



The Secrets of Najaf

Where the Light Descends

Based on the Lectures of
Ustad Mohammad Aleem Sheikh
Madrasa Tul Qaaim (A.S)
Karachi, Pakistan

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By

Raza Merchant

Based on the Lectures of Ustad Mohammad Aleem Sheikh

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About This Book

The Secrets of Najaf presents a series of lectures in book form, utilizing modern technology to preserve and share their insights. The content is based on lectures delivered by **Ustad Mohammad Aleem Sheikh** at **Madrasa Tul Qaaim (A.S.)** in **Karachi, Pakistan**.

The entire process was created and managed by **Raza Merchant**, including the development of the AI models used to generate this book. From technical design to narrative output, every step was built specifically for this purpose.

The process involved the following steps:

1. **Audio Extraction**

Video recordings of the lectures were processed to extract clear audio.

2. **Audio Enhancement**

The extracted audio was cleaned to reduce background noise and improve clarity.

3. **Transcription**

Custom developed automated speech recognition tools were used to transcribe the audio into text.

4. **Corpus Compilation**

All transcripts were combined into a single dataset for analysis.

5. **AI Modeling and Structuring**

An AI model analyzed the full content, identified major themes, and reorganized the material into chapters. This is not a sequential rendering of the lectures. Instead, the AI grouped related concepts into thematic sections.

This book is not a scholarly or officially verified religious source. While care has been taken to maintain the meaning and tone of the lectures, the use of AI may result in occasional errors or omissions. Readers are encouraged to refer to the original lectures or consult qualified scholars for clarification.

Feedback and suggestions to improve this work are welcome. For comments or corrections, please contact:

Raza Merchant

Toronto, Canada

`feedback@hyder.ai`

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Chapter 1

Najaf al-Ashraf: A Beacon of Divine Grace

The present-day importance of Najaf al-Ashraf is multi-dimensional, stemming from three primary pillars:

The Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (a.s.): Undeniably, the foremost reason for Najaf's eminence is its distinction as the final resting place of *Amir al-Mu'minin*, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.). Had his blessed tomb not graced this soil, Najaf might never have attained its global recognition. Just as Medina gained its unparalleled sanctity with the arrival of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.), transforming from *Yathrib* to *Medinat al-Nabi* (The City of the Prophet), and Karbala became *Karbala al-Mu'alla* (The Exalted Karbala) with the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (a.s.), so too did Najaf transcend its ordinary status to become *Najaf al-Ashraf* (The Noble Najaf) upon the burial of Imam Ali (a.s.). His presence alone elevated the city to a revered sanctuary.

The Hawza Ilmiyya (Seminary): Closely intertwined with the presence of Imam Ali's shrine is the **Hawza Ilmiyya of Najaf**, a renowned center of Islamic learning. Historically, the Najaf *Hawza* predates its counterpart in Qom. Indeed, the current *Hawza Ilmiyya* in Qom owes its very existence to Najaf; many of its prominent *Mujtahids* and *Maraje' Taqleed* (religious authorities) are direct or indirect students

of the Najaf school. When the Najaf *Hawza* faced periods of decline, scholars migrated from Najaf to Qom, nurturing the nascent seminary there. Many influential figures, including **Ayatullah Khoei**, a towering figure of the Najaf *Hawza*, have left an indelible mark on generations of scholars who later served in Qom. Today, the Najaf *Hawza* is experiencing a resurgence, revitalizing its intellectual and spiritual legacy and once again ascending to its peak.

Centre of Global Politics: For those interested in global affairs, Najaf al-Ashraf frequently appears as a focal point in political news. Iraq itself is a hub of geopolitical activity, and the personalities within Iraq who significantly influence its politics and society are concentrated in Najaf. International leaders, whether UN officials or presidents and ministers from global powers actively seek to establish ties with the *Maraje' Taqleed* in Najaf, particularly **Ayatullah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani**. This engagement aims to understand their disposition and preferences, thereby shaping policies related to Iraq and guiding subsequent actions within the country. Under the guidance of Ayatullah Sistani and the collective efforts of other *Maraje'*, the Shia world has witnessed continuous successes, strengthening the global reach of Shi'ism and elevating Iraq's stature, leading to increased respect and dignity for Shi'ism worldwide. This three-pronged significance makes Najaf al-Ashraf a renowned and respected city across the globe.

1.1 Najaf through its Names

Understanding the names and their etymological backgrounds provides profound insights into the nature and history of Najaf al-Ashraf. Beyond the common name 'Najaf,' the city has been known by over fourteen other names, each revealing a unique aspect of its character and past.

Najaf: The name itself is a compound word derived from 'Nee' and 'Jaff.' 'Nee' was the name of a river that once flowed through the area but later dried up. People would refer to it as 'Nee Jaff' – the river 'Nee' that dried up – and over time, this evolved into 'Najaf.' Alternatively, 'Najaf' is believed to be derived from

‘Manjoof,’ meaning a mound or elevated land where water cannot reach. This refers to the fact that Najaf, even today, stands approximately 70 meters above sea level. This elevation means that any surrounding water, such as from rainfall or diversions from the Euphrates River, would remain in the surrounding lowlands and not reach the city itself, earning it the descriptor of a land where water does not penetrate.

Mashhad: Meaning a “gathering place” or a “site of martyrdom.” While the famous holy city in Iran, Mashhad, is named after Imam Ali Reza (a.s.), Najaf too bears this name. Paradoxically, once a desolate and barren land, Najaf now boasts a population exceeding six million, a testament to the transformative power of Imam Ali’s presence. No one in antiquity, seeing its barrenness, could have predicted its future as a bustling metropolis.

Ghari or Ghara: The Arabic word *Ghara* describes a sensitive or noble person, one who is exceedingly cautious about sin. The term *Gharwi*, derived from *Ghara*, refers to something slender, thin, or a narrow place. Najaf is geographically characterized by its rectangular, elongated shape, slightly raised from the surrounding land, resembling a narrow corridor or elevated path, thus earning it the name *Gharwi*.

Judi: This name connects Najaf to the sacred history of Prophet Nuh (a.s.). According to tradition, Mount Judi, upon which Prophet Nuh’s ark landed after the great flood, extended from the region of Najaf all the way to Syria. When Prophet Nuh’s disobedient son, Canaan, declared he would seek refuge on a mountain to escape the flood, Allah (SWT) questioned Mount Judi about granting him shelter. In awe and fear of divine retribution, Mount Judi trembled, fractured, and sank into the earth, transforming the land from Najaf to Syria into a plain devoid of mountains. This event serves as a powerful lesson for humanity, prompting reflection on our own reactions to divine admonition when committing sins.

Tur: This name refers to Mount Tur, the sacred mountain where Prophet Musa (a.s.) conversed with Allah (SWT) and was bestowed with the title *Kalimullah* (one who spoke with Allah). This revered site is located a short walking distance

from the Holy Shrine in Najaf.

Dhohr: Meaning “back” or “posterior.” In earlier times, Najaf was not considered a distinct city but rather a part of Kufa, often referred to as ‘behind Kufa’ or ‘the back of Kufa.’ Many traditions mention it by this descriptor. Its rectangular and elevated shape further accentuates this idea, as if it is the “back” of Kufa.

Rabwa: This term also signifies a constricted or narrow place, similar to the narrowness experienced in respiratory ailments like asthma (*damah*). This name aligns with Najaf’s elongated and somewhat compressed physical shape.

Baniqya: This name carries a fascinating historical anecdote. When Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) passed through the area that would become Najaf, it was prone to earthquakes. One night, when no earthquake occurred, the inhabitants, intrigued and relieved, discovered Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) and his servants residing there. They requested him to stay another night, hoping his presence was the cause. Indeed, the second night also passed without an earthquake, confirming their suspicions of his blessedness. Though Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) was bound for Palestine, the people implored him to stay. He proposed purchasing the land, ensuring its blessings would remain whether he was present or not. Despite their willingness to gift the land, he insisted on buying it, paying with seven sheep and four donkeys. This act, seemingly a waste of wealth on barren land, was deeply symbolic. Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) foresaw that from this very land, seventy thousand individuals would be resurrected on the Day of Judgment, entering Paradise without reckoning. He desired for them to be among those associated with his acquired land. The local people at the time spoke the *Banitiya* language, in which ‘sheep’ was called *Naqaya*, leading to the compound word *Baniqya* – the place purchased with sheep.

Wadi al-Salam: Literally “Valley of Peace.” While today this name predominantly refers to the vast cemetery in Najaf, historically it encompassed the entire city. The cemetery was merely a part of the larger ‘Wadi al-Salam’ area. With the increased prominence of Imam Ali’s shrine, the name became specifically associated with the graveyard, while the city itself became known as Najaf. It is noteworthy that

before Islam, this area was a burial ground for Christians, and their ancient slabs are still occasionally unearthed during excavations.

Lisan: Meaning “tongue.” This name refers to Najaf’s characteristic rectangular and slightly elevated shape, which resembles the human tongue.

Hira: Before the advent of Islam, Hira was a flourishing, prosperous, and stunningly beautiful city, akin to modern-day metropolises like London or Dubai. Visitors were invariably astonished by its splendor. In stark contrast, Najaf at that time held no significant value, only mentioned as being on the route to Hira. Its current fame, overshadowing Hira, mirrors the shifting fortunes and spiritual ascendance.

Baratha: Meaning “external” or “outer.” This name describes Najaf’s geographical position as an outer part of Kufa, often referred to as ‘the back of Kufa’ or ‘external Kufa.’

Hawar: Meaning “dialogue,” “discussion,” or “contest.” This name is attributed to the historical prevalence of conflicts and bloodshed in Najaf. Like much of Iraq, Najaf has witnessed numerous invasions and battles, embodying a center of continuous struggle.

Adhlra: Meaning “apology” or “excuse.” This name reflects the spiritual reality of Najaf as a place where pilgrims confess their sins to Allah (SWT) and seek forgiveness through the intercession of Imam Ali (a.s.), finding purification and solace.

These myriad names offer a composite picture of Najaf al-Ashraf, hinting at its ancient history, unique geography, and profound spiritual significance.

Chapter 2

Iraq: A Cradle of Civilizations and Prophethood

To truly appreciate Najaf, one must first understand the historical context of the land it inhabits – Iraq. The history of Iraq is inextricably linked to that of Najaf, with the ebb and flow of empires and civilizations shaping the destiny of this sacred region.

2.1 The Ancient Land of Two Rivers

The ancient name for Iraq is **Mesopotamia**, derived from Greek, meaning “between the rivers.” This refers to its geographical location between the two mighty rivers, the **Tigris** (*Dijla*) and the **Euphrates** (*Furat*). These rivers originate from outside Iraq, one flowing towards Turkey and the other towards Syria, but they traverse the entire land of Iraq before emptying into the Persian Gulf. Their life-giving waters have sustained civilizations throughout history, transforming the arid landscape into fertile plains.

It is a historical fact that major civilizations have always flourished along riverbanks or coastlines. Rivers provide essential drinking water, vital for sustenance and agriculture, unlike seawater. This abundance of fresh water and fertile

land has made Iraq a cradle of civilization, a place where societies have thrived and developed. Furthermore, living near water bodies, especially rivers, is believed to enhance metabolism and intelligence due to elements like iodine in the water, contributing to the higher IQ levels observed in people from such regions compared to those in mountainous or desert areas. Thus, the presence of the Tigris and Euphrates was a primary reason for the flourishing of ancient civilizations in Mesopotamia.

2.2 Historical Epochs and Their Impact on Iraq

Iraq's rich history is marked by a succession of powerful civilizations and empires that have sought to control its strategic land and abundant resources:

Ancient Civilizations: Iraq was home to the ancient **Babylonian civilizations**, predating Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.). These early societies laid the foundation for much of human advancement.

Greek and Persian Empires: Figures like **Alexander the Great**, though Greek, extended their empire to include Iraq, signifying its importance. Subsequently, the **Persian Empire** also exerted considerable influence over the region, drawn by its fertile land and fresh water.

Muslim Conquests and Dynasties: Following the advent of Islam, Muslim forces conquered Iraq, incorporating it into the nascent Islamic Caliphate.

- The **Umayyad Dynasty** showed less interest in developing Iraq.
- However, the **Abbasid Dynasty** recognized Iraq's fertility and strategic value, investing in its development. This era marked the **Golden Age of Muslim Civilization**, with Baghdad, the Abbasid capital, flourishing as a global hub of knowledge, wealth, and progress, often compared to modern metropolises.

Mongol Invasions: Around the 6th century Hijri (12th century CE), the **Mongol**

hordes devastated Iraq, causing immense destruction and a period of decline.

Ottoman Empire: In the 12th century Hijri (16th century CE), the **Ottoman Empire**, a Turkish-led power, gained control over Iraq. The Ottoman Caliphate, a significant force in international politics for centuries, ruled Iraq until its collapse.

Colonial Powers (Britain and France): The decline of the Ottoman Empire during World War I led to Iraq falling under the control of **France and Britain**. These colonial powers exploited Iraq's resources, particularly its vast oil reserves, which were only discovered later but made Iraq the second-largest oil producer after Saudi Arabia. They extracted immense wealth from the country, and even today, many construction companies in Iraq are American, highlighting a continued foreign influence, seemingly involved in both its destruction (by supplying weapons to past regimes like Saddam's) and its "reconstruction."

Post-Saddam Era: The collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 marked a new chapter for Iraq and its Shia majority, who had been systematically oppressed. With 60% of the population being Shia (and unofficially, some estimate as high as 80% due to non-Shia emigration), the political landscape shifted. This shift, driven by the increasing influence of the *Maraje' Taqleed* like Ayatullah Sistani, alarmed global powers, leading to ongoing political maneuvers to potentially divide Iraq into three entities: Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish, to curb the rise of a unified Shia power.

This tumultuous history, marked by conflict and foreign intervention, has deeply shaped Iraq. However, its strategic location, bordering Turkey to the North, Saudi Arabia to the South, Iran to the East, and Jordan to the West, ensures its continued geopolitical significance, as developments in Iraq directly impact its neighbors and global dynamics.

2.3 The Sacred Land of Prophets

Beyond its political and historical significance, Iraq holds profound spiritual importance as the land of numerous Prophets (a.s.). While Palestine is often called the land of Prophets, Iraq too boasts this sacred distinction, with many Prophets having lived, preached, and been buried within its borders.

Prophet Adam (a.s.): His holy tomb is located here, and it was also his dwelling place.

Prophet Nuh (a.s.): His tomb is in Iraq, and the famous well in Kufa, from which water miraculously gushed forth during the flood, served as the center of his activity.

Prophet Khidr (a.s.): He also made this land his abode.

Prophet Musa (a.s.): He was honored with the title *Kalimullah* (one who spoke with Allah) on the sacred Mount Tur, located in Najaf.

Prophet Isa (a.s.): He was sanctified on this land.

Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.): He was honored with the title *Khalilullah* (Friend of Allah) on this land.

Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.): He was given the title *Habibullah* (Beloved of Allah) on this land.

This rich prophetic heritage underscores Iraq's divine blessing and spiritual centrality throughout history. Today, Iraq is divided into 18 provinces, including the significant provinces of Karbala, Najaf, and Baghdad, which houses the holy shrines of Kadhimayn.

Chapter 3

The Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (a.s.): A Testament to Enduring Love

The history of the Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (a.s.) is as dramatic and profound as the life of the Imam himself. His tomb remained hidden for an extended period, a stark reflection of the injustices faced by the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.).

3.1 The Concealed Tomb: A Hidden Treasure Revealed

Unlike the public burial of most historical figures, Imam Ali (a.s.) made a specific will regarding his interment. He instructed his sons that his body should be carried from behind, not from the front, as angels would be supporting it from the front. They were to follow wherever the bier led, and wherever it stopped, that would be his final resting place. Consequently, the procession of his *janazah* (funeral procession) moved through the air, elevated above the ground, with only a few trusted companions following from behind. It eventually stopped in Najaf, where he was secretly buried. His tomb remained concealed for a considerable period.

This concealment was a necessity due to the prevailing political climate and the

deep-seated animosity of certain groups towards him. The *Khawarij*, those who had initially supported him but later turned against him and declared him a disbeliever, remained a potent threat. Abdul Rahman ibn Muljam, who martyred Imam Ali (a.s.), was one of them, instigated by Mu'awiyah. Even after his martyrdom and burial, the *Khawarij* and their sympathizers sought to desecrate his blessed body.

3.2 Trials and Tribulations of the Holy Grave

The history of Imam Ali's (a.s.) grave is replete with attempts by his enemies to desecrate it and attempts by his lovers to protect and develop it:

Threats from Khawarij and Umayyads: During the Umayyad era, **Hajjaj ibn Yusuf**, a ruthless governor, ordered the excavation of over three thousand graves in Kufa in a desperate, albeit failed, attempt to find and desecrate Imam Ali's (a.s.) resting place.

Attempts by Abbasids: Even during the Abbasid period, **Dawood Abbasi**, a ruler in 132 Hijri, after the grave had been discovered (during the time of Harun al-Rashid, as discussed later), commanded his slaves to exhume and desecrate the body. When they tried to dig, they encountered a massive, immovable stone. The strongest slave, after striking it repeatedly, collapsed in tears, his flesh tearing and falling off. Alarmed by this divine punishment, Dawood Abbasi immediately ordered the reconstruction of the shrine and feigned devotion to Imam Ali (a.s.) to avert public suspicion and maintain his political image. This act mirrors the duplicity of figures like Ma'mun al-Rashid, who martyred Imam Reza (a.s.) but then appointed his son as his successor, using such acts for political gain.

Threats from Arab Tribes: Another unique threat came from various Arab tribes. Imam Ali (a.s.), in his defense of Islam, had directly confronted and defeated countless warriors from these tribes in battles. Consequently, he was viewed as a common enemy by many tribal factions whose members had been killed by his sword. These tribes posed a constant threat of desecration to his grave.

This behavior was not unique to Imam Ali's (a.s.) enemies; history records how the Abbasids themselves exhumed and desecrated the graves of many Umayyad caliphs, with the sole exception of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, who our scholars note was the only Umayyad ruler who did not curse Imam Ali (a.s.).

These persistent threats necessitated the concealment of Imam Ali's (a.s.) grave for a significant period.

3.3 Rebuilding and Renewing the Sacred Sanctuary

The discovery of Imam Ali's (a.s.) grave is itself a miraculous story involving one of his nominal enemies. It illustrates how Allah (SWT) can use even the wicked to fulfill His divine plan, as prophesied in Hadith.

Harun al-Rashid's Discovery: Harun al-Rashid, the Abbasid Caliph, was on a hunting trip near Kufa. His hunting dogs and falcon pursued a deer and a zebra until they reached an elevated mound. To Harun's astonishment, the dogs and falcon suddenly stopped, refusing to approach the animals on the mound, acting as if terrified and unable to proceed. Perplexed, Harun inquired of a local resident about the phenomenon. The man revealed that the mound was the resting place of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.). Upon hearing this, Harun, perhaps seeing a political opportunity to appear as a lover of *Ahl al-Bayt*, ordered the first official construction of the grave, building a small shrine and opening it to the public. This marked the initial public revelation of Imam Ali's (a.s.) resting place.

Contributions of Devotees: Following this discovery, the dormant love for Imam Ali (a.s.) surged among his followers. Shias from distant lands, such as **Daylam**, **Tabaristan**, and **Mosul**, came forward to contribute to the shrine's development, building domes, *Zarihs*, and expanding the sacred complex.

The Safavid Dynasty's Role: The **Safavid dynasty** in Iran, particularly **Shah Ismail I**, played a monumental role in the development of Najaf and its holy shrine. Shah Ismail even requested the Ottoman Empire (which then controlled Najaf) to

cede control of Najaf to the Safavids in exchange for a substantial sum, but the Ottoman minister famously replied that “a single stone of Najaf is dearer to us than a thousand men.” Shah Ismail’s contributions include the construction of the sacred *Haram* (sanctuary) and, crucially, the digging of a canal from the Euphrates River to Najaf, which dramatically increased the city’s population from 30,000 to 60,000. This act provided vital water to the city, which had previously suffered from blockades, especially during Wahhabi attacks.

Wahhabi Attacks: The 18th century witnessed brutal attacks by the **Wahhabis** under Abdul Wahhab’s leadership, often instigated by foreign powers. They mercilessly massacred thousands of innocent pilgrims in Karbala (up to 12,000) and Najaf, and infamously cut off the water supply to the holy cities, creating immense hardship. Shah Safi’s canal was a direct response to such atrocities.

Saddam Hussein’s Oppression: The oppressive rule of **Saddam Hussein** brought another period of intense persecution for the *Zaireen* and religious scholars. Saddam’s regime actively sought to intimidate pilgrims, and there were times when only a single *Zair* (pilgrim) could be seen in the shrine, such was the atmosphere of fear. Religious leaders, like Ayatullah Khoei, were arrested and humiliated.

Post-2003 Revival: With the downfall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the management of the holy sites in Iraq shifted from the government’s Ministry of Endowments to the **Diwan Waqfi Shia** (Shia Endowment Office). This marked a revolutionary change, as management was now exclusively in the hands of Shia personnel. Since then, there have been incredible improvements in facilities and services for pilgrims, so much so that Najaf is rapidly catching up to and may soon surpass the facilities offered in Medina. A recent testament to this progress is the installation of a new, even more beautiful *Zarih* over Imam Ali’s grave in January 2024, replacing the 70-year-old enclosure.

The history of Imam Ali’s (a.s.) grave mirrors the constant struggle between truth and falsehood, love and enmity. Despite centuries of oppression and attempts at obliteration, the light of his sanctity continues to shine, drawing millions of hearts to his blessed sanctuary.

Chapter 4

The Spiritual Rewards and Etiquettes of Ziyarat Amir al-Mu'minin

Having understood the profound historical and spiritual significance of Najaf al-Ashraf, we now turn our attention to the immense rewards and practical guidelines for performing the *Ziyarat* of *Amir al-Mu'minin*, Imam Ali (a.s.).

4.1 The Profound Virtues of Visiting Imam Ali (a.s.)

The traditions from the *Ahl al-Bayt* (a.s.) extensively narrate the immense virtues and spiritual benefits of visiting the Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (a.s.):

Pedestrian Ziyarat: One of the most emphasized acts is undertaking the *Ziyarat* of Imam Ali (a.s.) on foot. For every step taken towards the Holy Shrine, the pilgrim is rewarded with the merit of one *Hajj* and one *Umrah*. Furthermore, if the pilgrim walks back on foot, each returning step accrues the reward of two *Hajj* and two *Umrah*. This immense reward encourages pilgrims to choose pedestrian travel over convenience, highlighting the spiritual significance of enduring hardship for the sake of the Imam.

Staying Near the Shrine: The spiritual merit of staying in the vicinity of the Holy Shrine is extraordinary. Even a single night spent in a hotel close to the shrine is said to be equivalent to one year of worship. This underscores the profound blessings associated with the proximity to the Imam's sacred resting place. The rewards for those who are able to stay *inside* the shrine are, naturally, even greater.

Prophets Buried in Najaf: A unique distinction of Najaf is that it is the resting place not only of Imam Ali (a.s.) but also of two great Prophets: **Prophet Adam (a.s.)** and **Prophet Nuh (a.s.)**. Prophet Nuh (a.s.) is referred to as "Adam al-Thani" (the Second Adam). Both Prophets Adam and Nuh desired to be buried in this holy land, a testament to its sanctity and their foresight of Imam Ali's (a.s.) future presence. It is narrated that when Prophet Nuh's ark passed by the *Kaaba* (which remained elevated during the flood), it circled it. Then, upon divine command, Prophet Nuh (a.s.) excavated Prophet Adam's coffin from Mecca and placed it in his ark. Later, he reinterred Prophet Adam (a.s.) in Najaf and, knowing that Imam Ali (a.s.) would also be buried there, instructed his companions to bury him alongside Prophet Adam (a.s.) in that very spot. When Imam Ali (a.s.) was later brought for burial, upon excavating the grave, a tablet explicitly stating Prophet Nuh's (a.s.) desire to be buried there was found. This demonstrates that their burials were not coincidental but rather divinely willed and sought by the Prophets themselves.

Healing Through Ziyarat: The Sixth Imam, **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.)**, has emphatically recommended visiting the grave "behind Kufa" (referring to Imam Ali's grave in Najaf) for healing. He stated that whoever visits this sacred tomb with any illness, and supplicates sincerely with *Ma'rifat* on the night of **27th Rajab** (the night of *Mab'ath*, Prophet Muhammad's ascension), will return healed and free from their ailment. This tradition highlights the miraculous power of intercession and the Imam's spiritual efficacy in granting cure to the deserving pilgrim.

4.2 Practical Guidance for Performing Ziyarat at Najaf al-Ashraf

Performing *Ziyarat* is a structured act of devotion. To maximize its spiritual benefits, it is essential to follow the prescribed etiquettes and recite the specific *Duas* (supplications) and *Ziyarats*.

General Etiquette and Recitations:

- It is highly recommended to recite all *zikr* (remembrances) and *Duas* word-for-word, alongside their translations, to ensure full comprehension and spiritual presence.
- The pilgrim should maintain a state of humility, reverence, and spiritual focus throughout the *Ziyarat*.

Specific Duas at Various Stages:

- **Dua of Entering Kufa:** To be recited upon arrival in the Kufa region.
- **Dua of Entering Najaf:** To be recited upon entering the city of Najaf.
- **Permission to Enter:** A specific supplication seeking permission to enter the Holy Shrine, recited before crossing its threshold.
- **Dua in the Courtyard:** Recited within the vast courtyards of the shrine.
- **Dua in the Portico:** Recited in the portico or hall just before reaching the *Zarih* (shrine enclosure).
- **Dua at the Foot of the Grave:** Recited while standing near the foot of the sacred tomb.
- **Dua Facing the Zarih:** Recited while standing before the *Zarih*, with one's back towards the *Qibla* (direction of prayer).

- **Dua at the Head of the Grave:** Recited while standing near the head of the sacred tomb.

Recommended Ziyarats and Prayers:

- **Ziyarat Ameenullah:** This particular *Ziyarat* is highly emphasized and recommended for recitation at the Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (a.s.).
- **Salat al-Ziyarat (Prayer of Ziyarat):** After performing the *Ziyarat*, it is customary to offer a two-*rakat* prayer for each Imam. However, for Imam Ali (a.s.), a unique instruction is given: to offer **four *rakats*** of prayer (in two sets of two *rakats*), and in each *rakat*, to recite **Surah al-Tawhid five times**. This may be due to Imam Ali's (a.s.) profound love and knowledge of Surah al-Tawhid, symbolizing his ultimate devotion to the Oneness of Allah (SWT).
- **Ziyarat of Prophet Adam (a.s.) and Prophet Nuh (a.s.):** Since these two great Prophets are also buried within the precinct of the shrine, pilgrims should also perform their respective *Ziyarats*.
- Pilgrims are encouraged to recite as many *Ziyarats* and *Duas* as possible during their stay, which is typically around three to five days.

4.3 Mafaatih al-Jinan and its Importance

For pilgrims, the book **Mafaatih al-Jinan** (Keys to the Heavens) compiled by the revered **Sheikh Abbas Qummi**, is an indispensable companion. Its meticulous compilation and profound sanctity have earned it immense respect. The *Mafaatih* is generally divided into three sections:

Daily Acts: Covering daily prayers, supplications, and *azkar*.

Monthly Acts: Including special acts for months like Ramadan.

Ziyarat Section: This crucial part, often overlooked, contains the specific *Ziyarats* for various Imams and holy sites.

It is paramount that pilgrims dedicate time to the *Ziyarat* section. Even if one cannot physically travel to the holy shrines, traditions encourage facing the direction of the Imam's shrine from afar, perhaps from a rooftop, and reciting the *Ziyarat*. This earnest intent is believed to be accepted by the **Imam (AS)**.

Ziyarat Mutlaqah (Absolute Recitation): *Ziyarat Mutlaqah* refers to those *Ziyarats* that are not tied to any specific day or occasion. They can be recited at any time the pilgrim desires, upon arrival, or even from home. Among these, **Ziyarat Aminullah** holds a particularly prominent place. It is a highly renowned *Ziyarat* and is the second *ziyarat* among the seven prominent *Mutlaqah Ziyarats* mentioned in *Mafaatih al-Jinan*.

Ziyarat Makhsusah (Specific Occasions): In contrast, *Ziyarat Makhsusah* are designated for particular days or special occasions. Examples include the *Ziyarat* for **18th Dhul Hijjah** (Eid al-Ghadeer) or **27th Rajab** (Mab'ath of the Holy Prophet). These specific *Ziyarats* are also readily available in *Mafaatih al-Jinan* and should be recited on their designated days. While copies of *Mafaatih* are often available within the shrine in Urdu, Farsi, or Arabic, it is highly recommended that pilgrims familiarize themselves with the content, especially the translations, beforehand.

4.4 Aligning with Sacred Events

While *Ziyarat* can be performed at any time, certain dates hold special spiritual significance due to their connection with the **Ahlul Bayt (AS)**. Pilgrims who have the opportunity to visit on these specific dates are greatly encouraged to do so, as it enhances the spiritual experience by aligning with the historical and sacred context of **Imam Ali's (AS)** life and virtues.

- **13th Rajab:** The blessed **birth anniversary of Imam Ali (AS)**.
- **27th Rajab:** The day of *Bi'that* (Prophethood) of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).
While this is associated with the Prophet, the deep spiritual connection

between the Prophet and **Imam Ali (AS)** is encapsulated in the saying, “**I and Ali are from one light.**” The events significant to the Prophet’s mission are inherently significant to **Imam Ali (AS)**. This day also marks **Imam Ali’s (AS)** act of breaking idols on the Prophet’s shoulders inside the Kaaba and the victory of **Khaybar**.

- **17th, 20th, 21st Ramazan:** These dates commemorate significant events, including the **Battle of Badr** (17th), the **Day of Idol Breaking** (20th), and the **martyrdom of Imam Ali (AS)** (21st).
- **17th Shawwal:** The **Day of Brotherhood** and the **Battle of Uhud**. During the Battle of Uhud, when the Prophet was surrounded by enemies, he called out “**Ya Ali Madad!**” (Oh Ali, help me!). This day also miraculously marks **Radd al-Shams** (the returning of the sun) for **Imam Ali (AS)**, demonstrating his power not only to defeat enemies in battle but also to command celestial bodies.
- **1st Dhul Hijjah:** The day of the mission to deliver **Ayat al-Bara’at** (Chapter 9, Repentance). Initially, someone else was sent, but Allah commanded that **Imam Ali (AS)** deliver these verses, signifying his elevated status.
- **9th Dhul Hijjah:** The **Day of Arafah**, a day of immense supplication and spiritual significance. This day also commemorates the divine command to **close all doors to the Prophet’s Mosque except the door of Imam Ali’s house**, highlighting his purity and proximity.
- **18th Dhul Hijjah:** **Eid al-Ghadeer**, the pivotal day when the Prophet (PBUH) declared **Imam Ali (AS)** as his successor.
- **24th Dhul Hijjah:** The **Day of Mubahah**, when the **Ayat al-Wilayah** (Verse of Guardianship) was revealed, and **Imam Ali (AS)** gave his ring in charity while in prayer.
- **25th Dhul Hijjah:** The day of the revelation of **Surah al-Insan** (Chapter 76, **The Human Being**), which describes the **Ahlul Bayt’s (AS)** act of fasting for three days and giving their food to the needy. This day also marks the

marriage of Lady Fatima (AS) and the assumption of **Imam Ali's (AS)** caliphate.

- **1st Rabi al-Awwal: Shab-e-Hijrat** (Night of Migration), when **Imam Ali (AS)** courageously slept in the Prophet's bed to protect him, a night when he experienced profound peace.
- **17th Rabi al-Awwal: The birth anniversary of the Holy Prophet (PBUH).**
- **15th Jamadi al-Ula: The conquest of Basra.**

These dates offer a profound opportunity to reflect on **Imam Ali's (AS)** virtues, miracles, and historical contributions. Even if one cannot visit on these specific dates, any opportunity to perform *Ziyarat* should be embraced.

4.5 The Inner Journey

For a truly transformative *Ziyarat* experience, it is highly recommended that pilgrims, whether going for *Ziyarat* or performing *duas* at home, read the translations of the prayers and *Ziyarats* at least once, twice, or even ten times. The aim is to internalize the meanings and concepts so deeply that when reciting the Arabic text, the translation spontaneously comes to mind. This profound understanding elevates the spiritual enjoyment and connection.

Pilgrims are encouraged to undertake this "homework" a week, two weeks, or even a month before their trip. By familiarizing themselves with the translations of all the *Ziyarats*, *azkar*, and *duas* they intend to recite, they can avoid mechanical recitation. Instead, their attention will be fully focused on the meaning of their supplications, facilitating the acquisition of true spirituality. Just as one instantly recalls the translation of **Surah al-Fatiha**, **Surah al-Ikhlās**, **Surah al-Kawthar**, or **Surah al-Qadr** while reciting them, similar practice with the *Ziyarats* will ensure that the essence of each phrase resonates within the heart.

Chapter 5

Entering the Holy Shrine: Adherence to Sacred Protocol

Upon entering the holy *haram*, certain protocols are observed to show utmost respect and reverence.

Entering from the Foot Side

A crucial etiquette, deeply rooted in both wisdom and reverence, is to **enter the shrine from the *Pa'eendi***, or the foot side of the Imam's grave. This is based on the principle that when one stands before another, especially a revered personality, it is respectful to face them without one's feet pointing towards them. By entering from the *Pa'eendi*, the pilgrim ensures they approach the **Imam (AS)** in a manner that expresses humility and honor, avoiding any inadvertent disrespect by having their feet point towards the sacred head. The golden *Iwan* (porch) and the golden minarets serve as directional markers, indicating the approach to the *Pa'eendi* side of the **Imam's (AS)** holy tomb.

Exiting with Reverence: The Backwards Step

Just as entry is marked by specific etiquette, so too is departure from the holy *zarih*. The established and revered practice among scholars and pilgrims is to **exit the sacred space by walking backward**, without turning one's back to the

zarih. This act of reverence ensures that the pilgrim does not turn their back on the **Imam (AS)**, maintaining a continuous posture of respect. One should return to the *Pa'eendi* side from where they entered and begin their backward movement from there. This ensures that the *zarih* remains within one's field of vision for as long as possible, affirming unwavering respect and connection.

The Power of Tasbeeh

Upon arriving in Najaf or Karbala, a simple yet profoundly impactful act is to purchase a **tasbeeh** (prayer beads). Hold it in your hand, offer one to your child, spouse, parent, or sibling, and make it a habit to keep it in hand throughout your stay. This constant presence of the *tasbeeh* serves as a perpetual reminder of one's purpose: to engage in the remembrance of Allah and to absorb the spiritual essence of the **Imam (AS)**. Unlike other contexts where carrying a *tasbeeh* might seem unusual, in the holy cities, it is a natural expression of devotion.

The Efficacy of Ya Ali and Nad-e-Ali

For those who may find long *duas* challenging, shorter, yet powerful *azkar* are available:

Ya Ali (12,000 times): This *dhikr* (remembrance) is highly recommended and widely tested for the fulfillment of needs. Whether facing challenges related to sustenance, progeny, honor, relationships, or debt repayment, reciting “**Ya Ali, Ya Ali, Ya Ali**” twelve thousand times is considered incredibly potent. This practice is mentioned in the book **Alfeen Mujarrabat (Two Thousand Tested Prescriptions/Remembrances)** by Ayatollah Abdul Karim Kashmiri. Ayatollah Kashmiri, buried in the shrine of Sayyida Masuma (AS), was a highly revered spiritual figure in his time, so much so that even Ayatollah Khoi would seek *istikharah* from him.

Nad-e-Ali (110 times): Reciting this short supplication 110 times is also highly effective for seeking fulfillment of needs from Allah.

Tasbeeh-e-Arba'a: Frequent recitation of **Tasbeeh-e-Arba'a** (*Subhanallah, Walham-*

dulillah, Wala Ilaha Illallah, Wallahu Akbar) is also encouraged.

Prayers for Spiritual Ascent and Fulfillment of Needs

In addition to *dhikr*, several specific prayers are prescribed:

Dua before the head of the Imam's grave: After completing the initial *Ziyarat*, stand before the **Imam's (AS)** head and recite fourteen times, "By the right of **Lady Fatima (AS)**, her father, her husband, and her two sons, and by the hidden mysteries within them, O Allah, I ask You for [mention your need]." This heartfelt supplication is believed to lead to the fulfillment of desires.

Major Duas: Pilgrims should endeavor to recite significant *duas* like **Dua Kumayl**, **Dua Jawshan-e-Kabir**, and **Dua Tawbah**. The typical stay of five days, equating to over 100 hours, provides ample time for these acts of worship, which collectively may only take a few hours. This is far from the common misconception that after initial *Ziyarat*, one should solely focus on sightseeing or shopping.

Namaz Ja'far Tayyar: This **two-rakat** prayer is highly meritorious.

Namaz Imam Zamana: A **two-rakat** prayer where **Surah Yaseen** is recited in the first *rakat* and **Surah Rahman** in the second. If one does not know them by heart, they can be read from a copy.

Namaz Amir al-Mu'minin: A **four-rakat** prayer performed in two sets of two *rakats*. In each *rakat*, **Bismillah** is recited fifty times.

Namaz Hajaat (Prayer for Needs): This two-rakat prayer is particularly potent for addressing major problems or grave misfortunes. In each *rakat*, after *Surah al-Fatiha*, seven surahs are recited: the four *Qul* surahs (**Ikhlas**, **Kafirun**, **Falaq**, **Nasr**), plus **Surah al-Qadr**, **Surah an-Nasr**, and **Surah al-A'la**. After completing this prayer, it is believed that whatever one asks of the **Imam (AS)** will be granted.

Reciting **Salawat (Durood)** upon **Muhammad and the Household of Muhammad (PBUH)** is also always beneficial and brings blessings.

Chapter 6

Revered Personalities and Sacred Sites within the Haram

Upon entering the holy *haram*, the initial and paramount *Ziyarat* is directed towards **Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS)**. Once this profound act of reverence is completed, the pilgrim's attention extends to the two venerable Prophets who share this sacred resting place: **Prophet Adam (AS)** and **Prophet Nuh (AS)**. These three *Ziyarats* are generally performed in a single session.

After this, one may choose to explore the surrounding areas of the *haram*. This exploration is enriched by acknowledging and appreciating those who facilitated his *ma'rifat* for us. These are the scholars and historians who compiled texts and elucidated the teachings and virtues of the **Ahlul Bayt (AS)**. Similarly, contemplating the lives of his followers and the scholars who served his cause further elevates the spiritual experience.

The holy shrine of **Imam Ali (AS)** is not merely a single structure but a complex interwoven with profound history and spiritual significance. The entire *haram* is approximately rectangular or square. Entering from **Bab-e-Kabir** (or **Bab-e-Imam Ali Reza**), one should generally proceed in an anti-clockwise direction to explore the various sites. There are approximately fifteen distinct sites within the *haram* that pilgrims should endeavor to visit. It is highly recommended to visualize these

locations, perhaps by mentally capturing their image before the journey, to avoid getting lost and to ensure no significant site is overlooked. Each site offers a unique narrative and connection to the divine.

6.1 The Golden Iwan (*Iwan-e-Tila*)

The **Iwan-e-Tila**, or the **Golden Porch**, and the two golden minarets, which comprise over fourteen thousand gold bricks, mark the direction of the foot side approach to **Imam Ali's (AS)** holy *zarih*. This golden facade itself is associated with a remarkable miracle. A poor man, visiting the shrine, humbly requested **Imam Ali (AS)** for a single brick of gold. Miraculously, a golden brick appeared from the sky and fell within the *haram*. When pilgrims saw it, they rushed to claim a share, leading to a dispute. The matter was brought before the *marja' at that time*, who instructed the man to take the brick, confirming its divine origin. This story underscores the boundless generosity of **Imam Ali (AS)**, who swiftly grants the requests of those who seek with sincere hearts. It highlights that true piety is not always a prerequisite for receiving divine blessings; sometimes, sincere supplication suffices.

6.2 Bab-e-Kabir (Gate of Imam Ali Reza)

Bab-e-Kabir, also known as **Bab-e-Imam Ali Reza** or **Bab-e-Sahib**, is the main entrance to **Imam Ali's (AS)** shrine. It is named **Bab-e-Imam Ali Reza** because if one exits this gate and continues in that direction, they would eventually reach the shrine of **Imam Ali Reza (AS)** in Iran. This gate is surmounted by a large clock tower, whose chimes were once heard throughout the city of Najaf, making it the oldest clock tower in Iraq. During dawn, **Bab-e-Kabir** is notably illuminated, guiding pilgrims for the morning prayers. After *Iftar* during Ramadan, food is often distributed near this gate, indicating the time for breaking fast.

6.3 Bab-e-Muslim bin Aqeel

Adjacent to **Bab-e-Kabir** is a smaller gate known as **Bab-e-Muslim bin Aqeel**. Its name signifies that if one passes through it and continues walking, they will reach the very spot in Kufa where **Muslim ibn Aqeel (AS)**, the envoy of **Imam Hussain (AS)**, first entered the city. This gate thus serves as a powerful reminder of his historical arrival. In the past, a market for tailors (*khayyateen*) where *aba* (cloaks) and *qaba* (outer garments) were sewn existed nearby, but it has since been removed due to expansion and renovation.

6.4 Masjid Khazra

Moving anti-clockwise from **Bab-e-Muslim bin Aqeel**, one encounters the rectangular structure of **Masjid Khazra**. This mosque was built by a pious woman named Khazra, who was the sister of **Imran bin Shahin**. Another historical account suggests that an individual from India cultivated greenery within the mosque's premises, leading to its name, "Khazra" (meaning green).

Beyond its historical background, **Masjid Khazra** holds immense importance as the site where **Ayatollah Khoi**, a towering figure in Islamic scholarship, delivered his advanced jurisprudence lessons (*Dars-e-Kharij*) and led congregational prayers. His profound presence sanctified this space. **Ayatollah Khoi** is interred in **Hujra number 31**, an adjacent room connected to the mosque, along with his sons.

6.5 Hussainiya Gharbiyyah (Madrassa Gharbiyyah)

Further along the anti-clockwise path, one reaches the **Hussainiya Gharbiyyah**, also known as **Madrassa Gharbiyyah**. In earlier times, this served as a seminary where theology students (*tullab-e-ilm*) resided, studied, slept, and kept their belongings. The term *Hussainiya* is commonly used in Iraq to refer to such religious establishments.

6.6 Iwan-e-Ulema

The **Iwan-e-Ulema**, or the **Porch of Scholars**, is situated opposite the **Iwan-e-Tila** (Golden Iwan) on the inner side of the *haram*, near **Bab-e-Tusi** (which leads to Wadi al-Salam cemetery). This sacred space houses the resting places of twelve distinguished scholars, two of whom are particularly renowned: **Sheikh Mullah Muhammad Naraqi** and his son, **Sheikh Mullah Ahmad Naraqi**. Their presence here profoundly enhances the spiritual experience, allowing pilgrims to connect with their vast knowledge and exemplary lives.

Sheikh Mullah Muhammad Naraqi: A Paragon of Knowledge and Asceticism

Sheikh Mullah Muhammad Naraqi hailed from an extremely humble background; his father was a palace peon. Despite immense poverty, he journeyed to Isfahan, then a vibrant center for *ilm* (knowledge) and *irfan* (gnosticism). For three decades, he dedicated himself entirely to learning, immersing himself in profound studies. What truly astonishes is his unwavering focus during these thirty years: he never opened any letters from his family or friends, meticulously placing them under his mattress. He reasoned that reading them would evoke homesickness, a desire to meet friends, or distract his mind, thereby disrupting his concentration on his studies. This incredible discipline stands as a profound lesson for students in the contemporary world, constantly distracted by mobile phones and other digital devices.

A poignant incident illustrates his profound dedication: when news of his father's murder reached him through a letter, he still did not open it. After a few days, his teacher, **Mullah Muhammad Ismail**, compassionately broke the news, gently telling him that his father was unwell and then, upon Mullah Muhammad Naraqi's insistence, revealed his father's demise. His teacher then firmly commanded him to return home. He remained for only three days to attend to the funeral and immediately returned to his studies. Such unwavering commitment to knowledge is echoed in the lives of other great scholars, like **Imam Khomeini**, who continued his lessons even after receiving news of his son's martyrdom, and another *mujtahid*

who resumed teaching shortly after his son's passing, demonstrating that their love for knowledge surpassed all worldly attachments.

After completing his studies in Isfahan, **Mullah Muhammad Naraqi** moved to Kashan, where his scholarship attracted numerous scholars. He authored many books, including a monumental 100-volume work on diverse subjects. What is even more remarkable is that seventy books have been written *about* him and his scholarly contributions. He was also instrumental in classifying *hadith* into various categories beyond just "sahih" (authentic) and "za'eef" (weak), introducing classifications like *mawdoo'* (fabricated), *mursal* (missing narrator), etc., and clarifying which types of *hadith* are applicable in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) versus *akhlaq* (ethics).

His extreme poverty was legendary. He could not afford a lamp and would often study by the faint light of public latrines (*bayt al-khala*). If someone entered, he would shyly leave. This level of dedication, studying in such an unhygienic environment, contrasts sharply with the comfort and amenities available to students today. Yet, it was through such profound perseverance that his works gained immense recognition and guided countless individuals towards spiritual refinement.

Sheikh Mullah Ahmad Naraqi: The Author of *Mi'raj as-Sa'adah* and Embodiment of *Zuhd*

Sheikh Mullah Ahmad Naraqi, son of **Sheikh Mullah Muhammad Naraqi**, surpassed even his father in renown, particularly in the field of *akhlaq* (ethics). His magnum opus, ***Mi'raj as-Sa'adah* (The Ladder of Felicity or Ascension)**, is a thousand-page book regarded as one of the finest works on practical ethics and *tazkiya-e-nafs* (self-purification). This book delves into the fundamentals of human psychology, explaining the root causes of sin and how one can transform into a confident and successful individual. It is said that merely reading 250 pages of this book can make one a master of psychology. Even **Ayatollah Bahjat** recommended this book as a prerequisite for those seeking to delve into *irfan*. The book should be read with careful thought and practice, not just for quick completion.

Sheikh Ahmad Naraqī exemplified profound *zuhd* (asceticism). The true meaning of *zuhd* is not to possess nothing, but to ensure that nothing possesses you. Money in one's pocket makes one a master, but money in one's heart makes one a slave. A famous incident highlights his *zuhd*: a dervish, seeking spiritual guidance, came to live with **Sheikh Ahmad Naraqī**. After a few days, the dervish remarked that despite Naraqī's reputation for piety, his luxurious lifestyle (servants, fine food, soft beds, property) contradicted the principles of *zuhd*. Hearing this, **Sheikh Ahmad Naraqī** immediately resolved to abandon all his possessions. He told the dervish, "Let us go," and without a backward glance at his home, he left everything behind, even asking if he should lock the door, to which the dervish replied, "No, leave it open." He informed his servants and family that he was leaving everything. This profound act of renunciation demonstrated true *zuhd*. The dervish, realizing his own attachment, even to his begging bowl, was humbled by Naraqī's immediate and complete detachment.

The Political Authority of Scholars: Deposing an Unjust Governor

The lives of scholars like **Sheikh Muhammad Naraqī** challenge the misconception that **Imams (AS)** or religious authorities did not engage in political or social welfare. While they may not have held conventional governmental positions, their influence was profound. When an oppressive governor was appointed in Kashan, the people complained to **Sheikh Muhammad Naraqī**. He simply declared the governor "mazool" (deposed) by his word. Immediately, the governor's authority vanished; his employees and administrators ceased to obey him. This act, akin to a spiritual declaration, effectively stripped the governor of his power. When the Shah (king) heard of this, he summoned **Sheikh Muhammad Naraqī** and angrily questioned his authority to depose the governor. At that moment, **Sheikh Muhammad Naraqī** raised his hands in supplication, praying to Allah against the oppressive ruler. The Shah, witnessing this, immediately pleaded with Naraqī not to curse him, expressing fear and seeking forgiveness. This demonstrates the immense spiritual and practical authority of such scholars, who could govern hearts and minds without physical force or formal political office. Their true power lay in their connection to God and the purity of their intentions.

6.7 Masjid Imran bin Shahin

Masjid Imran bin Shahin is named after its builder, **Imran bin Shahin**, a significant figure from the time of **Azud al-Dawlah**, a king known for his contributions to the construction of **Imam Ali's (AS)** shrine. **Imran bin Shahin**, who served in the military and administration, once committed an act of disobedience against the king so severe that his arrest and execution seemed inevitable. Fleeing for his life, he sought refuge at the holy shrine of **Imam Ali (AS)**, confident that the **Imam (AS)** would protect him.

He stayed at the shrine for a few days. One night, he had a dream in which **Imam Ali (AS)** appeared and instructed him: "Tomorrow, Azud al-Dawlah will arrive from a certain gate and stand at a specific spot near the *zarih*, seeking my help to find 'Fana Khusrau' (Imran bin Shahin's original name). You must approach him from behind and whisper, 'O if you find Imran bin Shahin, what will you give in return?' Before he answers, you must then say, 'Will you forgive him?' He will immediately say, 'Yes, I will forgive him.'"

The next day, the events unfolded precisely as foretold. **Imran bin Shahin** followed the instructions, startling the king. Realizing the divine intervention, the king was unable to deny his word. **Imran bin Shahin** then revealed himself and recounted the entire dream. Profoundly moved, the king immediately removed his royal attire, declaring his intention to build a mosque. Thus, **Masjid Imran bin Shahin** came into existence. It is also believed that his sister built **Masjid Khazra**. This narrative vividly illustrates **Imam Ali's (AS)** boundless mercy and protection, demonstrating that he not only takes lives in battles when necessary but also saves countless others who seek his refuge. This incident serves as a powerful refutation to those who accuse **Imam Ali (AS)** of only resorting to force, highlighting his merciful intervention even for those who had wronged.

The journey through the sacred sites of Najaf reveals layers of history, spirituality, and divine grace, offering pilgrims an immersive experience into the profound legacy of **Imam Ali (AS)** and those connected to him.

6.8 Maktaba Haydariyya (The Haydariyya Library)

Following the anti-clockwise circuit from **Imran ibn Shaheen's** mosque, the next significant stop is **Maktaba Haydariyya**, the **Haydariyya Library**. As its name suggests, it is a vast and extensive library, housing millions of books, manuscripts, and historical documents. Beyond printed books, it preserves a treasure trove of historical letters—from kings and rulers regarding the construction and adornment of **Imam Ali's Zarih** to significant correspondence between religious scholars.

The library offers a serene and conducive environment for study, with air-conditioned spaces, tables, chairs, and well-organized shelves filled with literary and religious works. One can spend hours, from early morning until late night, immersed in its rich collection. It rivals renowned libraries in major cities globally. The library's collection includes extremely rare and historically important documents.

One such significant document is the decree issued by **Nadir Shah of Iran**. **Nadir Shah**, who rose to power in the 18th century after the fall of the Safavid dynasty, was a formidable and brave ruler, often referred to as the “Napoleon of the East” or “Alexander II.” After consolidating power in Iran, he expanded his conquests into Iraq and even India. Upon his return to Iraq, he was deeply moved by the devotion of the people to **Imam Ali (AS)** and resolved to further beautify the shrine. While adornment began during the Safavid era, **Nadir Shah** famously added golden bricks to the dome.

However, his most significant achievement, extending beyond his religious affiliation, was his effort to have **Fiqh Ja'fariyya** (the Ja'fari school of Islamic jurisprudence, followed primarily by Shias) recognized as the fifth major Islamic school of thought. At that time, Iraq was under Ottoman control, and the Ottoman rulers considered Shias to be heretics or even liable for execution. **Nadir Shah** expressed his concern and besieged several Iraqi cities for forty days, compelling the Ottoman government to negotiate a peace treaty. Among his conditions, he

proposed that **Fiqh Ja'fariyya** be recognized as a legitimate school, alongside the four existing Sunni schools (*Maliki, Hanbali, Shafi'i, and Hanafi*).

To facilitate this, **Nadir Shah** arranged for Shia scholars from Iran and Sunni scholars from the Ottoman Empire to engage in debates and discussions. After several days of deliberation, the scholars reached a consensus, acknowledging that **Fiqh Ja'fariyya** presented no beliefs contradictory to Islam and could indeed be accepted as a fifth school of Islamic law. A formal document was signed by both Sunni and Shia scholars, affirming this recognition. This historic document, a testament to **Nadir Shah's** efforts, remains a significant artifact in the **Haydariyya Library**, serving as a powerful rebuttal to those who mistakenly label Shias as deviant or outside the fold of Islam.

The **Haydariyya Library's** rich collection has been further augmented by personal libraries donated by individuals, making it an exceptionally vast repository of knowledge. It is deeply regrettable when certain narratives overlook such significant institutions. An article published by Mahpara Safdar on *bbc.com* on December 25th, describing her *Ziyarat* to Najaf, lamented the absence of libraries in the city. This claim is astonishing given that Najaf, known as the "city of the gate of knowledge" (**Bab al-Ilm**), has a library at practically every street corner and within the shrine itself. Such misrepresentations are disheartening, especially from Muslim commentators working for international media, as they fail to accurately portray the vibrant intellectual life of these holy cities. It is incumbent upon journalists to conduct thorough research before publishing articles, especially concerning such revered places.

6.9 Hussainiyya Baktashiyya

Moving further along the anti-clockwise path from the **Haydariyya Library**, one reaches the **Hussainiyya Baktashiyya**, also historically known as *Takkiya Baktashiyya*. The term *Takkiya* (or *Khanqah* in Persian) refers to a Sufi hospice or monastery, a place where Sufi mystics would reside, often in solitude, dedicating

themselves solely to divine worship, detached from worldly concerns.

While Islam discourages extreme asceticism (*rahbaniyyah*), as mentioned in a *hadith* where the Holy Prophet (PBUH) cautioned against it and highlighted how Christians, despite adopting it, could not maintain it, Sufi movements emerged within Islam. Some of these Sufi groups, while promoting spiritual devotion, sometimes veered into deviations. The **Baktashiya** sect, founded by Haji Baktash Veli, was one such group, characterized by its extreme form of Sufism that paralleled Christian monasticism. They held a Trinitarian belief, akin to Christianity, but distorted it to apply to their faith: they believed in three gods, including Allah, Jibreel, and **Imam Ali (AS)**, whom they elevated to divine status. This extreme veneration of **Imam Ali (AS)** led them to believe that he would intercede for them, thus rendering formal prayers (*salat*), fasting (*sawm*), and Hajj unnecessary. This sect, like the Ismaili sect (which diverged after the Sixth Imam), did not adhere to the fundamental acts of worship in Islam, focusing instead on ritualistic mourning during the first ten days of Muharram, often involving self-flagellation. Furthermore, their initiation ceremonies notoriously involved the consumption of alcohol and cheese, a practice that stands in stark contrast to Islamic injunctions.

The historical presence of the **Baktashiya Takkiya** within **Imam Ali's Haram** raises questions about how such a deviant group gained entry and established a presence. During the Ottoman era, the ruling power, often in need of military support, would grant patronage to various groups, including organized military factions like the Baktashiya. This historical context explains their presence and influence. However, in 1925, Kemal Atatürk in Turkey formally banned all forms of Sufism, including the Baktashiya order. Although the *Takkiya* as a formal entity has ceased to exist, the place itself has been transformed into a **Hussainiyya**, a center for Shia religious gatherings, commemorations of **Imam Hussain's** martyrdom, and mourning rituals. This transformation reflects the enduring reverence for **Imam Hussain (AS)** and his legacy, despite the historical deviations of the group originally associated with the site.

6.10 Rawaq Abi Talib (The Portico of Abu Talib)

Directly opposite the **Aywan al-Dhahab** (Golden Iwan) and the golden minarets is the **Rawaq Abi Talib** (Portico of Abu Talib). This area has been transformed into a grand mosque, capable of accommodating over two thousand worshippers. During the holy month of Ramadan, the entire *Rawaq* resonates with the melodious recitations of the *Qur'an*. Renowned *Qaris* (reciters) and *Huffaz* (those who have memorized the *Qur'an*) guide congregations in structured and disciplined *Qur'anic* study.

The atmosphere during Ramadan is particularly vibrant, with the entire city of Najaf, and especially the **Haram**, awakened by constant *Qur'anic* recitation from every home, mosque, and corner. The **Haram** serves as a reminder to us to excel in all aspects of *Qur'anic* engagement. The connection between the “silent *Qur'an*” (the holy book) and the “speaking *Qur'an*” (**Imam Ali (AS)**, who is considered the living embodiment of *Qur'anic* principles) is profound. **Imam Ali (AS)** himself stated, “When I want to speak to God, I pray; when I want God to speak to me, I read the *Qur'an*.” Thus, reciting the *Qur'an* in his holy precinct adds an unparalleled dimension to one’s spiritual experience.

6.11 Mizab al-Rahma (The Spout of Mercy)

Beyond the internal spaces and institutions, the **Haram of Imam Ali (AS)** boasts several significant external structures that enhance its spiritual and architectural grandeur.

The **Mizab al-Rahma** (Spout of Mercy) is a drainage spout located on the building directly opposite **Bab al-Qibla**, the gate facing the *Qibla* (direction of prayer towards the Kaaba). Just as the **Kaaba** in Mecca has its own **Mizab al-Rahma**, believed to bestow blessings upon those who stand beneath it during rain, the **Mizab al-Rahma** of **Imam Ali’s Haram** holds similar reverence. Pilgrims often gather beneath it during rainfall to receive the sanctified water, believing it to be

blessed.

While no specific narrations directly mandate this practice, reason dictates its merit. The **Mizab al-Rahma** of the **Kaaba** is connected to **Imam Ali's** birthplace, the **Kaaba** itself. Conversely, the **Mizab al-Rahma** of his **Haram** is linked to his final resting place. Both hold immense spiritual significance. Just as people pray and make supplications under the **Kaaba's Mizab**, the same reverence is extended to **Imam Ali's** shrine. Although there's no specific emphasis on praying here, a beautiful *hadith* from the Sixth Imam states that offering two or four units of prayer in a specific blessed location in Kufa (the city adjacent to Najaf) ensures the fulfillment of one's needs and the removal of burdens. This general principle can be applied here, linking the prayer under the **Mizab** to the broader blessings associated with **Imam Ali's** holy city. Pilgrims are encouraged to reflect on this connection, recalling **Imam Ali's** birth in the **Kaaba** and his burial in Najaf, and to offer prayers under the **Mizab al-Rahma**.

6.12 Bab al-Qibla

Bab al-Qibla (The Qibla Gate) is the gate that faces the direction of the *Qibla*. In earlier times, there was a large pool located between this gate and the golden dome of the shrine. It was said that the reflection of the golden dome in the waters of this pool created a breathtaking spectacle, drawing visitors from far and wide. An English traveler, Lord Curzon, famously described his awe upon witnessing this scene, highlighting how the beauty of the shrine captivated even non-believers. This architectural and visual grandeur served as a tribute to **Imam Ali (AS)**. While the pool has since been replaced by tiles or carpets, the memory of this exquisite reflection endures.

6.13 Sahn Fatima (The Courtyard of Fatima)

Sahn Fatima (The Courtyard of Fatima) is the largest ongoing construction project in Iraq. When approaching the **Haram** from hotels situated on Shara'

al-Safa (the street of Safa), one invariably hears the sounds of construction—hammers, machinery, and general commotion—emanating from the left side. This sprawling development is **Sahn Fatima**. The project is overseen by the **Atabat al-Muqaddasa al-Aliyya** (Committee of the Holy Thresholds), a group comprising four prominent religious authorities (*Maraje' Taqlid*). They have generously offered their services, both human resources and financial contributions, free of charge to the *Waqf Diwani Shi'i* (Shia Endowment Department), which administers the entire **Haram**. Their aim is to expedite the completion of this monumental undertaking.

Sahn Fatima is designed to be a comprehensive complex, addressing the needs of the ever-increasing number of pilgrims and scholars. Historically, Iraq has not witnessed such a massive influx of pilgrims as it does today. The new project will include:

A five-story library: A direct response to the previously mentioned critique about the perceived lack of libraries, this massive library aims to provide ample space for study and research.

A four-story museum: This will house the priceless artifacts, relics, and treasures that have been preserved in the shrine's underground vaults. These include swords from **Imam Ali's** era, gifts from various rulers, and precious jewels. These items, though invaluable, are not merely material possessions but bear deep historical and spiritual significance, representing the legacies of devotion and sacrifice.

Guesthouses (Mazaf): Unlike the large, dedicated dining halls in Karbala, these guesthouses in Najaf are designed for pilgrims to rest and receive free *niyaz* (blessed food), sometimes requiring identification like a passport. The demand for such facilities is immense, with pilgrims often waiting in long queues.

Recreational spaces: Recognizing that pilgrims often seek a place to relax and recuperate after *Ziyarat*, these spaces are being incorporated.

Restaurants: Facilities for food and drink will also be available.

The expansion of **Sahn Fatima** is strategically located, extending the boundaries of Najaf significantly. If one exits **Sahn Fatima's** gates, they are essentially outside the traditional boundaries of Najaf. The project integrates residential neighborhoods, such as **Sahil** and **Ammara**, into its expanded radius, transforming the entire area around **Imam Ali's Haram**. The development also includes improved infrastructure like circular roads, such as Shara' al-Kufa, and enhanced transportation services within the city. This holistic approach ensures that **Sahn Fatima** becomes a modern, self-sufficient complex, offering not only spiritual solace but also educational, recreational, and hospitality services, making it a pivotal destination for all visitors to Najaf.

6.14 Masjid al-Ras (Mosque of the Head)

Adjacent to **Rawaq Abi Talib** is **Masjid al-Ras** (Mosque of the Head), so named for two reasons. Firstly, it is situated directly opposite and near the blessed head of **Imam Ali (AS)** within his tomb. Secondly, according to tradition, while being taken to Syria, the sacred head of **Imam Hussain (AS)** was buried at this very spot by a devotee. Thus, **Masjid al-Ras** is believed to contain the blessed head of **Imam Hussain (AS)**.

This mosque, like **Rawaq Abi Talib**, has been beautifully transformed and now features fourteen domes, accommodating over a thousand worshippers. Its elegant domes are visible from a distance, contributing to the overall grandeur of the **Haram**.

6.15 Burials within the Shrine Courtyard

The courtyards (*sahn*) of the **Haram** are not merely open spaces for gathering but are themselves sacred resting places. Many people, out of their profound love and desire for proximity to **Imam Ali (AS)**, wished to be buried near his shrine. In earlier times, when the **Haram** was not fully developed and the courtyards were largely open, people were buried directly within these areas.

This fact came to light in the 13th century when Prince Abdul Hamid initiated excavation work to install new tiles. During the digging, numerous human remains were discovered, causing consternation. **Sheikh Bahai**, a prominent scholar, intervened, instructing that no further excavation should occur. Instead, the new tiles were to be laid over the existing graves. Thus, beneath the carpets and tiles of the courtyards, where pilgrims pray, perform *dhikr* (remembrance of God), and rest, lie countless layers of graves—some belonging to renowned scholars like **Sheikh Tusi**, **Muqaddas Ardabili**, **Muhammad Naraq**i, and **Ahmad Naraq**i, and others belonging to lesser-known devotees. This silent presence serves as a profound lesson (*ibrat*), reminding pilgrims of the countless souls who sought eternal proximity to **Imam Ali (AS)**.

6.16 The Sacred Dome and Minarets

The **Gumbad Mutahhar** (Pure Dome) of **Imam Ali's Haram** is a magnificent sight, visible from afar. Its grandeur increases with distance, captivating the eyes of all who behold it. Pilgrims often recount being overwhelmed with emotion upon their first glimpse, tears flowing uncontrollably. This phenomenon is akin to witnessing the **Kaaba** or the **Golden Dome of Jerusalem**, where even non-Muslims are mesmerized by the splendor, while believers are struck by a profound spiritual awe.

The history of the dome reveals its evolution:

First Dome: The very first dome, according to tradition, was built by **Harun al-Rashid**. While on a hunting expedition, he discovered **Imam Ali's** grave and subsequently had a simple red brick dome constructed over it.

Second Dome (Current Structure): The current structure of the dome, excluding its golden plating, was initiated by **Azd al-Dawla** in the 11th century. He was instrumental in establishing the comprehensive architectural plan of the **Haram**. Upon his demise, he left a will requesting to be buried near **Imam Ali (AS)** (he is buried in the *Rawaq*, to the right of the golden *Aywan*). He further stipulated

that a silver chain be placed around his neck and a paper inscribed with a verse from the *Qur'an* be placed on his chest. The verse, from **Surah al-Kahf (18:18)**, states: “**Wa kalbuhum basituun dhira'ayhi bil-waseed**” (“*And their dog lies with its forelegs stretched out at the entrance*”). By choosing this verse, **Azd al-Dawla**, a mighty ruler, humbly expressed his desire to be considered like the dog of the **Ashab al-Kahf** (Companions of the Cave), seeking eternal proximity to the Imam.

Golden Plating: The golden bricks adorning the dome and minarets were added by **Nadir Shah** in the 18th century. He was deeply moved after visiting the shrine following his campaigns in India, recognizing its spiritual value. The dome is adorned with 7,777 golden bricks, and the minarets with 4,000. **Nadir Shah's** humility upon entering the **Haram** is legendary: he entered through a narrow alley, wearing a golden chain around his neck, and asked an ordinary person to drag him like an animal on all fours into the shrine, symbolizing his profound submission to **Imam Ali (AS)**.

The dome also features twelve windows, with two of particular note: the eastern and western windows. Glimpsing the interior from the eastern window and the corresponding western window simultaneously offers a unique and spiritually uplifting view, though accessing these points requires special permission and can be challenging.

Another remarkable incident involving the golden dome concerns **Sultan Sulayman**, the Ottoman ruler of Baghdad. While on a *Ziyarat*, he witnessed a person immediately removing his shoes and walking barefoot upon seeing the golden dome. When questioned, the man explained his act of reverence for the sacredness of the place and the personality residing within. To validate this act, **Sultan Sulayman** opened the *Qur'an* and his eyes fell upon **Surah Ta Ha (20:12)**: “**Inni ana Rabbuka fa'ikhla' na'layka innaka bil-wadil-muqaddas tuwa**” (“*Indeed, I am your Lord, so take off your sandals; you are in the sacred valley of Tuwa*”). This verse, addressed to Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) at Mount Tur, affirmed that the act of removing shoes was indeed appropriate for such a holy place. These accounts demonstrate that even those not explicitly followers of **Imam Ali (AS)**

were moved by the profound spiritual aura of the **Haram**.

6.17 Mawza' al-Arba'een (The Place of the Forty)

The final specific location within the **Haram** mentioned is **Mawza' al-Arba'een** (Place of the Forty). This spot is located at the head of **Imam Ali's** sacred grave, marked by a slab with two holes. This seemingly simple spot holds two astounding historical incidents.

The first concerns **Marwan ibn Isa al-Azdi**, a powerful and fierce Arab tribal leader from the 8th century. Driven by a desire for revenge, he inquired among his elders about the person most responsible for killing his tribesmen. He was told it was **Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib**, who had fought against them in various battles. Enraged, **Marwan** swore an oath to desecrate **Imam Ali's** tomb. Leading a force of 4,000 men, he attacked Najaf, causing six days of destruction and slaughter. After subduing the local population, he personally entered the sacred shrine with some of his men. Standing at the head of the Imam's grave, he began uttering insults and threats, declaring his intent to desecrate the Imam's body. As he uttered these words, a shining sword miraculously emerged from the sacred spot, cleaving **Marwan** and his horse into two halves. The two halves immediately turned into stone and were subsequently placed at the entrance of the Kufa mosque as a warning. Later, members of his tribe discreetly removed them due to the humiliation. This event demonstrates **Imam Ali's** power to defend his sanctity, both in his lifetime and after his physical demise.

The second incident involves an unnamed individual, not a renowned scholar, who stood at the head of **Imam Ali's** grave, persistently requesting written proof of the acceptance of his *Ziyarat*. His unwavering faith and spiritual conviction led him to daily plead for a tangible sign. After several months of this consistent supplication, a hand miraculously emerged from the same spot where the sword had appeared, holding a written *ruq'a* (note) and placing it in his hand. This *ruq'a* served as the physical confirmation he sought. This spot, situated near the ladies'

gate area, is believed to be still present today, allowing pilgrims to witness this historical marvel.

These powerful anecdotes underscore the living spiritual reality of **Imam Ali's Haram**. Each part of the shrine, from its grand architecture to its hidden burial sites and sacred spots, offers lessons in devotion, humility, and the enduring power of the Ahlul Bayt. Pilgrims are encouraged to approach these holy sites with a heart full of reverence, seeking to draw spiritual benefit, strengthen their faith, and follow the footsteps of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his purified Household. May Allah grant all believers the opportunity to visit the holy shrines of Iraq and benefit from their immense blessings.

Chapter 7

The Enigmatic Chambers of Wisdom (*Hujurat*)

As one observes the *sahn* and its surroundings, numerous small, distinct chambers, known as *hujurat*, come into view. These structures, seemingly mere architectural embellishments, often appear as beautiful, arch-like platforms, resembling the *mihrab* (prayer niche) of a mosque. Many visitors mistakenly perceive them as simple, decorative seating areas where families might gather, eat, or socialize. However, these *hujurat* hold a much deeper, profound history, concealing countless stories and layered backgrounds that could occupy a seeker for an entire year of study.

7.1 Sheikh Bahai and His Genius

The true purpose and significance of these *hujurat* lie in the genius of their architect, Engineer Sheikh Bahai (Al-Sheikh Al-Baha'i), a polymath of his era. He was not only a towering figure in astronomy and engineering but also a master builder whose structures, even from the 16th century, have been formally preserved by UNESCO as ancient relics. Among his famed creations are a unique minaret and a bathhouse that reportedly provided warm water for years without requiring fire, showcasing his unparalleled architectural philosophy. His brilliance extended to

astrology, mathematics, and various other sciences, making him a truly unique personality, a contemporary of the revered Al-Muqaddas Al-Ardabili.

Kings of his time specifically sought his expertise for grand architectural projects. When the shrine of Imam Ali (AS) required reconstruction, Sheikh Bahai was commissioned. While some structural elements like the bricks were later added by Nader Shah, the intricate design and engineering were primarily Sheikh Bahai's work. Beyond his engineering prowess, Sheikh Bahai authored numerous scholarly works, including *Samadiyyah*, a highly challenging book on Arabic grammar and syntax, widely studied in the second and third years of *Hawza* (seminary) education for both Shia and Sunni students.

7.2 The 54 *Hujurat* and Their Connection to Knowledge

The true marvel of these *hujurat* lies not in their architectural beauty alone, which even a child with basic geometry could replicate, but in a profound, unresearched aspect of Sheikh Bahai's design. As an expert astrologer and astronomer, he held the belief that every celestial body is the patron of a specific branch of knowledge. If one were to sit in a particular direction beneath the celestial appearance of that star, the associated knowledge could be acquired more rapidly.

Based on this principle, Sheikh Bahai constructed 54 *hujurat*, each corresponding to one of 54 stars, and by extension, 54 branches of knowledge. The challenge now falls upon contemporary scholars and seekers to research and uncover:

- Which *hujra* corresponds to which star?
- Which branch of knowledge does that star patronize?
- When does that star appear (day, time, and specific hour of the night)?
- In which direction does it manifest?

The idea is to sit in the designated *hujra* with the relevant book, at the auspicious time, to absorb that knowledge quickly. This may explain phenomena where sometimes concepts are grasped instantly, while at other times, hours of effort

yield no understanding. Scholars of occult sciences suggest that these are specific moments when a star aligns in its position, and one can benefit by being present in the appropriate location. While much discussion and research are still needed, the knowledge likely exists in ancient texts.

This hidden purpose suggests that if one were to spend extended time in Najaf, they could seek out the relevant *hujra* for a specific field of knowledge—be it mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, history, or linguistics—and engage in study there. Even today, in the *Sahn-e Fatima*, one can observe groups of students and teachers seated in circles, engrossed in their studies. This, then, was the fundamental purpose of these *hujurat*.

7.3 From Knowledge to Scholars

However, the primary purpose of these *hujurat* has largely transformed. While initially intended as spaces for acquiring knowledge through celestial alignment, they now primarily serve as the final resting places for numerous scholars. Thus, the concept has shifted from “knowledge in the *hujra*” to “scholars in the *hujra*.”

When pilgrims visit these *hujurat*, they encounter the graves of eminent scholars. It is understood that Najaf, in its golden era, thrived on the dynamism, movements, and intellectual vibrancy of its scholars. While scholars are abundant in many religious centers today, the graves of the *Ulama* in Najaf stand as guiding beacons for our lives, serving as powerful sources of *Ibrat* (lessons).

Chapter 8

The Etiquettes and Blessings of Visiting Scholars' Graves

Many pilgrims, after performing *Ziyarat* at the main shrine and reciting the prescribed *duas* and *adhkar* (invocations) from provided booklets, often wonder what to do when they encounter the graves of scholars in the *hujurat*. While the names of some scholars might be clearly displayed on their grave markers, allowing for recognition, pilgrims may still feel hesitant or simply glance casually if they lack background knowledge about the individual.

8.1 Specific Practices at the Graves of Scholars

At the graves of these revered scholars, a pilgrim is encouraged to perform three specific acts:

Recitation of *Surahs* and Offering as a Gift:

- Recite *Surah Al-Fatiha*, commonly recited for the deceased.
- Recite *Surah Al-Qadr* seven times, ideally touching the grave.
- Recite as many other *Surahs* from the Holy Qur'an as one remembers.
- Offer the rewards (*sawab*) of these recitations as a gift (*hadiya*) to the deceased

scholars. This act of giving is immensely beneficial. It is hoped that on the Day of Judgment, these scholars—such as Sheikh Bahai, Sheikh Murtadha Ansari, or Sayyid Khoei—might acknowledge this gift and intercede, saying, “We received the reward of your *Surah Al-Fatiha* and other *Surahs*; now allow us to repay that kindness by taking you along with us into Paradise.” This simple act of offering divine merit can pave the way for extraordinary blessings.

Recitation of a Specific *Ziyarat*:

- A particular *Ziyarat* is recommended for scholars, as suggested by Sheikh Mufid. This *Ziyarat* can be found in books like *Rahnuma-e Musafir dar Najaf* by Sayyid Muhammad Alawi, a book primarily in Persian but often available in booklet form. While mobile phones might not be permitted within the shrine, pilgrims are advised to acquire this book or a printout of the *Ziyarat*.
- The *Ziyarat* often begins with phrases such as: **“Peace be upon you, O ocean of knowledge and its treasure.”** This *Ziyarat* is specifically for scholars of religion, whether buried within the shrine complex, in Wadi al-Salam cemetery, or elsewhere on the routes to Kufa, Karbala, or Samarra. This is distinct from the *Ziyarat* texts for the infallible Imams and Prophets, which are found in separate books of supplication.

Making *Dua* for Them and for Oneself:

- **For the Scholars:** Implore Allah for their forgiveness (*maghfirat*) and the elevation of their spiritual ranks (*bulandi-e darajat*).
- **For Oneself:** Seek Allah’s forgiveness and supplicate to be guided on their righteous path. This profound *dua* is to request Allah to allow one to follow in their footsteps and emulate their exemplary lives.

8.2 The Profound Goal

Some pilgrims might feel that their *duas* at the Imam's shrine remain unanswered. In such instances, they are encouraged to turn to the buried scholars and request them to intercede with Imam Ali (AS) on their behalf, saying, "You can intercede with the Imam, I cannot." The scholars, being beloved to the Imam, have a special status. There are numerous accounts of miracles and astounding events associated with these scholars and their connection to the Imams, as narrated in books such as *Hairat Angez Waqiaat* (Amazing Incidents) or *Darrakhshan Sitare* (Shining Stars). Reading such accounts can inspire hope and provide guidance on how to seek and receive divine blessings.

The ultimate aim of visiting these graves and learning about these scholars is to achieve spiritual transformation. As one departs from the sacred threshold of the Imam's shrine, the core intention should be: "O Mawla, transform me. When I return, let me be utterly changed." This transformation is achieved through *Ibrat*—drawing lessons from the lives of these exemplary individuals. This requires effort: delving into their biographies (*seerat*), understanding their daily routines, their habits, and their spiritual journeys.

8.3 Emulating the Pious

It is important to understand that while we cannot discuss all 500+ scholars buried in Najaf due to time constraints, even a select few can offer immense lessons. Scholars of previous eras, especially in Najaf, lived lives vastly different from ours. They were not just scholars; they were beacons of *taqwa* (piety), knowledge, and selfless service.

The lives of these scholars offer profound lessons on dedication, humility, and the true pursuit of knowledge, contrasting sharply with modern distractions. They illuminate the path to spiritual elevation, demonstrating how to align one's life with divine principles.

Chapter 9

Luminaries of Knowledge and Piety: Biographies and Lessons

Najaf al-Ashraf is a city adorned with the resting places of hundreds of scholars, each a beacon of light in the history of Islamic thought and practice. While it is impossible to delve into the biographies of all five hundred and more *Ulama* buried here, a glimpse into the lives of a few prominent figures offers invaluable *Ibrat*—lessons and reflections—for the contemporary seeker. These select luminaries, though numerous, are generally well-known, and familiarizing oneself with their lives, routines, services, knowledge, and *taqwa* is essential. Their example should serve as a role model, an ideal to emulate, and a path to follow in the footsteps of the Infallible Imams (AS).

The scholars, though they were human like us, often lived lives of extreme hardship and dedication that would astonish many today. Their commitment to knowledge and piety, even amidst severe economic and social challenges, offers profound insights into overcoming obstacles.

9.1 Sheikh Murtadha Ansari

Sheikh Murtadha Ansari (1214-1281 AH), whose final resting place is in Hujra #11, to the left when facing the *Qibla* at *Bab-e Qibla*, was a towering figure in Islamic jurisprudence and principles (*Usul al-Fiqh*).

His Miraculous Birth and Early Life

His birth was heralded by a divine dream experienced by his mother, in which Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (AS) appeared and presented her with a golden Qur'an. This dream was interpreted by his father as a clear sign that their forthcoming child would achieve immense honor and illuminate their household. Sheikh Ansari was born in Dezful, Iran, a unique city where both Arabic and Persian languages are spoken, giving him the advantage of mastering both from an early age.

The Journey of Knowledge and Battling Deviations

When Sheikh Ansari desired to embark on his scholarly journey, his mother initially expressed reluctance, due to the lengthy separation. However, they sought divine guidance through *Istikhara* (seeking good from Allah through the Qur'an), and the verse from Surah Al-Qasas (28:7) regarding Prophet Musa (AS)'s mother was revealed: **“And We inspired the mother of Moses, saying, ‘Suckle him, and when you fear for him, cast him into the river and do not fear nor grieve; surely We will bring him back to you and make him one of the messengers.’”** This verse provided reassurance that his journey was divinely sanctioned and for a noble purpose.

Sheikh Ansari spent approximately 22 years studying in Iran. Such was his scholarly stature that even when he intended to leave for further *Ziyarat*, the people of Iran compelled him to stay and continue teaching, recognizing the depth of knowledge he possessed. His early scholarly work included combating the Akhbari sect, prevalent in Najaf and Iraq at the time. The Akhbaris, akin to *Ahl al-Hadith* among Sunnis, rejected *taqleed* (following a qualified jurist) and the pillars of intellect (*aql*) and consensus (*ijma'*), insisting only on the Qur'an and Hadith

as sources of law.

His Revolutionary Teaching Methodology

Sheikh Ansari adopted a unique teaching style to counter such deviations. He would present hypothetical legal problems (*masail*) to his students, encouraging them to find solutions using various jurisprudential principles. After listening to their arguments, he would then present the correct solution, substantiated by Qur'anic verses and Hadith, often explaining it in a simple, non-technical manner. This Socratic method, reminiscent of Aristotle's approach, focused on engaging students' critical thinking before revealing the complete answer. He would often begin his classes by posing a question, allowing discussion, and then offering the final, comprehensive solution.

Enduring Contributions: *Rasail* and *Makasib*

Sheikh Ansari authored numerous seminal works, most notably *Rasail* and *Makasib*. These two books are considered cornerstones of *Hawza* (seminary) education, forming advanced texts studied in the 13th and 14th years of study before students proceed to *Dars-e Kharij* (advanced independent study). Their inclusion in the *Hawza* syllabus signifies their profound importance and influence on Islamic jurisprudence.

Unparalleled Humility and Devotion

Sheikh Ansari's life was marked by extraordinary humility and devotion. A famous incident recounts how Sayyid Husayn Kuhkani, a respected scholar himself, inadvertently witnessed Sheikh Ansari teaching in the mosque. Impressed by his profound knowledge, Sayyid Kuhkani, despite his own standing, immediately directed his students to attend Sheikh Ansari's classes, declaring, "His knowledge is greater than mine; it is better that you and I learn from him." This humility from such a high-ranking scholar is rare and deeply inspiring.

His daily routine was rigorously dedicated to devotion:

- He performed all **daily *Nawafil*** (supererogatory prayers), which most people struggle to maintain.
- He recited the entirety of **Dua Kumayl and other supplications**, not just abbreviated versions.
- He recited the complete **Ziyarat Jami'a** and **Ziyarat Ashura** (including the thousand curses and blessings).
- He performed **Salat al-Ja'far al-Tayyar daily**, a prayer known for its immense spiritual rewards.
- He recited **one *juz* (part) of the Holy Qur'an daily**.

The Burden of Marja'iyya and Profound Asceticism

Sheikh Ansari was destined to become the supreme religious authority (*Marja' al-Taqlid*) after his teacher, Sayyid Hasan Najafi. Once, Sayyid Najafi intended to announce his succession publicly. However, Sheikh Ansari deliberately absented himself from the gathering. When he felt a momentary "pleasure" at the thought of attaining the *marja'iyya*, he immediately went to the shrine of Imam Ali (AS), weeping profusely, lamenting the burden of such a responsibility. He questioned this feeling of pleasure, recognizing it as a potential sign of spiritual imperfection.

He even wrote to his contemporary, Al-Mazandarani, who had returned to Iran, urging him to assume the *marja'iyya* instead, stating that Mazandarani was still actively engaged in teaching while he himself was preoccupied with other services. This demonstrates his immense selflessness and fear of position.

Despite potentially having access to vast sums of *Khums* (religious taxes) from millions of followers, Sheikh Murtadha Ansari lived a life of such profound asceticism that upon his demise, there were no funds available for his burial. His family members were distressed, but a poor Sayyid stepped forward and covered the expenses. This incident stands as a powerful testament to his practical implementation of Islamic principles and his detachment from worldly possessions.

9.2 Sheikh Muhammad Husayn Nuri (Muhaddith Nuri)

Sheikh Muhammad Husayn Nuri (1254-1320 AH), commonly known as Muhaddith Nuri, is buried in Hujra #15, alongside his student Sheikh Abbas Qummi. His tomb is on the right side when facing the *Qibla* at *Bab-e Qibla*, just a short distance from Sheikh Murtadha Ansari's *hujra*.

His Miraculous Recovery and Lengthy Life

Born in 1254 AH, Muhaddith Nuri experienced a miraculous recovery from a severe illness at the age of ten. All hope was lost, but in a dream, he saw the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams (AS). Imam al-Zaman (AS) offered him a cup, saying, "Drink this, and you will not die from this illness." He drank it, recovered fully, and lived for over sixty more years, dedicating his life to monumental scholarly achievements.

Monumental Works: *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* and Other Literary Gems

Muhaddith Nuri's most significant scholarly contribution is *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il*, a colossal compilation of 123,000 *hadith* (traditions), meticulously organized by chapters, serving as a supplement to the renowned *Wasa'il al-Shi'a*. His other notable works include *Najm al-Thaqib*, a book detailing the circumstances and history of Imam al-Zaman (AS), and *Lu'lu' wal Marjan*, a vital text on the ethics and etiquette for religious speakers and eulogizers (*ahl-e mimbar*). This latter work was specifically penned in response to ethical issues among preachers in India, emphasizing the sanctity of the pulpit and the need to avoid commercializing religious discourse.

A Life of Devotion and Selflessness

His daily routine epitomized devotion and humility. He would rise before Fajr prayer, assisting the custodians in lighting the lamps within the shrine, then dedicating time to study before returning home to his personal responsibilities. His profound selflessness is evident in his desire for others. He famously wished

that someone would financially support his two diligent students, one of whom was Sheikh Abbas Qummi, so they could entirely focus on their studies without the burden of worldly concerns. This highlights the concept in *Hawza* life where students receive stipends (*shahriyah*) precisely to alleviate financial worries and enable full dedication to learning.

The Healing Power of Faith and Turba

A remarkable incident highlights his faith: he once lost his eyesight. He applied the soil from the graves of the Imams (*khak-e shifa*) or, as another account suggests, touched *Usul al-Kafi* (a book of Hadith) to his eyes, and his vision was miraculously restored. When questioned about the scientific explanation for such an event, Sheikh Abbas Qummi, his student, famously retorted that if a cobra can regain its sight by rubbing a specific plant on its eyes, are believers, with the sacred *khak-e shifa* and the blessed soil of the Imams' graves, any less capable of healing? This powerful argument underscores the profound belief in the spiritual efficacy of sacred objects and the unwavering power of divine miracles.

9.3 Sheikh Abbas Qummi

Sheikh Abbas Qummi (1294-1359 AH), another illustrious scholar, is buried in Hujra #15, alongside his esteemed teacher, Muhaddith Nuri. While he spent much of his life in Iran, his final resting place beside his teacher in Najaf suggests a profound spiritual connection.

A Life Dedicated to Service

Sheikh Abbas Qummi's name is inextricably linked with one of the most widely used books of *duas* and *Ziyarat* globally: *Mafatih al-Jinan*. So profound is this association that mentioning "Qummi" immediately evokes *Mafatih al-Jinan*, much like mentioning "Ardabili" brings to mind the revered Al-Muqaddas Al-Ardabili.

Literary Masterpieces: *Mafatih al-Jinan* and Others

Beyond *Mafatih al-Jinan*, his other significant works include *Nafas al-Mahmoom* (a detailed account of the tragedy of Karbala) and *Manazil al-Akhirah* (Stages of the Hereafter), which explores the journey of the soul after death. A beautiful anecdote about *Manazil al-Akhirah* reveals Sheikh Abbas Qummi's deep sincerity (*khuluq*). His father, Karbalai Sahib, would frequently attend the lectures of Sheikh Abdur Razzaq on *Manazil al-Akhirah* and, impressed, would encourage his son, Sheikh Abbas, to write a similar book. Sheikh Abbas Qummi, despite being the actual author, never revealed this to his father throughout his life, only asking for his father's *duas* to increase his divine success. This profound humility, prioritizing sincerity over recognition, serves as a powerful lesson.

Exemplary Sincerity and Self-Assessment

Another remarkable instance of Sheikh Abbas Qummi's *taqwa* and self-assessment occurred at the famous Goharshad Mosque in Iran. After much persuasion, he agreed to lead the congregational prayers (*Namaz-e Jama'at*). Within ten days, the congregation swelled to an immense size, resembling a grand Friday prayer gathering. However, after leading the *Zuhr* prayer one day, he abruptly left, stating he was departing. He remained absent for an entire year. When a close acquaintance eventually inquired about his sudden departure, Sheikh Abbas Qummi revealed that as he led the prayers and heard the increasing number of people joining from a distance, a fleeting moment of joy and pleasure arose within him at the thought of such a large congregation. This subtle, almost imperceptible, feeling of pride concerned him deeply. He concluded that his prayer leading might have been tainted by this worldly pleasure, rather than pure sincerity for Allah. To purify his intention, he withdrew for a year. This incident exemplifies his extreme sensitivity to inner states and his unwavering commitment to pure intention, reminding us that even subtle forms of self-admiration can diminish spiritual acts.

Miraculous Manifestations of Faith

Like his teacher, Muhaddith Nuri, Sheikh Abbas Qummi also experienced a miraculous recovery of his eyesight. When his vision deteriorated, he wept, not

due to physical pain, but out of fear of losing the ability to read and write about the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). His son encouraged him to seek medical treatment, but upon his son's return, he found his father joyfully writing. Sheikh Abbas Qummi explained that he had placed *Usul al-Kafi* (the Hadith book) on his eyes, and his vision was restored. He also famously demonstrated the power of his hand, which had written thousands of Hadith, by stirring medicine for his ill child with his finger, asserting that it would have greater effect than a spoon, and the child recovered.

9.4 Sayyid Jawad Maghniyah

Sayyid Jawad Maghniyah (1324-1400 AH), a distinguished scholar from Lebanon, is buried in Hujra #17, just a couple of chambers past Sheikh Abbas Qummi's *hujra* on the right side from *Bab-e Qibla*.

Early Life and Pursuit of Knowledge

Born in Lebanon in 1324 AH, Sayyid Maghniyah faced early hardships, losing his mother when he was an infant and his father a few years later. Despite a challenging family background, he was drawn to Najaf for his religious studies, ultimately making it his home.

Bridging Islam and Modernity

His most significant contribution lay in his efforts to bridge the gap between Islamic thought and contemporary Western philosophies and sciences. He extensively studied Western ideas and provided insightful Islamic responses, demonstrating that Islam is not distinct from or contrary to true scientific advancement, but rather, a holistic way of life that encompasses all aspects of existence.

Championing Islamic Unity

Sayyid Maghniyah was a staunch advocate for Islamic unity. He traveled extensively, engaging with scholars across the Muslim world to promote this cause. A notable instance was his meeting with Sheikh Shaltut, the esteemed Head

of Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Through several interactions and persuasive arguments, Sayyid Maghniyah successfully convinced Sheikh Shaltut to officially recognize Ja'fari jurisprudence as the fifth school of thought within Islam. His core argument for unity was simple yet profound: while there might be differences of opinion regarding succession after the Holy Prophet (PBUH)—Shias upholding Imam Ali (AS)'s claim—both Sunnis and Shias ultimately desire the unity of the *Ummah* against common enemies, just as Imam Ali (AS) chose silence after the Prophet's demise to prevent discord. He emphasized that discussing these historical differences in public should be avoided if it leads to disunity.

Unwavering Principle and Courage

Sayyid Maghniyah's unwavering principles were famously demonstrated when he declined a meeting with US President, who was known for his support of Israel's policies in Palestine. Sayyid Maghniyah stated that he would not meet someone who provided a platform for the shedding of Muslim blood in Palestine. This act of courage earned him widespread admiration in Arab newspapers, which hailed him as a "Brave Arab" for refusing an audience with the American President due to his principles.

Legacy of Intellectual Struggle

His most famous work is *Tafsir al-Kashif*, a comprehensive Qur'anic exegesis that, true to his mission, sought to connect Qur'anic teachings with contemporary thought and scientific understanding. His entire body of work revolved around demonstrating the inseparability of religion and politics, challenging the Western notion of secularism that sought to isolate religious institutions and individuals from governance. His writings continue to serve as a beacon for those seeking to understand Islam's holistic approach to life in the modern era.

The contributions of these four scholars—Sheikh Murtadha Ansari, Muhaddith Nuri, Sheikh Abbas Qummi, and Sayyid Jawad Maghniyah—represent only a fraction of the intellectual and spiritual heritage enshrined in Najaf. Their lives offer profound lessons in dedication, humility, sincerity, and unwavering faith.

9.5 Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi

Continuing our journey through the sacred chambers, we arrive at the resting place of another colossal figure in Islamic scholarship. From Bab-e-Qibla, moving anti-clockwise past Hujra 11 (Sheikh Murtada Ansari) and Hujra 15 (Muhaddith Nuri and Sheikh Abbas Qummi), we find **Hujra 19**, which contains the blessed tomb of **Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi**.

Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi (d. 1112 AH/1701 CE) was an exceptionally learned scholar and a *marja'* (source of emulation) of his time. His life was a testament to immense struggle and perseverance in the pursuit of knowledge. **Mirza Muhammad Baqir Tankabuli**, in his renowned work *Qisas al-Ulama* (*Stories of Scholars*), dedicates approximately sixteen pages to the detailed account of Sheikh Jazairi's life, chronicling the numerous phases, hardships, journeys, illnesses, and accidents he endured from childhood to his passing. He himself documented many of these personal tribulations, offering valuable lessons for aspiring scholars on the challenges that often accompany the path of sacred learning.

Sheikh Jazairi faced significant professional jealousy from his contemporaries. He recounted instances where rivals, including fellow students, went to the extent of destroying or hiding his precious books, thereby depriving him of his intellectual treasures. This phenomenon, known as professional jealousy, can afflict even those dedicated to religious scholarship if they lack inner purity and **purification of the self** (*tazkiya-e-nafs*). Without this inner cleansing, destructive traits such as envy, malice, and arrogance can take root, just as pride corrupted Iblis and the scholar Bal'am Ba'oor. True knowledge, therefore, requires not just the accumulation of information but also a profound spiritual illumination that enables one to discern right from wrong.

The Brilliant Student of Allamah Majlisi

Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi was considered one of the most brilliant students of **Allamah Muhammad Baqir Majlisi** (d. 1110 AH/1699 CE), a towering figure

whose unique methodology of writing and compilation astonished his contemporaries and continues to awe scholars today. Allamah Majlisi was known for his extraordinary output, reportedly writing a thousand pages daily—a feat that remains unfathomable to many. He was also said to have a thousand students, an immense number for that era.

Despite his scholarly eminence, Allamah Majlisi maintained a humble and humorous demeanor. He was famously informal with his students, encouraging them to question him freely without fear or pressure, valuing sincere inquiry above mere deference. Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi often assisted Allamah Majlisi in his literary endeavors, sitting with him for hours, taking dictation, or meticulously searching for *hadith* (narrations) in books—a painstaking task in an age before computers.

Despite his close relationship and the affectionate regard Allamah Majlisi had for him, Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi would feel his heart pounding before entering his revered teacher's room. He would pause at the doorway to compose himself, fearing any unintentional disrespect in the presence of such a towering personality. This anecdote vividly illustrates the profound reverence and respect that great students held for their masters.

Enduring Poverty and Divine Sustenance

Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi endured extreme poverty and hardship throughout his life. It is recounted that there were times when he went for two consecutive days without food, surviving solely on water. This echoes the experience of **Muqaddas Ardabili**, who, like many students of knowledge in those times, would subsist on discarded watermelon rinds or other leftover vegetables.

One poignant incident highlights his unwavering faith amidst destitution. Overcome by intense hunger after two days without food, Sheikh Jazairi sought solace at the sacred tomb of **Sayyid Ahmad ibn Musa (AS)**, a revered son of **Imam Musa al-Kadhim (AS)**. Prostrating himself at the grave, he clasped the sacred earth with both hands and declared, "Today, I am your guest." Moments later, a *Sayyid* (descendant of the Prophet) appeared and offered him food before

departing. This miraculous provision underscores the power of sincere prayer and seeking *wasila* (intercession) through the holy personalities, demonstrating how faith could swiftly resolve even the most dire of circumstances. Such incidents, often narrated in collections like *Tanbih al-Ghafilin* (Stories of Miracles), reaffirm the belief in divine assistance facilitated through the spiritual connection to the **Ahlulbayt (AS)**.

The Miracle of Durr-e-Najaf

Sheikh Jazairi also experienced a remarkable **miracle** related to the sacred **Durr-e-Najaf** (a precious stone found in Najaf). It is narrated that while he was moving his hand around the sacred tomb to collect some blessed earth, a piece of *Durr-e-Najaf* came into his hand. People were astonished, as *Durr-e-Najaf* is typically found during the rainy season and is associated with the **Valley of Peace** (*Wadi al-Salam*). Considering this a divine favor, he had a ring made from it. This ring, he said, functioned like the mythical rings in stories that, when rubbed, would grant wishes. He found it immensely helpful in resolving many of his affairs. Once, after a day of travel, he returned home only to realize the ring was missing. Distraught, he began his search, knowing he had visited many places throughout the city. However, upon lighting a lamp at home, he found the ring lying right there, having fallen near the door as he entered. This incident, whether involving a precious stone like *Durr-e-Najaf* or sacred soil (*khak-e-shifa*), exemplifies the profound efficacy of faith in the miraculous.

The Elevated Status of Scholars

The lofty status of Islamic scholars is often highlighted by the *Hadith* that states, **“The scholars of my *Ummah* (community) are superior to the prophets of Bani Israel.”** This comparison manifests in various accounts, including one involving Sheikh Ni’matullah Jazairi.

While traveling by boat, the vessel suddenly began to sway violently without any apparent reason. In ancient times, it was a common belief that such an occurrence indicated the presence of a sinner, a runaway slave, or someone whose journey

was not sanctioned. This notion is also found in the story of **Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him)**, whose ship began to pitch when he boarded it, leading people to believe a runaway slave was aboard. In Yunus's case, he had departed his city in anger after his prophecy of impending divine punishment did not materialize as expected, feeling humiliated before his people. He had left without seeking Allah's permission, which resulted in a divine trial.

Similarly, when Sheikh Jazairi's boat became stuck in the sand, the boatman expressed his bewilderment, stating he had never encountered sand there before. After two such incidents, Sheikh Jazairi instinctively understood that his journey was being divinely impeded. He then inquired about the date and learned it was the last days of Jamadi al-Thani, preceding the holy month of Rajab. Coincidentally, Najaf al-Ashraf was nearby. He suddenly felt a strong spiritual inclination to visit the Holy Shrine. Realizing that the disruptions were a divine call from Imam Ali (AS) for him to visit on the auspicious occasion of the 13th of Rajab (the birth anniversary of Imam Ali AS), he promptly abandoned his original travel plans, turned back, and proceeded to Najaf for the Ziyarat. This narrative beautifully illustrates how the devout and those beloved by the **Ahlulbayt (AS)** are guided by divine providence towards acts of virtue.

Literary Contributions

Sheikh Ni'matullah Jazairi was a prolific writer, contributing significantly to Islamic literature. His notable works include:

- **Anwar al-Nu'maniyya**: A collection of narrations and spiritual insights.
- **Tahdhib al-Ahkam**: A commentary on the renowned Hadith collection.
- **Jami'**: A comprehensive commentary on both **Nahj al-Balaghah** (Imam Ali's sermons and letters) and **Sahifa al-Sajjadiyya** (Imam Zayn al-Abidin's supplications).
- **Ghayat al-Maram fi Sharh Tahdhib al-Ahkam**: Another significant commentary.

9.6 Mirza Husain Na'ini

The 18th and 19th centuries witnessed a period of intense global upheaval, particularly the rise of European colonialism spearheaded by England and France. These powers aggressively expanded their empires, often through economic and political subjugation, establishing colonies worldwide. The British Empire, for instance, famously boasted that the sun never set on its dominion. This expansion was frequently disguised as trade, using industrialized production to flood local markets with finished goods, thereby crippling local economies and turning independent nations into dependent colonies. In regions like the Indian subcontinent, the East India Company became a vehicle for British dominance. Similar attempts were made in Iran and Iraq, aiming to dismantle their economic and cultural fabric.

Mirza Husain Na'ini (d. 1355 AH/1936 CE) emerged as a formidable intellectual and spiritual leader during this tumultuous period. His profound understanding of Islamic principles led him to actively oppose foreign colonial influence. He articulated a vision for an **Islamic government** and **Islamic society**, emphasizing how such a system could be established and maintained even amidst external pressures.

Unlike many regions that succumbed to foreign rule for extended periods, Iran and Iraq offered significant resistance, primarily due to the unwavering stance of their *ulama*. Scholars like Mirza Na'ini and **Abul Hasan Isfahani** understood that the foreign powers sought not only economic control but also the erosion of religious identity and cultural values. They identified the colonial strategy of offering “economic prosperity” as a means to corrupt the culture, faith, and beliefs of the indigenous population. This resistance, led by the religious establishment, prevented the complete subjugation of Iran and Iraq in the way the Indian subcontinent was controlled for over a century.

Mirza Na'ini, along with Abul Hasan Isfahani, vigorously campaigned against the colonial presence, warning people about the dangers of surrendering their

economic and religious sovereignty. Their firm stance led to their banishment from Iraq by the Qajar monarchy and British agents, who colluded to suppress their influence. They then relocated to Iran, where, alongside other prominent scholars like **Abd al-Karim Ha'iri** (the founder of the *Hawza* in Qom), they laid the groundwork for the early phases of the Islamic Revolution, successfully preventing the full imposition of colonialism and imperialism in Iran. Such was their stature that a postage stamp was issued in Iran to commemorate Mirza Na'ini's birth, recognizing his pivotal role in defending national and religious integrity.

9.7 Sayyid Ahmad Mustanbat

Proceeding to **Hujra number 23**, pilgrims can pay their respects at the tomb of **Sayyid Ahmad Mustanbat** (d. 1383 AH/1963 CE). Just as Sheikh Abbas Qummi is synonymous with *Mafatih al-Jinan*, and Allamah Majlisi with *Bihar al-Anwar*, Sayyid Ahmad Mustanbat is inextricably linked with the **virtues** (*manaqib*) of the **Ahlulbayt (AS)**. His magnum opus, **Al-Qatraḥ min Bihar al-Manaqib al-Nabawiyya wal-Atra al-Murtazawiyya** (*A Drop from the Oceans of the Virtues of the Prophethood and the Chosen Progeny*), is a vital resource for anyone seeking knowledge about the excellences, miracles, and noble qualities of **Prophet Muhammad (PBUH&HP)** and his blessed household.

Originally a two-volume work, its Urdu translation is available in four volumes, making it accessible to a wider audience. The renowned scholar **Sayyid Muhammad Riyaz Husain Najafi**, upon meeting with *ulama* in Iran, was advised to translate works on jurisprudential topics. However, Sayyid Riyaz Husain argued that the greater need was to disseminate the virtues of the Ahlulbayt (AS) into every home. He believed that once people understood the exalted status of the Ahlulbayt (AS) and the distinction between the infallible and others, they would naturally develop an aversion for their enemies. This, he reasoned, would spontaneously foster *tabarra*, the disassociation from the enemies of the Ahlulbayt (AS). Subsequently, he chose Sayyid Ahmad Mustanbat's *Al-Qatraḥ* for translation into Urdu, recognizing it as a superlative work for its comprehensive compilation

of virtues, miracles, piety, generosity, and all other noble attributes exemplified by the Ahlulbayt (AS).

Divine Affirmation of Service

A profound anecdote, narrated by Sayyid Ahmad Mustanbat's son, underscores the divine acceptance of his monumental work. After completing the first volume of *Al-Qatrah*, Sayyid Ahmad Mustanbat saw in a dream that **Lady Fatima Zahra (peace be upon her)**, the daughter of the Prophet and the mother of all *Sayyids*, had placed his head on her lap, cradling him as a mother would her child. Overwhelmed, he asked about the reason for such immense honor. Lady Fatima replied that it was due to his authorship of *Al-Qatrah*, a book dedicated to their virtues. This dream parallels the account of **Allamah Amini**, author of *Al-Ghadir*, who reportedly saw **Imam Ali (AS)** himself serving him water in a dream. These divine affirmations highlight that the efforts of these scholars in propagating the message of the Ahlulbayt (AS) are not merely earthly endeavors but are divinely sanctioned and profoundly rewarded, even in this world. Such figures, whose dedication receives heavenly confirmation, are deemed worthy of eternal proximity to the Ahlulbayt (AS) in Paradise.

9.8 Sheikh Muhammad Kazim Akhund Khurasani

Sheikh Muhammad Kazim Akhund Khurasani (d. 1329 AH/1911 CE) stands as one of the most brilliant and distinguished students of **Sheikh Murtada Ansari**. His intellectual legacy is immense, particularly in the field of *usul al-fiqh*. While Sheikh Ansari's *Rasa'il* and *Makasib* are fundamental texts in the *hawza*, they are often followed by **Kifayat al-Usul**, a complex and comprehensive work authored by Akhund Khurasani himself. This book serves as the final and most advanced text before students are deemed ready to enter *dars-e-kharij*, the pinnacle of jurisprudential study, and ultimately qualify for *ijtihad*. The fact that Sheikh Ansari's student authored such a pivotal work demonstrates the profound impact of Ansari's teaching methodology and the intellectual lineage that flowed from

him.

A Revered Teacher and Pious Scholar

Akhund Khurasani was an exceptional teacher. Those who attended his classes often remarked that his lectures evoked the memory of Sheikh Murtada Ansari's and even **Sheikh Tusi's** teaching styles. It is said that Sheikh Tusi's classes were attended by three hundred *mujtahids*, and similarly, Akhund Khurasani's lessons were frequented by an astonishing number of scholars—reportedly 1200 *ulama*, including 200 *mujtahids*. He nurtured and guided many students who went on to become colossal figures in their own right. For instance, **Ayatollah Boroujerdi**, a future **Grand Marja'**, was one of his distinguished students, often seen sitting in his lessons. Akhund Khurasani's teachings and writings profoundly benefited countless individuals, and his influence continues to reverberate through the *hawza* to this day.

Beyond his scholarly pursuits, Akhund Khurasani was a paragon of piety and devotion. While some scholars, faced with the rigors of academic life, may reduce their devotional practices, Akhund Khurasani was unwavering in his worship. His daily routine included the *Salat al-Layl* (night prayers), *Ziyarat Ashura*, and *Dua Kumayl*, alongside many other recommended acts of worship. His neighbor in Najaf recounted a remarkable observation: during hot summer nights, when people would often sleep on rooftops, he would frequently wake up to the sound of intense weeping. Upon investigation, he would see Akhund Khurasani prostrating on his rooftop, weeping with such fervor as if he were a great sinner repenting for monumental crimes, pleading with Allah for forgiveness with intense sincerity. This profound devotion, despite his towering scholarly and spiritual status, serves as a powerful reminder that true knowledge must be accompanied by deep worship and sincere humility. A scholar's knowledge can only transform into **true knowledge** (*ilm-e-haqiqi*) when it is sweetened by devotion, prolonged prostrations, and a profound connection to the divine.

A Unique Approach to Ziyarat

A peculiar anecdote regarding Akhund Khurasani's visits to the Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (AS) is widely recounted. Unlike many devotees who spend hours clinging to the *Zarih* (grille around the tomb), Akhund Khurasani would enter the shrine, perform his *Ziyarat* (salutation), and quickly exit, often within minutes. This unusual behavior was noted by many, who sometimes expressed concern, wondering if he lacked love for the Imam.

His profound response to such inquiries reveals his deep understanding of sincerity: He would grasp his white beard and say, "Do you wish for me, at this age and with this white beard, to engage in hypocrisy (*riya*) before the Imam? Do you want me to falsely assert my love by remaining seated here, suggesting that my presence signifies my devotion?" He emphasized that a true follower of the Imam demonstrates their love by embodying the Imam's teachings and principles in their daily lives, whether inside or outside the shrine. The Imam, he believed, would accept the *Ziyarat* of such a person.

This perspective is beautifully illustrated by another widely known account: A wealthy man, preparing for *Ziyarat* to Karbala, was asked by his poor, pious neighbor to convey his salutations to Imam Husain (AS). Upon reaching the shrine, the wealthy man recited his own *Ziyarat*. Remembering his neighbor, he conveyed the poor man's salutations. Immediately, a voice from the tomb responded, "**Wa alaikum as-salam!**" (And peace be upon you too!) – acknowledging the absent, pious neighbor, but not the physically present, perhaps less sincere, wealthy man. This story underscores that inner piety and sincerity hold greater weight than mere physical presence. Those unable to perform *Ziyarat* should not feel disheartened, for the true essence of *Ziyarat* lies in genuine connection and adherence to the path of the Imams, which transcends physical distance. The ultimate reward of *Ziyarat* is when the Imam lovingly embraces you and responds to your salutations, indicating his pleasure.

Akhund Khurasani's major work, **Kifayat al-Usul**, has been extensively *sharh* (commented upon) and *tashrihat* (explained) by numerous scholars and remains a cornerstone of the *hawza ilmiyya* in both Qom and Najaf to this day.

9.9 Sheikh Abul Hasan Isfahani

The city of Isfahan in Iran has historically been a cradle of Islamic scholarship, alongside other great cities like Qom, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Shushtar. Many distinguished scholars, though born and raised in Iran, would spend significant periods of their lives and scholarship in Najaf, and vice versa. This fluidity often makes it difficult to pinpoint the exact geographical origin of some of these intellectual giants. Among them was **Sheikh Abul Hasan Isfahani** (d. 1365 AH/1946 CE), a leading *marja* of his era.

As previously mentioned in the context of Mirza Na'ini, Sheikh Abul Hasan Isfahani was a staunch opponent of colonialism and the encroaching influence of British companies and other foreign powers seeking to control the economies of Iran and Iraq. His expertise in *fiqh* and *usul*, honed through his study of Sheikh Murtada Ansari's *Rasa'il* and *Makasib*, provided him with the necessary insight to articulate Islamic economic principles and guide people on how to conduct their business affairs according to divine law.

His resolute opposition to the colonial agenda led to his banishment from Iraq. He then traveled to Iran, where he was warmly welcomed by **Abd al-Karim Ha'iri** (the founder of the *Hawza* in Qom) and other prominent scholars. Together, they continued their efforts to safeguard the Islamic identity and sovereignty of the region from foreign encroachment. Sheikh Abul Hasan Isfahani's most celebrated jurisprudential work is **Wasila al-Najat**, a book held in high regard by scholars like **Imam Khomeini (RA)**, who penned his own commentary (*hashiya*) on it. This work remains highly influential in jurisprudential circles.

9.10 Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei

Another prominent personality to be highlighted is **Ayatollah Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei** (d. 1413 AH/1992 CE), whose blessed tomb lies in **Hujra number 31**, alongside those of his sons. The sheer magnitude of Ayatollah Khoei's scholarly

stature can be gauged by a singular fact: almost all contemporary *maraji'* (sources of emulation) and *mujtahids* in both Najaf and Qom have, either directly or indirectly, been his students. This includes luminaries such as **Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani**, **Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei**, **Ayatollah Wahid Khorasani**, and **Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi**.

The intellectual lineage is further exemplified by the fact that **Muhammad Muhammadi Ijtihadi**, the author of the widely acclaimed **Usul al-Anbiya** (Principles of the Prophets), was a student of Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi, who in turn was a student of Ayatollah Khoei. This chain of knowledge underscores Ayatollah Khoei's pivotal role in shaping generations of Islamic scholars.

Ayatollah Khoei was born in Khoy, Iran, further illustrating the interconnect-edness of Iranian and Iraqi *hawzas*. The traditional path for a scholar involves demonstrating his jurisprudential prowess in his native *hawza* (e.g., Qom for Iranians) to receive recognition as a *mujtahid* from local authorities. Subsequently, he would travel to Najaf, the older and historically central *hawza*, to further establish his authority and receive certification from its *mujtahids*. Similarly, a scholar attaining *ijtihād* in Najaf would often seek recognition in Qom. This cross-pollination ensures a rigorous standard of scholarship, driven by the insatiable thirst for knowledge that transcends geographical boundaries.

Expansive Knowledge and Prolific Works

Ayatollah Khoei's contributions to Islamic knowledge are vast and varied:

- **Tafsir Surah al-Fatiha:** He authored a commentary solely on Surah al-Fatiha. When he learned that **Allamah Muhammad Husain Tabatabai** was embarking on his comprehensive **Tafsir al-Mizan**, Ayatollah Khoei, in a profound display of humility and trust in another scholar's capabilities, decided not to continue his own Quranic exegesis, believing Tabatabai would undoubtedly do justice to the subject. This highlights the respect and confidence scholars of that era held for each other's intellectual integrity.

- **Minhaj al-Salihin:** This widely referred jurisprudential text serves as a primary source for the *Tawdih al-Masa'il* (explanation of rulings) of many *maraji'*.
- **Urwat al-Wuthqa:** Another significant jurisprudential reference.
- **Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith:** This monumental work, comprising an astonishing forty-two volumes, is a comprehensive encyclopedia of *rijal* (the study of narrators of *hadith*). This field is crucial for *ijtihad*, as it involves discerning the authenticity of *hadith* by evaluating the lives, character, and reliability of their narrators. Ayatollah Khoei's painstaking research in this work significantly simplified the process of *ijtihad* for subsequent generations of scholars, making the verification of *hadith* and the evaluation of their chains of transmission far more accessible.
- **Beyond Religious Sciences:** Ayatollah Khoei's intellect extended beyond traditional religious studies. He was also highly regarded in the fields of astronomy and physics. When discussing the issue of moon sighting for Islamic months, his theories and explanations were accompanied by detailed diagrams, demonstrating a precise understanding akin to that of a professional astrologer or physicist. His ability to accurately predict the phases of the moon showcased his mastery of both religious and empirical sciences.

Challenges under Saddam's Regime

Ayatollah Khoei's eminent position did not shield him from political persecution. During the reign of Saddam Hussein, he was arrested and forced into public appearances alongside the dictator, ostensibly to project an image of the *marja's* support for the regime. However, it soon became evident that these were coerced appearances, and he was subsequently imprisoned. Despite this, he remained steadfast in his principles. Tragically, two of his sons, **Ayatollah Ali Khoei** and **Taqi Khoei**, along with **Majid Khoei**, were martyred. Three of his sons are buried within the Holy Shrine. This violence was aimed at crushing his legacy, but his teachings and intellectual heritage continue to thrive through his brilliant students, most notably **Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Sistani**, who continues to serve as a beacon

of guidance for the Shia world. May Allah grant him long life and high station.

9.11 Ayatollah Muhammad Hasan Shirazi

Another towering figure associated with the city of Shiraz, **Ayatollah Muhammad Hasan Shirazi** (d. 1312 AH/1895 CE), is universally remembered for his courageous and impactful **Tobacco Fatwa**. He was a distinguished student of **Sheikh Murtada Ansari** and, after a brief period of leadership by Ja'far Shushtari, assumed the weighty responsibility of the *Marja'iyat* (religious leadership) for a considerable duration.

A Genius Mind and a Visionary Leader

Ayatollah Shirazi possessed an exceptionally sharp memory, enabling him to deliver lectures for hours without reference to any books. He would continuously move from one side of the podium to the other, engaging his students with his profound insights. This feat of memory and intellectual prowess was a marvel to his contemporaries, who often wondered how he could deliver such intricate discourses without relying on texts, especially when they themselves required books even for a simple *Ziyarat*. This high level of intellectual retention and stamina was a hallmark of scholars of that era, who often lacked modern distractions like social media, allowing them to dedicate their entire lives to knowledge and worship.

One of Ayatollah Shirazi's most significant achievements was his initiative to establish a **Hawza** (Islamic seminary) in **Samarra**. Samarra, though geographically blessed with the shrines of **Imam Ali al-Hadi (AS)** and **Imam Hasan al-Askari (AS)**, and the sacred cellar (*sardab*) where **Imam Mahdi (AS)** is believed to have gone into occultation, has historically been a volatile region, plagued by conflict, looting, and animosity from the enemies of the **Ahlulbayt (AS)**. Even today, despite improved security, caution is necessary for pilgrims. Recognizing the strategic and spiritual importance of Samarra, Ayatollah Shirazi undertook the bold step of establishing an academic center there, aiming to revive its scholarly

tradition and ensure the continuous presence of learning and piety in a perennially threatened location. While a fully functioning *hawza* might not exist there today, his initiative laid a crucial foundation for its potential resurgence as an academic hub.

The Historic Tobacco Fatwa: A Blow to Colonialism

Ayatollah Shirazi's most renowned act, however, was his issuance of the **Tobacco Fatwa**. This powerful religious decree was a direct response to the insidious tactics of British colonialism in Iran during the late 19th century, around the same time the East India Company was consolidating its control in the Indian subcontinent. The colonial powers would exploit local resources, like cotton, process them cheaply in their factories, and then sell the finished goods back to the native populations at exorbitant prices, effectively destroying local industries and enriching themselves.

In a similar vein, the British sought to gain control over Iran's tobacco industry. They struck a deal with the then-weak Qajar monarch, **Nasir al-Din Shah**, offering him a substantial sum of 15,000 pounds sterling, along with a percentage of the profits, in exchange for a monopoly over Iran's tobacco cultivation and trade. The king, desperate for funds and glory, readily agreed. The British plan was to export Iranian tobacco to England, process it into cigarettes and other products, and then re-import and sell these products back to Iranians at inflated prices. This would not only devastate Iran's economy but also create a dependency on foreign goods, further enslaving the nation.

Ayatollah Shirazi, with his keen insight, immediately discerned the deeper imperialistic motives behind this seemingly economic venture. He recognized that this was not merely a commercial deal but a strategic move to subjugate Iran economically and, ultimately, culturally and religiously. In response, he issued a **religious hukm**, declaring the use of tobacco **forbidden** (*haram*) for Muslims. He declared it *haram* from his side, thereby issuing a definitive command. Other prominent *mujtahids* of the time supported his decree, and the populace, out of deep reverence for their religious leaders, universally abided by it. The nationwide boycott of tobacco products inflicted a massive financial blow on the British

companies, forcing them to retract the concession and effectively preventing them from firmly establishing their foothold in Iran. This historical event stands as a testament to the immense power of religious authority and the unity of the people when guided by righteous scholars, a phenomenon that unfortunately was not as prevalent or effective in the Indian subcontinent due to a different socio-religious context.

9.12 Sheikh Ja'far Shushtari

Our final stops in this journey through the scholarly landscape of Najaf bring us to **Sheikh Ja'far Shushtari** (d. 1303 AH/1886 CE). Hailing from the city of Shushtar, he had already attained the distinguished position of a *marja'* in his hometown, overseeing its religious affairs and leading its scholarly discourse. This makes his subsequent actions even more remarkable, demonstrating an extraordinary level of humility and dedication to the pursuit of truth.

A Humbling Revelation and a Divine Calling

An extraordinary incident profoundly impacted Sheikh Shushtari's life and intellectual trajectory. While serving as a *marja'*, he was once presented with a land dispute involving orphans. Witnesses provided testimony, asserting that the land did not belong to the orphans but to another party, and Sheikh Shushtari ruled accordingly. However, that very night, a tailor (*jullah*) knocked on his door. This tailor, whose traditional appearance was well-known in that era, informed Sheikh Shushtari that his judgment was incorrect and that the land rightfully belonged to the orphans. Crucially, the tailor revealed that the document proving the orphans' ownership was buried at a specific location within the land.

The next morning, Sheikh Shushtari dispatched people to the indicated spot. To their astonishment, they unearthed the document, which clearly stated that the land was indeed the property of the orphans. Sheikh Shushtari immediately rectified his judgment, compensating the false witnesses and ensuring justice for the orphans. The incident, however, left him deeply disturbed. He began to

question his own abilities, feeling that he lacked the insight (*firasat*) and spiritual perception to discern truth from falsehood and recognize deceitful testimonies. This crisis of confidence led him to ponder whether his *ijtihad* and his entire scholarly endeavor were truly at the required level.

The tailor reappeared the following night, reiterating that Sheikh Shushtari's current path was insufficient and that he needed to change. This further deepened Sheikh Shushtari's internal turmoil. He was a recognized *marja'*, yet this unknown tailor, seemingly an ordinary person, was challenging his entire understanding. On the third day, the tailor appeared yet again, delivering a startling command: "You must immediately go to Najaf to seek knowledge, and wait for me in *Wadi al-Salam* after six months." The authoritative tone and the specific instructions left no doubt in Sheikh Shushtari's mind that this was a divine directive, emanating from someone possessing deep spiritual insight.

The Path of Humility: From Marja' to Student

In an extraordinary act of humility and submission to the divine will, Sheikh Ja'far Shushtari sold his home and possessions and immediately departed for Najaf. After six months, he went to *Wadi al-Salam*, where he found the same tailor awaiting him. The tailor provided him with detailed guidance on his studies in Najaf: where to live, from whom to seek knowledge, and what specific services to render. Sheikh Shushtari meticulously followed every single instruction.

Crucially, he became a student of **Sheikh Murtada Ansari**, the same scholar whose *hujra* we visited earlier. This was a monumental decision; for a scholar who was already a *marja'* in his own right, leading an entire community, to sit as a student at the feet of another master demonstrated an unparalleled level of humility and intellectual integrity. It is reminiscent of the revered **Allamah Kohkamari**, who, despite being a prominent scholar, sat in Sheikh Ansari's classes after recognizing the profound depth of his lectures.

While Sheikh Shushtari excelled in **ethics** (*ilm al-akhlāq*), Sheikh Murtada Ansari was preeminent in *fiqh* (jurisprudence), which forms the core of Shia *marjaiyat*.

Sheikh Ansari began to teach Sheikh Shushtari *fiqh*. Yet, the humility was reciprocal. Sheikh Shushtari continued to teach his acclaimed ethics lectures once a week to a wide audience. Observing this, Sheikh Murtada Ansari, the great teacher of *fiqh* and *usul*, would himself attend Sheikh Ja'far Shushtari's ethics lessons, sitting as a student before his own student, recognizing Sheikh Shushtari's superior mastery in the field of *ilm al-akhlaq*. This beautiful exchange exemplifies the true spirit of learning in the *hawza*, where knowledge is pursued for its own sake, and scholars, regardless of their position, are willing to learn from anyone who possesses greater expertise in a particular field. It illustrates that one can simultaneously be both a teacher and a student, constantly striving to deepen their understanding across various disciplines. This mutual respect and intellectual generosity are hallmarks of the greatest scholars of the Islamic tradition.

9.13 Lessons from the Scholars' Routines

The routines and lifestyles of these scholars offer profound lessons applicable to modern life, often contrasting sharply with contemporary notions of "work-life balance." For them, life itself was work, a continuous dedication to divine service and the pursuit of knowledge.

Early Rising: Many scholars, like Muhaddith Nuri, would rise before Fajr, assist in preparing the shrine, and then dedicate time to study and worship. This echoes the general spiritual advice to wake early for *Salat al-Layl* (Night Prayer) and meditation.

Continuous Dedication: Their lives were characterized by relentless work and study, mirroring the ethos of leaders like Quaid-e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Ayatullah Marashi Najafi, who famously stated he had not taken a single day off for forty years. They saw no separation between "life" and "work," dedicating themselves entirely to their divine mission.

Humility in Knowledge: The *Hawza* system, particularly in its traditional form, emphasized a trust-based approach to learning. Students were not subjected to

formal attendance checks or exams, as the system implicitly trusted their sincerity (*khuloos*) and commitment. This contrasts with modern assessment methods, where continuous evaluation often implies a lack of trust. The story of Sheikh Abbas Qummi, who in his old age, invited colleagues to test his continued ability of *istinbat* (deriving legal rulings), exemplifies a profound level of sincerity and self-assessment, driven by a fear of God, not external validation.

The anecdotes of these great scholars serve as a guiding light, encouraging pilgrims to strive for a life of unwavering devotion, humility, and sincerity, always seeking to follow in the footsteps of the infallible Ahl al-Bayt (AS). This concludes our exploration of the chosen twelve scholars interred within the Holy Shrine of Imam Ali (AS) in Najaf al-Ashraf. These luminaries, through their profound knowledge, unwavering piety, and courageous stands, have introduced us to the true essence of the **Ahlulbayt (AS)**.

Chapter 10

Navigating the Holy City of Najaf

Understanding the geography of Najaf al-Ashraf is essential for pilgrims to fully appreciate and access its myriad sacred sites. The city, particularly the historic “Old Najaf,” is laid out in a distinct manner, with specific landmarks and roads serving as crucial navigational aids.

10.1 Understanding the Map of Najaf

When viewing any geographical map, particularly in books or digital formats, it is a universal convention that the top of the map represents the **North Pole**, and the bottom represents the **South Pole**. Similarly, the right side corresponds to **East**, and the left side to **West**. This fundamental orientation helps in understanding the layout of Najaf.

Old Najaf, the historical core of the city, is identifiable on a map by a roughly circular or rectangular yellow line. Everything within this boundary constitutes Old Najaf. Areas outside this line are considered New Najaf or “outside Najaf.” For instance, *Wadi-us-Salam*, though contiguous, is technically outside the old city limits of Najaf.

Key Reference Point: Bab al-Qibla and Bab al-Tusi

For navigation within Old Najaf, the primary reference point is the **Bab al-Qibla** (Gate of the Qibla), which is one of the main entrances to the Holy Shrine of Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). This gate is often directly opposite the large *Bazar al-Kabir* (Grand Bazaar). Pilgrims are advised to make this **Bab al-Qibla** their *zero point* or *reference point* for all their movements within the city.

Major Roads and Their Significance

From the perspective of the **Bab al-Qibla**, one can identify the key thoroughfares of Najaf:

- **Shar-e-Imam Zain-ul-Abideen:** This road extends from the Bab al-Qibla, going straight into the eastern part of Najaf, crossing the entire breadth of the old city.
- **Shar-e-Imam Sadiq:** This road runs from the east up to the Holy Shrine.
- **Shar-e-Safa:** This road continues from the Holy Shrine towards the end of the old city.

In terms of north-south routes:

- **Shar-e-Tusi:** This road runs from the north towards the Holy Shrine.
- **Shar-e-Rasool:** This road extends from the Holy Shrine further south.

These five main roads – *Shar-e-Imam Zain-ul-Abideen*, *Shar-e-Imam Sadiq*, *Shar-e-Safa*, *Shar-e-Tusi*, and *Shar-e-Rasool* – form the primary arteries of Old Najaf.

Additional peripheral roads include:

- **Shar-e-Mahdi:** Located along the eastern perimeter.
- **Shar-e-Banaat al-Hasan:** Located further along the *Shar-e-Rasool*.
- **Shar-e-Madina:** Situated slightly beyond *Shar-e-Banaat al-Hasan*.

The Four Quarters of Old Najaf

Old Najaf is historically divided into four main quarters (*mahallas*):

- **Mashriq:** Located to the right (east) when entering from Bab al-Qibla.
- **Maghrib:** Located to the left (west).
- **Imarah:** Adjacent to Mashriq.
- **Huwaysh:** Adjacent to Maghrib.

These quarters represent the traditional residential and commercial areas of the old city.

Understanding the Modern Extensions

Beyond the old city boundaries, new areas have developed, which are often referred to as “New Najaf” or “Jadidah.” For example, *Wadi-us-Salam* is situated outside the old city of Najaf. Similarly, there is an area known as **Jadidah Thaniyah** or **Shawafiyah**, located perpendicular to *Shar-e-Madina*. This area is particularly significant as it hosts the residences of many prominent *Maraji’ al-Taqlid* (religious authorities) and scholarly figures, as well as several student residences.

The purpose of providing this detailed map and location information is to empower pilgrims. By understanding where each site is situated, they can independently navigate, especially if a caravan is unable to facilitate a visit or if they wish to explore at their own pace. This knowledge enables pilgrims to maximize their spiritual journey, ensuring they visit all the significant sites within Najaf al-Ashraf.

Chapter 11

Sacred Sanctuaries within Old Najaf

The spiritual heart of Najaf al-Ashraf beats strongest around the venerable tomb of Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S.). Having already delved into the Holy Shrine itself, our journey now expands to other significant locations within the city, each holding a unique piece of Islamic history and spirituality. Pilgrims are encouraged to commence their individual Ziyarat from the Holy Shrine, seeking the blessings of Imam Ali (A.S.) as they embark on their spiritual explorations.

11.1 Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen (A.S.)

The second significant site for walking Ziyarat in Najaf is the **Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen (A.S.)**. To locate this sacred spot, pilgrims can begin at the **Bab al-Qibla**, their primary reference point. From the Holy Shrine, exit through **Bab al-Tusi**. Upon exiting, turn left and proceed along **Shar-e-Imam Zain al-Abideen**. Continuing along this road, as one reaches the end of Old Najaf, the *Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen (A.S.)* will be found.

The term *Maqam* signifies a place where an Imam has been present. Whether

the Imam merely visited, resided for a period, or performed prayers, the location becomes sacred due to his blessed footsteps. Such is the case with *Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen*. Historical accounts confirm that Imam Zain al-Abideen (A.S.) visited this very spot, resided here for some days, and engaged in worship and prayers. It is from this location that he would proceed to the Holy Shrine of his grandfather, Imam Ali (A.S.), for Ziyarat. Some narrations suggest that after the tragedy of Karbala, Imam Zain al-Abideen (A.S.) spent several years or months in seclusion in the wilderness before coming here to perform Ziyarat of his grandfather, subsequently traveling to Medina. His stay here, spanning days of worship and prayer, elevates the sanctity of this *Maqam*.

Currently, a grand new building is under construction at this *Maqam*, featuring a magnificent dome and a splendid structure. This construction further enhances the prominence of this site. It is noteworthy that *Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen* exists in more than one location; for instance, there is another *Maqam* in Mosul. The one in Mosul had tragically fallen under the control of Daesh but has since been liberated, underscoring the spiritual and historical value of such sites.

11.2 Maqam Safa Yamani

Adjacent to the *Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen* (A.S.) lies the **Maqam Safa Yamani**, easily identifiable as it sits next to a large park. This proximity means pilgrims can visit both sites consecutively, regardless of their starting point. If one's hotel is located on *Shar-e-Safa*, for example, they might visit *Maqam Safa Yamani* first, followed by *Maqam Imam Zain al-Abideen* (A.S.). The site is characterized by a wide road where large vehicles, including those traveling to Kufa, are often parked.

The historical background of *Maqam Safa Yamani* is particularly poignant. It is narrated that Imam Ali (A.S.) was once outside Najaf when he encountered a caravan carrying a deceased person. The Imam inquired about the deceased and the travelers' origin. A man from the caravan explained that they were from Yemen and that the deceased was his father. Imam Ali (A.S.) then asked if there

was no place to bury him in Yemen, prompting the man to reveal his father's dying wish: to be buried in a place where a man resides whose intercession is equivalent to that of the two great Arab tribes, Rabi'ah and Mudar. This implied that this individual could intercede for a vast multitude of people.

Upon hearing this, Imam Ali (A.S.) declared, repeating thrice, "By God, I am that person! By God, I am that person! By God, I am that person!" This profound declaration underscores his divine authority and status. The internal area of the *Maqam* displays a *Ziyaratnamah* (supplication for visiting a holy site). The outdoor sign at the entrance further clarifies the site's significance, identifying it as "Maqam Amir al-Mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib and Marqad Abd al-Salam Mu'alla." It is also known as *Safa Yamani*.

The appellation *Maqam Amir al-Mu'minin* is attributed to the belief that Imam Ali (A.S.) would frequent this place for supplications (*munajat*) with Allah. Some traditions also connect this site to Prophet Musa (A.S.), stating that it was here that he conversed with Allah, and upon the divine manifestation (*tajalli*), the mountain disintegrated, leaving a leveled ground. Thus, Imam Ali (A.S.) chose this very spot, already hallowed by the presence of Prophet Musa (A.S.), for his private communion with the Divine. The *Maqam Safa Yamani* therefore stands as a dual testament to the spiritual legacies of both Prophet Musa (A.S.) and Imam Ali (A.S.).

11.3 Masjid and Marqad Sheikh Tusi

Najaf al-Ashraf is not only the resting place of Imam Ali (A.S.) but also a vibrant center of Islamic scholarship, having nurtured generations of profound scholars, jurists, and mystics. Their contributions have shaped the intellectual and spiritual landscape of the Shia world. Visiting their tombs and former residences offers a glimpse into their lives of dedication, asceticism, and immense learning.

The **Masjid and Marqad Sheikh Tusi** is a site of immense historical and religious importance, yet it is often overlooked by pilgrims due to a lack of awareness. It is

located at the **Bab al-Tusi** gate, which is a major thoroughfare for those heading to *Wadi-us-Salam*. Most pilgrims pass by or gather at this gate, but few enter the mosque itself, despite it housing the tomb of Sheikh Tusi and Sayyid Mehdi Bahr al-Uloom.

To reach it, one would exit the Holy Shrine from the **Bab al-Qibla**, then turn right towards **Bab al-Tusi**. The mosque and tomb are immediately on the left side upon exiting Bab al-Tusi. This location was originally the house and seminary of **Sheikh Tusi**, who migrated from Kadhimiya/Baghdad to Najaf. Before his passing, he willed that his house be converted into a mosque, and his wishes were honored.

Sheikh Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Tusi, commonly known as Sheikh Tusi, was a monumental figure in Shia Islam. Born in Tus, Iran, he was a student of Sheikh Mufid for five years in Kadhimiya, under whose guidance he authored *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*, one of the four foundational books of Shia Hadith. After Sheikh Mufid's demise, he became a student of Sayyid Murtadha, Sheikh Mufid's brother (also known as Sharif Murtadha), and under his tutelage, compiled *Al-Istibsar*, another of the four canonical books. This means Sheikh Tusi authored 50% of the core Hadith collections that form the bedrock of Shia jurisprudence. His contributions effectively provided half of the written knowledge base of Shia Islam.

Sheikh Tusi's arrival in Najaf in 448 AH (1056 CE) marked a turning point for the city. Before his arrival, Najaf was not a developed city; pilgrims would visit and leave quickly. Sheikh Tusi, with his thirst for knowledge, transformed it into a bustling center of learning. He established the Hawza (religious seminary) of Najaf, attracting thousands of students and hundreds of *mujtahids*. This influx of scholars and students led to the development of various amenities, effectively turning Najaf into a thriving city. He willed to be buried in his house, which then became the mosque, and his tomb is still present there.

11.4 Marqad Sayyid Mehdi Bahr al-Uloom

Also buried within the **Masjid and Marqad Sheikh Tusi** is the revered **Sayyid Mehdi Bahr al-Uloom**. Among the numerous great scholars in Islamic history, Sayyid Mehdi Bahr al-Uloom stands out, inspiring profound awe and wonder. His eminence was so immense that for a significant period, many people believed he was Imam al-Mahdi (A.S.) himself, such was his piety, knowledge, and purity. This speaks volumes about his spiritual stature, that a non-Infallible could be mistaken for the Hidden Imam. He earned the title *Bahr al-Uloom* (Ocean of Knowledge) from his student days, and his descendants continue to bear this distinguished title, a testament to his enduring legacy.

Sayyid Mehdi Bahr al-Uloom's extraordinary knowledge is further evidenced by a fascinating anecdote. Once, while traveling with his companions, he stopped a passing caravan, inquiring in detail about their well-being, their families, their neighborhoods, and their city in Yemen, as if he had resided there for a long time. His astonished companions questioned how he knew so much about a place he had never visited. He humbly replied, "If I were to say that I am aware of every nook and corner of the world, it would not be an exaggeration."

His profound connection to the unseen and to Imam al-Mahdi (A.S.) is further demonstrated by his role in discovering and identifying many important Ziyarat sites in Iraq. These include:

- The actual location of **Masjid Kufa**.
- The house of **Imam Ali (A.S.)** in Kufa.
- The tomb of **Kumayl ibn Ziyad**.
- **Masjid Hananah**.
- The tombs of **Prophet Hud** and **Prophet Saleh (A.S.)** in *Wadi-us-Salam*.

Many of the most significant Ziyarat sites in Najaf and Kufa were revealed through his divine insight and connection. The discoveries attributed to Sayyid Mehdi Bahr al-Uloom are indeed a testament to his elevated spiritual station.

11.5 Marqad Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Najafi

Continuing along the path from **Masjid Sheikh Tusi** on *Shar-e-Imam Zain al-Abideen*, pilgrims will reach the tomb of **Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Najafi**, famously known as **Sahib Jawahir**. He was the esteemed teacher of **Sheikh Murtadha Ansari**, a pivotal figure in Shia jurisprudence.

In ancient times, scholars who authored highly influential books were often identified by the name of their works, such as *Sahib Mafatih* or *Sahib Bihar*. Similarly, Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Najafi gained the appellation *Sahib Jawahir* due to his monumental work, **Jawahir al-Kalam** (The Jewels of Discourse). This magnum opus, comprising 42 volumes, took him 32 years to complete, representing a significant portion of his life dedicated to compiling this comprehensive work of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). Sheikh Murtadha Ansari, his student, famously stated that studying *Jawahir al-Kalam* and *Wasail al-Shia* is sufficient for anyone to become a *mujtahid*.

Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Najafi is historically recognized for establishing the concept of centralized *Marja'iyat* (religious authority). During his era, he was the sole, undisputed, and universally accepted *Marja'* of the Shia world. While today there are multiple *Maraji'*, his period marked a unique historical instance where the entire Shia community coalesced around a single authority. This centralization of leadership is highly beneficial, as it consolidates resources and streamlines decision-making, provided the *Marja'* possesses the necessary comprehensive knowledge. *Sahib Jawahir* undoubtedly held such an exalted position of knowledge and leadership in his time.

11.6 Marqad Sheikh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita

The tomb of **Sheikh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita** is another important Ziyarat site. He was a distinguished scholar whose lineage traced back to **Malik Ashtar**, the loyal companion of Imam Ali (A.S.). His prominent work, **Kashif al-Ghita** (Unveiler

of Mysteries), lent him his renowned title. This book covered principles of faith (*Usul al-Din*), tenets of belief (*Aqaa'id*), and meticulously resolved complex jurisprudential issues. Visiting his resting place allows pilgrims to connect with a scholar who inherited both intellectual brilliance and a noble lineage.

11.7 Masjid Hindi and Kutub Khana Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim

The **Masjid Hindi**, built by an Indian named Haji Khan Muhammad Hindi, is not only a place of worship but also houses the **Marqad and Kutub Khana (Library) of Ayatollah Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim**. This site is easily locatable, typically found on the right side when one is exiting the Holy Shrine from Bab al-Qibla and proceeding towards the area of Ayatollah Sistani's residence.

Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim (1298 AH - 1970 CE) was a towering figure of his time, a *Marja' al-Taqlid* whose eminence was such that he was the teacher of luminaries like Ayatollah Khomeini. He was the son of Sayyid Mehdi al-Hakim, who had migrated from Lebanon to Najaf, establishing the esteemed Hakim family there. After Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim's passing, fourteen *Maraji'* emerged, including Ayatollah Khomeini, a testament to his profound influence and the intellectual environment he fostered. The current **Ayatollah Sayyid Sa'eed al-Hakim**, one of the four contemporary Grand Maraji' in Najaf, is the nephew of Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, continuing the legacy of this illustrious family of scholars.

The library within Masjid Hindi is a testament to the scholarly tradition, containing a vast collection of invaluable books. The presence of Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim's tomb here further enhances the spiritual and intellectual aura of the place, making it a significant stop for pilgrims seeking blessings and inspiration from these great beacons of knowledge.

Chapter 12

The Guiding Lights: Living Maraji'

Najaf al-Ashraf is not only a historical center of Shia Islam but also a vibrant contemporary hub, home to some of the most influential living *Maraji' al-Taqlid* (religious authorities). Visiting their residences, even for a brief glimpse or audience, offers pilgrims a unique opportunity to connect with the living pulse of Shia scholarship and leadership. The term *Ziyarat* extends beyond visiting the deceased; it encompasses meeting and seeking blessings from living spiritual guides, a practice that can be even more impactful.

12.1 Bayt Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Hussaini al-Sistani

The residence of **Ayatollah Sayyid Ali al-Hussaini al-Sistani** is a significant site for pilgrims, offering a rare chance to see and perhaps meet one of the most prominent living *Maraji'*. Located on *Shar-e-Rasool*, a short walk from **Bab al-Qibla**, pilgrims can find his house on the left side of the street (if coming from Bab al-Qibla towards the Bab al-Qibla-Bab al-Tusi axis). The street leading to his home might appear like an ordinary bazaar alley with shops, but the presence of people gathering indicates the sanctity of the area. The narrow alleyways are often inaccessible by car, or even bicycle, due to their constricted nature.

Ayatollah Sistani was born either in Sistan or Mashhad, with Sistan being the more widely accepted birthplace. He pursued his early education from his esteemed father and later became a student of Ayatollah Sayyid Husayn Borujerdi. After completing his studies, he moved to Najaf, where he spent a considerable time as a student of Ayatollah Sayyid Abul-Qasim al-Khoei. In 1960, at the young age of thirty, he attained the degree of *Ijtihad* (the ability to independently derive Islamic rulings), and by 1992, at the age of sixty-two, he became a *Marja' al-Taqlid*. Following Ayatollah Khoei's demise in 1992, he was designated to lead the funeral prayers, signaling his succession as a leading *Marja'*.

Ayatollah Sistani, despite his advanced age and having undergone two bypass surgeries, is known for his remarkable stamina. He meticulously answers every question, sometimes taking up to half an hour or more per query, with visitors often tiring before him. His reclusiveness from direct public interaction does not equate to political inactivity. Like the Infallible Imams, who exercised control even from imprisonment or occultation, Ayatollah Sistani demonstrates significant political mobilization. A notable example is his act of directly intervening during a critical standoff in Najaf. While in London for recovery after surgery, upon learning that American forces were about to attack the shrine of Imam Ali (A.S.), where forces of Muqtada al-Sadr were besieged, he immediately returned to Najaf. He walked directly into the Holy Shrine, personally retrieved Muqtada al-Sadr, and saved his life. This incident powerfully demonstrated his active role and debunked notions of rivalry between different religious leaders.

Furthermore, in 2005, Ayatollah Sistani issued a definitive fatwa urging all Iraqis to participate in the general elections, the first truly free elections after Saddam Hussein's dictatorial rule. This mobilization led to a significant turnout of Shia voters, demonstrating their political voice. He also notably encouraged women to participate, likening a woman casting her vote to Lady Zainab's journey to Karbala, which inspired countless women to exercise their right. More recently, in 2014, when ISIS gained significant ground, Ayatollah Sistani issued a historic fatwa calling on all able-bodied Iraqis to defend their land and holy sites. This call led to an unprecedented mobilization, with even religious scholars taking up

arms, effectively halting ISIS's advance and reclaiming lost territories.

Beyond political engagement, Ayatollah Sistani is deeply involved in modern technology and scholarship. Under his supervision, several websites provide comprehensive information about Ahlul Bayt in multiple languages, showcasing his embrace of modern means for propagating knowledge.

12.2 Bayt Ayatollah Sayyid Sa'eed al-Hakim

Adjacent to Ayatollah Sistani's residence, in the **Jadidah Thaniyah** or **Shawafiyah** area (a new quarter of Najaf), lies the home of **Ayatollah Sayyid Sa'eed al-Hakim**. To reach it from Ayatollah Sistani's residence on *Shar-e-Rasool*, one would continue straight, crossing *Shar-e-Banaat al-Hasan* and then *Shar-e-Madina*. On the right side of this intersection is the Jadidah Thaniyah area, where Ayatollah Sa'eed al-Hakim resides.

The Hakim family is a lineage of distinguished scholars, with **Ayatollah Sayyid Sa'eed al-Hakim** being a prominent contemporary *Marja'*. His family's roots trace back to Lebanon, making him one of the *Maraji'* in Najaf who is not originally Iraqi. His uncle, **Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim**, was also a highly revered *Marja'*, and his family boasts perhaps the largest number of *mujtahids* among any single lineage.

The Hakim family faced severe persecution under Saddam Hussein's regime. They were frequently imprisoned, tortured, and oppressed due to fears that they might challenge the government. Ayatollah Sa'eed al-Hakim and his family endured a long period of imprisonment. During this hardship, his father famously remarked that even if their good deeds were insufficient for paradise, their suffering in prison was merit enough. What is truly astonishing is that despite the harsh conditions, they continued their lessons and academic activities within the prison, turning their confinement into a seminary, a testament to their unwavering commitment to knowledge.

Ayatollah Sa'eed al-Hakim's office is particularly influential in academic matters,

especially concerning the annual Hawza examinations, indicating his significant role in shaping scholarly discourse.

12.3 Bayt Ayatollah Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyadh

Also located in the **Jadidah Thaniyah/Shawafiyah** area, across from the residences of Ayatollah Sa'eed al-Hakim and Ayatollah Bashir Najafi, is the home of **Ayatollah Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyadh**. To reach him from *Shar-e-Rasool*, after crossing *Shar-e-Banaat al-Hasan* and *Shar-e-Madina*, one would turn left to reach his residence.

Ayatollah Ishaq al-Fayyadh hails from Ghazni, Afghanistan, marking him as another non-Iraqi *Marja'* in Najaf. He is known for his exceedingly quiet and composed demeanor. During the oppressive era of Saddam Hussein, his quiet nature led some ignorant individuals to suspect his commitment, yet his silence was a strategic strength. He remained politically disengaged from overt confrontation, focusing on his scholarly pursuits. This quietude allowed him to serve as an unofficial channel for communication, particularly for Western nations like the US and UK, who would convey messages through him to other *Maraji'* like Ayatollah Sistani and Ayatollah Sa'eed al-Hakim. This demonstrates the wisdom in sometimes choosing strategic silence over emotional outburst, a lesson in diplomacy that *Maraji'* exemplify.

Despite his own *Marja'iyyat* and his independent *dars* (lectures), Ayatollah Ishaq al-Fayyadh has consistently supported Ayatollah Sistani's *Marja'iyyat*, reaffirming the unity of purpose among the Grand *Maraji'* in Najaf.

12.4 Bayt Ayatollah Bashir Hussain Najafi

The residence of **Ayatollah Bashir Hussain Najafi** is also found in the same **Jadidah Thaniyah/Shawafiyah** area, slightly before Ayatollah Sa'eed al-Hakim's house (if coming from *Shar-e-Madina*). Ayatollah Bashir Najafi is of Pakistani

origin, with his family having migrated from India to Gujranwala, Pakistan. He received his initial religious education at Jamia Muntazir in Lahore, Pakistan's oldest and most renowned seminary, before moving to Najaf.

Ayatollah Bashir Najafi is known for his vibrant and enthusiastic personality. His office often welcomes pilgrims with warmth and pride. He is a prolific author, having written over 31 books on various Islamic sciences, solidifying his scholarly contributions. His administrative acumen is so remarkable that Ayatollah Khoei, once during an illness, entrusted him with the entire administrative affairs of his seminary.

Beyond his scholarly and administrative roles, Ayatollah Bashir Najafi has initiated significant developmental projects in Najaf. He has purchased land near **Bab al-Qibla** (specifically the area beyond Bab al-Qibla on the left side) to establish **Imam Ali Hospital**, which will provide free medical care to pilgrims and students. He is also developing **Najaf Colony**, a housing project with over a thousand free residential units for students. These projects aim to alleviate some of the common difficulties faced by students and pilgrims in Najaf, such as the persistent electricity issues (where power is supplied for only two hours at a time, despite intense heat in summer and extreme cold in winter). While efforts are ongoing to resolve the electricity crisis, his initiatives provide crucial relief.

Ayatollah Bashir Najafi, like the other *Maraji'*, exemplifies unity and cooperation among the scholarly leadership in Najaf. Despite differing approaches, they collectively strive to serve the cause of Islam and the waiting for Imam al-Mahdi (A.S.).

Chapter 13

Other Significant Sites in Najaf's Heart

Beyond the prominent shrines and residences of the Grand Maraji', Najaf al-Ashraf holds numerous other sites of profound historical and spiritual significance. These places, often clustered together, tell tales of scholarship, sacrifice, and unwavering devotion to the Ahlul Bayt.

13.1 Kutub Khana Amir al-Mu'minin and Marqad Allamah Abdul Hussain Amini

A site that often receives less attention than it deserves is the **Kutub Khana Amir al-Mu'minin (Library of Amir al-Mu'minin)** and the adjacent **Marqad Allamah Abdul Hussain Amini**. This significant location is found on **Souq al-Huwaysh** (Huwaysh Market), which is easily accessible upon exiting **Bab al-Qibla**. As one emerges from Bab al-Qibla, looking straight ahead, Souq al-Huwaysh lies directly in front, a bustling market area. The library and tomb are visible as a distinct building with blue tiles.

Allamah Abdul Hussain Amini (1902-1970 CE) was a monumental scholar

renowned for his magnum opus, **Al-Ghadir**. This multi-volume work meticulously documents the event of Ghadir Khumm and the Imamate of Imam Ali (A.S.), drawing evidence from Sunni sources. Allamah Amini's dedication to this project was extraordinary. He famously stated that for *Al-Ghadir*, he meticulously read **ten thousand books letter by letter, from beginning to end**. If repetitions are counted, where a single book might have been consulted multiple times, the number escalates to **one hundred thousand books**. This unparalleled scholarly endeavor took him **forty years** to complete.

His commitment to truth was absolute. When he traveled to India for three years for his research, he worked **seventeen to eighteen hours daily**. Upon his return, when asked if he visited the Taj Mahal, he responded that he had not gone to India for sightseeing but for knowledge. His single-minded pursuit of knowledge often led to personal hardship; he once returned from India with the same worn-out shoes he had departed with.

Allamah Amini's perseverance, however, came at a physical cost. The immense strain and fatigue from his research led to severe illness. He was rushed to a hospital in Tehran, where he passed away. His body was then brought to Najaf al-Ashraf for burial. His life was a testament to his fervent desire to prove the *Wilayat* (guardianship) of Imam Ali (A.S.). It is narrated that after his passing, a close friend and scholar dreamt of Imam Ali (A.S.) distributing water from the fountain of *Kawthar*. When Allamah Amini approached, Imam Ali (A.S.) placed the cup down, rolled up his sleeves, and personally offered him water, praying, "May Allah illuminate your face as you illuminated my face." This dream underscores the immense spiritual reward for his unwavering devotion and monumental efforts.

The library, built by Allamah Amini himself, houses the books he painstakingly collected over his lifetime. In his era, books were neither cheap nor easily available, making his collection a remarkable feat. Visiting this library and his resting place offers deep motivation and spiritual upliftment for pilgrims, reminding them of the power of dedication in the path of truth.

13.2 Bayt Imam Ruhollah Khomeini

Also located on **Souq al-Huwaysh** is the modest residence of **Imam Ruhollah Khomeini**. This house holds immense historical significance as it was here that Imam Khomeini resided for **twelve years** during his exile from Iran.

After being exiled from Iran, Imam Khomeini initially sought refuge in Turkey. However, due to pressure from the Iranian government, he was not granted a permanent stay and subsequently moved to Najaf al-Ashraf with his son, Mustafa Khomeini. While Mustafa Khomeini continued the underground political activities of the nascent Iranian Revolution, Imam Khomeini dedicated himself to teaching in Najaf. He began teaching in **Masjid Sheikh Ansari**, the very mosque where Sheikh Murtadha Ansari had once delivered his renowned lectures.

From Najaf, Imam Khomeini openly articulated his revolutionary ideas. His lessons were transcribed into pamphlets and books and secretly disseminated to Iran, effectively making Najaf a crucial platform for the Iranian Revolution. This period in Najaf was instrumental in shaping the intellectual and ideological foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, demonstrating how a scholarly center could also become a cradle for political and social transformation.

13.3 Marqad Sayyid Abdullah Sabzawari

Still within the vicinity of **Souq al-Huwaysh** is the tomb of **Sayyid Abdullah Sabzawari**. While perhaps not as widely known as other prominent scholars, his significance is notable: he held the position of *Marja' iyyat* for one year following the passing of Ayatollah Khomeini, underscoring his high scholarly standing.

13.4 Masjid Sheikh Murtadha Ansari

Also located on **Souq al-Huwaysh**, the **Masjid Sheikh Murtadha Ansari** is a revered place of worship and learning. It is known as the location where Sheikh

Murtadha Ansari, one of the most influential jurists, used to deliver his profound lectures. Later, during his exile in Najaf, Imam Ruhollah Khomeini also taught in this very mosque, establishing a spiritual and intellectual lineage that binds these great figures.

13.5 Kutub Khana Imam Hassan (A.S.)

The final walking Ziyarat site mentioned is the **Kutub Khana Imam Hassan (A.S.)**, located at the very end of **Shar-e-Banaat al-Hasan**. This library was founded by Ayatollah Baqir Sharif and holds valuable works, including the books of the *Sayyid Ahl al-Bayt*.

13.6 Tombs of Banaat al-Hasan (Daughters of Imam Hasan A.S.)

The street itself, **Shar-e-Banaat al-Hasan**, is named for the presence of the tombs of three daughters of Imam Hasan (A.S.): **Amina bint Hasan**, **Zahra bint Hasan**, and **Ruqayyah bint Hasan**. These tombs, though previously less accessible or known, have now been discovered, adding to the spiritual landscape of Najaf. In earlier times, when even reaching the Holy Shrine was difficult, the existence of such graves outside the main shrine area was less highlighted. These newly discovered sites further enrich the spiritual journey within Najaf al-Ashraf.

This concludes the detailed exploration of the walking Ziyarat sites within Najaf al-Ashraf.

Chapter 14

Wadi-us-Salam: The Valley of Peace

Wadi-us-Salam, an expansive and ancient cemetery located in Najaf al-Ashraf, holds a unique and profound significance in Islamic tradition. Often referred to as the **Valley of Peace**, its name itself is deeply symbolic, combining *wadi* (valley) and *salam* (peace, safety). This designation carries a profound spiritual meaning, signifying a place where those interred are believed to be safeguarded from the torments of *barzakh* (the intermediate realm) and the accountability of the Day of Judgment. This belief underscores the exceptional sanctity attributed to this sacred burial ground.

Geographically, **Wadi-us-Salam** is situated in the northern part of Najaf, stretching vast distances from the holy shrine of **Amir al-Mu'minin Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib** (A.S.). While its exact dimensions vary in historical accounts, it is widely believed to encompass an area of approximately 10 to 20 square kilometers, making it one of the largest and oldest cemeteries in the world. This immense scale accommodates an estimated 50 million graves, a testament to its continuous use as a burial site over many millennia. The sheer number of souls laid to rest within its boundaries speaks to its historical depth and enduring spiritual magnetism.

The spiritual importance of visiting cemeteries, and particularly **Wadi-us-Salam**,

cannot be overstated. Just as one might visit a plot of land or a house they intend to inhabit to ensure its condition and security, so too should one frequently visit their ultimate abode – the grave. While individuals reside in various cities during their lifetime, the true and final city for every human being is the **City of the Silent**, the graveyard. It is here that one will remain from the moment of death until the Day of Resurrection. Maintaining a connection with this final resting place through visits profoundly enhances one's spiritual state and strengthens faith. Such visits serve as a stark reminder of the transient nature of worldly life and the eternal reality of the hereafter, encouraging greater piety and preparedness for the ultimate journey.

Wadi-us-Salam is not merely a burial ground; it is regarded as a piece of Paradise itself. This elevated status suggests a direct connection to the divine realm, where blessings and tranquility permeate the very soil. The belief that the souls of all believers, regardless of where they pass away or are interred, ultimately gather in **Wadi-us-Salam** further amplifies its spiritual significance. On the Day of Resurrection, it is prophesied that this valley will serve as the primary gathering point for humanity, with countless luminous faces emerging from Najaf, signifying the special favor bestowed upon those associated with this sacred land. These profound beliefs transform a visit to **Wadi-us-Salam** from a simple act of remembrance into an immersive spiritual experience, connecting the pilgrim to the continuous flow of divine mercy and the profound mysteries of existence.

14.1 Directions to Wadi-us-Salam

Navigating to **Wadi-us-Salam** from the holy shrine of **Imam Ali** (A.S.) is a straightforward journey, often undertaken on foot due to its proximity. Upon exiting the shrine from the **Bab al-Kabir** (Great Gate), which is typically considered the reference “zero point,” pilgrims should turn right to locate the **Bab al-Tusi** (Gate of Tusi).

From **Bab al-Tusi**, proceed along a small, narrow street known as **Shara' al-Tusi**.

This street derives its name from the revered scholar **Shaykh Tusi**, whose tomb and mosque are situated along this path. Historically, this was also the site of his residence. The initial stretch of **Shara' al-Tusi** is relatively flat, but as one progresses towards its end, the path becomes slightly rough and sloped, requiring careful footing. This short, uneven stretch marks the very beginning of the vast **Wadi-us-Salam** cemetery.

At the culmination of **Shara' al-Tusi**, the expansive **Wadi-us-Salam** begins, extending both to the left and right of the central road. While many pilgrims, particularly those visiting for the first time, tend to focus solely on the graves of **Prophet Hud** (A.S.) and **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.), it is essential to remember that the entire area beyond **Shara' al-Tusi** constitutes **Wadi-us-Salam**. Many might mistake the shops lining the initial path as the extent of habitation, assuming nothing lies beyond. However, the cemetery stretches far beyond these initial visible structures, covering vast tracts of land on both sides of the road. Understanding this layout is key to appreciating the immense scale of this holy site and recognizing the numerous other revered figures buried within its sacred grounds.

14.2 Prophetic Footprints: The Tombs of Hud and Saleh

Among the myriad graves within **Wadi-us-Salam**, the tombs of **Prophet Hud** (A.S.) and **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.) hold a distinct place of reverence. These two prophets, who succeeded **Prophet Nuh** (A.S.) in lineage and prophetic mission, are interred together in a single sacred enclosure, mirroring the arrangement found in the shrine of **Imam Ali** (A.S.) where **Imam Ali** (A.S.), **Prophet Adam** (A.S.), and **Prophet Nuh** (A.S.) share a single *darih*. The shared burial site of **Hud** (A.S.) and **Saleh** (A.S.) symbolizes their interconnectedness in conveying divine messages and facing similar challenges from their recalcitrant communities.

To reach their sacred resting place, pilgrims turn right upon completing **Shara' al-Tusi**. After a short walking distance, the tomb, an interior view of which reveals a single structure housing both prophets, becomes visible. This is often the first and

sometimes only destination for many visitors to **Wadi-us-Salam**, yet it represents just a fraction of the spiritual treasures contained within the valley.

14.3 The Story of Prophet Hud (A.S.) and the People of ‘Ad

Prophet Hud (A.S.) emerged as a divine messenger long after the passing of **Prophet Nuh** (A.S.) and the period of significant spiritual absence. He was sent to the powerful and prosperous nation of ‘**Ad**, a people known for their immense physical strength, wealth, and abundant blessings. However, like many nations before them, their prosperity led to arrogance and forgetfulness of God. They indulged in various vices, including idolatry, theft, banditry, and usury, embodying a profound state of moral corruption.

Prophet Hud (A.S.), himself a man of great fortitude and steadfastness, challenged their widespread idol worship, becoming the second prophet after **Nuh** (A.S.) to directly confront this practice. His primary concern was the pervasive corruption in their dealings, particularly their dishonesty in weighing and measuring goods. He persistently admonished them, urging them to abandon their wicked ways and worship the One God. However, the people of ‘**Ad** scoffed at his warnings, often mocking him and demanding to know when the promised divine punishment would descend upon them. Their story is recounted ten times in the **Holy Qur’an**, notably in **Surah Hud** (Chapter 11).

Despite **Hud’s** (A.S.) earnest pleas, the people remained defiant. As a precursor to divine wrath, a severe drought struck their land. The rains ceased, animals perished, and the people faced starvation. Yet, even this initial sign failed to awaken them to their transgressions. Divine punishment often begins with such warning signals, offering a chance for repentance. When these are ignored, a more severe judgment inevitably follows. One day, the skies dramatically darkened with black clouds, leading the people to rejoice, believing it signaled the end of their drought. **Prophet Hud** (A.S.), however, recognized it as the impending divine chastisement. Instead of rain, a devastating, tempestuous wind began to

blow, raging for seven days and eight nights. This destructive storm was followed by an intensely piercing shriek, obliterating all the disbelievers where they stood. Finally, lightning struck the area, incinerating them into ash. This formidable people, known as 'Ad, perished, their fate serving as a stark warning against arrogance and disobedience.

14.4 The Story of Prophet Saleh (A.S.) and the People of Thamud

Prophet Saleh (A.S.) was sent to the nation of **Thamud**, another people characterized by their strength, wealth, and prosperity, much like the people of 'Ad. They were skilled architects, carving homes into mountains, and like their predecessors, they too succumbed to arrogance and materialism, becoming deeply engrossed in idol worship. **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.) earnestly called them to monotheism and righteous conduct, but they largely rejected his message.

One day, while **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.) stood near a mountain in the desert with seventy of his followers, the disbelievers challenged him, demanding a tangible miracle as proof of his prophethood. They specifically asked for a she-camel to emerge from the mountain right before their eyes. **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.) supplicated to Allah, and miraculously, a magnificent she-camel emerged from the mountain. Still unconvinced, they further challenged, demanding that the she-camel be pregnant and give birth immediately. Again, by divine command, the she-camel became pregnant and instantly gave birth to a calf.

Even after witnessing these astonishing miracles, not all of them believed. While seventy individuals initially embraced faith, sixty-four of them quickly apostatized, accusing **Saleh** (A.S.) of sorcery. This phenomenon of apostasy after initially accepting faith is not unique to **Saleh's** (A.S.) community. In the history of prophets, significant numbers sometimes turned away from their faith. For instance, out of 240 believers with **Prophet Nuh** (A.S.) on the ark, 160 apostatized when commanded to retrieve timber, leaving only 80. Similarly, of the 600,000

people **Prophet Musa** (A.S.) left behind, over half a million apostatized during his absence. Even **Prophet Isa** (A.S.) faced apostasy among his twelve disciples, with eight of them renouncing their faith. This approximate two-thirds apostasy ratio seems to have repeated itself throughout history.

Of the six remaining believers with **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.), one, a man named **Qudar ibn Salif**, apostatized on the way back, leaving only five true followers. This **Qudar ibn Salif** became the individual who viciously attacked and hamstringed **Saleh's** (A.S.) she-camel. The camel, which provided milk for the entire city on its designated day, while all other animals drank water, became an object of envy and hatred for the disbelievers. The entire community conspired in its destruction, participating either directly or indirectly in its cruel slaughter.

The she-camel's calf, witnessing its mother's brutal murder, fled to the mountain and began to supplicate to Allah, crying for divine retribution against the perpetrators. Immediately, divine punishment descended upon the people of **Thamud**. This incident of **Saleh's** (A.S.) she-camel is profoundly significant in Islamic tradition. It is recounted that three individuals of the **Ahl al-Bayt** (A.S.) directly referenced this event in moments of profound adversity.

Firstly, **Sayyida Fatima Zahra** (S.A.), upon the attack on her house, cried out: "Is my status less than that of the she-camel's calf? If that calf supplicated against its oppressors, its prayer was answered, and they were destroyed. Should I raise my hands in *dua* (supplication), the entire *Ummah* (community) would be annihilated!" It was only through the fervent pleas of companions like **Salman al-Farsi** that she refrained from invoking such a devastating curse, saving the *Ummah* from immediate destruction.

Secondly, **Lady Ruqayya**, while imprisoned in Syria, asked **Lady Zaynab** (S.A.) if her status was less than the she-camel's calf, desiring to curse the people who had stoned them. **Lady Zaynab** (S.A.), with profound wisdom, immediately reminded her to consider the severed head of **Imam Husayn** (A.S.), emphasizing that her father had sacrificed his life precisely to prevent the annihilation of this *Ummah*, and thus, they should refrain from invoking such a curse.

Thirdly, **Imam al-Taqi** (A.A.) also made reference to the she-camel, highlighting its immense significance in divine history. These mentions by the **Ahl al-Bayt** (A.S.) underscore the gravity of the act committed against **Saleh's** (A.S.) she-camel and connect it to the profound trials faced by the prophetic household.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself drew a parallel between the one who slew the she-camel of Saleh and the murderer of **Imam Ali** (A.S.). Addressing **Imam Ali** (A.S.), the Prophet (PBUH) stated: “The most wretched person among the ancients was **Qudar ibn Salif**, who hamstrung **Saleh's** (A.S.) she-camel. And the most wretched among the later ones will be the one who stains your beard with your blood – **Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam**.” The Prophet further indicated that **Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam's** wickedness would surpass that of **Qudar ibn Salif**, underscoring the extreme depravity of the Imam's assassin.

In contemporary times, the gravity of sins, particularly those related to looking at non-mahram (forbidden) individuals with lust, is often overlooked. The Islamic tradition strongly warns against even approaching such sins, as articulated in the Qur'anic verse, “**Nor come nigh to adultery...**” (**Quran 17:32**). The act of casting a lustful glance at a non-mahram, whether male or female, is considered so grievous that it has been likened to killing **Imam Ali** (A.S.) sixty times over. This implies a level of depravity even exceeding that of **Abdur Rahman ibn Muljam**, who killed the Imam once. This severe spiritual consequence serves as a potent reminder for believers, particularly the youth, to guard their gazes and remain vigilant against such common transgressions, always remembering the immense spiritual cost before succumbing to temptation.

14.5 The Resting Place of Sayyid Ali Qadhi

Beyond the tombs of **Prophet Hud** (A.S.) and **Prophet Saleh** (A.S.), just a short distance further along the same main road, lies the revered resting place of **Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Qadhi Tabataba'i** (R.A.). To reach it, pilgrims turn left from the main road after visiting the Prophets' shrine. While his tomb may not be as

frequently visited by Pakistani pilgrims, many Iranian devotees make it a point to pay their respects to this extraordinary spiritual luminary. His life and teachings represent the pinnacle of *akhlaq* (ethics), *irfan* (gnosis), and *falsafa* (philosophy) within the Shi'a tradition.

Sayyid Ali Qadhi (R.A.) was not merely a scholar; he was a master of the esoteric sciences, renowned for his profound spiritual insights and extraordinary karamat (miracles). His students included some of the most prominent religious authorities of the 20th century, individuals whose intellectual and spiritual contributions shaped the contemporary landscape of Islamic thought. Among his illustrious disciples were:

- **Imam Ruhollah Khomeini** (R.A.)
- **Ayatollah Sayyid Abul Qasim Khoei** (R.A.)
- **Ayatollah Sayyid Abdul Husayn Dastghaib Shirazi** (R.A.)
- **Ayatollah Sayyid Shahabuddin Mar'ashi Najafi** (R.A.)
- **Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai** (R.A.), the renowned exegete of *Tafsir al-Mizan*.

The anecdotes from his life offer glimpses into his deep spiritual wisdom and connection to the unseen. Once, while engaged in a lengthy discussion on *tawhid* (Oneness of God) with a companion in the Mosque of Kufa, in an area known for snakes, a snake suddenly appeared. Perceiving a certain incompleteness in their understanding, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) declared, "It seems neither of us has a complete grasp or awareness of *tawhid*; we need to seek more knowledge." At that very moment, he commanded the snake, "By Allah's command, die!" The snake instantly perished. After performing their prayers, his companion, still wondering if the snake was truly dead, casually poked it with a stick, confirming its demise. Upon returning, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) smiled and asked, "Were you testing me?" This demonstrated his ability to perceive the inner thoughts of others, a hallmark of profound spiritual insight.

On another occasion, **Allama Muhammad Husayn Tabatabai** (R.A.) inquired

from **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) about **Prophet Sulayman's** (A.S.) ability to fly. He sought to know if it was an inherent quality of his ring or a miraculous gift from Allah. **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) replied, "I do not know, but come, let us ask." To Allama Tabatabai's surprise, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) led him to a mountain where they encountered an ancient-looking man, dressed in old garments. **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) conversed with this man in a language other than Arabic or Farsi, specifically the language of Tabriz. Upon returning, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) informed Allama Tabatabai that the man stated there was no inherent power in **Prophet Sulayman's** (A.S.) ring; it was solely a divine miracle that allowed him to fly. This remarkable event astonished Allama Tabatabai, revealing **Sayyid Ali Qadhi's** (R.A.) extraordinary ability to communicate with beings from different times and realms to resolve complex theological questions.

Ayatollah Khoei (R.A.), a leading Marja' (religious authority) of his time, once approached **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) requesting spiritual guidance. In the tradition of *irfan* masters, such requests are often phrased as "Give me something" or "Bestow upon me." **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) simply pointed, and **Ayatollah Khoei** (R.A.) saw a young man, precisely his own younger self, engrossed in study. Gradually, the beard of the young man turned white, then completely white. This older self then stood before a vast gathering, delivering lectures, with the number of attendees increasing exponentially, requiring a loudspeaker. Finally, the scene shifted, and an announcement was made via the loudspeaker of **Ayatollah Khoei's** (R.A.) passing. Having shown him his entire life's trajectory, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) smiled and said, "Go, your future is very bright." This profound vision served as a testament to **Sayyid Ali Qadhi's** (R.A.) spiritual foresight and his ability to unveil future events.

Despite the thousands who attended his lessons, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi's** (R.A.) funeral procession was strikingly sparse, with only a few individuals accompanying his body. This unexpected scene bewildered many, who wondered about the absence of his numerous disciples. It later emerged that his death was a result of a conspiracy by the oppressive regime of **Saddam Hussein**, who had him martyred. The severe political climate of the time prevented public participation

in his funeral, a stark contrast to his immense spiritual influence.

During his lectures, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) often spoke about the Islamic government. Once, while he was delivering a lecture, **Imam Khomeini** (R.A.), then a young, relatively unknown student who spent twelve years in Najaf, entered late. Instead of chastising him, **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.) paused his lecture, smiled, and addressed him directly: “O **Sayyid**, persevere! Show steadfastness against the tyrannical government. Allah willing, you will be victorious.” This seemingly cryptic instruction to a young student, whose future role as the leader of the Iranian Revolution was then unimaginable to most, astonished many present. Years later, they witnessed the fulfillment of this prophecy, recognizing **Sayyid Ali Qadhi’s** (R.A.) profound insight into the destiny of his students and his role in guiding the architects of future Islamic movements.

14.6 Martyr Baqir al-Sadr

Another revered figure interred in **Wadi-us-Salam** is **Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.). He was the father-in-law of **Muqtada al-Sadr**, whom we have previously discussed as the leader of the Mahdi Army and a figure protected by **Ayatollah Sistani** from American forces. **Martyr Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.) was widely recognized for his extraordinary genius and precocious intellectual development.

His brilliance manifested from a very early age. It is reported that by the age of ten, he began teaching Islamic history, an age when most children are barely in primary school. By eleven, he had achieved complete mastery of *Mantiq* (logic), a discipline often described as the “language of jinns” due to its intricate and foundational role in philosophy and structured reasoning. His command over logic at such a young age enabled him to formulate arguments and express ideas with unparalleled clarity, ensuring both accurate conveyance and precise understanding.

At the age of twenty-four, **Martyr Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.) authored his seminal work

on philosophy. Following this, he wrote another profoundly influential book, **Iqtisaduna** (Our Economics). This work emerged at a critical juncture in history when Communism, led by figures like **Stalin** and **Marx**, was at its zenith, not only in Russia but also spreading its influence across Europe, and even reaching countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. The world was starkly divided into two major ideological blocs: the American-led Capitalist group and the Russian-led Communist group.

Communist ideology advocated for the equal distribution of wealth, asserting that an individual's income should be based solely on their needs, irrespective of their education or position. For instance, a person with more children would receive a larger salary or scholarship. This system deliberately blurred the lines between a manager and a subordinate, granting them equal financial status. This egalitarian approach resonated deeply with the impoverished masses, leading many to embrace Communism. However, as **Martyr Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.) argued in **Iqtisaduna**, this system was fundamentally flawed. If individuals knew their efforts would not lead to greater rewards, there would be no incentive for hard work or intellectual pursuit, ultimately hindering societal progress.

Conversely, **Martyr Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.) also critiqued Capitalism. He highlighted how Capitalism exacerbates wealth disparities, allowing the rich to become progressively richer. The system favors the wealthy in terms of credit and loans, despite the fact that those in need, the poor, are the ones who truly require financial assistance. The rich, by definition, have less need for such interventions. Thus, Capitalism, while promoting individual enterprise, fails to address the inherent imbalances of wealth distribution.

In **Iqtisaduna**, **Martyr Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.) presented an alternative, Islamic economic model, articulating the principle that **Imam Khomeini** (R.A.) later popularized: "**Neither East nor West, only Islam!**" This influential book is still taught in European universities today, a testament to its enduring intellectual depth and relevance. It is widely acknowledged that the writings and intellectual contributions of **Martyr Baqir al-Sadr** (R.A.), along with those of **Martyr**

Mutahhari, played a crucial role in shaping public consciousness and laying the intellectual groundwork for the Iranian Revolution, providing vital support to **Imam Khomeini** (R.A.) in his monumental endeavor.

14.7 The Promise of Return: The Station of Imam al-Mahdi (A.S.)

Within the sacred expanse of **Wadi-us-Salam**, there exists a pivotal site known as the **Station of Imam al-Mahdi** (*Maqam al-Imam al-Mahdi*). It is important to note that the term “station” (**maqam**) in the context of an Imam, such as the station of **Imam al-Sajjad** (A.S.) or **Imam al-Sadiq** (A.S.), denotes a place where the Imam has visited, resided, worshipped, or even merely performed a two-unit prayer. In the spiritual framework of Shi’ism, any place graced by the footsteps of an Imam becomes sanctified and blessed.

To reach this significant site, one proceeds from the tomb of **Sayyid Ali Qadhi** (R.A.). Instead of returning to the main road, pilgrims should continue further along the path, then turn left onto a side road. After a short distance, a right turn will lead directly to the **Maqam Imam al-Mahdi** (A.S.). This location is particularly revered because numerous individuals have reported witnessing **Imam al-Mahdi** (A.S.) himself at this very spot. It is believed that whenever the Imam visits this station, he performs *wudu* (ablution) from a specific well located there, and many devout individuals have testified to witnessing him perform *wudu* with the water from this well.

Historically, this site was once surrounded by the homes of the cemetery’s caretakers. However, due to attacks by adversaries, the caretakers’ dwellings were relocated. The **Maqam Imam al-Mahdi** (A.S.) holds immense eschatological significance, for it is believed to be a foundational site for the establishment of the **Mahdi’s** (A.S.) government. This directly connects to the prophecy that **Imam al-Mahdi** (A.S.) will first gather twenty-seven individuals at this very location within **Wadi-us-Salam**.

These twenty-seven individuals are prophesied to be the initial companions who will join the **Imam** (A.S.) upon his **Zuhur** (reappearance), forming a critical part of the larger force of 313, and eventually, the ultimate army of 10,000, and beyond. According to traditions, these initial twenty-seven companions will represent a diverse spiritual lineage:

Fifteen individuals will be from the *Ummah* (community) of **Prophet Musa** (A.S.).

Seven individuals will be from the **Ashab al-Kahf** (Companions of the Cave).

One individual will be **Yusha ibn Nun**, the successor of **Prophet Musa** (A.S.).

The remaining four will be from the *Ummah* of **Prophet Muhammad** (PBUH), comprising:

- **Salman al-Farsi** (R.A.): Renowned for his deep love and loyalty to the **Ahl al-Bayt** (A.S.), the Prophet (PBUH) famously called him “Salman al-Muhammadi.” His close association with the **Ahl al-Bayt** (A.S.) was evident even during the event of *Mubahala*, where he was seen holding the reins of the Prophet’s camel, signifying his integral place within the Prophet’s household.
- **Miqdad ibn Aswad** (R.A.): He is counted among the first three individuals who fiercely defended the right of **Imam Ali** (A.S.) to the Caliphate after the Prophet’s demise. His faith was described as exceptionally strong, though his early demise meant less mention of him in historical texts.
- **Abu Dharr al-Ghifari** (R.A.): While not explicitly mentioned in the list of four, the transcript includes **Abu Dujana** (R.A.) here. **Abu Dujana** (R.A.) was a renowned warrior during the early Islamic period. During the Conquest of Mecca, he was seen strutting proudly, wearing a red band on his head, among the disbelievers. Some companions complained to the Prophet (PBUH) that he was displaying arrogance. The Prophet (PBUH) clarified that such a display of pride is permissible, even recommended, when facing the enemy to instill fear and demonstrate Muslim strength. This also ties into the Prophet’s instruction for Muslims to maintain a strong and healthy

appearance to project might.

- **Malik al-Ashtar** (R.A.): He was the loyal right-hand commander of **Imam Ali** (A.S.). **Ibn Hadid**, in his commentary on *Nahj al-Balagha*, states that after **Imam Ali** (A.S.), **Malik al-Ashtar** (R.A.) was the bravest Arab. **Imam Ali** (A.S.) himself said to **Malik al-Ashtar** (R.A.), “Your position to me is like my position to the Messenger of Allah.” During the Battle of Siffin, **Malik al-Ashtar** (R.A.) had almost reached the tent of **Mu’awiya**, the Syrian ruler, intending to vanquish him. However, due to the cunning of **Amr ibn al-As**, who raised the Qur’an on spears, and the insistence of some soldiers to halt the war, **Imam Ali** (A.S.) was compelled to call off the attack, much to **Malik al-Ashtar’s** (R.A.) dismay. He was later martyred by **Mu’awiya’s** agents, who poisoned his favorite honey. His name, *Ashtar*, meaning “scarred,” derived from a sword wound he sustained below his eye.

The concept of **Rajah** (the return of the Imams) is a deeply held belief in Shi’a Islam. It posits that certain Imams will be resurrected before the Day of Judgment to exact retribution from their enemies. While historically considered a fundamental tenet, the speaker notes that due to advancements in *ijtihad* (religious interpretation) and the discovery of new narrations, it is no longer universally categorized as one of the *Musallimat-e-Deen* (undeniable tenets of faith) whose denial would constitute disbelief. Nevertheless, the belief in **Rajah** persists, with **Wadi-us-Salam** prophesied to be the site where **Prophet Muhammad** (PBUH) and **Imam Ali** (A.S.) will be resurrected and unite before the ultimate Day of Judgment. The Prophet (PBUH) himself is narrated to have told **Imam Ali** (A.S.), “You are my brother, and the place of our promised meeting is **Wadi-us-Salam**.” Even the archangel **Jibreel** used the term “**Maw’id al-Salam**” (the promised place of peace) for their reunion. This tradition implies that this sacred valley will be the battleground where **Imam Ali** (A.S.) and **Prophet Muhammad** (PBUH) will confront their historical adversaries, the hypocrites.

14.8 Recommended Ziyarat and Etiquettes

The spiritual journey through **Wadi-us-Salam** transcends mere physical visitation; it is an immersion into the very essence of human mortality and divine promise. The collective presence of so many souls, particularly those of prophets, Imams, and righteous individuals, imbues the valley with an unparalleled spiritual energy. It is believed that the souls of all believers, regardless of their place of death or burial, converge upon **Wadi-us-Salam**. **Imam Ali** (A.S.) himself, when he would visit the cemetery, would speak as if addressing living beings, confirming that the souls of the faithful indeed meet and interact within its boundaries, their *barzakhi* (intermediate) eyes opened to a reality beyond the physical.

Furthermore, **Wadi-us-Salam** is considered a fragment of **Jannah** (Paradise) itself, signifying its profound sanctity and blessedness. This implies that the tranquility and spiritual abundance of Paradise are, in some measure, present within this earthly resting place. The belief that all individuals, irrespective of where they are buried, will ultimately be resurrected and gathered at **Wadi-us-Salam** on the Day of Judgment further elevates its status. It is prophesied that on that momentous day, seventy thousand luminous faces will emerge from Najaf, symbolizing the immense spiritual grace and divine favor bestowed upon the inhabitants and visitors of this holy ground.

General etiquette for *ziyarat* to graves includes:

Purity: Ensure one is in a state of ritual purity (having performed *wudu* or *ghusl* if necessary).

Humility: Approach the graves with humility, reverence, and a sense of awe, remembering the transient nature of life.

Prayers and Supplications: Recite specific *ziyarat* texts for the prophets and Imams, offer *Fatiha* for the deceased, and supplicate to Allah for forgiveness and blessings for oneself and the departed souls.

Reflection: Take time for introspection, reflecting on the brevity of life, the inevitability of death, and the importance of preparing for the hereafter.

The purpose of visiting graves is not merely to mourn but to learn from the lives of the righteous, to seek intercession (*tawassul*) through them, and to gain spiritual fortitude for one's own journey. It is a profound act of connection, affirming the continuum between this world and the next, and drawing the pilgrim closer to the divine through the revered intermediaries. Each visit to **Wadi-us-Salam** is an opportunity to strengthen faith, deepen spiritual understanding, and remember one's ultimate destination, guiding the soul towards righteousness and preparation for the eternal realm.

14.9 The Cradle of Civilization

The profound significance of **Wadi-us-Salam** extends far beyond its role as a monumental cemetery. It is a place intertwined with the very genesis of humanity and the sacred history of prophethood, holding esoteric depths that reveal its unique status in the divine scheme.

Historians universally acknowledge the region of Mesopotamia, the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, which includes present-day Iraq, as the **Cradle of World Civilizations**. Dating back to 3100 BCE, this area witnessed the earliest human settlements and the blossoming of sophisticated societies. The abundance of water, essential for life, naturally attracted populations, leading to the flourishing of early cultures. From an Islamic theological perspective, this historical account aligns with a deeper truth: it was here, according to our traditions, that **Prophet Adam** (A.S.) was sent to Earth.

More profoundly, **Wadi-us-Salam** is identified as the very place where all angels prostrated before **Prophet Adam** (A.S.) by divine command. The **Holy Qur'an** records this momentous event: "**And [mention, O Muhammad], when We said to the angels, 'Prostrate before Adam'; so they prostrated, except for Iblees...**" (**Quran 2:34**). This signifies that the first act of worship and submission to a

divinely chosen human being on Earth occurred in this very valley. Thus, **Wadi-us-Salam** is not just the cradle of human civilization as understood by historians but, more importantly, the site of humanity's divine recognition and the initial test of obedience for spiritual beings. It stands as the earliest *masjid* (place of worship) on Earth, a testament to the primordial presence of divine revelation and angelic submission. While historians attribute the rise of civilization to human ingenuity, our tradition places **Prophet Adam** (A.S.) and the angels here from the outset, affirming the divine origins of human presence and purpose on this sacred land.

14.10 A Sanctuary for Prophets and a Path for Miraj

The spiritual aura of **Wadi-us-Salam** is further amplified by its association with countless prophets. Traditions state that approximately 45,000 prophets have either passed through this valley, worshipped here, or are interred within its blessed soil. This makes **Wadi-us-Salam** a sacred ground imbued with the spiritual energy of divine messengers throughout history. It served as a sanctuary, a place of solace, and a spiritual retreat for those tasked with guiding humanity.

A significant narration highlights this sacred connection during the **Mi'raj** (Ascension) of **Prophet Muhammad** (PBUH). As the Prophet (PBUH) journeyed from Mecca to *Masjid al-Aqsa* on his celestial mount, **Buraq**, the Archangel **Jibreel** (A.S.) paused the journey over this particular location. **Jibreel** (A.S.) instructed the Prophet (PBUH) to dismount and offer two units of prayer, explaining that this was the dwelling place, the prayer niche, and the burial ground of numerous prophets, including **Prophet Adam** (A.S.). While some sources may attribute a similar incident to the Mosque of Kufa (where a *Musalla al-Buraq* is also mentioned), the specific narration concerning **Wadi-us-Salam** explicitly uses the term "**Dar al-Salam**" (Abode of Peace) for this sacred place. This suggests that the Prophet (PBUH) indeed offered prayers here, further cementing **Wadi-us-Salam's** status as a pivotal site of prophetic worship and divine blessing.

14.11 Imam Ali's Solitary Retreat and the Gathering of Souls

The deep spiritual resonance of **Wadi-us-Salam** was not lost on **Imam Ali** (A.S.). During his residence in Kufa, he frequently journeyed to Najaf, often seeking solitude in the serene expanse of **Wadi-us-Salam** to engage in profound acts of worship and intimate communion with Allah. While **Imam Ali** (A.S.) also had another revered spot, **Safa al-Yamani** (also known as *Maqam Amir al-Mu'minin*), where he would offer his heartfelt supplications and *munajat* (whispered prayers), **Wadi-us-Salam** served as another cherished retreat for his nocturnal devotions. This practice underscores the profound sanctity and spiritual potency that **Imam Ali** (A.S.) himself attributed to this valley.

The significance of **Wadi-us-Salam** extends into the very fabric of human existence after death. It is a deeply held belief that the souls of all believers, irrespective of where their physical bodies are interred in the world, ultimately converge and reside within **Wadi-us-Salam**. This concept implies a spiritual gathering point for the faithful in the intermediate realm of *barzakh*. **Imam Ali** (A.S.) would often address the souls in **Wadi-us-Salam** as if they were present and listening, indicating his heightened spiritual perception of this phenomenon. The valley, therefore, functions as a spiritual melting pot, where the souls of those who have passed on continue their journey, awaiting the ultimate resurrection.

14.12 The Prophecy of Resurrection

The ultimate destiny of **Wadi-us-Salam** is intrinsically linked to the **Day of Resurrection** (*Yawm al-Hashr*). It is prophesied that when humanity is raised from their graves, the primary gathering place for all souls will be this very valley. This means that regardless of where an individual's body is buried on Earth, their ultimate assembly point for the Day of Judgment will be **Wadi-us-Salam**. This grand assembly will be marked by divine grace for those associated with this holy land. A poignant narration describes this scene: "Indeed, I see on the Day of Resurrection seventy thousand radiant faces emerging from Najaf" – signifying

that among the multitudes, those connected to Najaf, and by extension **Wadi-us-Salam**, will possess a unique luminescence. This prophecy elevates **Wadi-us-Salam** to the status of a global congregational point for humanity's ultimate reckoning, making it a site of unparalleled eschatological importance.

Chapter 15

The Sacred City of Kufa and Its Grand Mosque

The journey of spiritual pilgrimage to the holy lands of Iraq is a continuous and blessed endeavor. Having embarked on the *ziyarat* of Najaf al-Ashraf and explored the revered Wadi al-Salam, the spiritual path now turns towards the esteemed city of Kufa, a destination intrinsically linked to Najaf. Kufa holds immense importance primarily due to the presence of its magnificent mosque, a spiritual beacon that has drawn countless souls throughout history. Its significance is further magnified by the profound prophecy that in the coming era, it will serve as the capital of Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), rendering its status and sanctity even more exceptional.

Kufa, therefore, stands out in two paramount capacities: as a city of historical depth and divine favor, and as the host of the venerable Masjid Kufa. To fully grasp the sanctity and spiritual weight of this place, it is essential to delve into its historical background and understand the unique virtues bestowed upon it. Just as Najaf possesses its own rich history and divine blessings, Kufa, with its hallowed ground and sacred mosque, likewise boasts an unparalleled historical narrative and spiritual eminence. It is crucial to distinguish between human endeavors, which shape a place's historical context, and divine blessings, which

imbue it with inherent virtues from the Almighty.

Location and Climate

The revered city of Kufa, home to the magnificent Masjid Kufa, is situated approximately 10 kilometers northeast of Najaf al-Ashraf. Nestled alongside the banks of the Euphrates River, it enjoys a moderate climate and thrives as a fertile region. This geographical setting has historically contributed to its strategic importance and its ability to sustain a vibrant population.

The Genesis of Kufa: A Military Cantonment

The historical background of Kufa reveals its genesis as a military cantonment during the era of the second Caliph. **Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas** and his army initiated the establishment of this settlement. At that time, military expeditions and campaigns were frequently launched from Medina, requiring soldiers to travel back and forth, consuming considerable time and resources. To mitigate this inefficiency, the idea arose to establish a permanent military base outside Medina, specifically in Iraq, from which various expeditions could be dispatched to different countries. This concept mirrors modern military bases, such as American, NATO, or European bases, strategically located on islands, at sea, or within allied nations.

Initially, Kufa was designed as a military encampment, accommodating approximately one hundred thousand soldiers. Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas communicated with the Caliph, highlighting the logistical challenges of repeatedly bringing such a large army back to Medina and then redeploying them. Consequently, the decision was made to locate a suitable place in Iraq where these soldiers could be permanently housed, provided with sustenance, and from where future military movements could be coordinated.

Initially, attempts were made to settle the army in Mosul and Basra. However, these regions proved unsuitable due to their extreme heat. Kufa, with its moderate climate, proximity to the river, and fertile land, was deemed the most appropriate location. Thus, it became the permanent dwelling for these military contingents.

In their initial settlement, the soldiers, perceiving Kufa as a temporary military post or cantonment, constructed dwellings primarily from wood, mats, and bamboo rather than durable, solid structures. This choice, however, proved precarious, as wood is highly flammable. During those times, cooking involved open fires fueled by wood or brush. Consequently, a massive fire once engulfed the entire city, reducing it to ashes. Following this devastating incident, the inhabitants began to construct sturdy, permanent buildings.

Remarkably, this shift towards building with solid materials, which Muslims adopted centuries ago, is now being revisited in modern architecture. The lecture draws a contemporary comparison, noting that in parts of Europe, America, and Canada, houses are still built primarily with wood, including doors and walls made of particleboard with straw filling. Such structures are highly susceptible to fire, triggering alarms even at the slightest hint of smoke. This historical anecdote from Kufa highlights the early adoption of resilient construction in the face of environmental challenges.

15.1 A City of Profound Significance

Kufa in Qur'anic Allusion: Decoding Surah At-Tin

The profound virtues of the city of Kufa are unveiled through a deeper understanding of the Holy Qur'an, particularly when contemplating the verses of **Surah At-Tin**. While the literal interpretations of "Tin" (fig), "Zaytun" (olive), "Tur Sinin" (Mount Sinai), and "Hadhā al-Balad al-Amin" (this secure city, referring to Mecca) are well-known, Islamic traditions offer alternative profound explanations. In these interpretations, "Tin" refers to Medina al-Munawwarah, and "Zaytun" signifies Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem). Crucially, "Tur Sinin" is identified as Kufa.

This identification stems from the event where Prophet Musa (a.s.) conversed with Allah on Mount Sinai. When Musa (a.s.) expressed his desire to behold Allah's divine essence, a divine manifestation (*tajalli*) occurred, causing the mountain to crumble into dust. This mountain was transformed into flat land,

vanishing from sight and becoming the very sand of Najaf al-Ashraf and the pebbles and gravel of Kufa. The Arabic word *kufa* itself denotes pebbles and gravel, a linguistic connection highlighting this historical transformation. It is narrated that when one exits the holy shrine in Najaf, the *Safa al-Yamani* — also known as *Maqam Amir al-Mu'minin* — is the very place where Imam Ali (a.s.) would converse with the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.), and where Prophet Musa (a.s.) engaged in divine dialogue. Thus, *Tur Sinin*, the site of such profound spiritual communion, is identified with Kufa.

Kufa's Enduring Connection with Najaf

It is worth noting the intricate relationship between Kufa and Najaf. Many virtues attributed to Najaf al-Ashraf find their manifestation in Kufa, and conversely, numerous virtues ascribed to Kufa are reflected in Najaf. This interconnectedness is rooted in the tradition that Najaf is referred to as *pusht-e Kufa* or "Kufa's back," indicating that at one time, Najaf and Kufa were considered a single twin city.

While Najaf has gained greater prominence in modern times due to its spiritual significance and increased pilgrimage, Kufa's former bustling prominence has somewhat waned among general visitors. Nevertheless, academic and political centers often revolve around Najaf. However, with the advent of Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), Kufa is prophesied to regain and even transcend its past glory, becoming the epicenter of global hope and prosperity.

Just as the **Holy Ka'aba** is revered as the Haram (sanctuary) of Allah, and **Masjid an-Nabawi** is honored as the Haram of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.), so too is **Masjid Kufa** recognized as the **Haram of Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali (a.s.)**. This designation underscores its unique association with the Imam and its status as a divinely protected and sacred space dedicated to his spiritual legacy.

The city of Kufa truly blossomed and attained profound spiritual meaning during the era of **Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)**. His arrival imbued the city with a transcendent significance that had been previously unrecognized. The people intuitively understood that if Imam Ali (a.s.), the embodiment of di-

vine wisdom, chose a particular land as his residence, that land must undoubtedly possess immense importance.

Upon his relocation to Kufa, Imam Ali (a.s.) transformed it into his capital (*Dar al-Khilafah*). He made Kufa his permanent abode, a central hub for worship, and a vibrant center for teaching and learning. It was from this city that he initiated a comprehensive system of education and spiritual guidance, cementing Kufa's legacy as a pivotal intellectual and spiritual heartland of early Islam.

The Four Sacred Sanctuaries of Islam

Islamic traditions elevate Masjid Kufa to a status alongside the most revered sanctuaries on Earth. It is counted among the four most important places in the world, alongside the **Holy Ka'aba** in Mecca, **Masjid an-Nabawi** in Medina, and **Bayt al-Maqdis** in Jerusalem. The sanctity of these locations is underscored by the immense spiritual rewards for acts of worship performed within their precincts.

For instance, giving charity in any of these four sacred sites yields a reward equivalent to donating one hundred *dirhams*. Similarly, performing two units of prayer (*rak'at*) in these places is akin to performing one hundred units of prayer elsewhere. This divine emphasis on generosity and worship in these specific locations suggests a profound purpose: Allah desires a continuous flow of people to these sites. The more people spend and reside there, the more prosperous and vibrant these areas become, attracting further inhabitants. This constant human presence and activity serve to keep the attention of believers focused on the Imam of their time, particularly Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), for whom Kufa is destined to be the global center of all aspirations, prosperity, and advancement.

15.2 Masjid Kufa: A Sanctuary Blessed by Prophets

Masjid Kufa stands as a testament to historical grandeur and architectural expanse. Its dimensions are considerable, stretching approximately 110 meters in length and 101 meters in width, making it almost square in shape. The total area of the

mosque spans roughly 11,110 square meters, enclosed by walls reaching 10 meters in height. The open courtyard (*sahn*) covers an area of 5,600 square meters, while the covered corridors or prayer halls (*shabistan*) total 5,200 square meters. The mosque is supported by 187 pillars and features four towering minarets, each approximately 30 meters high. This impressive scale facilitates the gathering of large congregations, echoing its historical role as a central hub for the Muslim community.

Ancient Foundations: From Adam to Nuh

The historical origins of Masjid Kufa stretch back to the dawn of human civilization. It is said that the first to inhabit or establish this sacred space was **Prophet Adam (a.s.)**. Upon his descent to Earth, Adam (a.s.) performed his acts of worship and sought repentance precisely on this ground, and it was here that his repentance was accepted by Allah.

Following him, Masjid Kufa became the site where **Prophet Nuh (a.s.)** constructed his legendary ark. The mosque grounds served not only as his workplace but also as his residence, where he gathered his companions to embark on the colossal task of building the vessel that would save humanity from the Great Flood. This deep historical connection imbues Masjid Kufa with an aura of antiquity and profound spiritual significance.

The Strategic Establishment of Masjid Kufa

The precise location of Masjid Kufa, as it exists today, traces back to a strategic decision during the early Islamic Caliphate. When the military forces needed a base outside Medina, **Salman al-Farsi** and **Hudhayfah al-Yamani** were tasked with finding a suitable site. They journeyed for miles along the banks of the Euphrates, Salman on the western side and Hudhayfah on the eastern, but found no place that met their requirements. Eventually, both independently settled on the very spot where Masjid Kufa now stands, declaring it the most fitting location. They then performed two *rak'at* of prayer and supplicated to Allah, asking Him to make this place a center of stability, safety, and progress. It was on this divinely

chosen ground that Masjid Kufa was subsequently erected.

The Zenith of Kufa: Imam Ali's Spiritual and Scholarly Hub

The true meaning, importance, and status of Masjid Kufa received their ultimate elevation with the arrival of the first Imam of the Muslims, **Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)**. It is widely narrated that upon entering the city of Kufa, Imam Ali (a.s.) did not proceed to any stately mansion or the home of any prominent personality. Instead, his first destination was Masjid Kufa. There, he immediately delivered a sermon to the people, setting a precedent for his daily routine.

From that moment onwards, Masjid Kufa became the epicenter of Imam Ali's spiritual and intellectual activities. He regularly led prayers, delivered profound sermons, and engaged in extensive teaching. It was within the hallowed confines of this mosque that the initial rules of Arabic grammar, specifically *sarf* (morphology) and *nahw* (syntax), were codified and developed. Many classical grammar texts frequently cite the "Kufan school" or "Basran school" when discussing linguistic rules. These two schools represent prominent groups of scholars who specialized in Arabic grammar and other sciences during that era. Just as Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.) established Masjid an-Nabawi as his central hub for learning, Imam Ali (a.s.) transformed Masjid Kufa into his primary center. It was here that he formally established a seminary (*madrasa*) where renowned figures such as Abdullah ibn Abbas, Maytham al-Tammar, and Kumayl ibn Ziyad, among other dedicated followers, received their profound education.

The virtues of Masjid Kufa are eloquently articulated in a lengthy tradition from **Imam Ali (a.s.)**, the essence of which conveys profound spiritual insights. The Imam (a.s.) proclaimed that Allah has bestowed upon the people of Kufa a unique mosque, one not granted to any other people. He further stated that this mosque served as the residence and prayer place for **Prophet Adam (a.s.)**, **Prophet Khidr (a.s.)**, **Prophet Nuh (a.s.)**, and **Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.)**.

Imam Ali (a.s.) also foresaw its future, stating, "Indeed, I see this mosque in two

garments on the Day of Judgment, interceding for the believers who prayed in it.” He added, “I see the **Black Stone** being installed in this mosque.” The Imam (a.s.) then declared that no one enters this mosque without being captivated by its beauty and falling deeply in love with it. He emphasized the mosque’s unparalleled significance, asserting that if people truly knew its immense virtue, they would come to it crawling on their knees, even dragging themselves through snow and ice, enduring all hardships just to reach its sacred precincts. This profound statement from Imam Ali (a.s.) highlights not only the divine favor upon Masjid Kufa but also its deep spiritual connection to past prophets and its crucial role in the future, particularly as a beloved sanctuary for both Imam Ali (a.s.) himself and the awaited Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.).

The experience of being in Masjid Kufa, especially during the early morning hours or at night, is described as ethereal. It is akin to a spiritual rainfall, where particles of divine light descend, refreshing one’s body and soul, leaving a profound reluctance to depart from such a spiritually charged environment.

Sanctified by Angels and Prophets

Masjid Kufa is referred to as the **place of prostration, prayer, and worship for the angels**. Even before the creation of Prophet Adam (a.s.), angels engaged in worship on this very land. When Allah commanded the angels to prostrate to Adam (a.s.), they performed their prostration upon this sacred ground.

Furthermore, this blessed mosque has served as a pathway and place of worship for a thousand prophets and a thousand of their vicegerents (*awsiya*). Countless prophets and their successors have performed their acts of devotion and remembrance within its hallowed walls, leaving behind a legacy of divine connection and spiritual presence.

15.3 The Unmatched Reward of Prayer in Masjid Kufa

The reward for prayer in Masjid Kufa is exceptionally high. It is one of only four places in the world where prayers can be performed *in full* (i.e., without shortening them even when traveling, a rule known as *Namaz-e Kamil*). These four places are the **Holy Ka'aba**, **Masjid an-Nabawi**, the **precincts of Imam Husayn's shrine** (*Hayr-e Husayni*), and **Masjid Kufa**.

The spiritual recompense for prayer in Masjid Kufa is profound:

- Performing an **obligatory prayer** in Masjid Kufa carries the reward equivalent to performing **Hajj** (specifically, the Hajj performed by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.)).
- Performing a **voluntary prayer** (*nafl*) in Masjid Kufa carries the reward equivalent to performing **Umrah** (specifically, the Umrah performed by the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.)).
- One unit of prayer (*rak'at*) performed in Masjid Kufa is equivalent to **seventy units of prayer** performed elsewhere.
- More broadly, any prayer performed in Masjid Kufa is considered **a thousand times greater** in reward than a prayer performed in other mosques.

The Resting Place of Prophets and Vicegerents

Adding to its mystique, Masjid Kufa is believed to be the burial site of **370 prophets** and **600 vicegerents** (*awsiya*). While their exact resting places remain unknown to humanity in this world, their identities and the immense spiritual gravity of their presence will be unveiled on the Day of Judgment. This hidden congregation of divine personalities further elevates the spiritual standing of the mosque's courtyard, making every step within its confines tread upon hallowed ground.

The Future Capital of Imam Mahdi's Global Rule

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Masjid Kufa's virtue, especially for the present and future generations, is its prophesied role as the **center of government**

for Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.). Just as Imam Ali (a.s.) dispensed justice and resolved the issues of the people from Masjid Kufa during his caliphate, Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) will similarly address and resolve the problems of humanity from this very mosque when he reappears.

This prophecy highlights Kufa's ultimate destiny as the global spiritual and administrative capital, a place from which divine justice and universal peace will emanate.

A Site of Forgiveness and Resurrection

The city and mosque of Kufa are also associated with profound blessings related to divine forgiveness and the Day of Judgment. Imam Ali al-Ridha (a.s.) once inquired of a person where they resided. When the individual replied, "I live in Kufa," the Imam responded, "You live in an excellent place! Indeed, it is the house of Nuh." It is narrated that if a person enters Masjid Kufa one hundred times and seeks forgiveness one hundred times, Allah will forgive them one hundred times.

Furthermore, a significant event of the Day of Judgment is tied to Kufa. When the trumpet is blown by **Israfil (a.s.)** for the first time, leading to the death of all living creatures, and then again for the resurrection, it is precisely from Kufa, or its vicinity, that Israfil (a.s.) will blow the trumpet. This connection signifies Kufa's role as a pivotal point in the divine scheme of creation and resurrection.

Additionally, a tradition related to Kufa, or by another account to Wadi al-Salam in Najaf, states that **seventy thousand individuals** with luminous faces will rise from this land and enter Paradise without any reckoning. This prophecy underscores the immense spiritual purity and divine favor bestowed upon the inhabitants or those connected to these sacred grounds.

The Blessings of Presence: Even Sitting is Worship

Masjid Kufa is a vast complex of numerous sacred spots for *ziyarat*. While performing specific acts of worship at each station is highly encouraged, the sheer size of the mosque and the multitude of stations can be physically demanding.

Recognizing this, it is said that even merely sitting in Masjid Kufa, without engaging in any specific recitation, prayer, or remembrance (*dhikr*), still earns a reward. This profound blessing is likened to the spiritual recompense for sleeping during the holy month of Ramadan, which is considered an act of worship itself. Such is the sanctity of Masjid Kufa that merely being present within its sacred confines confers divine blessings.

Within the mosque, the **right side** (when facing the mihrab or central prayer direction) is considered more blessed than the left side. The main central entrance, known as **Bab al-Kinda**, is usually closed to visitors. Therefore, pilgrims typically enter through **Bab al-Shu'ban**. The right side, in relation to entering from Bab al-Shu'ban, encompasses highly venerated stations such as the *Mihrab al-Shahadah* (where Imam Ali (a.s.) was martyred), *Maqam Adam (a.s.)*, and *Maqam Nuh (a.s.)*. These three locations hold the greatest virtues within the mosque. Imam Ali (a.s.) himself emphasized that if people understood the true significance of Masjid Kufa, they would approach it crawling on their knees, even dragging themselves through snow, enduring all difficulties to reach this blessed sanctuary.

15.4 Navigating the Sacred Space: Etiquettes and Gateways

The journey to Masjid Kufa is not merely a physical displacement but a profound spiritual undertaking. To maximize the spiritual benefit, pilgrims are advised to be fresh and well-rested before embarking on the *a'mal* (acts of worship) within the mosque. It is recommended to avoid visiting other *ziyarat* sites immediately before Masjid Kufa, such as the house of Imam Ali (a.s.) or the shrine of Maytham al-Tammar, to preserve one's energy and spiritual focus. The ideal approach is to proceed directly to Masjid Kufa, perform its prescribed *a'mal*, and then visit other sites.

While the initial enthusiasm of a pilgrim may lead them to diligently perform *a'mal* at smaller sites, the vastness of Masjid Kufa can be overwhelming. The sight of its immense structure and the knowledge of its numerous stations—twelve pillars

and three burial sites—can cause fatigue or anxiety if one is already exhausted. Unfortunately, a common practice among some groups is to hastily complete the *a'mal* by pointing to locations or even hiring someone else to perform the prayers and supplications on their behalf. Such shortcuts diminish the spiritual experience and prevent pilgrims from deriving the full benefit and profound spiritual connection that each sacred spot offers. Every station holds a unique significance; some are associated with Prophet Nuh (a.s.), others with Angel Jibrael (a.s.), or Imam Ali (a.s.), or Imam Sajjad (a.s.). It is therefore highly recommended to perform the specific acts of worship at each designated location to fully absorb its unique blessing.

Just as a detailed understanding of Imam Ali's (a.s.) shrine in Najaf enhances the *ziyarat*, memorizing the locations of the twelve pillars and three personalities within Masjid Kufa (a total of fifteen points of interest) is crucial. This knowledge allows pilgrims to consciously engage with the historical background, virtues, and specific *a'mal* of each location, ensuring a truly immersive and spiritually enriching experience.

Entering the City

Merely entering the holy city of Kufa is considered an act of great blessing and spiritual merit. Unlike Najaf, where pilgrims may be dropped off at a distance and walk towards the shrine while reciting supplications, entrance into Kufa often occurs swiftly, particularly by bus, leaving pilgrims little time to consciously engage in specific prayers for city entry. Nevertheless, the spiritual significance of entering Kufa remains profound, and it is highly recommended to recite the appropriate supplications upon doing so. These prayers can be found in spiritual guidebooks such as *Mafatih al-Jinan* or other *ziyarat* compilations often provided by pilgrimage caravans.

The Prayer for Kufa's Entry

Upon entering the city of Kufa, the following supplication should be recited:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ وَبِاللَّهِ وَعَلَى مِلَّةِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ

Transliteration: *Bismillahi wa billahi wa ala millati Rasulillah*

Meaning: In the Name of Allah, by Allah, and upon the religion of the Messenger of Allah.

Approaching the Grand Mosque

As one progresses from the city of Kufa towards the sacred Masjid Kufa, each step taken with intention and devotion is a moment of blessing. While advancing towards the mosque, pilgrims should recite the following supplication:

اللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ

Transliteration: *Allahu Akbar walhamdulillah wa subhanallah*

Meaning: Allah is the Greatest, and all praise belongs to Allah, and Glory be to Allah.

The Gates of Masjid Kufa: History and Significance

Masjid Kufa has several entrances, each with its own historical and spiritual significance.

- **Bab al-Kinda:** This is the central and main gate of the mosque. However, it is generally kept closed to visitors.
- **Bab al-Shu'ban:** This gate is the most frequently used and holds the highest virtue for entry. It is often the primary point of access for pilgrims, and there is a specific supplication associated with entering through it.
- **Bab al-Anmat:** This gate is also occasionally open but is used less frequently than Bab al-Shu'ban.

In addition to these external gates, there are two internal gates:

- **Bab Sidra**
- **Bab al-Rahma**

These internal gates lead directly to the resting places of the three revered personalities buried within or near the mosque: **Muslim ibn Aqil**, **Mukhtar al-Thaqafi**, and **Hani ibn Urwah**.

Bab al-Shu'ban: The Serpent's Gate and its Miracle

Bab al-Shu'ban (which means "Serpent's Gate" or "Dragon's Gate") derives its name from a miraculous event during the time of Imam Ali (a.s.). One evening, while Imam Ali (a.s.) was delivering a sermon and issuing judgments from his pulpit, a large serpent or dragon entered the mosque through this very door. It approached Imam Ali (a.s.), asked him questions, and received answers. After this extraordinary exchange, the serpent departed through the same gate. This event consecrated the entrance, forever linking it to this divine encounter and bestowing upon it the name Bab al-Shu'ban.

Later, a tyrannical ruler from Syria, upon learning of this miracle and the gate's popular designation, became infuriated. In an attempt to erase the memory of Imam Ali's (a.s.) miracle and diminish the gate's spiritual significance, he brought an elephant and stationed it at the entrance, ordering people to refer to it as "Bab al-Fil" (Elephant's Gate). Although some historical texts briefly mention the name Bab al-Fil, the common people continued to refer to it as Bab al-Shu'ban. This resilience of popular memory ensured that the true miracle of Imam Ali (a.s.) remained associated with the gate, eclipsing the attempts of his detractors.

Upon entering through **Bab al-Shu'ban**, after reciting the initial prayers for city and mosque entry, one should also say:

سَلَامٌ عَلَى رَسُولِ اللَّهِ

Transliteration: *Salamun ala Rasulillah*

Meaning: Peace be upon the Messenger of Allah.

Following this, another specific prayer should be recited while standing or sitting at the gate. As pilgrims often wait for their groups to gather, this waiting time can

be utilized for reciting these important supplications, which are readily available in religious apps or pocket-sized *Mafatih al-Jinan* books. After entering through Bab al-Shu'ban, it is customary to declare **Allahu Akbar** three times.

Other Gates and Their Historical Names

While Bab al-Shu'ban is the primary entry point, the mosque's other gates also carry historical designations. The main gate, **Bab al-Kinda**, was also known as *Dar-e Hujjat*. **Bab al-Shu'ban** itself was historically called *Dar-e Sa'bani*. **Bab al-Anmat** was sometimes referred to as *Dar-e Rahma*. The internal gates, **Bab Sidra** and **Bab al-Rahma**, were also known by older names: Bab Sidra as *Dar-e Ashtar* and Bab al-Rahma as *Dar-e Azdi*. There is also an outer gate, **Dar-e Aqeel**, situated almost opposite Bab al-Kinda. This gate can be used to access the shrines of the buried personalities: entering Dar-e Aqeel, turning right for Hani ibn Urwah's shrine, and then left through Dar-e Hamida to visit Muslim ibn Aqil and Mukhtar al-Thaqafi. However, to avoid confusion, pilgrims are generally advised to remember and utilize **Bab al-Shu'ban** as their main entry and exit point for the mosque complex.

15.5 The Stations of Grace: A'mal within Masjid Kufa

Masjid Kufa encompasses a series of sacred stations (*maqamat*) and pillars (*dukkhan*) that commemorate the presence and worship of various prophets and Imams. A *maqam* generally signifies a place where a respected personality visited, performed acts of worship, or left a profound spiritual mark. It may also be associated with a specific event or miracle. The *ziyarat* within Masjid Kufa can be extensive and physically demanding, often taking several hours to complete if performed with due diligence.

General Guidelines for Worship at Each Station

At most of these stations, the recommended acts of worship (*a'mal*) typically include:

- Performing either **two or four rak'at** of prayer.

- Reciting **Tasbih Fatimah** (the glorifications of Lady Fatimah (a.s.)).
- Reciting a **specific dua** (supplication) associated with that particular *maqam*.
- Sometimes, an additional *dua* or *namaz al-hajat* (prayer for needs) may be prescribed.

It is crucial for pilgrims to carry a comprehensive *ziyarat* guide, whether a detailed book or a digital application, to follow the precise instructions and *duas* for each station. This ensures that the *a'mal* are performed correctly and that the spiritual benefits are fully realized.

15.5.1 Maqam Hazrat Ibrahim (A.S.): The Forefather's Abode of Worship

The first pillar or station within Masjid Kufa, after entering through Bab al-Shu'ban, is the **Maqam of Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.)**. This *maqam* signifies that Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.) visited and worshipped at this very spot. A small elevated platform marks this revered location.

A'mal at Maqam Hazrat Ibrahim (a.s.):

- Perform **four rak'at of prayer**, offering them as two separate two-rak'at prayers.
 - In the first *rak'at* after Surah al-Hamd, recite **Surah al-Ikhlās**.
 - In the second *rak'at* after Surah al-Hamd, recite **Surah al-Qadr**.
- After the prayer, recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Then, recite the following *dua*: **Allahumma Saliheen...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).

15.5.2 Maqam Hazrat Khidr (A.S.): A Passing of Divine Presence

The second pillar or station is the **Maqam of Hazrat Khidr (a.s.)**. This *maqam* signifies that Prophet Khidr (a.s.), known for his mystical encounters and eternal life, passed through this location, leaving a spiritual imprint of his divine presence. Pilgrims perform their general *a'mal* here, acknowledging the blessed passage of this revered prophet.

15.5.3 Dakkal Qadha: The Seat of Justice and Divine Wisdom

The third station encountered within the mosque is **Dakkal Qadha**, literally meaning “the place of judgment.” This is the sacred spot where **Imam Ali (a.s.)** would sit to administer justice, deliver verdicts, and resolve the complex disputes of the people. The significance of this *maqam* is underscored by the inscription of the Qur’anic verse from **Surah An-Nahl (16:90)** on its boundary:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ

Transliteration: *Innallaha ya’muru bil ‘adli wal ihsan*

Meaning: Indeed, Allah enjoins justice and good conduct.

This verse epitomizes the very essence of Imam Ali’s (a.s.) rule and his profound commitment to upholding divine justice. It is also mentioned that Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (a.s.) also prayed at this *maqam*.

A’mal at Dakkal Qadha:

- Perform **two rak’at** of prayer.
- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Recite the *dua* which begins with: **Allahumma innaha dhikra tu tawhid...**
(The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).

15.5.4 The Verdict of Truth: Bayt al-Tasht

Connected to Dakkal Qadha, the fourth station is **Bayt al-Tasht**, meaning “the house of the bowl” or “basin.” While it appears as a separate spot, it is intrinsically linked to one of Imam Ali’s (a.s.) remarkable judgments at Dakkal Qadha. Chronologically, one visits Dakkal Qadha first, then proceeds to Bayt al-Tasht, which is a small area just behind Dakkal Qadha.

The incident associated with Bayt al-Tasht involves a woman who was mistakenly believed to be pregnant. Her brothers, in their haste and anger, sought to kill her for what they perceived as a transgression. The woman was brought before Imam

Ali (a.s.) in Masjid Kufa for judgment. Imam Ali (a.s.) summoned a midwife and had a curtain drawn, allowing the midwife to examine the woman privately. The midwife, upon examination, confirmed that the woman appeared to be pregnant.

Imam Ali (a.s.), however, with his divine knowledge, knew the truth. He then instructed that a basin (*tasht*) be brought, filled with mud, and that the woman be seated in it. According to one narration, he extended his hand and brought a piece of ice from Syria, placing it in the basin. Shortly after the woman was seated in the muddy basin, a large leech emerged from her body. It was then understood that this leech, which had entered her body perhaps while she was in a river, had grown large by consuming her blood, giving her the appearance of pregnancy. This profound judgment by Imam Ali (a.s.) saved the innocent woman's life, as the people had falsely accused her and were on the verge of stoning her. This *maqam* stands as a testament to Imam Ali's (a.s.) unparalleled wisdom and justice, which often saved lives that others, in their haste, would have condemned.

A'mal at Bayt al-Tasht:

- Perform **two rak'at** of prayer.
- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Recite the *dua* which begins with: **Allahumma innaha dhikra tu tawhid...** (It is the same *dua* as Dakkal Qadha as it is connected).

15.5.5 Maqam Safinat Nuh (A.S.): The Ark of Salvation

The fifth pillar, located almost in the center of Masjid Kufa, is the **Maqam of Safinat Nuh**, the place where **Prophet Nuh (a.s.)** constructed his ark. Prophet Nuh (a.s.) himself was a carpenter and gathered wood from distant places to build the massive vessel. The ark was built precisely at the location where there was an oven (*tannur*), from which the waters of the Great Flood eventually began to gush forth. The unusual combination of fire (the oven) and water (the flood) at this very spot highlights a divine miracle.

While Nuh (a.s.) and his companions diligently built the ark in a dry, barren land,

people mocked them, questioning the need for a ship where there was no water or rain. Yet, Nuh (a.s.) steadfastly continued his work, adhering to Allah's command to build the ark with his companions.

The Holy Qur'an narrates this divine command in **Surah Hud (11:37)**:

وَاصْنَعِ الْفُلْكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا وَوَحْيِنَا وَلَا تُخَاطِبْنِي فِي الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا إِنَّهُمْ مُغْرَقُونَ

Transliteration: *Wa isna' al-fulka bi a'yunina wa wahyina wa la tukhatibni fil-ladhina dhalamu innahum mughraoon*

Meaning: And construct the ship under Our observation and Our inspiration, and do not address Me concerning those who have wronged; indeed, they are to be drowned.

And when the ark was completed, Allah's command came in **Surah Hud (11:40)**:

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُنَا وَفَارَ التَّنُّورُ قُلْنَا احْمِلْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا مَن سَبَقَ عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ وَمَنْ آمَنَ وَمَا آمَنَ مَعَهُ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ

Transliteration: *Hatta idha ja'a amruna wa far at-tannur, qulna ihmil fiha min kullin zawjayni ithnayni wa ahlaka illa man sabaqa alayhi al-qawl wa man amana wama amana maahu illa qalil*

Meaning: Until when Our command came and the oven gushed forth [water], We said, 'Load therein of each [living thing] two pairs – male and female – and your family, except those against whom the word has already gone forth, and [include] whoever has believed.' But none had believed with him except a few.

A remarkable incident is narrated concerning the ark's construction. People, in their mockery, began to defile the ark, using it as a latrine. The ark became completely filled with filth, emitting a terrible stench. Nuh (a.s.) and his companions were distressed by this, but they were instructed to continue their work. Then, a severe skin disease, similar to leprosy or scabies, spread among the people. One man afflicted with the disease, in desperation, went to the ark to relieve himself. His foot slipped, and he fell into the accumulated filth.

To his astonishment, wherever the filth touched his skin, the itching and sores disappeared. He rushed home, shared his experience, and soon the entire city rushed to the ark, stripping naked and covering themselves in the filth. This unusual and humiliating act miraculously cured their skin disease, but it also had an unintended consequence: the ark was thoroughly cleaned by the very people who had defiled it, leaving it sparkling clean. This story is a testament to Allah's ingenious ways of bringing about His will and humbling the arrogant.

At this *maqam*, there is still a well containing blessed water. Pilgrims are encouraged to sprinkle this water over their heads and bodies and drink from it, while reciting a specific *dua*.

A'mal at Maqam Safinat Nuh (a.s.):

- Perform **four rak'at of prayer**.
- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Recite the *dua* which begins with: **Allahumma Salli** ala Muhammadin wa Ali Muhammadin wa**ammil...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).
- Additionally, perform **two rak'at of prayer** with the *dua* starting: **Allahumma innaha halal...**
- This *maqam* is also highly recommended for performing a special **Salat al-Hajat** (prayer for needs), which is a four-*rak'at* prayer.

15.5.6 Dakkal Mi'raj: The Ascent of Prophecy

The sixth pillar is **Dakkal Mi'raj**, "the place of ascension." This sacred spot commemorates a significant event in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.). It is narrated that upon his return from the miraculous **Mi'raj** (ascension to the heavens), Angel Jibrael (a.s.) pointed out this location to him, informing him that it would eventually become the residence and judgment seat of Imam Ali (a.s.). Upon hearing of its future significance and the virtues of Masjid Kufa, the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.w.) expressed his desire to pray two *rak'at* there. Despite Mecca and Medina being just "two steps away" (a figurative expression for close proximity), the Prophet chose to descend and perform these prayers at

this very spot in Kufa. This act of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) further sanctifies the *maqam*, making it a highly recommended place for pilgrims to offer two *rak'at* of prayer.

A'mal at Dakkal Mi'raj:

- Perform two *rak'at* of prayer.

15.5.7 Maqam Hazrat Adam (A.S.): The Place of Repentance and Divine Forgiveness

The seventh station is the **Maqam of Hazrat Adam (a.s.)**, which is considered one of the most important and venerated places within Masjid Kufa. This is the very spot where Prophet Adam (a.s.) sought and received divine forgiveness after his descent from Paradise. The Holy Qur'an describes this in **Surah al-Baqarah (2:37)**:

فَتَلَقَّى آدَمُ مِنْ رَبِّهِ كَلِمَاتٍ فَتَابَ عَلَيْهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

Transliteration: *Fataallaqa Adamu min Rabbihi kalimatin fatabaalayhi innahu huwa at-tawwabu ar-rahim*

Meaning: Then Adam received from his Lord [some] words, and He accepted his repentance. Indeed, it is He who is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.

Traditions reveal that the “words” (*kalimat*) by which Adam (a.s.) supplicated and sought repentance were the sacred names of the **Panjatan Pak** (the Five Holy Ones: Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali, Lady Fatimah, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husayn, peace be upon them all).

This *maqam* holds additional significance because **Imam Ali (a.s.)** himself frequently worshipped here with such intense devotion that it is said only a small lamb could have passed between him and the spot due to his closeness and absorption in prayer. This deep connection of Imam Ali (a.s.) further enhances the sanctity and desirability of worshipping at this location.

It is also narrated that **sixty thousand angels** descend to this *maqam* daily to

worship. These angels do not return but are replaced by another sixty thousand the next day, indicating the immense spiritual activity and fervent desire of angels to be present at this blessed spot.

A'mal at Maqam Hazrat Adam (a.s.):

- Perform **four *rak'at* of prayer**.
 - In the first *rak'at* after Surah al-Hamd, recite **Surah al-Qadr**.
 - In the second *rak'at* after Surah al-Hamd, recite **Surah al-Tawhid**.
- Recite the *dua* that begins with: **Bismillahi wa billahi wa ala millati Rasulillah Allahumma anna huna qad asaa...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).

15.5.8 Maqam Jibrael (A.S.): The Angelic Visitation

The eighth station is the **Maqam of Jibrael (a.s.)**, located on the right side, parallel to Maqam Adam (a.s.). This *maqam* marks the spot where the Archangel Jibrael (a.s.) descended and was present.

A'mal at Maqam Jibrael (a.s.):

- Perform **two *rak'at* of prayer**.
- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Recite the *dua* that begins with: **Allahumma inni as'aluka bi jami'i...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).

15.5.9 Maqam Imam Sajjad (A.S.): The Prostration of Submission

The ninth station, located slightly ahead from Bab al-Kinda, is the **Maqam of Imam Sajjad (a.s.)**, the fourth Imam. Abu Hamza al-Thumali, a renowned companion, narrates a profound experience at this *maqam*. He recounted that he once witnessed a beautiful young man radiating an exceptionally fragrant aroma, dressed in exquisite attire, wearing Arab sandals, and with a turban on his head. The young man began his prayer with the *takbiratul ihram* (declaration of Allah's

greatness at the start of prayer). Abu Hamza was deeply affected by his demeanor. When the individual went into prostration (*sujud*), he recited supplications and repeated the phrase “**Ya Karimu, Ya Karimu**” (O Generous One, O Generous One) until his breath was cut off. When the young man raised his forehead from prostration, Abu Hamza realized with awe that it was none other than **Imam Ali Zayn al-Abidin (a.s.)**, Imam Sajjad. Abu Hamza asked the Imam why he had come to this place, and Imam Sajjad simply replied, “I have come for the very purpose you saw me engaged in,” referring to the prayer and *ziyarat*.

A'mal at Maqam Imam Sajjad (a.s.):

- Perform **two rak'at** of prayer.
- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- While in prostration, place your cheek on the ground (on the *sajdagah* or prayer mat) and recite:

يَا سَيِّدِي يَا سَيِّدِي يَا سَيِّدِي، صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِ مُحَمَّدٍ وَاعْفِرْ لِي وَاعْفِرْ لِي

Transliteration: *Ya Sayyidi, Ya Sayyidi, Ya Sayyidi, Salli 'ala Muhammadin wa Ali Muhammadin waghfir li, waghfir li...*

Meaning: O my Master, O my Master, O my Master, send blessings upon Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, and forgive me, and forgive me...

15.5.10 Maqam Hazrat Nuh (A.S.): A Place of Profound Worship

The tenth station is the **Maqam of Hazrat Nuh (a.s.)**, distinct from the place where his ark was built. This *maqam*, located slightly ahead on the left side from Maqam Sajjad, is where Prophet Nuh (a.s.) specifically performed his acts of worship and devotion.

A'mal at Maqam Hazrat Nuh (a.s.):

- Perform **four rak'at** of prayer.

- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Recite the *dua* that begins with: **Allahumma inni as'aluka bi Muhammadin wa Ali Muhammadin wa ghadara...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).
- Optionally, perform an additional **two *rak'at* of prayer** with **Tasbih Fatimah** and the *dua* starting: **Allahumma innaha halal...**
- For those with specific and urgent needs or problems, a special **Salat al-Hajat** (prayer for needs) is highly recommended here. This is a four-*rak'at* prayer where in each *rak'at*, after Surah al-Hamd, one recites:
 - The **four “Quls”** (Surah al-Kafirun, Surah al-Ikhlās, Surah al-Falaq, Surah an-Nas).
 - **Surah an-Nasr** (often referred to as *Nasl* in some contexts).
 - **Surah al-Qadr**.
 - **Surah al-A'la**.
 - After the prayer and **Tasbih Fatimah**, recite the *dua* that begins with: **Allahumma inni as'aluka min latrahu...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books). It is hoped that Allah will grant your needs.

15.5.11 Mihrab al-Shahadah of Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.): The Altar of Martyrdom

The eleventh and most pivotal *maqam* within Masjid Kufa, likened to the precious gem in a ring, is the **Mihrab al-Shahadah of Imam Ali (a.s.)**—the sacred spot where **Amir al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)**, was martyred.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.) had foretold this tragic event. He drew a parallel between Imam Ali's (a.s.) future assassin and Qaddar ibn Salif, the most wretched individual who hamstringed the she-camel of Prophet Salih (a.s.). The Prophet (s.a.w.w.) prophesied that “the most wretched among people” would be the one who would stain Imam Ali's (a.s.) beard with the blood from his head. This prophecy came to pass through **Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam**, who was instigated by the governor of Syria, Muawiyah, with promises of wealth and power, and given a poisoned sword.

Upon arriving in Kufa, Ibn Muljam became infatuated with a woman named Qatamah, whose family members Imam Ali (a.s.) had killed in various battles. Qatamah demanded Imam Ali's (a.s.) head as her dowry, solidifying Ibn Muljam's resolve. This serves as a cautionary tale: how looking at non-mahram women with lust can corrupt one's faith and strengthen evil intentions. With money, power, and the promise of Qatamah, Ibn Muljam's resolve to assassinate Imam Ali (a.s.) became unshakeable.

To gain Imam Ali's (a.s.) trust and dispel suspicion, Ibn Muljam feigned loyalty, even offering his sword to the Imam. Imam Ali (a.s.), who possessed divine knowledge of the unseen, knew of Ibn Muljam's treacherous intentions. He remarked, "If you give your sword, then with what will you kill?" This shocked Ibn Muljam, who feigned innocence, proclaiming himself a loyal follower and offering himself to be killed by the Imam if there was any doubt. Imam Ali (a.s.), the embodiment of divine justice, famously replied, "How can I punish a criminal before he commits the crime?" This act of supreme justice, even when his own life was at stake, reflects the unwavering commitment of the Imam to the principles of Islam. He allowed Ibn Muljam to leave, knowing full well that his martyrdom was destined to occur after the *Fajr* (dawn) prayer.

On that fateful morning, Imam Ali (a.s.) himself woke Ibn Muljam for prayer, allowing the conspiracy to unfold as predestined. Ibn Muljam, lying on his stomach, had concealed his poisoned sword. As Imam Ali (a.s.) prostrated in prayer, the wretched assassin struck him with the poisoned sword. Though Imam Ali (a.s.) had demonstrated unparalleled bravery and strength in countless battles, such as Uhud and Khaybar, never once attributing victory to himself, upon receiving this fatal blow, he declared, **"Fuztu bi Rabb al-Ka'ba!"** (**By the Lord of the Ka'aba, I have succeeded!**) This statement signified his ultimate triumph—martyrdom in the path of Allah.

Even in his final moments, Imam Ali (a.s.) exemplified immense compassion and generosity. While suffering from the poisoned wound, he inquired about Ibn Muljam, requesting that his bonds be loosened. When a drink was offered to him,

he asked for a portion to be given to Ibn Muljam. He also advised his sons that if he did not survive, Ibn Muljam should only be struck once, exactly as he had been struck, and that if he recovered, he himself would deal with him. This profound display of justice and mercy, even towards his assassin, underscores the Imam's unwavering commitment to divine principles, accepting his destiny for the sake of justice.

A'mal at Mihrab al-Shahadah of Amir al-Mu'minin (a.s.):

- Perform **two rak'at of prayer**.
- Recite the *dua* that begins with: **Ya Man Azhar al Jamil...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).
- It is highly recommended to recite the **Munajat Amir al-Mu'minin** (Supplication of the Commander of the Faithful) at this holy spot, reflecting on its profound meaning while doing so.

15.5.12 Maqam Imam Sadiq (A.S.): The Fountain of Knowledge

The twelfth and final pillar/station is the **Maqam of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.)**, the sixth Imam. This *maqam* commemorates his presence and spiritual blessings within Masjid Kufa.

A'mal at Maqam Imam Sadiq (a.s.):

- Perform **two rak'at of prayer**.
- Recite **Tasbih Fatimah**.
- Recite the *dua* that begins with: **Ya Sani'a Kulli Masnu'in...** (The full *dua* can be found in *ziyarat* books).
- For those with specific and intense needs or problems, a special **Salat al-Hajat** (prayer for needs) is highly recommended here. This is a two-*rak'at* prayer where in each *rak'at*, after Surah al-Hamd, one recites the following seven surahs:
 - **Surah al-Falaq**
 - **Surah an-Nas**

- **Surah al-Ikhlās**
- **Surah al-Kāfirūn** (these four are collectively known as the “Four Quls”)
- **Surah an-Nāsr**
- **Surah al-Qadr**
- **Surah al-A‘lā**
- After the prayer and **Tasbīh Fatimah**, supplicate for your needs. It is hoped that Allah will grant your needs.

15.6 The Heroes of Kufa: Buried within the Sacred Grounds

After completing the devotional acts at the twelve pillars or stations within Masjid Kufa, pilgrims proceed to the third major segment of *ziyarat*: visiting the shrines of the revered personalities buried within or in close proximity to the mosque. These three noble figures are **Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.)**, **Mukhtar al-Thaqafi**, and **Hani ibn Urwah (a.s.)**. The shrine of Muslim ibn Aqil is typically in the center, Mukhtar al-Thaqafi on the right, and Hani ibn Urwah on the left (when facing them).

15.6.1 Muslim ibn Aqil (A.S.): The Envoy of Karbala

Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.) holds a pivotal position in the tragedy of Karbala. He was the esteemed cousin and envoy of **Imam Husayn (a.s.)**, dispatched to Kufa to assess the situation and gather support from the people who had sent numerous letters inviting Imam Husayn (a.s.) to lead them.

The Mission to Kufa

Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.) embarked on his journey to Kufa with two guides. However, en route, both guides lost their way and perished. This incident caused Muslim (a.s.) to send a letter to Imam Husayn (a.s.), expressing concern and suggesting that proceeding might not be advisable. Imam Husayn (a.s.), however, instructed him to continue the journey. Later, Muslim (a.s.) encountered a gazelle and hunted it, perceiving it as a good omen. Some, however, retrospectively view

it as an ominous sign of his impending martyrdom.

Upon arriving in Kufa, Muslim (a.s.) initially stayed at the house of Sa'd ibn Sultan Sulayman, where secret meetings were held. It was from here that the initial letters, numbering approximately 18,000, were sent to Imam Husayn (a.s.), urging him to come to Kufa. When Sa'd was away, Muslim (a.s.) moved to the house of **Hani ibn Urwah (a.s.)**.

Betrayal and Martyrdom

At this time, Basheer ibn No'man, a somewhat soft-hearted governor, was in charge of Kufa. He stated that he would not act against Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.) and his followers unless they initiated aggressive actions. However, a spy, a slave named Jaan who served Ibn Ziyad, alerted Ibn Ziyad, advising him to appoint a more ruthless governor as Basheer would not take decisive action. Yazid initially hesitated to appoint Ibn Ziyad, fearing his ambition for the caliphate. But when Ibn Ziyad presented a letter from Yazid's father, which instructed the appointment of Ibn Ziyad as Kufa's governor, the appointment was confirmed.

Ibn Ziyad entered Kufa disguised, wearing a veil that resembled the attire of the Hashemites. People mistook him for Imam Husayn (a.s.) and enthusiastically followed him in hundreds. When he finally lifted his veil, revealing his true identity, he immediately recognized the prominent figures who had greeted him. He then swiftly ordered the arrest of Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.).

Muslim (a.s.), realizing the shift in power, moved to the house of **Hani ibn Urwah (a.s.)**, a powerful tribal chief from Banu Madhhij with 12,000 guards. Ibn Ziyad summoned Hani and demanded that he surrender Muslim (a.s.). When Hani refused, he was imprisoned. Upon the arrival of Hani's tribe, numbering in the thousands, demanding his release, Ibn Ziyad deceitfully presented Hani from the first floor of Dar al-Imara (the governor's palace), claiming Hani was his guest, not a prisoner. The tribe, unaware of the deception, dispersed.

Eventually, Muslim (a.s.) realized the dire situation and decided to leave Hani's house to avoid further danger to his host. He gathered people and proceeded

towards Dar al-Imara, but as night fell, the crowd dwindled, until after the *Maghrib* (evening) prayers, not a single person remained with Muslim (a.s.). Isolated and alone, Muslim (a.s.) wandered the streets of Kufa. He was found by a woman named Taw'ah, a former servant of Ash'ath ibn Qays al-Kindi, who offered him shelter. When Taw'ah's son, Muhammad, discovered Muslim (a.s.) in their home, he betrayed him to Ibn Ziyad for a reward.

A force of three thousand soldiers was dispatched to arrest Muslim (a.s.). Even then, no one could overpower him. When they finally persuaded him to come with them, promising to resolve the matter with Ibn Ziyad, they disarmed him. Muslim (a.s.) recognized this as the first act of betrayal and understood his fate. Upon entering the palace, Ibn Ziyad ordered his execution.

Before his martyrdom, Muslim (a.s.) made three final requests: to pay off his debts, to have his body buried, and to send a message to Imam Husayn (a.s.) informing him that the situation in Kufa was dire and that he should not come. Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.) was tragically martyred on the roof of Dar al-Imara. It is believed that this was the first *ziyarat* recited for Imam Husayn (a.s.), to which Imam Husayn (a.s.) responded with a profound acceptance, though the circumstances in Kufa had irrevocably changed.

15.6.2 Hani ibn Urwah (A.S.): The Steadfast Host

Hani ibn Urwah (a.s.) was a revered leader of the Banu Madhhij tribe, known for his bravery and loyalty. With 12,000 armed guards, he was a formidable figure in Kufa. His role as the host and protector of Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.) put him directly in conflict with Ibn Ziyad.

As described, Hani's refusal to surrender Muslim (a.s.) led to his imprisonment and subsequent deception by Ibn Ziyad. Ultimately, Hani ibn Urwah (a.s.) was martyred around the same time as Muslim ibn Aqil (a.s.), near the Dar al-Imara, the palace where Ibn Ziyad resided. Due to the proximity of their martyrdom, Hani's tribe, Banu Madhhij, sought and received permission from Ibn Ziyad to bury both Hani ibn Urwah and Muslim ibn Aqil near the palace. Their shrines

stand today as a testament to their unwavering loyalty and ultimate sacrifice.

15.6.3 Mukhtar al-Thaqafi: The Avenger of Karbala

Mukhtar al-Thaqafi was the son of Abu Ubaydah al-Thaqafi, who had been sent to Iraq by the Caliph. Mukhtar famously vowed to avenge the martyrs of Karbala. Recognizing his determination and the potential threat he posed, Ibn Ziyad imprisoned him. During that era, millions were reportedly imprisoned.

It is crucial to understand the demographics of Kufa at that time. As previously mentioned, Kufa was initially a military cantonment established by Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas's army, who were generally not followers of Imam Ali (a.s.). While a Shi'a community began to emerge and grow during Imam Ali's (a.s.) caliphate, they remained a minority. The majority of the population often aligned themselves with the dominant political power. The 18,000 letters sent to Imam Husayn (a.s.) were primarily from non-Shi'a individuals. When Ibn Ziyad assumed power and began his crackdown, most of the Shi'a were either imprisoned or marginalized, lacking any political or influential authority.

Therefore, the claim that Shi'a invited Imam Husayn (a.s.) and then betrayed or killed him is fundamentally incorrect. Kufa was a military hub hostile to the Ahlulbayt, as evidenced by a saying attributed to the second Caliph: "O Kufans, you are the head from which I take aim, you are my arrow with which I target my enemies." This indicates that the majority of Kufans were, in fact, adversaries of the Ahlulbayt. While Imam Ali's (a.s.) arrival did increase the number of his loyal followers, such as Malik al-Ashtar, Sulayman ibn Surad, and Hani ibn Urwah, the overwhelming majority remained non-Shi'a.

Mukhtar al-Thaqafi meticulously hunted down and executed the killers of Karbala. He even sent the heads of Ibn Ziyad and Umar ibn Sa'd (the commander of Yazid's army at Karbala) to Imam Sajjad (a.s.). This brought immense relief and satisfaction to the Imam and his household, leading them to finally end the period of intense mourning (*azadari*) that had enveloped them since Karbala. The Imams themselves, particularly Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) and Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.), spoke

favorably of Mukhtar, cautioning against slandering him, as he was the one who avenged their family's blood. It is even narrated that in his childhood, Imam Ali (a.s.) placed his hand on Mukhtar's head, prophesying that he would be the one to seek vengeance.

Thus, Mukhtar al-Thaqafi enjoys the endorsement and satisfaction of three Imams. While enemies of the Ahlulbayt consider him a rebel, for followers of the Ahlulbayt, he is a true hero and an asset. His name is often mentioned among the brave individuals who, if they had been present at Karbala, might have altered its tragic outcome.

15.7 Kufa in the Era of Imam Mahdi (A.T.F.S.)

The future of Kufa, as prophesied in Islamic traditions, is one of unparalleled grandeur and global significance, particularly in the era of **Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.)**. It is foretold that during his universal government, Masjid Kufa will become the vibrant **central hub** of his rule. The city is expected to be so densely populated with eager followers that it will be overflowing with people seeking to be near their Imam.

A remarkable transformation awaits Masjid Kufa: it is said that while it currently possesses only five to ten gates, in the time of Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), it will expand to have **one thousand gates**. This signifies an unimaginable increase in its size and accessibility, designed to accommodate the vast multitudes that will converge upon it from every corner of the world.

Expansion and Prosperity

The expansion of Kufa will not be limited to its mosque. Imam al-Mahdi's (a.t.f.s.) rule will usher in an era of unprecedented prosperity, where the land and properties in Kufa will become immensely valuable. It is prophesied that "a few square feet of land will be sold for thousands of *ashrafi* (gold coins)." This economic boom is already hinted at, as observed in the present day where property

prices around the holy shrine of Hurr ibn Riyahi, located on the road from Najaf, have soared to exorbitant levels. In the Imam's time, it will become exceedingly difficult to find housing in Kufa, and every inch of land and every dwelling will be considered extremely precious.

Furthermore, the boundaries of Kufa are expected to expand dramatically, extending as far as the **city of Hirah**, which is situated slightly beyond Najaf. A new, grand mosque will be built in Hirah, mirroring the vastness of Masjid Kufa and featuring **five hundred gates** of its own. This immense geographical and structural expansion will solidify Masjid Kufa's central position, attracting waves of pilgrims and devotees, especially the followers of Imam Ali (a.s.), who will arrive in droves.

The Purging of Unholy Sanctuaries

Just as the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.w.) ordered the destruction of **Masjid Dhirar** and other mosques built by hypocrites for conspiratorial purposes, Imam al-Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) will similarly dismantle "inauspicious mosques" that have been used as centers for conspiracies and evil plots by deviant groups. This act of purification will ensure that all houses of worship truly serve their divine purpose and align with the principles of justice and truth.

The detailed exposition of Masjid Kufa, its acts of worship (*a'mal*), and its sacred stations concludes here. Future discussions may delve into other important *ziyarat* sites located in the vicinity of Masjid Kufa, such as the shrine of Khadijah bint Ali, Bayt Ali, Maytham al-Tammar, and Dar al-Imara, which are equally significant though perhaps less widely known.

Chapter 16

Sites Near Masjid al-Kufa

The journey through the sacred city of Kufa and its environs reveals a tapestry of sites, each weaving stories of devotion, sacrifice, and divine connection. The *ziyarat* often commences with a bus journey from the hotel, making stops at key locations before reaching Masjid al-Kufa itself, allowing pilgrims to immerse themselves in the rich history and spiritual aura of these revered places.

16.1 Masjid al-Hanana

The first significant stop on the itinerary after departing the hotel is often Masjid al-Hanana. Located approximately two kilometers northeast of Najaf, along the main road leading to Kufa, this mosque stands in an area known as *Suwayhiya*, which also contains a cemetery of the same name. Many people mistakenly believe the cemetery next to Masjid al-Hanana is solely dedicated to Kumayl ibn Ziyad, but it is, in fact, the broader *Suwayhiya* cemetery, which houses the graves of numerous companions of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) and other revered personalities. While the graves of many of these companions lack formal arrangements, their presence adds to the sanctity of the area.

The name *Hanana* itself is derived from an Arabic word signifying a soft, sorrowful sound, particularly the crying of a camel calf. This etymology points to the

profound historical events associated with this sacred site, as recounted through various narratives:

- **The Weeping Camel Calf:** One powerful tradition states that when the procession carrying the sacred head of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) passed through this area after the tragedy of Karbala, there was no mosque here. According to one account, the sacred head was placed at this spot, and from that very ground, the soft, mournful cries of a camel calf could be heard, lamenting the loss of its mother. Witnessing this heart-wrenching phenomenon, the people named the place *Hanana*, and a mosque was later built on this site, preserving the name.
- **Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq's Prayer:** Another tradition corroborates the sanctity of the location. Our Sixth Imam, Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him), journeyed from Najaf to Kufa. During his journey, he offered prayers at three significant spots: Masjid al-Hanana, the *Maqam* of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (peace be upon him) (also known as *Wadi al-Salam*), and the *Maqam* of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him). When questioned about his prayer at Masjid al-Hanana, Imam al-Sadiq explained that it was at this very spot that the sacred head of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) was placed. Some accounts further mention that during the passage of Imam Ali's funeral procession or after his martyrdom, mournful cries emanated from a pre-existing minaret at the mosque, leading to its name *Hanana*.
- **The Weeping Pillar (*Ustuwana Hanana*):** A deeply moving analogy from the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) sheds further light on the significance of the name *Hanana*. In Masjid an-Nabawi, there was a pillar of a date palm trunk against which the Prophet would lean while delivering his sermons. When a pulpit (*mimbar*) was built for him, the Prophet began delivering sermons from it. As soon as the Prophet moved to the *mimbar* for his first sermon, the date palm trunk began to weep so profusely that the companions too were moved to tears. Despite the Prophet's attempts to console it, the trunk continued to sob. The Prophet then offered it a choice: to be replanted in Paradise to bear fruit, or

to return to its original place and flourish. The trunk replied that it longed only for the Prophet's closeness. The Prophet then promised it a place with him in Paradise and ordered it to be buried nearby. This incident, where an inanimate object wept in separation from a divine personality, resonates profoundly with the weeping camel calf or minaret at Kufa, highlighting the capacity of all creation to grieve for the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

- **Conversion of a Church:** A lesser-known but equally intriguing tradition suggests that Masjid al-Hanana was originally a Christian church that was later converted into a mosque. This transformation signifies the triumph of monotheism over polytheism and the establishment of divine worship where idol worship once prevailed, akin to the purification of the Ka'bah.

These narratives collectively emphasize a fundamental principle: that not only humans but also jinn, inanimate objects, and plants mourn and grieve in separation from the *Ahl al-Bayt*. For those who question the act of grieving for the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the example of the *Ustuwana Hanana* in Masjid an-Nabawi or Masjid al-Hanana in Kufa serves as a powerful testament to this universal manifestation of sorrow. Pilgrims are encouraged to pause at this sacred site, reflecting on the profound suffering of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and the compassion shown by all creation. After offering prayers here, it is recommended to recite the same *Ziyarat* that is offered at *Maqam Ra's al-Husayn* (the location of Imam Husayn's head) at the Shrine of Amir al-Mu'minin in Najaf.

16.2 Mazar of Kumayl ibn Ziyad

Directly opposite Masjid al-Hanana, in the heart of the *Suwayhiya* neighborhood or cemetery, lies the revered shrine of **Kumayl ibn Ziyad** (may Allah be pleased with him). Kumayl was one of the most distinguished and devoted companions of Imam Ali (peace be upon him), renowned for his unwavering loyalty, courage, and profound spiritual insight.

Kumayl belonged to the noble **Banu Nakha'** tribe, a unique clan from Yemen

that was entirely devoted to the service of Islam and the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny). So profound was their commitment that the Prophet specifically prayed for them, saying, “O Allah, bless Banu Nakha’!” This collective blessing underscores the exceptional devotion of this tribe.

Kumayl’s acceptance of Islam is a fascinating tale. Six months before the Prophet’s passing, Khalid ibn Walid was sent to Yemen to invite its people to Islam. However, his mission encountered difficulties, leading to conflict. Upon learning of this, the Prophet immediately dispatched Imam Ali (peace be upon him) with a group of companions. When Imam Ali arrived, the Yemenis, mistaking him for another warrior, began pelting him and his companions with stones. Imam Ali, with his characteristic patience and wisdom, instructed his companions not to retaliate with swords, spears, arrows, or stones. They endured the stoning until they were covered in blood. When the Yemenis, exhausted by their aggression, were eventually stopped by their elders, they realized the extraordinary forbearance of Imam Ali and his companions. Apologizing, they then listened to the message of Islam, deeply impressed by the Imam’s conduct. It was through this event that prominent tribes like Hamdan and Nakha’ embraced Islam, and among these new converts were illustrious figures like Malik al-Ashtar and Kumayl ibn Ziyad. This incident also forms a foundational aspect of the event of Ghadir Khumm, where Imam Ali’s virtues were further highlighted.

Kumayl ibn Ziyad was considered one of Imam Ali’s “special companions” (*Ashab al-Sirr*), a select group known for their exceptional bravery and unwavering commitment. These individuals were always at the forefront of battles, understanding that as long as they stood, no enemy could reach Imam Ali. In times of peace, they were instrumental in implementing every command of the Imam. They were the “eyes and ears” of Imam Ali, not merely following orders but anticipating the Imam’s needs and acting proactively to alleviate his difficulties or fulfill his desires. Malik al-Ashtar was the foremost among them, with Kumayl ibn Ziyad standing directly alongside him in leadership and initiative. Other prominent figures in this group included Ziyad ibn Wadai’ and Uways al-Qarni. These individuals were constant thorns in the side of oppressive regimes, always challenging injustice.

Kumayl's political activism is well-documented. During the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab, when Walid ibn Uqba was governor of Kufa, his scandalous behavior—such as leading prayers while intoxicated—caused widespread distress among the Muslims. Kumayl, alongside Malik al-Ashtar and Hujr ibn Adi, formed a delegation to confront Walid. Finding him intoxicated, they journeyed to Damascus to complain to Mu'awiya, who had appointed Walid. Mu'awiya, however, dismissed their concerns. The delegation then proceeded to Medina to present their case to the Caliph. Along the way, they met Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, who was himself exiled, revealing the severe state of affairs. This intensified their resolve to challenge the injustice. Upon reaching the Caliph, their complaints were again dismissed. Eventually, they approached Imam Ali (peace be upon him), who attempted to resolve the issue peacefully, but his warnings were ignored, and Mu'awiya was instead encouraged to deal harshly with these “rebels.”

During Imam Ali's caliphate, Kumayl was appointed governor of Hīt. At one point, hearing of an impending attack by Mu'awiya's forces, Kumayl, in an act of misguided initiative, left his post to launch an offensive against the enemy in another city. While he succeeded in that skirmish, Imam Ali later severely admonished him in a letter (Nahj al-Balagha, Letter 61) for abandoning his primary responsibility, emphasizing the importance of holding one's ground and fulfilling assigned duties. This incident highlights Imam Ali's gentle yet firm approach in guiding his companions, as he did not punish Kumayl harshly.

Kumayl ibn Ziyad, like Maytham al-Tammar and Habib ibn Madhahir, was among the select few to whom Imam Ali imparted the knowledge of the unseen (*Ilm al-Ghayb*). A profound incident illustrating this occurred when Kumayl and Imam Ali were walking near Kufa at Fajr time. From a nearby house, the beautiful, melodious recitation of the Quran could be heard. Kumayl, impressed by the beauty and devotion in the reciter's voice, would often remark to Imam Ali about its sincerity. Imam Ali would simply reply, “I will tell you about that person later,” and they would move on. Years later, after the Battle of Nahrawan, as Imam Ali and Kumayl passed among the slain bodies, Imam Ali pointed to one of the corpses and asked Kumayl if he recognized him. Kumayl was stunned to realize it was

the very Quran reciter whose voice he had admired. Imam Ali then revealed the tragic truth: “What is the benefit of a Quran recitation that does not benefit the person? As the Prophet said, ‘There will be people whose Quran recitation you will consider nothing in comparison to theirs, and whose prayers you will consider nothing in comparison to theirs, yet the Quran will not descend below their throats, and they will exit from the religion as an arrow exits from the bow.’ ” This deeply insightful exchange taught Kumayl that outward piety without sincere faith and *Wilayah* (love and allegiance) for Imam Ali is ultimately fruitless.

Perhaps the most enduring legacy of Kumayl ibn Ziyad is his profound connection to **Dua Kumayl**. This renowned supplication, widely recited on Thursday nights and on the 15th of Sha’ban, was originally known as *Dua Khidr*. One day, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) addressed the people, urging them to recite *Dua Khidr*, emphasizing its power to remove sins, problems, and promote virtues. When the people departed, Kumayl, being one of the special companions, quietly approached the Imam and humbly requested, “O Imam, please teach me this *Dua*. I do not wish only to hear or read it; I wish to learn it so I can teach it to others, so that this *Dua* may enter people’s lives.” Imam Ali embraced Kumayl, prayed for him, and then dictated the entire *Dua*, with detailed explanations and interpretations. Kumayl then diligently taught this *Dua* to others. Over time, people associated this *Dua* so closely with Kumayl that it became known as *Dua Kumayl*, recognizing him as the specialist in its recitation and teaching. This *Dua* remains a powerful and cherished supplication, guiding believers to seek forgiveness and divine closeness.

After Imam Ali’s martyrdom, Kumayl remained in hiding for approximately forty years, emerging only in his old age, around 80-82 years old, to oppose the tyranny of Hajjaj ibn Yusuf al-Thaqafi. While some traditions suggest he was imprisoned by Ibn Ziyad, and his name even changed to Kumayl al-Hamdani due to the alliance of Hamdan and Nakha’ tribes, his eventual defiance of Hajjaj is well-documented. Hajjaj, known for his extreme cruelty (he held 50,000 men and 30,000 women captive in his prisons, often in horrific conditions), sought to capture Kumayl. When Kumayl’s family and tribe were imprisoned, he bravely presented

himself to Hajjaj. Hajjaj offered him clemency if he would renounce Imam Ali. Kumayl's defiant response echoes through history: "Bring me a better person than Ali (peace be upon him), and I will pledge allegiance to him! Allah, the Exalted, and Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) have shown me a path better than any other, and I follow that path!" This powerful declaration epitomized his unwavering loyalty to truth and to Imam Ali, leading to his eventual martyrdom.

The *ziyarat* of Kumayl ibn Ziyad serves as a profound reminder of the sacrifices made by the companions of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Pilgrims are encouraged to recite *Dua Kumayl* at his shrine, reflecting on his unparalleled courage, devotion, and intellectual depth.

16.3 Mazar of Maytham al-Tammar

As pilgrims conclude their *ziyarat* at Masjid al-Hanana and the shrine of Kumayl ibn Ziyad, the next significant stop is often the revered shrine of **Maytham al-Tammar** (may Allah be pleased with him). Located strategically before one reaches Masjid al-Kufa, pilgrims are dropped off at a parking area near his shrine and proceed on foot. It is akin to the pathway between the two sacred shrines in Karbala, where one visits Habib ibn Madhahir before proceeding to Imam Husayn (peace be upon him). Standing at Maytham's shrine, one can also see the dome of Muslim ibn Aqil's shrine in the distance, creating a similar spiritual experience to the *Bayn al-Haramayn* (the area between the shrines of Imam Husayn and Hazrat Abbas) in Karbala, with pilgrims walking between these holy sites.

Maytham al-Tammar was an exceptional companion of Imam Ali (peace be upon him). His name, *Tammar*, meaning 'date seller', reflects his humble profession. He was a freed slave whom Imam Ali had personally bought and then emancipated. A Hadith from Imam al-Baqir (peace be upon him) beautifully captures Imam Ali's profound love for Maytham: "I love you, O Maytham, and I love your father very much."

Maytham's life was a testament to his deep spiritual connection with Imam Ali. He was not merely a follower but a true student of the Imam, blessed with knowledge of the unseen (*Ilm al-Ghayb*) directly from his master. This is exemplified by the changing of his name. Imam Ali asked Maytham his name, and when Maytham replied, "Salim," Imam Ali said, "No, your father named you Maytham." Maytham, surprised, confirmed that his father had indeed named him Maytham, but the name was no longer used. Imam Ali then declared, "Maytham is a good name. Stay with it." This subtle interaction revealed Imam Ali's profound knowledge and his special connection with Maytham.

Maytham's dedication to Imam Ali went beyond mere obedience; it was an intuitive understanding of the Imam's will and desires. This profound bond is illustrated by a poignant incident. After becoming Caliph, Imam Ali, despite his supreme authority, continued to live a life of extreme simplicity, devoid of any worldly grandeur. One day, he went to the Kufa market and saw Maytham sitting in his date shop. Imam Ali requested to sit in Maytham's place for a while. Soon, a person approached, asking for dates worth one *dirham*. Imam Ali instructed the buyer to place the *dirham* on the counter and take as many dates as he wished. The buyer, astonished by this unusual transaction, thought to deceive the Imam, placing a counterfeit coin and filling his bags with dates. When Imam Ali returned home, he found his wife, who often playfully teased him about his business acumen, already aware of the situation. She said, "You cannot deceive the Imam; he knows everything!" Imam Ali had known about the counterfeit coin but chose to overlook it, demonstrating his boundless patience and compassion, always seeking to guide individuals towards spiritual uprightness rather than punishing their worldly shortcomings. This incident underscored Maytham's spiritual state, implying his day's only legitimate earning might have come from this single, though flawed, *dirham*.

Maytham's most profound and harrowing experience was his martyrdom, which Imam Ali had prophesied with astonishing detail. Imam Ali told Maytham that he would be crucified on a date palm, and his hands, feet, and tongue would be severed. Maytham was also forewarned that he would be the tenth person to

be crucified on that specific date palm. Maytham had accepted this destiny with unwavering faith and patience.

Just a few months before his martyrdom, Maytham traveled to Medina and Mecca, as if to bid farewell to the sacred places and personalities. He met with Umm Salama, the Prophet's wife, who held Maytham in high esteem, saying that the Prophet had often praised him. He also met with Abdullah ibn Abbas, the renowned Quranic exegete and one of Imam Ali's most brilliant students. Ibn Abbas, who would often receive dictation directly from Imam Ali, respected Maytham's knowledge so deeply that he would take dictation from him. During this meeting, Maytham dictated his own martyrdom narrative, detailing how he would be crucified, how his hands, feet, and tongue would be cut, and how he would continue to speak the truth even from the gallows. When Ibn Abbas expressed disbelief, Maytham instructed him to keep the dictation secret and verify it later. True to Maytham's prophecy, the events unfolded exactly as he had described, leaving Ibn Abbas amazed and deeply moved, and he later preserved this account.

The final act of Maytham's life was a testament to his unwavering conviction. When he was brought before Ibn Ziyad, the tyrant demanded that Maytham renounce Ali. Maytham, with unparalleled courage, defiantly refused. Ibn Ziyad, enraged, ordered his hands and feet to be severed and him to be crucified on a date palm outside the house of Amr ibn Hurayth, the governor of Kufa, whose complaints Maytham had been pursuing for injustice. The location itself was significant; it was a tree directly opposite Amr ibn Hurayth's residence.

Crucifixion during that era was not merely an execution but a gruesome act of prolonged torture. The victim would be nailed or bound to a tree or cross, and a dagger might be inserted into their body, but not deeply enough to cause excessive bleeding or immediate death. The purpose was to inflict excruciating pain, slowly draining the life and spirit from the victim. Maytham endured this torture for three days, his blood slowly dripping from the wound, yet his spirit remained unbroken.

In this agonizing state, Maytham continued to preach, his voice echoing through the marketplace. He called out to the people, “O people! This is my last opportunity. Come, and I will narrate to you Hadith of Imam Ali that you have never heard before!” He revealed the virtues of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and exposed the evils of the Umayyads, captivating the crowd. The market emptied, shops became deserted, and the streets fell silent as the entire city of Kufa gathered around the date palm, listening intently to Maytham’s words. Amr ibn Hurayth, witnessing the massive gathering in front of his house and the condemnation of his masters, was greatly alarmed. He rushed to Ibn Ziyad, urging him to silence Maytham immediately, fearing that the crowd might turn against the governor himself. Ibn Ziyad, furious, dispatched his slave to cut out Maytham’s tongue. As the slave climbed the tree to carry out the brutal order, Maytham’s noble soul departed, fulfilling the prophecy of his Imam.

After his martyrdom, Ibn Ziyad strictly forbade anyone from burying Maytham’s body. However, under the cover of night, a group of devoted followers quietly came and secretly buried him near the very date palm where he had been crucified.

The *Ziyarat* of Maytham al-Tammar is a powerful reminder that true faith is not merely a verbal declaration but an unwavering commitment, even in the face of unimaginable suffering. His life and martyrdom serve as a beacon of resistance against tyranny and a testament to the profound love and loyalty one can have for the *Ahl al-Bayt*. It teaches pilgrims to welcome difficulties as opportunities to strengthen their bond with the Imams, for indeed, the more one endures for the sake of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the closer one becomes to them, knowing that their sacrifices far surpassed our own.

16.4 Bayt Ali (The House of Imam Ali)

Among the most significant landmarks in Kufa is **Bayt Ali**, the humble abode of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) during his caliphate. When Imam Ali assumed the caliphate, Kufa became the center of his governance, a city embroiled in

conspiracies and conflicts. He faced numerous challenges, particularly the refusal of many, led by Mu'awiya, to pledge allegiance to him. Remaining in Medina would have compromised the sanctity of the Prophet's city, thus Kufa became his capital. His four-and-a-half-year caliphate was marked by three major wars—Jamal, Siffin, and Nahrawan—which, though challenging, served to expose the hypocrites and enemies of Islam hidden beneath a veneer of piety.

Upon his arrival in Kufa, Imam Ali was offered the *Dar al-Imara* (the Governor's Palace), the opulent seat of power. However, with characteristic humility and justice, Imam Ali refused, stating, "From this *Dar al-Imara*, the stench of injustice emanates, and I cannot reside here." He chose instead a simple dwelling for himself. According to some traditions, he built this house with his own hands from mud; other traditions state that his sister, Umm Hani, whose house was the starting point of the Prophet's *Mi'raj* (ascension to heaven), provided her home to him. It is also possible that Umm Hani offered her home, and Imam Ali made some modest alterations to it.

Today, Bayt Ali stands as a powerful symbol of simplicity and spiritual purity, a stark contrast to the grand palaces of worldly rulers. While the current structure may not be the original mud and brick (it has been preserved over time), its essence remains. Upon entering the central gate, pilgrims step into a modest courtyard, approximately 300 square meters. Inside, pilgrims will find:

A wall: This is not part of the original structure but was added later, possibly to manage the vast crowds that gather here, especially during religious occasions. The house can become so densely packed that people struggle to breathe. It is advisable to visit during less crowded times.

The prayer area: To the left upon entering, pilgrims will find the area where Imam Ali, his sons Hasan and Husayn, and other family members used to pray. This space is also known as the "House of Quran," from which the melodious recitation of the Holy Quran could be heard day and night. It is also believed that Imam Ali would meet with people here, or in a small corridor designated for receiving guests.

The well (*Quwwa*): After visiting the prayer area and returning to the entrance, a narrow corridor leads to a well on the right. This well is believed to have been dug by Imam Ali himself. Historically, people would drink water directly from this well using cups. However, due to the large crowds and potential for disarray, the well has been covered, and a pipe now extends outside Bayt Ali, allowing pilgrims to easily draw and drink water. This water is considered blessed, akin to the water of *Zamzam*, and pilgrims are encouraged to partake in it. It is also believed that Imam Ali's blessed body was given its final ritual bath from the water of this very well after his martyrdom.

The women's quarters: Beyond the well are chambers where Imam Ali's wife, Umm al-Banin, and his daughters, including Lady Zaynab (peace be upon her), resided.

Bayt Ali, though a simple mud house, remains vibrant with pilgrims, a testament to the enduring legacy of Imam Ali. In stark contrast, the magnificent *Dar al-Imara* of the rulers, a massive structure covering thousands of square meters, lies in ruins, a barren and desolate field. This contrast serves as a profound lesson: worldly power, no matter how grand, is fleeting, while spiritual purity and justice, embodied by Imam Ali, endure eternally.

16.5 Mazar of Khadijah bint Ali

Upon exiting Masjid al-Kufa, pilgrims will find the shrine of **Khadijah bint Ali**, the youngest daughter of Imam Ali (peace be upon him). She was born just three years before Imam Ali's martyrdom in 37 AH and passed away shortly thereafter in the same year. This *ziyarat* is usually performed due to its close proximity to Masjid al-Kufa.

16.6 Maqam Yunus (Place of Prophet Yunus)

Another significant, though lesser-known, *ziyarat* in Kufa is **Maqam Yunus**. It is crucial to understand that this is a *maqam* (place or station), not the *marqad* (tomb) of Prophet Yunus (peace be upon him). Prophet Yunus's actual tomb is located in Mosul, a region that has unfortunately been a center of conflict in recent times.

The Maqam Yunus in Kufa is situated about one kilometer east of Masjid al-Kufa, along the path leading to the Euphrates River. This site is revered as the precise location where the great fish ejected Prophet Yunus from its belly. Prophet Yunus had spent a week in the belly of the fish, after spending a week in the sea. When he was finally cast onto land, he was as vulnerable and frail as a newborn infant. At this spot, there was a tree with a gourd vine, from which a nourishing liquid dripped directly into the mouth of the weakened Prophet. He survived by consuming this liquid.

After about a week or ten days, a worm gnawed at the roots of the tree, causing it and the gourd vine to wither and fall. Prophet Yunus, deeply saddened by the loss of his only source of sustenance, wept and appealed to Allah. Allah responded, asking if he grieved so much over the loss of a plant he had not cultivated, yet showed no concern for a hundred thousand people in Nineveh who were about to face divine punishment. Allah then revealed that the people of Nineveh had repented upon seeing the approaching punishment, and thus Allah had removed the torment from them. Prophet Yunus, in his haste, had left his people before this divine mercy was shown. Feeling embarrassed, he did not immediately return to Nineveh or seek Allah's permission, fearing how his people would react to his return. This act of impatience led to his ordeal in the fish's belly, where he constantly supplicated, "There is no god but You; glory be to You! Indeed, I was among the wrongdoers!" This *Maqam* serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of patience, reliance on divine providence, and not judging circumstances based on immediate emotions. The original place of his ordeal in the fish's belly was also located in Mosul, and it was also targeted by

terrorist activities but remained preserved.

16.7 Masjid al-Hamra'

Kufa, during its early history, housed various mosques, some deemed blessed and others, unfortunately, cursed. The blessed mosques included **Masjid al-Hamra'**, Masjid Ghani, and Masjid Ju'fi. Conversely, the Kharijites, a rebellious and deviant sect, constructed mosques in Kufa, much like Masjid Dhirar in Medina, using them as centers for plotting conspiracies and preparing for conflicts like the Battle of Nahrawan. Among these "cursed mosques" were Masjid Asha'th ibn Qays al-Kindi (who fought alongside Imam Ali in Siffin but betrayed him in Nahrawan), Masjid Jarir ibn Abdullah, Masjid Saqif, and Masjid Samarq. These mosques were breeding grounds for deceit and sedition. It is even believed that when Imam al-Mahdi (peace be upon him) reappears, he will demolish these inauspicious mosques, leaving no room for future conspiracies.

Masjid al-Hamra', however, stands as a blessed sanctuary where Imam Ali (peace be upon him) often offered prayers and engaged in worship. It is also notable as the site where Amir Mukhtar al-Thaqafi initially took allegiance (*bay'ah*) from his companions, marking the beginning of his movement to avenge the martyrs of Karbala.

16.8 Shrines of Other Imamzadagan

In the vicinity of Kufa and its historical landmarks, several other shrines of *Imamzadagan* (descendants of the Imams) are located, though they may not be as widely publicized. Many of these tombs were previously concealed due to the persecution of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their followers. Their detailed biographies are slowly coming to light as conditions improve.

Sayyid Hasan: His shrine is located in the Hashimiya neighborhood of Kufa. He was born in Medina and passed away in Kufa.

Muhammad ibn Hasan Muthanna: His shrine is found in the Abadah neighborhood of Kufa. He was a grandson of Imam Hasan (peace be upon him) and was martyred by Mansour al-Dawaniqi.

Sanwan ibn Hasan and Khadijah: Their shrines are located between the Hindiya neighborhood of Kufa and the city of Hilla, requiring a short travel from Kufa.

Ibrahim al-Ghamr: Another grandson of Imam Hasan (peace be upon him), his shrine is in the Hira Kanda neighborhood. The epithet *al-Ghamr* means ‘envy’, signifying that his immense generosity was such that people envied him, wishing they could be as charitable.

These lesser-known *ziyarat* sites offer additional opportunities for spiritual reflection and connection with the pure progeny of the Holy Prophet. While some *ziyarat* are primarily for gaining knowledge and lessons (*ibrat*), others are for expressing love and devotion to the *Ahl al-Bayt* and showing disassociation (*bara’at*) from their enemies.

16.9 Dar al-Imara (The Governor’s Palace)

The **Dar al-Imara**, the former Governor’s Palace in Kufa, stands as a stark contrast to the humble Bayt Ali. Located adjacent to Masjid al-Kufa, just a few steps from Imam Ali’s house, its current desolate state tells a poignant story. This was once the grand complex that served as the seat of power for successive rulers. It was first established by Sa’ad ibn Abi Waqqas when he settled in Kufa. Later, various governors and caliphs resided here. When Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was offered to reside in it, he famously refused due to its association with injustice.

The Dar al-Imara, now a barren field, is a place steeped in tragedy and historical significance, having witnessed numerous pivotal events:

Martyrdom of Muslim ibn Aqil (60 AH): It was from this very palace that the order for Muslim ibn Aqil’s arrest and subsequent martyrdom was issued. His sacred body was also displayed here after his execution.

Head of Imam Husayn (61 AH): Following the tragedy of Karbala, the sacred head of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) was brought to this palace and presented before the tyrannical Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad.

Execution of Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad (66 AH): Years later, the very same Ubaydullah ibn Ziyad, the orchestrator of the Karbala massacre, was captured and executed by Mukhtar al-Thaqafi within the confines of this palace. His head was then displayed here, mirroring the fate he had inflicted upon the Head of Imam Husayn.

Martyrdom of Mukhtar al-Thaqafi (66 AH): Tragically, Mukhtar al-Thaqafi himself was martyred in this palace by Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr.

Executions of Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr and Abdullah ibn Marwan: The cycle of violence continued, as Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr was later killed at this site, followed by Abdullah ibn Marwan.

A fascinating anecdote underscores the cursed nature of this palace. When Abdullah ibn Marwan was residing there, a man named Muslim ibn Nakh'i approached him, staring intently. When questioned by Ibn Marwan, the man replied, "This is the place where I saw the head of Imam Husayn before Ibn Ziyad. Then I saw the head of Ibn Ziyad before Mukhtar. Then I saw the head of Mukhtar before Mus'ab ibn al-Zubayr. And now, I see the head of Mus'ab before you!" Overcome with fear and trembling, Ibn Marwan immediately ordered the palace to be demolished. All its inhabitants were instructed to evacuate. From that day to this, the Dar al-Imara has never been rebuilt, standing as a desolate testament to the tyranny it once housed. This barrenness serves as a divine sign, a vivid lesson for those who seek to understand the consequences of oppression. The site witnessed the death of four tyrannical rulers and the martyrdom of three pure souls. Indeed, "Verily, in these things there is a lesson for those who possess insight."

16.10 Grave of Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam

The final, yet deeply significant, *ziyarat* in Kufa is the grave of **Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam**, the individual who struck Imam Ali (peace be upon him) with the fatal sword. The renowned traveler Ibn Battuta, in his writings, recounts visiting Kufa and finding this grave near the cemetery. He described it as a flat piece of land with a distinct black spot in the middle. When he inquired about it, the locals informed him that the people of Kufa would bring firewood annually and burn the spot for seven days, turning the earth black as a continuous condemnation of Ibn Muljam's heinous crime.

This ritual burning carries profound spiritual symbolism. It is believed that when Imam Ali was struck, a celestial angel, created by Allah in the likeness of Imam Ali for angels to visit and revere (akin to the celestial Ka'bah), was also struck at the same moment. Upon witnessing this, the visiting angels instantly began to curse Ibn Muljam, a condemnation that continues and will persist until the Day of Judgment. This act of the people of Kufa, perpetually defiling Ibn Muljam's grave, mirrors the eternal curse invoked by the heavenly hosts.

The *ziyarat* to this site serves as a stark reminder of the ultimate consequences of betraying truth and justice. It reinforces the profound love and devotion for Imam Ali and the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and an unwavering disassociation from their oppressors.

Through these journeys to the sacred sites around Masjid al-Kufa, pilgrims are invited not merely to observe historical landmarks but to immerse themselves in the living legacy of devotion, sacrifice, and divine justice. May Allah grant us the grace to understand and act upon the lessons embedded in these holy places, enabling us to follow in the footsteps of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and disassociate ourselves from their enemies.

Chapter 17

The Sanctuary of Hope: An Introduction to Masjid Sahla

Among the many revered sites in Iraq, **Masjid Sahla** holds a distinct and profound significance, setting it apart from other places of **Ziyarat**. While most pilgrimages lead one to reflect upon the past—to gaze through the windows of history and witness the tribulations, oppression, disrespect, and persecution endured by the **Imams (A.S.)** and their followers—**Masjid Sahla** offers a radically different perspective. Pilgrims often find themselves overwhelmed with grief, their eyes welling with tears, and their minds heavy with sorrow as they contemplate the injustices of bygone eras. A recurring lament arises from the depths of the heart: “When will the time come for all these oppressions to be avenged?”

It is at **Masjid Sahla** that this sorrow gives way to profound joy and hopeful anticipation. The pilgrim, who moments ago wept over the past, suddenly finds their lips adorned with a smile. The heavy cloak of historical suffering is cast aside, and their gaze turns towards the future, filled with optimistic expectation and a radiant flicker of happiness in their eyes. This transformation is rooted in the powerful realization that **Masjid Sahla** is the designated place where **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**, the Imam of our time, will reside permanently with his family upon his glorious reappearance. It is the very ground where he will establish his

permanent dwelling, a testament to the culmination of divine justice.

Thus, **Masjid Sahla** is the solitary **Ziyarat** that fills the human heart with profound happiness. It is a place where smiles become involuntary, and rays of hope illuminate the corridors of the mind. Spontaneous prayers pour forth from the lips, invoking Allah to grant the blessing of witnessing the **Imam's Zuhoor** (reappearance) and to behold, with one's own eyes, the retribution for all past oppressions at the **Imam's** hands. It is a fervent **Dua** (supplication) that Allah may grant all believers, and their children, the honor of being among the **Imam's** loyal supporters and soldiers.

Since its very inception, **Masjid Sahla** has been a focal point for the attention and pilgrimages of countless individuals. It stands as a beacon of hope, inspiring anticipation for the just future under the divine leadership of **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**.

17.1 The Sacred Abode: Location, Origin, and Nomenclature

The Geographic Location of Masjid Sahla

Masjid Sahla is strategically situated approximately ten kilometers northeast of the holy city of Najaf. From **Masjid Kufa**, it lies about two kilometers to the northwest. For those traveling from Najaf, the journey covers a distance of ten kilometers. Pilgrims typically visit **Masjid Sahla** after completing their **Ziyarat** at **Masjid Kufa**, a shorter two-kilometer journey. While the spiritual exertion at **Masjid Sahla** may not be as demanding as that at **Masjid Kufa**, it still requires approximately half to three-quarters of the time and effort. Many pilgrims often dedicate an entire day or a specific block of time, either in the morning or evening, to immerse themselves in the spiritual atmosphere of **Masjid Sahla**.

Masjid Sahla possesses a distinctive architectural layout. While generally rectangular, its dimensions of approximately 125 meters in length and 120 meters in width make it almost square-shaped. The total area of the mosque spans about 17,500 square meters. Its imposing walls rise to a height of 22 meters, and a

majestic minaret, standing 30 meters tall, graces the central eastern entrance. Upon completion of the ongoing construction and expansion projects, the mosque is expected to become even more spacious, accommodating a greater number of pilgrims within its blessed precincts.

The Etymology of ‘Sahla’ and its Spiritual Implications

The name **Masjid Sahla** is commonly attributed to a man named Sohil from the Banu Zufar tribe, specifically the Abtal Qays branch, who were residents of this area. Sohil built this mosque on what was once a desolate land characterized by red soil.

Beyond its historical origin, the name **Sahla**, meaning “easy” or “facilitated,” carries profound spiritual implications. It is believed that tasks which seem difficult elsewhere become remarkably easy to accomplish within the confines of this sacred mosque. A mere two *rak’at* (units) of prayer followed by a **Dua** (supplication) to Allah are said to be sufficient for one’s prayers to be answered. This remarkable ease of acceptance extends to all difficult matters; prayers that might go unanswered elsewhere are readily accepted here. Indeed, even the **Imams (A.S.)** themselves would visit **Masjid Sahla** to seek the acceptance of their own supplications, highlighting its unique spiritual potency.

An Ancient Legacy: A Hub for Prophets and Imams

Masjid Sahla is not merely a mosque; it is a profound historical and spiritual landmark. It is renowned as a place of worship for **Prophets** and a dwelling for **Imams**. Tradition holds that no prophet has passed through this region without offering prayers within its hallowed walls. Similarly, many **Imams (A.S.)** have worshipped here, bestowing upon it unparalleled honor and blessing.

It is said to be one of the four places with a direct connection to **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**, including **Wadi al-Salam**, **Hillah**, and **Masjid Jamkaran**. These four locations are strongly recommended in traditions as places where one might encounter **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**, and among them, **Masjid Sahla** is most frequently mentioned as the site where he has been seen and where meetings with him are

most likely. This further underscores its unique status as a beacon of hope and a conduit for divine connection.

17.2 The Ocean of Blessings: Virtues and Spiritual Rewards

The Acceptance of Prayers and Ease of Affairs

The profound virtues of **Masjid Sahla** are a testament to its sanctity and divine favor. It is widely believed that any supplication made within its precincts, after offering just two *rak'at* of prayer, is readily accepted by Allah. This characteristic is so strong that the very name *Sahla* (meaning 'easy' or 'facilitated') is attributed to it, signifying that what is difficult elsewhere becomes easy here. The **Imams (A.S.)** themselves, as narrated in traditions, would frequent this mosque to seek the acceptance of their prayers, thereby validating its unique power.

The Elevated Status: A Comparison with Masjid Kufa

From **Imam Ali (A.S.)** himself, traditions narrate the immense significance of **Masjid Sahla**. He stated that among the four most important mosques in Kufa, **Masjid Sahla** holds a paramount position. While **Masjid Kufa** possesses its own rich history and virtues, **Imam Ali (A.S.)** emphatically declared that **Masjid Sahla** should never be considered inferior to it. While **Masjid Kufa** served as the center for the first **Imam's** governance and spiritual activities, **Masjid Sahla** is designated as the future abode and center for the final **Imam, Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**. This distinct role elevates its status to an unparalleled degree.

A Place of Divine Manifestation: Where the Trumpet Will Sound

A profound tradition states that **Masjid Sahla** is one of the places where the trumpet (*Sur*) will be sounded by **Israfil (A.S.)** for the resurrection. This momentous event will mark the advent of Qiyamah (the Day of Judgment) and the subsequent revival of all beings. It is further narrated that seventy thousand individuals will be resurrected from this very location and enter Paradise without any reckoning or questioning. While similar traditions exist regarding Najaf and

Wadi al-Salam, it is understood that the entire region, historically known as Kufa (encompassing Sahla, **Masjid Kufa**, Najaf, and **Wadi al-Salam**), is blessed with this distinction. The vastness of this area accommodates the multitude mentioned in the tradition, as it would be impossible for such a large number of people to assemble in a small, restricted space.

The Unveiling of Hidden Virtues

The extent of **Masjid Sahla's** virtues is so vast that, as narrated by **Imam Sadiq (A.S.)** to Abu Basir, not all of them have been revealed. The **Imam (A.S.)** implied that the unrevealed virtues far surpass those that have been disclosed. He likened it to the abundant rewards of *Namaze Shab* (Night Prayer), whose blessings are so immense that they cannot be fully contained within the Holy Qur'an, requiring detailed elaboration in the *Hadith* (traditions) of the Prophet (P.B.U.H.). Similarly, the complete elucidation of **Masjid Sahla's** virtues is beyond human comprehension. Perhaps, the **Imams (A.S.)** withheld some of these profound merits because people's spiritual capacity (*ma'rifat*) might not be developed enough to fully grasp or absorb them. This suggests that the true depth of **Masjid Sahla's** significance remains largely veiled, awaiting a greater spiritual awakening.

Abu Basir, upon hearing of these virtues, immediately inquired if **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)** resides there constantly. **Imam Sadiq (A.S.)** affirmed this, indicating that **Masjid Sahla** is indeed the continuous and permanent dwelling of **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**. However, this residence is currently hidden from our sight due to our lack of spiritual *ma'rifat* (gnosis). Those who have been blessed with the sight of **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)** have reported seeing him within **Masjid Sahla**, confirming its status as the most probable place for an encounter with the awaited **Imam (A.S.)**. This underscores the mosque's importance as a focal point for anticipation and spiritual connection with the living **Imam (A.S.)**.

A Haven for the Prophets and the Righteous

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A.S.), the fifth **Imam**, further emphasized that

Masjid Sahla has been a place of worship for every prophet. No prophet has passed through this land without praying within its sacred walls. It has historically served as a central hub for **Prophets**, *Siddiqin* (the truthful ones), and *Salihin* (the righteous). This divine lineage imbues the mosque with immense spiritual energy, making it a powerful magnet for blessings and divine grace. Within **Masjid Sahla**, there is a particular corner known as the “Corner of the Prophets and the Righteous” (*Kuna Ambia-e-Salihin*). While other specific stations are dedicated to individual prophets, this collective corner, often visited last by pilgrims, is known to have been a place of worship for many prophets and righteous individuals, though their specific names are not all identified.

The Blessing of Extended Life

One of the most remarkable and tangible blessings associated with **Masjid Sahla** is the promise of an extended life. It is narrated that whoever offers two *rak'at* of prayer in **Masjid Sahla** will have two years added to their life. For those afflicted with illness, despair, or a sense of impending end due to an accident, this promise offers immense comfort and hope. Indeed, who does not desire a longer life or the continuation of their existence? This reward serves as a powerful incentive for individuals to visit and worship at this sacred site, seeking not only spiritual elevation but also a practical and joyous blessing in this temporal world.

17.3 Etiquettes and Rituals of Ziyarat

The Auspicious Time for Ziyarat

For those intending to perform **Ziyarat** at **Masjid Sahla**, the most highly recommended and auspicious time is the night between Wednesday and Thursday, specifically the evening of Thursday (*Shab-e-Jumu'ah*). This means after Wednesday has passed and Thursday has commenced. Pilgrims arriving from other cities or distant places are advised to especially remember this time and endeavor to enter the mosque between the prayers of *Maghrib* (sunset) and *Isha* (night).

Protocols for Entry and Supplication

Before entering **Masjid Sahla**, pilgrims should observe certain etiquettes and perform specific **Dua** (supplications), similar to those performed before entering **Masjid Kufa** or the holy city of Najaf. Upon reaching the eastern gate, which serves as the main entrance, one recites the **Dua**: “*Bismillah, Iman billah, Iman minallah.*” This invocation, affirming belief in Allah and His divine presence, can be found in various **Ziyarat** books, along with other recommended supplications to be recited before stepping into the mosque.

The Structured Journey through the Maqamat

Upon entering **Masjid Sahla** through the eastern gate, the pilgrim will find various **Maqamat** (stations) arranged within the mosque. The journey through these **Maqamat** follows a specific sequence, each dedicated to a revered personality and associated with particular acts of worship and supplication. The general flow begins from the central **Maqam** and proceeds through the others in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction, ensuring that the spiritual blessings of each station are fully embraced. It is essential to approach each **Maqam** with reverence, reflecting upon the life and virtues of the personality to whom it is dedicated, and making a pledge (*'ahd*) to emulate their noble qualities. This structured approach allows the pilgrim to immerse themselves deeply in the spiritual history and lessons embodied by each sacred spot.

17.4 The Stations Within Masjid Sahla

17.4.1 Maqam Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (A.S.): The Fountain of Wisdom

The first significant station to visit in **Masjid Sahla** is the **Maqam of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (A.S.)**, located centrally on a prominent platform. This area, often bustling with pilgrims, signifies the pivotal role of the Sixth **Imam** in preserving and disseminating Islamic knowledge. Here, pilgrims are encouraged to offer prayers and recite specific *azkar* (invocations) dedicated to the **Imam**.

The Story of Bashar Makari and the Imprisoned Woman

A profound incident related in Sheikh Abbas Qummi's book *Mafatih al-Jinan* highlights the compassion and spiritual depth of **Imam Sadiq (A.S.)** and the significance of **Masjid Sahla**. Bashar Makari, a companion of the **Imam**, once approached him. The **Imam** was eating dates and offered some to Bashar, who declined, stating he was not in the mood to eat. When the **Imam** inquired why, Bashar explained that he had just witnessed a distressing incident: a woman was being beaten and dragged to prison by government soldiers. When she fell, her tongue involuntarily uttered, "O Allah, O Fatima! May Allah's mercy be far from those who oppressed you!" For this statement, the king's soldiers arrested her, severely beat her, and took her to prison.

Upon hearing this, **Imam Sadiq (A.S.)** placed his hand on his face and wept profusely, his face, beard, and even his turban becoming wet with tears. The **Imam** then declared, "Let us go to **Masjid Sahla** to pray for this woman." It is crucial to note that the **Imam (A.S.)** did not pray then and there but specifically chose **Masjid Sahla**. They went to the mosque, and the **Imam** sat at this very spot, offered prayers, and supplicated for the woman. It is reported that the woman was subsequently freed from the clutches of the oppressors. This incident reveals the immense importance the **Imam** placed on **Masjid Sahla** for the acceptance of prayers, even for a minor injustice against a single woman. It also prompts reflection on the depth of the **Imam's** sorrow over injustice, particularly in contrast to the atrocities committed against his own grandmother, Sayyida Fatima (A.S.), and the lack of empathy shown by those who heard of her sufferings. The actions of the **Imam** serve as a poignant reminder for us to show similar compassion and to uphold justice.

At this **Maqam**, after performing *Maghrib* prayers and its *nafala* (supererogatory prayers), followed by two *rak'at* of *Tahiyyatul Masjid* (greeting the mosque), one raises hands towards the sky and recites a specific **Dua** beginning with "*Antallahu, Antallahu, Antallahu...*" and concluding with a known supplication. The primary lesson here is the **Imam's** profound empathy for the oppressed and his immediate

resort to prayer in **Masjid Sahla** as a means of seeking divine intervention. Pilgrims are encouraged to reflect on their own reactions to injustice and strive to emulate the **Imam's** compassion.

17.4.2 Maqam Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.): The Champion of Monotheism and Hospitality

After completing the rituals at **Maqam Imam Sadiq (A.S.)**, pilgrims turn right and move towards the back to reach the **Maqam of Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.)**. This is the starting point for further **Ziyarat** within the mosque's corridors.

The Dwelling and the Departure

This **Maqam** is believed to be the home of **Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.)**, from where he departed to confront and wage war against the tyrannical people of Nimrud. The people of Nimrud were known for their immense stature, arrogance, and polytheism, ruled by a king named Nimrud, said to be so gigantic that his shadow extended for a mile. This **Maqam** thus symbolizes the unwavering resolve of **Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.)** in confronting falsehood and upholding **Tawhid** (Monotheism).

At this **Maqam**, pilgrims perform two *rak'at* of prayer, followed by the *Tasbihat al-Zahra* and specific supplications beginning with "*Allahumma bi hurmatiha wa bi maqamatiha ash-sharifah...*" and raising hands towards the *Qibla*. The emphasis here is on remembering the core characteristics of **Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.)**: his unparalleled **Tawhid** and his renowned hospitality (*mehman nawazi*). Pilgrims are encouraged to make a pledge (*'ahd*) to embody these virtues in their own lives—to never falter in showing hospitality to guests and to steadfastly endure any hardships in upholding the Oneness of Allah. This commitment to **Tawhid** and generosity forms a cornerstone of their spiritual journey.

17.4.3 Maqam Prophet Idris (A.S.): The Pioneer of Knowledge and Righteousness

Continuing straight from **Maqam Prophet Ibrahim (A.S.)** without returning to the main courtyard, pilgrims will arrive at the **Maqam of Prophet Idris (A.S.)**.

This corner is associated with **Prophet Idris (A.S.)**, believed to be his home where he worked as a tailor and taught.

The Origin of His Name and His Inventions

Prophet Idris (A.S.)'s original name was Akhnukh. He became known as Idris because of his extensive teaching (*dars*) and instruction (*tadris*). He is credited with pioneering the use of the pen and inventing clothing; before him, people covered their bodies with animal hides. His innovations brought significant advancements to humanity.

The King's Tyranny and Idris's Supplication

A fascinating account regarding **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** tells of a tyrannical king who coveted a specific piece of land belonging to a man. When the king demanded the land, the owner refused, stating it was his ancestral property, fertile from his lifelong labor. Enraged, the king confided in his queen, who suggested a plot: arrange for fifty men to falsely accuse the landowner of conspiracy against the king. With fifty witnesses, the king could then execute the man for treason and seize his land. The king followed this wicked advice, had the man killed, and confiscated his land. When the man's eighteen family members protested, they were also killed or exiled.

Prophet Idris (A.S.) then approached the king to admonish him, but the king threatened to kill him too. Upon returning, **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** supplicated against the king, leading to a severe drought that left the king with nothing to eat. The very queen who orchestrated the injustice was reduced to begging for scraps of bread from house to house at night. Ultimately, Allah destroyed that tyrannical nation.

The Ascension and Meeting with Azrael

It is narrated that after **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** served for 300 years, an angel came to him, informing him that Allah had accepted his deeds and congratulating him. When asked if he desired anything, **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** expressed a wish to

spend his entire life in gratitude for Allah's acceptance of his deeds and to never die, so he could continuously enjoy the pleasure of thanking Allah. The angel then took him to Paradise, where he remains, thanking Allah.

Another account mentions an angel whose wings were plucked. This angel sought **Prophet Idris (A.S.)**'s prayers, and upon his supplication, the angel's wings were restored. **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** then requested to see Azrael, the Angel of Death. The angel, carrying **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** on his restored wings, ascended through the heavens. Upon meeting Azrael, **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** noted Azrael's smile. When asked why, Azrael revealed that Allah had just commanded him to seize **Prophet Idris (A.S.)**'s soul, and he was perplexed, thinking of the vast distances and time it would take to reach him from the fourth heaven (each heaven being 500 years apart). Azrael was relieved to find **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** right there, making his task easier. Thus, **Prophet Idris (A.S.)**'s soul was taken.

The Living Prophets: Idris, Isa, Khidr, and Ilyas

Traditions indicate that **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** and **Prophet Isa (A.S.)** are two prophets who are alive in the heavens, while **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)** and **Prophet Ilyas (A.S.)** are alive on earth. **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)** is associated with guiding those lost in water and rivers, while **Prophet Ilyas (A.S.)** helps those lost on land. The Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) himself met **Prophet Ilyas (A.S.)** during his return from Ta'if, when his shoes were filled with blood after the persecution by the people of Ta'if. He sat and ate with **Prophet Ilyas (A.S.)** at that location. Allah mentions **Prophet Idris (A.S.)** in Surah Maryam (19:57): *"And We raised him to a high station."*

At this **Maqam**, pilgrims perform two *rak'at* of prayer and recite a specific **Dua** starting with *"Allahumma inni as'aluka..."* The message to carry from this station is the importance of seeking knowledge and living a life dedicated to teaching and guiding others towards good. It is a reminder to aid people and to consistently express gratitude to Allah. One should strive to refrain from sins, as doing so will lead to an increase in divine knowledge.

17.4.4 Maqam Prophet Khidr (A.S.): The Guide to Hidden Wisdom

After completing the visit to **Maqam Prophet Idris (A.S.)**, the pilgrim proceeds to the far corner on the left side, which is the **Maqam of Prophet Khidr (A.S.)**. His original name was Abul Abbas Beliya ibn Malkan. He earned the title *Khidr*, meaning “the green one,” because wherever he sat, greenery would sprout due to his blessings and knowledge.

The Name and the Knowledge

When asked about the source of his profound knowledge, **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)** attributed it to avoiding sins. While some scholars debate whether he was a prophet, as no record of him being sent to reform a specific community exists, his immense knowledge is undisputed, particularly as highlighted in his encounter with **Prophet Musa (A.S.)**.

The Encounter with Prophet Musa (A.S.)

This **Maqam** is especially significant as it is believed to be the place where **Prophet Musa (A.S.)** met **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)** as described in the Holy Qur’an (Surah Kahf, 18:60-82). **Prophet Musa (A.S.)** once had a thought that he was the most knowledgeable person on earth. To humble him and teach him a deeper lesson, Allah instructed him to meet **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)**, who possessed a different kind of divine knowledge. The famous journey of **Prophet Musa (A.S.)** under **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)**’s guidance, involving the three events (damaging the boat, killing the boy, and rebuilding the wall) and **Prophet Musa (A.S.)**’s three questions and **Prophet Khidr (A.S.)**’s subsequent explanations of the hidden divine wisdom, is a powerful narrative often quoted for those who struggle to comprehend divine wisdom and complain about hardships. It emphasizes that even in apparent adversities, Allah’s profound wisdom and benefit are often concealed.

At this **Maqam**, pilgrims offer two *rak’at* of prayer and recite a **Dua** beginning with “*Allahumma anta Alladhi...*” The core message here is to seek knowledge, and

to understand that true knowledge increases when one avoids sins. It also teaches patience and submission to Allah's will, recognizing that every adversity carries a hidden divine wisdom.

17.4.5 Maqam of Prophets, *Salihin*, and *Awsiya*: A Confluence of Righteousness

After visiting the **Maqam of Prophet Khidr (A.S.)**, the pilgrim returns to the **Maqam of Prophets, *Salihin*, and *Awsiya*** (Successors). This concludes a circuit that began at **Maqam Imam Sadiq (A.S.)**, proceeded to **Maqam Ibrahim (A.S.)**, then to **Maqam Idris (A.S.)**, **Maqam Khidr (A.S.)**, and finally returns to this collective station.

The Collective Blessing

This **Maqam**, particularly located on the eastern side of **Masjid Sahla**, is dedicated to the collective presence and blessings of **Prophets, *Salihin*** (righteous individuals), and *Awsiya* (successors to prophets). It is a place where one can connect with the spiritual legacy of countless divine figures.

Pilgrims perform two *rak'at* of prayer and recite a specific **Dua** after praising Allah and sending *Salawat* upon Prophet Muhammad and his progeny (*Allahumma salli ala Muhammadin wa Aal-e-Muhammad*). Spending even a moment here, associating oneself with the **Prophets** and the righteous, is considered an honor. It is believed that Allah inscribes the pilgrim's name among the names of these holy personages. The lesson is to strive to align oneself with the pious, to seek their blessings, and to emulate their virtues, thereby elevating one's own spiritual standing.

17.4.6 Maqam Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A.S.): The Master of Prostration

The sixth station is the **Maqam of Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A.S.)**, located to the left, further along from the **Maqam of Prophets, *Salihin*, and *Awsiya***. This spot is particularly associated with the Fourth **Imam (A.S.)**, revered as *Sayyid al-Sajidin* (Master of those who prostrate). It served as his place of worship and spiritual retreat.

The Legacy of Devotion

Pilgrims perform two *rak'at* of prayer and recite a **Dua** that includes the phrase "*Amana huwa wa aqrabu ilahi min habl al-warid*" (He is nearer to me than my jugular vein). At this **Maqam**, it is crucial to reflect deeply on the quality of the **Imam's** worship and prostrations.

The visit to this **Maqam** prompts self-reflection: "How is my worship? How are my prostrations?" The aspiration is to ensure that one's own acts of devotion carry at least a glimmer of the **Imam's** profound dedication, or that others might at least acknowledge the sincerity in one's prayers, reminiscent of the Master of Prostration. This station calls for an elevation in the quality of one's personal devotion and a deeper connection with Allah through prayer.

17.4.7 Maqam Imam Mahdi (A.S.): The Ultimate Destination

The final and perhaps most significant **Maqam** within **Masjid Sahla** is dedicated to **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**. While the entire mosque is intrinsically linked to him, this particular spot, located to the right of **Maqam Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A.S.)** and positioned between **Maqam Idris (A.S.)** and **Maqam Imam Zayn al-Abidin (A.S.)**, is where the **Imam (A.S.)** has specifically been seen praying, supplicating, and performing *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah).

The Visible and Hidden Presence

The very act of stepping foot in **Masjid Sahla**, walking on the ground where the **Imam's** blessed feet have trodden, and prostrating where he has prostrated, is an immense blessing. While our prostrations may not be worthy of divine acceptance on their own, the sacredness of this place, imbued with the presence of the **Imam (A.S.)**, elevates them. The blessings of this ground purify and enhance our acts of worship, making them acceptable to Allah and bringing about a positive transformation in our character.

At this **Maqam**, pilgrims perform two *rak'at* of prayer, recite the *Salawat* upon Prophet Muhammad and his progeny, and then offer a specific, comprehensive

Dua. When approaching this station, one should enter with the mindset of meeting the **Imam (A.S.)**. Just as one brings a gift (sweets, cake) when visiting someone important, pilgrims are encouraged to consider what unique offering they bring for the **Imam (A.S.)**. This gift could be the two *rak'at* of prayer, acts of charity, helping others, their own worship, or their pursuit of knowledge. The intention should be to dedicate the reward (*thawab*) of these actions to the **Imam (A.S.)**, symbolizing devotion and spiritual kinship.

17.5 Divine Interventions: Miracles and Personal Testimonies

The spiritual potency of **Masjid Sahla** is not merely theoretical; it is often manifested through tangible miracles and extraordinary occurrences experienced by pilgrims. It is widely believed that any task that seems impossible elsewhere becomes miraculously easy within the sacred confines of this mosque. A mere two *rak'at* of prayer followed by a heartfelt **Dua** is said to be sufficient for one's prayers to be answered, even if they have been rejected elsewhere. This inherent facility in the mosque is why it is named *Sahla* (easy). Many individuals testify to their difficult affairs being resolved, and their seemingly impossible supplications being granted, after seeking divine assistance at this blessed site. The **Imams (A.S.)** themselves would frequent this mosque for the acceptance of their prayers, solidifying its reputation as a place of profound divine grace.

The Path to Meeting Imam Mahdi (A.S.): The Forty Night Vigil

For those earnestly desiring an encounter with **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**, a specific spiritual practice is highly recommended: observing a forty-night vigil (*Chilla* or *Arba'in*) of worship and devotion at certain sacred sites. It is narrated that if one performs a vigil of forty consecutive Thursday nights (Shab-e-Jumu'ah) at **Masjid Sahla**, or similarly at **Masjid Kufa** for forty consecutive Friday nights, or at the holy Shrine of **Imam Husayn (A.S.)** for forty consecutive Friday nights, then an encounter with **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)** becomes possible. This continuous devotion

signifies a deep longing and commitment, which, by divine will, may lead to the honor of meeting the living **Imam (A.S.)**.

Sayyid Mahdi Bahrul Uloom: A Miracle of Spontaneous Transport

Numerous accounts illustrate the blessings and facilitations granted to those with sincere intentions for **Ziyarat**. One such famous incident involves the revered scholar, Sayyid Mahdi Bahrul Uloom. He was a figure of such immense knowledge and piety that people sometimes wondered if he himself might be **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**. On a Thursday night, as he departed from **Masjid Kufa**, he intended to travel to Najaf for a lesson. However, he also wished to visit **Masjid Sahla** first. Torn between the two intentions—fearing he might be late for his students in Najaf if he visited **Masjid Sahla**—he found himself in a dilemma. While lost in thought, a strong gust of wind swept him up and miraculously transported him to **Masjid Sahla**, allowing him to perform the **Ziyarat** without delay. This incident serves as a powerful testament to the divine assistance provided to sincere pilgrims.

Similar miracles are reported regarding the facilitation of *Ziyarat* journeys, even when seemingly impossible. Many people narrate how, despite lacking funds or facing difficulties in obtaining passports and visas, their paths were miraculously cleared. Funds appeared from unexpected sources, bureaucratic hurdles dissolved, and travel documents were processed with unprecedented speed. These are considered divine blessings (*Tawfiqat*) and acts of grace, stemming from the pilgrim's sincere intention and devotion.

Sayyid Abdul Qazwini and His Son: Witnessing the Imam

Another compelling account involves Sayyid Abdul Qazwini and his son, Sayyid Jafar. While standing in **Masjid Sahla**, Sayyid Jafar expressed doubt, saying, "Father, I don't believe **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)** would be in this mosque." Upon hearing this, Sayyid Abdul Qazwini immediately stood up, approached a spot, and commenced his prayers. After completing his prayer, he greeted an individual, conversed briefly with him, and then returned. Sayyid Jafar, who had been

observing, was then told by his father, “My son, that was **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**.” This powerful anecdote illustrates that with certainty (*yaqeen*) in one’s heart, not only can one be blessed with an encounter with the **Imam (A.S.)**, but one can also facilitate such an experience for others, especially those who harbor doubts about the **Imam’s** presence or his *Ghaybat* (occultation).

The Dutiful Son: Serving Parents as a Gateway to the Imam

A touching narrative highlights the profound connection between serving one’s parents and attaining the blessings of the **Imam (A.S.)**. There was a young man deeply devoted to his father, serving him day and night, even to the extent of standing on one leg. He would never neglect his father’s needs, yet he also dedicated his Thursday nights to worship in **Masjid Sahla**. He maintained this routine for some time. However, after a while, people noticed that he stopped coming to **Masjid Sahla** on Thursday nights. They became concerned, fearing that his devotion had wavered or that some religious issue had arisen.

When asked why he had ceased his regular vigil at **Masjid Sahla**, the young man explained that when he learned about the forty-night vigil for meeting the **Imam (A.S.)**, he began to perform it diligently. On the fortieth Thursday night, as he was preparing to leave for **Masjid Sahla**, his father fell ill. He was distressed, wondering what to do. Yet, he thought, “It’s only for a short while; I’ll quickly ride my horse, perform the **Ziyarat**, and return. It’s the last night of my forty-night vigil; I don’t want to start over.”

As he rode his horse swiftly, he noticed someone following him. In those days, pilgrim caravans were often looted, and a solitary traveler was an easy target. When he realized he was being pursued, he sped up, but his pursuer also accelerated. Realizing he couldn’t outrun him, the young man stopped. The pursuer, a venerable figure, approached him and asked where he was going. The young man replied that he was going to **Masjid Sahla** to perform the forty-night vigil, as it was his last night. The figure then asked about his father, to which the young man replied his father was ill at home. The figure then inquired if he had any food with him. The young man checked and found only some raisins he had

bought for his child, expressing surprise at how the stranger knew. The venerable figure then instructed him, “Go back and take care of your father; remember your father.”

A moment after hearing this, the young man looked up, and the figure had vanished. It was then that he realized he had just encountered **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)** himself. From that day onward, the young man dedicated his Thursday nights to serving his father. This incident serves as a profound lesson for those who may lack the means to travel for **Ziyarat**. It highlights that serving one’s parents with devotion and sincerity is a means of attaining the **Ziyarat** of the **Imam (A.S.)** and, *InshaAllah*, of meeting him.

17.6 The Masjids of Ziyad and Sa’sa’ bin Sohan

Beyond the main structure of **Masjid Sahla**, two smaller mosques stand as testaments to the devotion of two brothers, one to the east and the other to the west. These are the mosques dedicated to Ziyad bin Sohan and Sa’sa’ bin Sohan. May Allah raise their ranks and grant them abundant rewards in Paradise.

17.6.1 Masjid Ziyad bin Sohan (A.S.): The Abodal and the Martyr

To the east of **Masjid Sahla**, beyond the **Maqam Idris (A.S.)**, lies the mosque attributed to Ziyad bin Sohan. This mosque is currently under construction and is being built on a grand scale. Ziyad bin Sohan, born in Qatif, is counted among the *Abdal* (substitutes) – a revered rank among the helpers of **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)**. The spiritual hierarchy of the **Imam’s** hidden supporters comprises four *Awtad* (pillars), followed by forty *Abdal* (among whom Ziyad bin Sohan is counted), then seventy *Nujaba* (nobles), and finally three hundred and sixty-seven *Saliheen* (righteous ones). This intricate network of devoted individuals, led by **Imam Mahdi (A.S.)** himself, silently governs and maintains the order of the world, preventing its collapse and protecting believers, even during the **Imam’s Ghaybat** (occultation). These *Abdal*, *Nujaba*, and *Saliheen* operate in perfect teamwork, yet they never disclose their identities, choosing to work anonymously. Hence, if

one encounters an individual who tirelessly serves people but prefers to remain unknown, it is possible they belong to one of these blessed ranks.

His Martyrdom and Legacy

Ziyad bin Sohan achieved martyrdom while fighting alongside **Imam Ali (A.S.)** in the Battle of Jamal. While there is a mosque named after him near **Masjid Sahla**, his actual shrine is located in Bahrain, where he and his brother were exiled by the ruler of Syria. At **Masjid Ziyad bin Sohan**, pilgrims are encouraged to offer two *rak'at* of prayer, reciting the very **Dua** that Ziyad bin Sohan himself used to recite in his *Namaze Shab* (Night Prayer). This practice serves as a powerful reminder of the virtue of *Namaze Shab* and encourages pilgrims to revive or strengthen their own commitment to this highly rewarding prayer.

17.6.2 Masjid Sa'sa' bin Sohan (A.S.): The Eloquent Orator

To the west of **Masjid Sahla**, by taking a slight detour from the left turn and then turning right, one will find the mosque attributed to Sa'sa' bin Sohan. This mosque is also currently under construction, promising to be a significant spiritual landmark upon its completion. Sa'sa' bin Sohan was a fiercely devoted and ardent companion of **Imam Ali (A.S.)**.

Sa'sa' was a passionate and eloquent orator. When he expounded upon the words of **Imam Ali (A.S.)**, the verses of the Holy Qur'an, and their interpretations, his audience was captivated. **Imam Ali (A.S.)** himself bestowed upon him the title *Khatib Shah Shah*, which signifies an "eloquent and clear expositor." Like a gifted teacher who clarifies complex concepts, Sa'sa' had the ability to present profound truths with such clarity and fervor that he deeply moved his listeners.

Imam Ali (A.S.) held Sa'sa' in high regard. It is narrated that whenever the **Imam's** heart was heavy with grief, he would call upon Sa'sa' and say, "O Sa'sa', recite something to me and bring comfort to my heart." Sa'sa' would then stand and, in his captivating voice and expressive manner, recite the noble words of the **Imam (A.S.)** or verses from the Qur'an that he had heard directly from the **Imam**.

The First Majlis of Imam Ali's Martyrdom

During the reign of Hisham, Sa'sa' bin Sohan, like his brother, was exiled to Bahrain, specifically to its capital, Manama, where his blessed grave is located. A poignant tradition recounts that after the martyrdom of **Imam Ali (A.S.)**, Sa'sa' bin Sohan was among the select few who accompanied the funeral procession, including **Imam Hasan (A.S.)**, Zayd ibn Abbas, Muhammad ibn Hanafiyya, and other children of **Imam Ali (A.S.)**. After the burial, Sa'sa' took a handful of earth and scattered it over the grave, expressing his deep sorrow. He then began to recite the virtues of **Imam Ali (A.S.)**, followed by narrating the tragic sufferings (*masa'ib*) that befell the **Imam (A.S.)**. As he spoke, he wept profusely, moving everyone around him to tears. It is believed that the very first *Majlis-e-Aza* (mourning gathering) for **Imam Ali (A.S.)** after his martyrdom was conducted by Sa'sa' bin Sohan at that time, immediately following the burial. After concluding his powerful lament, he approached **Imam Hasan (A.S.)** to offer him solace.

At **Masjid Sa'sa' bin Sohan**, pilgrims perform two *rak'at* of prayer and recite a specific **Dua** associated with him. The profound lesson derived from Sa'sa' bin Sohan's life is to strive for excellence in communication, to be a source of solace for others, and to speak the truth with passion and clarity, just as he did for **Imam Ali (A.S.)**. His example inspires us to become individuals upon whom the **Imams (A.S.)** can rely, and from whom they can derive comfort.

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