sought somewhere else, which was a turning point in his blessed life. That is, when the Shaykh said, "I had no teachers", he was pointing out to this issue.

One of his devotees quoted the Shaykh as having said: "I had no teachers, but I attended the sessions

by the late Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bafqi⁴ held in the courtyard of Harat Abdul Azim's (a) holy shrine where he lectured in the evenings. He was a spiritual man. One night he addressed me among the audience and said: 'You will attain a (high) station'."

A Turning Point

To my opinion, the secret of the Shaykh's leap forward, beginning, of development, and his turning point in life lies in an event that is extremely impressive and instructive. In his early youth, something happened to the Shaykh that was very similar to what happened to the Prophet Yusuf (a). This event and what ensued was an example of the Shaykh's practical monotheism. It indicated that what the Holy Qur'an says at the latter part of the story of the Prophet Yusuf (a) in the verse:

انه من يتق ويصبر فان الله لا يضيع أجر المحسنين

(Behold, he that is righteous and patient—never will Allah let the reward to be lost, of those who do right.) (Yusuf: 90), is a general rule and is not restricted only to the Prophet Yusuf (a).

This shows that what the Holy Qur'an says concerning the Prophet Musa (a) i.e.

(ولما بلغ أشده وأستوى أتيناها حكماً وعلماً وكذلك نجزي المحسنين)

(When he attained his full manhood, and was firmly established (in life) We gave him power and knowledge: thus do We reward those who do right.) (al-Qasas: 14)⁵, is also a general rule. From the viewpoint of the Holy Qur'an all the righteous and the benevolent people are endowed with the light of wisdom and specific Divine knowledge.

A Story Similar to that of the Prophet Yusuf (a)

The Shaykh had rarely told a full account of this event; however, he did on some occasions make a brief hint at it:

"I did not have any *ustad* (master), but I said: O God! I refrain from this for the sake of pleasing You, and I restrain myself in the hope that You train me only for Yourself."

Referring to this story, the eminent *faqih*, Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hadi Milani (ra) said: 'The Shaykh had been graced with blessings, and that was because of the self-restraint he had practiced in his youth.'

The Shaykh himself had related this story in a meeting with that noble *faqih*. In the meeting, Ayatollah Milani's Son, Hujjat al-Islam. Sayyid Muhammad Ali Milani, was also present, who quoted the Shaykh telling the event as follows:⁶

"In my youth, a beautiful daughter of my relatives fell in love with me, and eventually found me alone in a desolate place. I said to myself: 'Rajab Ali! God can test you many times; why do not you test God once!? Restrain from this pleasurable unlawful act for the sake of God!'

'Then I said to God':

"O God! I refrain from this sin; and You train me for Your own in return!"

Thereupon, like the Prophet Yusuf (a), he bravely resisted falling into the sinful temptation, evaded the enticement, and promptly rushed away from the risky snare.

This self-control and avoidance of committing sin led him to insight and intuition; his otherworldly vision enlightened, seeing and hearing what others could not see and hear. He got such clear an insight that whenever he went out of his house he would see some people as they really were, and some mysteries were revealed to him.⁷ The reverend Shaykh is quoted as saying:

"One day I went from "Mawlavi" intersection through "Sirus" Avenue down to "Galubandak" (a neighborhood in Tehran) and returned (the same way) and I saw just one human face!"

How he Received Divine Training

The invocation of an entrapped young man entreating: "O God! Train me for Yourself!" was answered in that sensational situation and caused such a leap forward in the spiritual life of this holy young man that the superficial people are unable to comprehend. With this leap, Rajab Ali traveled in one night a one hundred-year-long distance (defying the limits set by space and time), and became renowned as "Shaykh Rajab Ali Khayat."

In the first step of Divine training, his eyes, ears, and heart opened up so that he could see beyond the world of matter and through the high Heaven the things other people could not see and hear what others could not hear. This esoteric experience prompted the Shaykh to believe that: *ikhlas* (sincerity and devotion) causes the eyes and the ears of the 'heart' to open up. He often asserted to his disciples:

"If one works for Allah, their heart's eyes and ears will open up."

The Eyes and Ears of the Heart

One may wonder here whether a heart can have eyes and ears. One may ask: Is man capable of seeing and hearing things by means other than the physical eyes and ears?

The answer is, "yes", it is true. The Islamic *hadiths*– narrated by both Shi'as and Sunnis –have given positive answers to this question. Hereby, some examples are given in this respect:⁸ The Holy prophet (s) said:

"ما من عبد الا وله في وجهه عينان يبصر بهما امر الدنيا، وعينان في قلبه
يبصر بهما أمر الآخرة، فاذا أراد الله بعبد خيراً فتح عينيه اللتين في قلبه،
فأبصر بهما ما وعده بالغيب، فأمن بالغيب على الغيب"

"There is no servant (human being) except that they have two eyes on their faces to see the worldly things with, and two eyes in their hearts to see the affairs of the Hereafter. Whenever God wants the good of a servant, He opens two eyes in their hearts by which they can see His promised bounties and believe in the Unseen through their unseen eyes."⁹

And in another *hadith*, the Holy Prophet (s) said:

"لولا تمزّع قلوبكم وتزيدكم في الحديث لسمعت ما أسمع"

"If your hearts were not dispersed and you were not so loquacious, you would undoubtedly hear what I hear."¹⁰

Similarly, Imam al-Sadiq (a) said:

"ان للقلب أذنين: روح الايمان يساره بالخير، والشيطان يساره بالشر، فايهما
ظهر على صاحبه غلبه"

"Verily the heart has two ears: the Spirit of Faith whispers good in one and the Satan whispers evil in the other one. Thus, anyone of those that wins over the other will dominate him."¹¹

1. In chapter three of the same part, more will be said in this regard.

2. Imam Khomeini (ra) repeatedly remembered and named the latter as his Ustad (master) in Divine Knowledge. See: Misbah al-Hidayah, XXVII,46:90.

3. It is related that he is the brother of Haj Agha Nurullah Isfahani known as Agha Najati Isfahani. He was the prayer leader of the Masjid of Sayyid Azizullah in Bazaar of Tehran at the beginning of Reza Shah's reign. About his sermons, it is quoted from the late Shaykh Rajab Ali who said: "His minbars (sermons) produce lovers of God." Because of his opposition to Reza

Khan, he was exiled to Isfahan where he was martyred and buried in "Takht-i Fulad" cemetery. Dr. Abul Hasan Shaykh said: 'Once the reverend Shaykh and I went to Takht-i Fulad cemetery. We sat down beside a grave. The Shaykh said: "The man buried here had been my master."

'Hujjatul Islam Karimi has quoted Ayatollah Kazim Assar as narrating an interesting Karamat that Ayatollah Mirza Jamal Isfahani had been graced with by Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (a) as follows:

Hadrat Ayatollah Assar was a great teacher of Asfar in Shahid Mutahhari Islamic Seminary (formerly called Sipahsalar), and I, Shaykh Karam Ali Karimi, passed the six year-course of the seminary with him and some other teachers. The first miracle about Mirza Jamal Isfahani was told to us at our Asfar lesson by Ayatollah Assar while he was shedding tears: "Hadrat Ayatollah Haj Agha Jama1 Isfahani (ra), who was exiled by Reza Khan Pahlavi to Tehran and was the prayer leader of Masjid Haj Sayyid Azizullah in Bazaar, used to teach at Marvi Islamic seminary. His teaching in that Madrasa was so fascinating and rich in content that his classes were always overcrowded with scholars and learned students, to the extent that some of the prayer leaders felt highly envious toward him.' So the latter held a meeting in which they declared that he (Ayatollah Isfahani) was illiterate and deceived the clerics he had gathered around him. They made an arrangement to test Haj Agha Jamal in three topics: Philosophy, fiqh, and usul. I was assigned to test him in philosophy, i. e., Asfar, and two others-whose names I do not remember-were supposed to examine him in fiqh and usul. The three of us arranged to attend his class, sit at separate places, and each ask him our questions during his lessons.'

I (Assar) had taken a copy of Asfar with me. When Haj Agha Jama1 Isfahani was explaining a philosophical viewpoint, I brought up a question from Asfar finding fault with his viewpoint. He looked at me and said: "I did not answer your question in such a way. You go on and open Asfar at random (by the way of istikhara (bibliomancy)) and read the first of the page."

I did so and read the top sentence of a page. He said: "That is enough" and then began to recite the whole page word by word by heart and translated it. Then he said: "You have come here to test me? I have nothing of my own; whatever I have is (bestowed on me) by the Mawla (Imam) of the pious, Ali ibn Abi Talib (a)."

Then Haj Agha Jamal related an account of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali's (a) miracles: "I studied in Najaf for forty years, achieving the rank of ijtilhad and high levels of scholarship. My father sent some of the scholars and traders from Isfahan to Najaf to bring me back to Isfahan to administer the Hawzah as head and chairman. The night after which we were supposed to leave Najaf for Iran, all of a sudden I came down with typhoid fever and fell unconscious for forty days. When I regained consciousness, I found that I had forgotten all the things I had learned since childhood up to then; absolutely oblivious of all my accumulated knowledge.

I got bitterly distressed and went to (the holy shrine of) Amir al Mu'minin Ali (a) and began to wail and lament, saying to my Mawla: "My lord! For forty years I acquired much scholarly provision from the widespread expanse of your 'ilm (Divine knowledge) but know that I want to return home, I am empty-handed. You are an ocean of Magnanimity." (The late Assar was crying while narrating.) Then the late Ayatollah Haj Agha Jamal said: "I wept and lamented so much that I felt drowsy and then fell asleep. (In my sleep) I saw the Mawla Ali (a) who put a fingertip of honey in my mouth and caressed me, and then I came to. When I returned home I found I knew by heart whatever I had learned from childhood to the present."

After that' Haj Agha Jamal cried and said: "Sirs! I have nothing of my own. Whatever I know belong to my Mawla and Imam Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (a). You do come and examine me; I know by heart all the texts by the Grace of Allah (s) and the favor from Amir al Mu'minin Ali (a). Mr. Assar was crying while he said: When Haj Agha Jama1 stated this event, a commotion arose from among the gathering, and I got up and approached him to rub that nobleman's slippers on my eyes as a blessing.'

4. The perfect ascetic and the practicing scholarly mujahid. Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bafqi Yazdi who, as a result of a confrontation with Reza Khan on the issue of Kashf-i Hijab (Reza Khan's order to remove Qijab (veils) from the Iranian Muslim women), and after being beaten up by that despotic monarch in the holy shrine of Hazrat Ma'sumeh (a), he was exiled to Shahr-i Ray. He remained in exile there till the end of his life. Those who enjoyed close association with this

Divinely endowed scholar, relate many miraculous acts performed by him. His servant, the late Shaykh Isma'il told me (the author): "In the latter years of his life, the Shaykh (Bafqi) was unable to leave home due to illness. Once he asked me: 'When you go for a ziyarat pilgrimage to Hazrat Shah Abdul Azim, do you make a ziyarat to all three Imamzadehs (grandchildren of Imams-(a)) or do you say Salam (pay homage) to the Imamzadeh Tahir while you are just passing by his tomb? In that era the development project of the holy shrine had not been carried out yet, and the shrine of Imamzadeh Tahir was located off the main site. I replied to him: 'I do not enter Imamzadeh Tahir for a ziyarat; rather I just make the pilgrimage from outside of his shrine. The Shaykh said: 'This is not decent. You find the audience with the three nobles, and you visit two of them closely but visit one from a distance?! This is considered disrespectful. The next time you go for a Ziyarat, go inside the shrine of Hazrat Tahir (a) and make your Ziyarat give my regards to him too.' Shaykh Isma'il said: As recommended by the Shaykh, I entered the shrine of Hazrat Tahir (a). Nobody was inside the shrine; I remembered the Shaykh's bidding; I was about to say that he sent regards when all of a sudden I heard the phrase "Labbayk, Labbayk, Labbayk (here am I)!" from inside the darhi. "

Also in his private teaching sessions and in order to encourage his students to meet with the late Bafqi who was in exile, Imam Khomeini (ra) would often recite this couplet:

How joyful it is to attain double bliss with one act,

Ziyarat of Shah Abdul Azim and visiting the beloved (the late Shaykh Bafqi).

5. It is worth mentioning that the same verse is repeated about the prophet Yusuf (a) in sura Yusuf, ayah 22 excluding the word istawa.

6. The Shaykh had brought up some other points in this regard that will come up in the first chapter of part 3: "Private Guidelines."

7. This had apparently happened to the Shaykh at the age of 23.

8. For further information of these ahadith, see: Mizan al Hikmah, X, 4988: 3390-1.

9. Mizan al-Hikmah, X, 4988: 16942.

10. Ibid, X, 4990: 16956.

11. Ibid, X, 4988: 16950.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/the-elixir-of-love-ayatullah-muhammadi-rayshahri/divine-training>