

Appendix: Spiritual Guidance of the Imam

The life and behaviour of the Holy Prophet represent the true teachings of Islam. He was both the political leader and the social head of the Muslim ummah, and in that capacity enforced in the territory of the Islamic government the laws and the rules he received from Allah through revelation. What he said or did was the law (Shari'ah). His behaviour constituted the ethical principles. His instructions formed wise and true guidance. He not only advised the people and gave counsel to them, but also formed a model society based on justice.

To ensure the prosperity of society, Islam has prescribed executive action in this world also. It does not leave the case of those who deliver a blow to the happiness of society to be dealt with in the next world only. It punishes the culprits in this world as well. Hence leadership and governing were both an integral part of the duties of the Holy Prophet.

Anyhow, as compared with other systems of government in the world, Islam has the distinction of having an eye on the other side of man's existence also. That is why side by side with its other teachings, it exhorts the people to acquire spiritual qualities and human virtues

It is humanity, spirituality and future life which have in modern human culture been consigned to oblivion, and the evil consequences of forgetting are being seen everyday. But Islam has paid special attention to these very things, and the Muslim leadership has based its philosophy on the spiritual training of mankind.

Most people are aware of the reality of their sublime human essence, because it is so fine and subtle that it can be observed by the clear-sighted only. That is why as far as the ordinary people are concerned, this verdant land of man's existence is situated so far away from their ideas that they can neither notice it nor pay attention to it, so how can they be the leaders in that field?

When man, despite the passage of so many centuries, has not yet known even 50 per cent of the physical actions and reactions of his body, how can he be expected to understand its metaphysical aspects or to lay down a program to secure that remote objective?

Hence there can be no denying the fact that there should be a leader the essence of whose existence may have a link with the metaphysical world, and who may be conversant enough with its intricate ways to be able to lead mankind, for he, who himself does not know the way, cannot be a guide.

Nevertheless, will it be proper to make no effort to know the destiny of man or to overlook his spiritual genius and his sublime essence?

Can we take him to be a beast living in the world of appetite, sleep, passion and sex, and leave him to wriggle like a worm to meet his animal desires only?

Obviously that will not be in conformity with the high status of man.

Man has his special spiritual and celestial needs. Allah has put a special genius in his nature. He is the master-piece of creation and the bright star of the creative world. It is his duty to reach the inaccessible heights and from there shed light and energy everywhere like the sun.

Man is not a forlorn being in the creative system. Though he is a small speck, he is illuminated with Divine Light. Allah has chosen him out of all His creatures for His special favour.

We see the signs of this favour throughout the long history of mankind. It is because of Allah's Grace and Favour to man that He sent His Prophets to guide him and lead his turbulent soul to salvation and eminence.

The Qur'an in numerous verses has referred to this truth. For instance, Prophet Ibrahim praying to Allah says

"Our Lord! Raise up in their midst a Messenger from among them who shall recite to them Your revelations, shall instruct them in the Book and in the wisdom and purify them. Indeed You are the Mighty, the Wise". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2 129)

This verse shows that apart from knowledge, wisdom and guidance, the purification of soul, viz. spiritual training, is an essential part of the prophetic mission.

In the School of the Holy Prophet a number of people acquired this special training and made a marvellous and dazzling progress. Salman Farsi, Abuzar Ghifari, Miqdad bin al-Aswad, Ammar bin al-Yasir, Maytham al-Tammar, Uwais al-Qarani and many more were among this distinguished group.

Their very existence was a source of purity and uprightness. They were purged of all that was evil. They wanted nothing but Allah and saw nothing but Him. Allah alone ruled their soul, their heart and their body. Their entire existence was dominated by Him alone (i.e. they bowed down before none but Allah).

For this reason each of them was an example of a spiritually developed man and each of them rendered a great service to the cause of human dignity and the elevation of his society.

Hence moral virtue and spiritual purification are not a superfluous thing nor a matter of mere formality so that we may attend to them at our leisure and when we have settled all other affairs of our life. In fact, virtue is the builder of life, a part of it, and even much more important than life itself. By the testimony of reason and consciousness the high qualities of moral virtue and spiritual purity are so great that under their patronage man can pass from mere appearance to the reality of his human truth and, so to say, can see what is invisible.

Evidence of the Qur'an in regard to the Spiritual Life of Man

The Holy Qur'an says:

"We will grant a blessed happy life to a believer, whether male or female who is virtuous, and will repay such people according to their deeds" (Surah al-Nahl, 16:97) ***"O you who believe! Respond to Allah and the Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you (virtuous) life"***. (Surah al-Anfal, 8 24)

Evidently the life mentioned in the above verses is different from the ordinary life. It can be no life other than the spiritual life which is true human life and which can be obtained only through good conduct and spiritual purification.¹

How does Spiritual Life Come into Existence

Like all other phenomena, the emergence of spiritual life also requires the fulfilment of certain conditions. It is the outcome of man's own behaviour and actions, but naturally his behaviour and action must be in conformity with the true Divine teachings. There exist complete concord and harmony between the commands of Allah, terminologically known as Shari'ah and the realities of the world of creation and the realm of existence.

Since because of the inadequacy of our intellectual faculties we are unaware of the realities of the world and the advantages and disadvantages of all that happens, we do not know what is conducive to a spiritual life. But the Imam, like a wise and affectionate teacher, reveals these sublime realities to us and tells us what is to our advantage so that we may succeed in attaining a spiritual life.

The Islamic teachings and instructions consist of the realities which may not be ordinarily grasped by us. In order to infuse spiritual life into us and to ensure our everlasting happiness, Allah has made an arrangement to explain them through the Holy Prophet and his rightful and infallible successors.

Now if we obey the Divine commands, we shall attain salvation; otherwise we shall suffer a great loss. In this respect we are just like a child given under the tutelage of a tutor. The child receives his orders and does what he is required to do without any argument even if he does not understand the advantage of doing that. Anyhow, after completing his education, he will pass a happy life as a result of the moral

virtues and good habits inculcated in him. But if he disobeyed the orders of his tutor, he would realize later how much loss he had incurred.

Guide to Spiritual Life

There is no doubt that a guide is needed for the attainment and the development of spiritual life. Now let us see who is fit to undertake the task of such a guidance.

Naturally this task cannot be performed by an ordinary man. The guide must be a person whose speech is dependable, who is infallible, and who himself stands on the pinnacle of spiritual life.

As we know, Allah does not entrust the duty of guiding others to anyone unless He Himself has guided him fully.

The Qur'an says:

"Is He who guides to the truth more worthy to be followed, or he who does not guide unless he himself is guided" (Surah Yunus, 10:35)

A guide to spiritual life or the Imam must possess special qualities, because the function of Imamate is not ordinary guidance, which is the duty of every Muslim and is not confined to the Imam.

In the case of the Imam guidance means 'guidance by behest'. Those who have not attained spiritual life and to whom the realities of the world have not been revealed, cannot undertake such guidance.

A study of those verses of the Qur'an in which there is a mention of Imamate will show that in most cases the mention of Imamate has been followed by that of 'guidance by behest' as an explanation of the meaning of Imamate.

What is Guidance by Behest

The Imam besides giving instructions in Islamic law and guiding the people on the exoteric side of Islam, holds the responsibility of esoteric guidance also and has been given a special power and authority for the purpose.

In an esoteric way he leads to perfection those who have the required capacity and qualifications.

As this guidance is carried out on the basis of spiritual blessing and esoteric status, it is called 'guidance by behest'.

To be the esoteric guide is such a superior status that the great Prophets reached it after they had been appointed a Prophet. Accordingly Prophet Ibrahim was raised by Allah to the status of esoteric guidance after he had been appointed a Prophet.

Allah said:

"Surely I appoint you an Imam for mankind". (Surah al-Baqarah, 2 124).

As the Imam reaches the status of Wilayat (special authority) and guidance by behest, he can apply himself to the tasks which from the viewpoint of ordinary people appear to be astonishing and even impossible.

As the Holy Qur'an tells us, Asif bin Barkhia, a courtier of Prophet Sulayman could bring in the twinkling of an eye the throne of the Queen of Saba to Sulayman before her own arrival, for he had a supernatural power and some knowledge of the hidden realities of this world.

The infallible Imams of Prophet Muhammad's Family occupied a position far above that of Asif bin Barkhia.

This fact is proved by the authentic history and the documented narratives where we find many stories of the spiritual and esoteric Wilayat of the Imams of the Shi'ah.

Wonderful Power

As the Imam himself is endowed with the highest degree of spiritual life, he has a sort of power of guidance and a spiritual attraction by means of which he can influence the hearts of the people. He can mould their character and can lead them to perfection.

In history we can read the account of a number of the disciples of the Imams and see how they illuminated the pages of history with their brilliance.

The Man from Damascus

Ali ibn Khalid was a Zaydite, and as such he did not acknowledge the Imams who came after Imam Ali Zayn al-Abidin, the fourth Imam. (37—95 A.H.) He lived in the time of Imam Muhammad Taqi al-Jawad, the ninth Imam. (195—220 A.H.) He says "I was in the city of Samarra, when I was told that a man from Damascus who claimed to be a prophet had been brought there and put in prison. Ali ibn Khalid went to see him and asked him what the matter with him was".

He said "I was in Syria where I was busy in worship at the site supposed to be the resting place of the Holy head of Imam Husayn, the Doyen of the Martyrs. One night I found all of a sudden a man standing before me. He asked me to get up. I rose unconsciously and went a short distance with him when I found myself in the Masjid of Kufah. He asked me if I knew that masjid.

I said that I did and that it was the Masjid of Kufah. He offered his prayers. I too offered my prayers along with him. Then we set out again. We had not gone far, when I noticed that we were in the Masjid al-Nabi. There he invoked blessings on the Holy Prophet, and then we both offered our prayers.

Thereafter, we left that place too and set out again. A moment later I found myself in Mecca. There we circumambulated the Ka'bah, and then left the Masjid al-Haram.

After walking a few steps I found myself at my original place in Damascus. Then all of a sudden that man disappeared from my sight as if he was a slight draught of breeze which swept my face and vanished.

A year had passed since this incident when I met that man again. He took me on the same journey and we two visited once again all the Holy places which we had visited the first time.

When he wanted to leave me, I said to him: 'I beseech you in the name of Him who has given you such a wonderful power to be so kind as to let me know your name'. He said 'I am Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far'. He was the ninth Imam.

Now I proceeded to tell this extraordinary event to everyone whom I met, till the news reached Muhammad ibn Abd al-Malik al-Zayyat. He ordered my arrest and accused me of posing as a prophet. Now, as you see, I am in prison".

Ali ibn Khalid says further: "I said to him would you like me to write to Muhammad ibn Abd al-Malik about your case?"

"You may", he said: I wrote, but in my reply he wrote back: "Tell him to ask the person who took him in one night from Damascus to Kufah and then to Mecca and Medina and then brought him back to Damascus to get him released from this prison also".

I was distressed by this reply. Next morning I went to the prison to convey the reply to that man. There I saw a large number of soldiers and a big crowd of other people coming and going around the prison. I asked the people what had happened? They told me that the prisoner who claimed to be a prophet had escaped from the prison and it was not known how he had escaped whether he had gone into the ground or had flown to the sky like a bird.

Ali ibn Khalid says "After seeing this incident I gave up my Zaydite creed and became a Twelver Shi'ah, believing in the Imamate of Imam Jawad, the ninth Imam in the line of Ali ibn Abi Talib.²

Maytham al-Tammar

Imam Ali bought Maytham as a slave and then freed him. He asked him what his name was; "Salim", he said: "But I heard the Prophet saying that your true name was Maytham". "He was correct and you are also correct. My true name is Maytham".

"Then stay with the name mentioned by the Holy Prophet and give up the other name".

Imam Ali bought and freed him, but he put a bond of love around his neck so that he remained with him

up to the last moment of his life. Even death could not break this bond.

Maytham was a wonderful man. With his remarkable ability he gradually secured an honourable position among the companions of Imam Ali. He became aware of the realities and could understand their fine distinctions. He had great love for Imam Ali. He was as fond of him as a thirsty plant is of rain. He took his inspiration from Imam Ali. With him he lived and in him he remained fully absorbed. Imam Ali was the light of his heart and the rejoicing of his soul; and he was not willing to lose this rejoicing even to gain all the wealth of the whole world.

One day Imam Ali said to Maytham "After my death you will be hanged. A spear will be thrust into your body. On the third day your beard will be stained with the blood of your nose and mouth. You will be hanged beside the house of Amr ibn Hurayth along with nine others. The gallows on which you will be hanged will be the shortest. Come along I'll show you the date-palm from the branches of which you will be ultimately hanged". And then he showed Maytham the tree.

Years passed. Imam Ali was martyred. The Umayyads gained power over the people.

Maytham went out from time to time to look at the tree; offered his prayers and spoke to it thus "Tree, may Allah bless you! I have been created for you and you are growing for me".

In the year of his martyrdom Maytham had the honour of visiting Kab'ah, the House of Allah. There, he met Umme Salama, the Mother of the Faithful.

"I've often heard your name from the Holy Prophet", she said. "He recommended you to Ali", she added.

Maytham asked about Imam Husayn and learnt that he had left the city.

"Convey my regards to him", he said, "and tell him that it will not be long before he and I see each other in the presence of our Lord"

Umme Salama ordered perfume to be brought. She applied it to the beard of Maytham. Then she said to him. "Before long your beard will be painted with your own blood" (because of your love for the Prophet and his progeny).

Maytham then went to Kufah, where Ibn Ziyad's agents arrested him. When he was produced before Ibn Ziyad, the following dialogue took place between them.

Ibn Ziyad "Where is your Allah?"

Maytham "He is lying in wait for the oppressors, and you are one of them".

Ibn Ziyad "What did your master Ali say about me and you? "

Maytham "He said that you will hang me along with nine others, and my gollows will be shorter than those of others".

Ibn Ziyad "I would like to go against what your master said and kill you in some other way".

Maytham "How can you? He learnt that from the Prophet and the Prophet learnt it from Allah. Can you

go against Allah? I even know the place of my martyrdom. I also know that I am the first Muslim in whose mouth a bridlebit will be laid".

Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad was enraged. He ordered that for the time being Maytham might be taken back to prison. It was in this very prison that Maytham gave Mukhtar Thaqafi the good news of his release, and said "In revenging for the Doyen of the Martyrs you will kill Ibn Ziyad". And so it was.

Anyhow, at last Maytham was taken to the place where he was to make supreme sacrifice; to the place of his spiritual rise; the place from which he was to soar to the greatest heights of human spirituality. He was hanged beside the house of Amr ibn Hurayth from the tree that he already knew. The people gathered round him, and on the gallows he found a good opportunity to tell them of the virtues of Imam Ali.

He spoke and moved the hearts of the people. He made them acquainted with the truth.

Ibn Ziyad was informed that Maytham was defaming him whereupon he ordered him to be gagged so that he might not utter a word further.

As Imam Ali had foretold, a spear was thrust into Maytham's body.

"Allabu Akbar", he cried.

At the end of the third day the blood from his mouth and nose flowed down and coloured his beard. May peace of Allah be upon him!³

Uwas al-Qarani

The Holy Prophet said "The sweet smell of Paradise is coming from the direction of Qaran. Uwais al-Qarani, I am eager to see you! Let anyone who meets him, convey my regards to him".⁴

While people were pledging their allegiance to him in the area of Zi-qar. Imam Ali announced: "From Kufah a thousand soldiers, neither more nor less, are about to come and pledge their allegiance to me".

When these soldiers arrived, Ibn Abbas counted them. He found that their number was 999 only. He was surprised why one man was short.

In a few moments a man appeared wearing woolen clothes and having a sword, a shield, and other war accoutrements. He went direct to Imam Ali and said "I want to pledge my allegiance to you up to death".

Imam Ali said: 'What is your name?' "Uwais" he said. The Imam asked "Are you Uwais al-Qarani?" "Yes" replied he.

"Allah o Akbar! My well-beloved Prophet, may Allah bless him, told me that I would meet one of his followers, named Uwais, al-Qarani, who was one of the favourites of Allah and His Messenger. He would lay down his life for the cause of Allah and would have the privilege of interceding on behalf of

many'.5

So it was. He was martyred in the company of Imam Ali.6 Uwais is known for his high position from spiritual angle. He took pleasure in worship and had little interest in worldly riches.7

We can judge the depth of the spirituality of this man from his sayings. He says: "By Allah, the thought of death and the fear of the ultimate end leave no room for happiness in this world for a man of faith".

"People abuse us when we exhort them to do good and restrain them from evil, but we still rise for the cause of Allah".8

Qambar

Qambar was also one of those brave men who secured a high position through the influence of the spiritual power of the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali.

He was not afraid of telling the truth and following the right path. Though from the viewpoint of the worldly people he was apparently no more than a slave, he spiritually secured such a high position that he became a confidant of Imam Ali.

The powerful and piercing words with which this man of iron will replied to Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the bloodthirsty sadist, are well-known:

Once Hajjaj said "Qambar! What were your duties when you were in the service of Ali?" Qambar "I used to bring him water for ablution". Hajjaj "On finishing ablution, what did he use to say?" Qambar "He used to recite this verse of the Qur'an

"When they forgot Our admonition, We opened to them the gates of everything they desired; but just as they were rejoicing in what they were given, We seized them unawares with the result that they were left confused. Thus the last remnant of the people who did wrong was cut off. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds". (Surah al-An'am, 6:44—45)

Hajjaj "I think that he applied this verse to us".

"Yes", said Qambar boldly.

Hajjaj: "If I put you to death, what will you do?"

Qambar "I shall be lucky and you will be unlucky".

Hajjaj "Confess that you no longer acknowledge Ali to be your master".

Qambar "If I renounce his way, can you show me a better way? "

Hajjaj did not answer this question, and said "In any case I am going to put you to death. Now tell me how you would like to be killed".

Qambar "I leave that choice to you". Hajjaj "Why?"

Qambar "The way you will kill me, the same way I'll kill you in the next world. Ali, my master told me that

I'd be beheaded unjustly".

So Hajjaj ordered him to be beheaded.

Indeed, if a man obeys Allah, the Holy Prophet and his Ahl al-Bayt, he can have spiritual and esoteric guidance even today and can tread the path of perfection and proximity. For him then, there shall be no fear nor grief for because he will be a Muslim perfectly spiritual and divine.

The Holy Qur'an declares

"As for those who say that our Lord is Allah and then they remain firm in their faith, the angels will descend on them saying: Neither be afraid nor be grieved". (Surah al-Fussilat, 41: 30)

1. These verses should not be interpreted allegorically. They indicate that a fresh and a pure life will actually be granted to the believers having a befitting character. As the most conspicuous signs of real life are understanding, consciousness, power and energy, we may infer that some believers will have such knowledge and power as others do not have. We have reproduced the view expressed by Allamah Tabatabai in his valuable exegesis, al-Mizan. For further explanation a reference may be made to it.

2. Al-Irshad by Shaykh Mufid, p. 304—305.

3. Al-Irshad by Shaykh Mufid, p. 152

4. Safinah al-Bihar by Shaykh Abbas Qummi, Vol. 1, p. 53.

5. Al-Irshad by Shaykh Mufid, p. 149.

6. Usud al-Ghabah Fi Ma'rifah al-Sahabah by Ibn al-Athir al-Shafi'i, Vol. 1, p. 152.

7. A'yan al-Shi'ah by Allamah Mohsin al-Amin, Vol. 13, page 81—93 Second Edition.

8. Safinah al-Bihar by Shaykh Abbas Qummi, Vol. 1, p. 53.

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