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Lessons from the Lives of Ulema

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Anecdotes from the lives of Islamic Scholars

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Ayatullah Burujerdi (R.A.)

It has been narrated about the spiritual station of the great *marja*, Ayatullah Muhammad Husein Burujerdi (d. 1961), that he had made a vow (*nadhr*) that **if he ever uttered inappropriate words when angry, he would fast for a whole year (to train his soul)**. Indeed, he had a very lofty station.

He himself has said, “Before I came to Qom, I used to hear the voices of angels, but after I arrived here and became occupied and busy in the role of Marja, I lost that blessing!”

Ayatullah Burujerdi was a *marja* whose credentials as a supreme authority have been endorsed by Amir al-Mu'mineen (A.S.) himself. Allamah Nahawandi relates the following incident:

“When the late Ayatullah Burujerdi came to Mashad, I gave him my place in the holy shrine – that is, I asked him to lead the prayers and I stood behind him, out of respect.” He continues, “That same year, I was blessed with the opportunity to go to Najaf-al-Ashraf. The great *marja*, Ayatullah Sayyid Abu'l Hasan Isfahani, who was the leader of the prayers in the courtyard of Amir al-Mu'mineen (A.S.), insisted that I lead the prayers.

I was very surprised, that a man of the status of Ayatullah Isfahani, to whom even the Imam of our Age (A) had written a letter stating: *”Irkhas Nafsaka – Make yourself easily accessible to the people – wajaļ majlisataka fi al-dahliz – and sit in the street outside your house (so people can easily benefit from your knowledge) – waqdhi hawaijan nas – and fulfil the needs of the people – nahnu nansuruka – we will help you – made me stand at the head of the prayers and himself stood behind me.”*

Allamah Nahawandi says, “I was still wondering as to why a scholar of this great stature was following me in prayer. As I prepared to say the opening *takbir*, I heard the voice of Amir al-Mu'mineen (A.S.) coming from his sacred tomb, “You showed respect to my son Burujerdi, so we have also honoured and respected you, by making Sayyid Abu'l Hassan Isfahani pray behind you.”

Ayatullah Burujerdi had made a vow, in order to train his soul, that if he ever said something unbecoming in anger, he would fast one whole year. One day he was sitting teaching a class in Burujerd. At these times he had a great presence and a special dignity. A student began to argue with him, and Agha answered his query. He raised another objection, which was also answered. However, when he objected a third time, Ayatullah Burujerdi became momentarily angry and with an annoyed tone, he said from the pulpit, “Be quiet, young man”.

However, realising what he had done, as soon as Agha finished his class, he called that student and, in front of the whole class, **he bowed and kissed his (student's) hand and gave him a cloak and 500 Tumans (a reasonable amount in those days), and then said, “Forgive the mistake of Burujerdi! I do not understand how the reins of my soul slipped from my hands and why I asked you to be quiet in front**

of everyone.”

From the very next day, Ayatullah Burujerdi began to fast – just for one harsh word, which in itself was neither backbiting nor a lie.

Taken from the speech of Haj Agha Hashimi Najhad, as quoted in “**Karamat wa Hikayate Ashiqane Khuda**” – “**Miracles and Anecdotes of the Close Servants of Allah**”. Translated AJ/091105.

Ayatullah Shaykh Ja’far Shustari (R.A.)

The eminent philosopher and jurist, Marhum Ayatullah Shaykh Ja’far Shustari is the author of the important book of **Maqatal**: “**Khasais al-Husainiyyah**”, meaning “**The Attributes of Husain’s Movement**”. He relates the following incident about his meeting with our 3rd Imam, Imam Husain (A.S.):

“When I completed my studies at the Hawza of Najaf and returned to my home in Shustar, I found that there was a need to make the people more aware of the teachings of the Qur’an and Islam in general. As a first step, I decided to start giving public lectures every Friday. When the month of Ramadhan came, I continued with my lecturing. I would take Tafsir-e Safi (of Mulla Muhsin Fayz Kashani) with me and teach from it. I would always end my talk with a few words of *masaib* of Imam Husain (A.S.) from the book “**Rawdhatu’l Shuhada**” (“**The Garden of the Martyrs**”) because, as the popular saying goes, every food requires salt, and the salt of any religious lecture is the remembrance of the tragedy of Kerbala.

However, no matter how much I tried, I could not recite the *masaib* of Imam Husain (A.S.) i.e. the tragedy of Kerbala on the *mimbar/pulpit* without reading from the book. As a result, it did not have that much effect on the people. In any case, I persisted in this manner for a whole year. The following year, when the month of Muharram arrived, I said to myself, “*How long will I have to carry on reciting the masaib from a book? When will I manage to recite from memory?*” I knew that I had to find a way out of this undesirable situation, but no matter how much I tried, I could not manage to find a solution. I began to constantly worry about it and one day, exhausted after thinking about the same matter, I fell asleep.

That day, I dreamt that I was on the plains of Kerbala, and that too, at the time when Imam Husain (A.S.)’s caravan was there. I entered the camp and greeted that holy and radiant personality. The Imam (A.S.) seated me next to himself and then said to Hazarat Habib bin Mazahir, “Habib! Shaykh Ja’far is our guest, and a guest must always be made welcome. It is true that there is no water in the camp, but there is some flour and oil – so go and prepare some food for our guest.”

At the words of Imam (A.S.), Habib bin Mazahir rose up at once and after sometime, returned and

placed some food in front of me. I will never forget that there was a spoon in the dish of food as well. I had eaten only a few spoonfuls of that heavenly food when I woke up. I found that because of the blessing of that *ziyarat* of Imam Husain (A.S.) and *his kindness to me*, I had been inspired with a special knowledge about the family of the Prophet (SWW), including many facts and subtle details of their lives, which was not known to anybody else before this.”

His valuable book, “**Khasais al-Husainiyyah**”, contains many such details and inferences which is probably from the knowledge he received as a result of his meeting with the Imam Husain (A.S.), and which was not previously known to anyone else.

Taken from: “**Khasais al-Husainiyyah**” p. 8, as quoted in “**Karamat wa Hikayate Ashiqane Khuda**” – “**Miracles and Anecdotes of the Close Servants of Allah**”. Translated AJ/141105.

Shaykh Abbas-e-Qummi (R.A.)

The writer of the Traditions of Ahlu'l Bayt (AS)

Shaykh Abbas-e Qummi is the author of the indispensable book of du'as, called **Mafatih-al-Jinan**, (Keys to the Heavens). He was an expert in *hadith*, and for this reason, he is famously known as **Muhaddith-e Qummi**. Amongst his many other works, **Manazil-e Akhira** and **Safinatul-Bihar** are well-known.

He was a man of great piety and a sincere lover of the Prophet (SWWS) and his progeny (AS). Such was his faith and conviction, that one day, when his son was very ill, he took a glass of water, and after mixing the water with his finger, he gave it to his son to drink, saying, “Drink this my son, you will soon be better, because with this hand I have written many *ahadith* (traditions) of the Ahlu'l Bayt (AS).”

One of the senior scholars of Najaf once said to Shaykh Abbas-e-Qummi, “My foot is constantly hurting me – please pray for me.” The Shaykh replied, “If I say I will pray for you, it is possible that my prayer may not be answered if I have uttered something sinful in the past. However, I will pass my hand over your foot, because with this hand I have written many *ahadith* of the Ahlu'l Bayt (AS) and Insha'Allah Imam Sadiq (AS) will effect a cure for you.” He rubbed his hand over the scholar's foot and the pain left him immediately.

When he began to compile the **Mafatih**, some scholars of Qum advised him to use his vast knowledge to write explanatory notes on some of the complicated books, like **Kifayah** and **Makasib** of Shaykh al-Ansari, instead. “Are you just sitting writing a book of du'as?” they asked. He replied, “I will continue writing the **Mafatih**, and I have dedicated its reward to the soul of Fatima Zahra (AS), and, with her blessings, it will become **Mafatih-al-Jinan** – keys to the gardens of Paradise.”

One day he was sitting contemplating in the graveyard of *Wadi-as-Salaam* in Najaf – where many great personalities are buried. He saw that some people had just buried a man. Suddenly, for a brief moment, the veils were lifted from before his eyes and he saw angels descending from the heavens with whips of fire with which they began to strike the dead man. He started to scream and shriek in pain, but none of the mourners heard or saw anything unusual; there was a man sitting near the grave reciting Qur'an and another was distributing dates and fruits, and another was weeping, but none saw what was happening to that man. However, the terrible sight that the Shaykh saw in those brief moments made him ill for one whole week.

Source: “**Karamat wa Hikayate Ashiqane Khuda**” – “**Miracles and Anecdotes of the Close Servants of Allah**”, pp 61–64. Translated AJ/231105

Sayyid Ali Qadhi Tabatabai (R.A.)

A great Scholar and 'Arif, Teacher of Ayt. Khui, Ayt. Behjast, Allamah Tabatabai and many other Ulema

Marhum Qadhi was a scholar of the highest calibre in Najaf in the last century. He taught **akhlaq, aqaaid and 'irfan**, and was also well versed in **falsafah and fiqh**. Many great scholars of the previous generation were his students. He had a special status and piety, which enabled him to perform many miraculous acts, some of which his students have described. *One of the teachers at the Hawza in Najaf reports:*

“I had heard much about the wondrous abilities of Marhum Qadhi, but I doubted whether the stories were actually true or not, until one day, when I met him outside the mosque of Kufa. I greeted him and we spoke together for a few moments. When we reached the entrance of the mosque of Kufa, (which was facing the open desert), we sat outside facing the *qiblah* in the shade of one of the walls of the mosque, for some rest, before we entering the mosque.

We began a discussion and Marhum Qadhi related some matters about the secrets and signs of Allah swt, the definition of *tawhid*, the importance of pondering deeply on this subject and the fact that this is the true and the only purpose of man's creation. The talk continued until the call for prayers came.

As he spoke, I thought to myself, “Truly, we are all confused and totally unaware of the actual reality of our creation. How shameful will it be if our lives end in this manner? What he says is so true, and if we do not take benefit from it, then woe to us!”

Suddenly, I saw a large snake came out of its lair and began to slide next to the wall of the mosque, coming towards us. There were many snakes in that region, and people would often see them, but they

did not usually attack anyone. However, this snake came right next to us, really frightening me. I noticed that immediately Marhum Qadhi pointed at it (the snake) and said, “*mut, bi idhnillah*” – i.e. “*die, by the permission of Allah!*” To my utter surprise, I saw that the snake immediately withered away and died. Then without even pausing for a moment, he concluded his comments and then we stood up to attend the prayers.

Marhum Qadhi recited his prayers in the mosque and then retired to a side room where he used to engage in worship. I also performed some *a'mal*, and then decided to return to Najaf. Before I left, a thought passed in my mind, “was the snake truly dead or had this man somehow tricked me, as some magicians do?” I decided to go and examine the snake to see if it was actually dead. I went out and saw that it was exactly in the same place, dead & dried up. I pushed it to check – it did not move. I became ashamed of my doubts and returned to the mosque to continue with prayers, but I could not concentrate.

Marhum Qadhi remained in his room for some time engrossed in his worship, and then came out and left the mosque. I also came out and we met again. As soon as he saw me, he turned to me and with a smile said, “Well sir, you tested me, you tested me!”

Allamah Tabatabai, the author of Tafsir al-Mizan, reports the following, about his teacher:

“My brother (Allamah Mohamed Hasan Ilahi) had sent a question to our teacher, Agha Qadhi through one of his students that, “The carpet of Prophet Sulayman (A.S.) on which he sat with his entire court and travelled from the east to the west; was it a physical thing, manufactured from some components, or was it a miracle of Allah that had nothing to do with any physical object?” Marhum Qadhi replied to the student, “I do not know the answer. However, one of the creatures who was alive at the time of Prophet Sulayman (A.S.), and who participated in these journeys, is still alive. I will go and ask him.”

Marhum Qadhi set off for an area, which was mountainous. When he reached a particular mountain, a creature who resembled a human being came out, and they began to talk with one another. The student, who had accompanied Marhum Qadhi, could not understand anything of their conversation, but when Marhum Qadhi returned, he said, “He (the creature from the mountain) says that it was from the miracles of Allah swt, (through wind currents which Hazarat Sulayman (A.S.) was allowed to control) and there was no apparent physical apparatus involved at all.”

This was Marhum Qadhi, who not only was able to perform miracles like Prophets, but was also able to communicate with ancient creatures in their own languages. May Allah swt's peace and blessings be on him and on all our Ulema, (Ameen).

Source: “**Karamat wa Hikayate Ashiqane Khuda**” – “**Miracles and Anecdotes of the Close Servants of Allah**”, p40 & “**Mehr-e-Tabaan**” – “**The Radiant Sun**”, p373. Translated AJ/301105.

Marhum Qadhi was a scholar of the highest calibre in Najaf in the last century. He taught **akhlaq, aqaaid and 'irfan**, and was also well versed in **falsafah and fiqh**. Many great scholars of the previous

generation were his students. He had a special status and piety, which enabled him to perform many miraculous acts.

Brief Biography

Ayatullah Sayyid Mirza Ali Tabatabai, famously known as **Qadhi** (1285 – 1366 AH) was born in Tabriz in Iran. He completed his basic *hawza* studies in his hometown, and then at the age of 28, migrated to Najaf to learn from the great masters who taught him in the shadow of the *haram* of Imam Ali (A.S.).

In time, Sayyid Qadhi excelled in **fiqh, usul, hadith, tafsir** and **akhlaq** and distinguished himself as one of the most sought-after instructors in Najaf, especially in the fields of **akhlaq** and **'irfan**. He wrote several books, including a partially completed *tafsir* of the Qur'an, which is a commentary up to verse 91 of Surah al-An'am. Several of the top ranking *'ulama* and *maraje* of the last generation were his students, including: **Grand Ayatullah Behjat** (may Allah prolong his life), **Grand Ayatullah Zanjani** (may Allah prolong his life), **Grand Ayatullah Khui** (R.A.), **Grand Ayatullah Najafi Mar'ashi** (R.A.), **Grand Ayatullah Hadi Milani** (R.A.), **Allamah Tabatabai** (R.A.), **Shahide Mehrab Ayatullah Dasteghayb** (R.A.), **Sayyid Hashim Haddad** (R.A.) and many others.

His Extraordinary Abilities

Marhum Qadhi was a man of exceptional abilities – many times his illustrious students would describe their memories of the wondrous acts they witnessed in his blessed presence. The contemporary scholar and student of Ayatullah Khui, **Ustad Fatimi Niya**, relates the following incident:

In the days when Ayatullah Qadhi was in Najaf, Ayatullah Khui came to him and requested, “*I would like you to instruct me in some matters.*” He (Ayt. Khui) probably meant **'irfan** and **Divine gnosis** and **Spiritual Exercises**. Agha Qadhi gave him some special spiritual instructions which Ayatullah Khui faithfully followed.

Then one night in the blessed Month of Ramadhan, Ayt. Khui visited his illustrious teacher, Ayt. Qadhi, who showed him (Ayt. Khui) a vision of his future. Suddenly, Ayt. Khui saw a man who resembled himself, appear in front of him; the man slowly began to age until his beard turned white. He saw the man teaching students of *hawza* at the highest level in the Masjid-e Hindi in Najaf. He saw him beginning to issue edicts (*fatawa*) and then saw that his treatise of fiqh (*risalaye amaliyyah*) was printed. After a long time he heard the loudspeakers in the mosque of Kufa announce, “The grand Ayatullah al-Khui has passed away”.¹ When the vision was over, Ayt. Qadhi turned to Ayt. Khui and said, “**This was your life, from now till your death. You have a good future; now you may go.**”

Ayatullah Nasiri Dawlat Abadi² relates that his teacher, Marhum **Ayatullah Shaykh Abbas Quchani** narrated the following incident to him:

In Najaf al-Ashraf, we used to have special sittings with Marhum Qadhi. Usually the participants would inform each other about the gatherings and we all used to know one another. In one such gathering, I suddenly saw a young Sayyid enter the room. Marhum Qadhi interrupted his discussion with us and showed great respect to the young Sayyid who had just entered and then said to him, **“Agha Sayyid Ruhullah! Do not hesitate to stand firm against the tyrant rulers and unjust governments. You must resist them, you must oppose their ignorance!”**

This was a time when there was not even a whisper about any revolution in Iran. Marhum Quchani used to say, **“We were all very surprised that day at this conversation, but after many years, when the Islamic revolution happened, we understood what Marhum Qadhi had been referring to on that day and why he had shown such great respect to Ayatullah Khumayni.”**

Ayatullah Khumayni would often remember this great scholar. He once said, “When it came to (understanding) the deep and lofty meanings of *tawhid*, Qadhi was a mountain.”

Source: **“Karamaat-e Ma'nawi” – “Spiritual Miracles”** p9 &10. Translated AJ/071205.

1. Interestingly, Ayatullah al-Khui was in Kufa when he passed away.

2. This elderly scholar still leads prayer at the Kamar zarrin mosque in Isfahan, and conducts akhlaq classes at this mosque on Sundays.

Ayatullah Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bahlool

(R.A.)

Short Biography

Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Bahlool was an unusually gifted scholar and a famous orator of the present era. Behind his small stature, simple dress and modest manners, there was a talented, eloquent and pious individual, who never hesitated in speaking the truth as well as defending it. .

He was born in 1908 in Khurasan. His father was a *mujtahid*, and he ensured that his son received the best education and the correct training from his early years. Thus, **Shaykh Bahlool memorised the Qur'an at the tender age of 8 years, and even at this young age, one would see him giving lectures from the pulpit.**

He finished his preliminary Hawza studies under his father, and then came to Qum, where his teachers

were the *Grand Ayatullah Aakhund*, *Mulla Ali Ma'sumi* and *Grand Ayatullah Mar'ashi Najafi*. Later he also studied in Najaf under *Grand Ayatullah Abu'l Hasan Isfahani*. This last illustrious teacher told him to use his talents to enter politics and participate in the resistance movement against the dangerous policies of Shah Razakhan, the Shah of Iran.

After completing his studies, Shaykh Bahlool returned to Iran where he became a powerful voice against anti-Islamic policies of the government of the day. The government was alarmed and worried at his popularity and as a result, put him in the prison. For defending the truth, **he spent 13 long years of his youthful life in prison.** He was released from the prison in a miraculous way.

After his release from the prison, he spent sometime in Egypt and Syria, familiarising himself with the current situation, before returning to Iran. He was very active in the run up to the Islamic Revolution.

He left this world just about 4 months ago, at a ripe age of over 100 years. Ulema and Islamic Scholars throughout the world, led by Ayatullah Khamenai paid a glowing tribute to his brilliant life and work. We pray to Allah swt to Grant the Marhum the choicest place in the proximity of Ma'sumeen (A.S.).

Anecdote

In the eyes of Shaykh Bahlool, *Salatu'l Layl* (i.e. *Namaze Shab*) had a special prestigious place. He often used to say that “**in *Salatu'l Layl*, there lies the benefit of this world and the hereafter.** When I urge you all never to miss its recital, I have a personal proof of its benefit”.

This is one of the incidents he has narrated regarding his habit of regularly praying *Salatu'l Layl*: He says, “In my student days when I was in *Madressa-e- Faydhiyyah in Qum*, it was a very difficult time and we had very little money, even for our basic necessities.

One year, in which the night of 15th *Sha'ban* coincided with the coldest days of winter, the weather in *Qum* was so cold that even water would turn into ice in a few moments. That night I had gone for a *Majlis*, which had been arranged in honour of our 12th Imam, Imam al-Mahdi (A.S.).

When I returned, the doors of the *Madressa* were already locked. The doors of the *Haram* were also closed. The night was also bitterly cold. However, because of my unflinching habit of reciting *Salatu'l Layl* regularly, I stood next to the outside door of the *Haram*, and began to pray in the open.

No sooner had I finished my prayers, I saw that a pilgrim who was speaking in Turkish had come to the doors. He asked me when the *Haram* would open. I said, 'it would open in about one to two hours'. Hearing this, he said, “Because my friends are waiting for me, I cannot wait that long. But please do me a favour. Take these candles for me, and place them wherever it is dark in the *Haram*, and light them on my behalf.” Before I could say anything, he gave me those candles and a bag of money as a gift and then he quickly departed.

I took the candles and the money he gave me as a gift. When I counted the money, I saw that it was 500 Tumans, which was a considerable sum in those days.

I thought for a long time that why would a pilgrim give such a large gift to an unknown person like me. However, later on it dawned on me that this must be a divine plan by Allah swt and the barakat of regularly praying Salatu'l Layl.

That money helped me solve many of the difficulties I was facing at the time. And indeed, this is only one small example of the benefit of Salatu'l Layl, both in this world and Insha'Allah in the next.”

Source: “**Karamat-e Ma'nawi**” – “**Spiritual Miracles**” p. 33. Translated AJ/141205

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