

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-Taqlaad*) 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.).