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Ayatullah Burujirdi: Epitome Of Sincerity

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Abstract

As the top *marja' taqlid* for the majority of Shi'as at one point in time as well as the custodian of the theological seminary of Qom, Ayatullah Burujirdi was a well-known scholar within the Shi'a world. But many may be unaware of his activities in trying to foster unity between the *madhahib*. In his role as a jurist, Ayatullah Burujirdi believed in the importance of becoming acquainted with the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence; in fact, he considered it a necessary preliminary to understanding the Shi'a *Fiqh*.

When the *Dar al-Taqrib bayn al-Madhahib al-Islamiyyah* was launched, he gave his full-fledged support of it and established cordial relationships with the Sunni leaders of al-Azhar in Egypt, an initiative which led to Shaykh Shaltut's historic edict acknowledging the validity of the *Ja'fari Fiqh*. This article surveys the life, works, and activities of this great scholar whose efforts undoubtedly contributed to the unification and strengthening of the Ummah.

Keywords: Burujirdi, unity, *Fiqh*, *Dar al-Taqrīb bayn al-Madhahib al-Islamiyyah*, *Ahl al-Bayt*, *marja' taqlid*, *Ummah*, Shaykh Shaltut, hadith.

Introduction

Proximity and cooperation are the most important aspects required of Islamic societies in the complex and sensitive era of today's world—an era in which Islam finds itself confronted by oppressive forces that have joined forces against it. All Muslims must take note of the fact that the only way to defeat the imperialist and colonial fronts is through unity of all Muslims regardless of their environmental, racial and religious diversities, as well as through combating the ideas of secularism and the segregation of religion from politics.

Islamic scholars, both Shi'a and Sunni, have led the fight against secularism and have directed their most handsome efforts at uniting the Muslims of the world. This writing is a biography of two of the most renowned erudite scholars of Islam, namely: the Grand Ayatullah Burujirdi and Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut¹. An exposition of the valuable lives of these two great personalities, who took effective and remarkable steps at unifying various Islamic sects, makes the need and necessity of preserving unity within the Islamic Ummah even more profound.

Ayatullah Burujirdi's Lineage

He hailed from a 'Sadat Tabataba'i' family of the city of Borujerd, which means that both of his parents were descendants of the Prophet of Islam (S), and his lineage goes back thirty generations to Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba ('a). In both maternal and paternal ancestries of Ayatullah Burujirdi, one notices well-known religious figures who, in the last few centuries, have shouldered the responsibility of *marja'iyyah* (position of religious authority and source of emulation in jurisprudential matters). His fifth ancestral grandfather, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Tabataba'i-Burujirdi, was one of the renowned Islamic religious authorities of the city of Najaf who compiled a number of books.

Furthermore, he was regarded as the nephew of the likes of the senior 'Allamah Majlisi. Likewise, 'Allamah Bahr al-'Ulum Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Tabataba'i, regarded as one of the great Islamic jurisprudents and one of the outstanding protégés of Wahid Bihbahani, is the paternal uncle of Ayatullah Burujirdi's great grandfather. In other words, Ayatullah Sayyid Jawad Tabataba'i (the brother of 'Allamah Bahr al-'Ulum) is Ayatullah Burujirdi's great-great grandfather, his son Mirza 'Ali Naqi Tabataba'i is the Ayatullah's great grandfather, and his son Hajj Mirza Ahmad Tabataba'i is the Ayatullah's direct grandfather—all of whom are considered to be outstanding *mujtahidin* (qualified religious authorities).²

His Childhood And Early Travels

Ayatullah Sayyid Husayn Burujirdi was born in the city of Borujerd in the lunar month of Safar in the year

1292 AH (circa 1874 AD). His father, Hajj Sayyid 'Ali Tabataba'i was an erudite scholar and played a significant role in the educational development of his son. Under the guidance of his father, he went to the *maktab-khaneh* (traditional schools), learning the works of Sa'di's *Bustan*, *Jami' al-muqaddamat*³, Suyuti⁴ and Logic⁵.

Thereafter, for further education, he joined the city's Nurbakhsh School and after completing his preliminary education, studied *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *Usul* (principles of jurisprudence). Throughout this period he made, as his chief objective, the acquisition of spiritual purification and moral virtues until he reached a high level of perfection and excellence.⁶

Migration To Isfahan

In the year 1892, at the age of eighteen, Sayyid Husayn joined the Isfahan School of Theology and took up residence in the city's Sadr School. In this period, the Isfahan School of Theology was enjoying a remarkable boom and Sayyid Husayn made good use of this opportunity. For a period of four years, he sought to perfect his academic achievements under the tutelage of the likes of Mirza Abu al-Mu'alla Kalbasi, Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Mudarris, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Durchi'i, Jahangir Khan Qashqa'i and Mulla Muhammad Kashani.⁷ While he was preoccupied with study and research, he received a letter from his father asking him to return to Borujerd in order to make preparations for his marriage and to set up a family. Initially, he did not agree to it out of fear that marriage would prevent him from continuing his studies. However, upon consultation with his father and upon his insistence, he retracted. After a short stay in Borujerd, he returned to the Isfahan School of Theology, this time with his family. He continued with his education and research in this city for a period of five more years, thereby spending nine years in total in Isfahan. This duration allowed him to reach a significant level in his scholastic life.⁸

His Time In Najaf Al-Ashraf

In the year 1319 AH (circa 1900 AD), Hajj Aqa Husayn returned from Isfahan to his hometown. Thereafter, on the advice of his father, he departed for the city of Najaf al-Ashraf. The duration of his residence in Najaf for further studies lasted for nine years; in this period, he studied the advanced sciences of Islamic jurisprudence, rational theology, and *rija* (study of biographic evaluation) under the tutelage of great erudite scholars such as Akhund Khurasani, Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Yazdi, and Shaykh al-Shari'ah (master of religious teachings) Isfahani. His inquiring presence during the classes offered by Najaf's jurisprudents created a unique zeal and fervour in that theological school; his sharp intelligence and quick-wittedness astonished everybody and his academic reputation resonated in most of the theological school's social gatherings of those days, to the extent that he earned the favour and interest of his mentor, Akhund Khurasani.⁹

The high reputation that Ayatullah Burujirdi earned in Najaf facilitated the beginning of his own series of lectures, so that alongside learning from Najaf's great Islamic scholars, he himself started teaching as well. He taught the book *Fusul* to a gathering of highly learned scholars from Najaf's theological school.

Ayatullah Burujirdi's teaching of the book *Fusul* in Najaf had certain distinct advantages to it. He had himself opined that in teaching *Usul* (principles of jurisprudence), he would try hard to respond to any debates that had been raised in the study.¹⁰

Return To Homeland

In the year 1328 AH (circa 1910), after a decade-long stay in Najaf al-Ashraf and with the decision to return to Najaf once again, Ayatullah Burujirdi returned to his place of birth in order to visit his parents and other family members. He entered the city of Borujerd to a rare and tumultuous welcome by the people of the city, including its erudite scholars. Hardly six months had passed when his learned father, Hajj Sayyid 'Ali Tabataba'i, passed away. Although he had promised his mentor in Najaf, Akhund Khurasani, that he would return to the Najaf Theological School in order to help in its growth and advancement, the death of his father prevented him from being able to fulfil with desire. Sometime later, in the year 1329 AH (circa 1911 AD), the grief at the passing away of his mentor Akhund Khurasani—whom he regarded as his second father—doubled his sorrow and sapped him of his strength. He would often say to his friends, "The death of two fathers in quick succession disturbed and deeply affected me."¹¹

In the end, Ayatullah Burujirdi was not able to return to Najaf and consequently, he stayed in Borujerd for approximately thirty years. Throughout this time, he was constantly preoccupied with writing, teaching, and educating prominent individuals of the theological school. Most of his written works are the product of this period during his residence in the city of Borujerd. His blessed presence in Borujerd caused the thirsty seekers of knowledge to descend on Borujerd from cities such as Qom, Kashan, Isfahan and Ahwaz making it a center of learning. Moreover, he was the *marja'* (religious authority and source of emulation for juristic matters) of the people in this city. He would lead the noon congregational prayers in the Nasikhuddin Mosque and the evening prayers in the Hajj Aqa Mahdi Mosque; towards the end of his stay, he would occasionally lead the congregational prayers at the Shah Mosque as well. He would also attend to the religious and social problems of the people alongside his other responsibilities.¹²

Other Journeys

In the year 1344 AH (circa 1934 AD), Ayatullah Burujirdi departed for the hajj pilgrimage to the House of God via the sacred land of Iraq; after performing the sacred rites of the hajj, he went to Kazimayn and Samarra from Makkah and visited the mausoleums of the Imams buried in these two cities. Thereafter, he arrived in Iran through the city of Basra. This period coincided with the struggles of Isfahan's erudite scholars—Hajj Aqa Nurullah and Aqa Najafi—who had revolted against Reza Khan (the first Pahlavi monarch); Ayatullah Burujirdi was arrested and transferred to Tehran where he was interrogated by the secret service agents.

In Tehran, the monarch Reza Khan hurried to meet him with the aim and objective of discrediting Sayyid 'Abd al-Karim Ha'iri in his eyes and driving a wedge between them. In fact, this was the hidden reason

for Reza Khan's leniency towards Ayatullah Burujirdi. In any case, he was under arrest in Tehran for about a hundred days and after this restriction was lifted, he went to visit the holy mausoleum of Imam Ridha ('a) in Mashhad. After a thirteen-month stay in the vicinity of the Eighth Imam's ('a) mausoleum, he went to Qom and after a short stay here, returned to his hometown where he was accorded a tumultuous welcome by the residents of Borujerd. He remained in Borujerd until 1947.[13](#)

Acceptance Of Marja'iyyah

In the lunar year 1364 AH (circa 1948 AD), Ayatullah Burujirdi was shifted to Tehran due to illness and was operated upon in two stages at the Firuzabadi Hospital. A flood of erudite scholars from Qom, Tehran, and other cities hurried to visit him in hospital. Meanwhile, some of the prominent Islamic jurisprudents of the Qom Theological School led by Hajj Aqa Ruhullah Khumayni took advantage of this opportunity and invited Ayatullah Burujirdi to take up residence in Qom and accept the responsibility of the *marja'iyyah* of the Shi'a world as well as the leadership and management of the Qom Theological School.[14](#)

At the insistence of the gathering present, this offer was accepted and on the twenty-sixth day of the lunar month of Safar in 1364 AH (circa 1948), in the midst of an unprecedented welcome by the Shi'a religious authorities, highly learned Islamic scholars, and people of Qom, Ayatullah Burujirdi arrived in this holy city. After settling down to work and with the full cooperation of the erudite scholars and Shi'a religious authorities, he began teaching Islamic jurisprudence and rational theology. Most of the well-known erudite scholars and tutors including Hajj Aqa Ruhullah Khumayni and Sayyid Muhammad Muhaqqiq-Damad would zealously attend his lectures.[15](#)

Likewise, Sayyid Sadrudin Sadr, who himself was one of the Shi'a *marja's* and leader of congregational prayers in the great precincts of the Holy Mausoleum, ceded the responsibility to Ayatullah Burujirdi and cancelled his own congregational prayer program. Late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Hujjah was yet another Shi'a *marja'* who placed his academic center at the disposal of Ayatullah Burujirdi. Late Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Khansari who was regarded as one of the well-known Islamic jurists of Qom and Najaf, would out of respect for him attend his lectures and in all affairs added to the daily strengthening of the leadership and *marja'iyyah* of Ayatullah Burujirdi.[16](#)

Moreover, in the lunar year of 1365 (circa 1946 AD), Ayatullah Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Isfahani, one of the supreme *marja's* died in the city of Najaf. For this reason, Najaf's erudite Islamic scholars and *muqallidin* (followers of a *marja'*) of the late Isfahani, and subsequently Shi'a's all over the world became the followers of Ayatullah Burujirdi; in a short while, his indisputable Shi'a religious authority became apparent. Ayatullah Burujirdi's unique management and decisive leadership that lasted for about sixteen years until the lunar year 1380 AH (circa 1961 AD) brought about substantial changes from the political and societal aspects. Towards this end, the administrative structure of the Qom Theological School was transformed and a remarkable unity and solidarity was created among the theological schools, the

clergy, and the various strata of people.[17](#)

Innovation In Inference Of Religious Laws

Innovation In Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence)

Ayatullah Burujirdi's method of independent reasoning created astonishing changes in the manner of inference of religious laws in the theological schools of Qom and Najaf. The style of most of the great Islamic jurisprudents in inference of religious laws was simply to refer to the relevant books of hadith. However, when Ayatullah Burujirdi stepped into the arena of Islamic jurisprudence, he diligently examined the development of traditions narrated by earlier and later scholars and pursued the subject of referring to books of earlier scholars as a principle which he interpreted as 'principle of adjuncts'.

In deduction of any jurisprudential derivative, if he came across any hadith of the Prophet of Islam (S), he would pay special attention both to the period of its issuance—from the viewpoint of the presence of Sunni Islamic jurisprudents and their opinions, especially in Madinah and in cities in which questioners were either residing in those lands or were in contact with them—as well as from the viewpoint of the understanding of the prophet of Islam's (S) companions and questioners in relation to that jurisprudential adjunct, whereby that same understanding would be the cause of questioning the Imam ('a).

It is evident that the Ayatullah's command and proficiency over minor and major historical points would assist commendably in an improved presentation of this style of inference of Islamic laws.[18](#)

Principled Style

Ayatullah Burujirdi's rare proficiency in the science of Usul (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence) has resulted in some advances in this science. He had adopted a unique basis on the concept of consensus. On the subject of occlusion as well, in contrast with renowned Islamic jurisprudents who regard it as reason for absolute authority of consensus of opinion, he regarded it as authority of consensus of enunciation of single individual narration as well. Likewise, the discussion as to whether the science of principles is 'proof' or 'four proofs' is considered to be among his initiatives.[19](#)

Initiative In The Study Of Narrators

One of the fields of Islamic sciences in the theological schools—one which is considered an important pillar of deduction—is the study of narrators. Ayatullah Burujirdi had an amazing genius in this field and he could, so to speak, count the number of narrators of hadith on his fingers.[20](#) As a result of this command and proficiency, he was able to leave behind a legacy of novel initiatives and innovations in this field. In a rare step, he separated the documents of narrated traditions under consideration from the text and scrutinized and examined them professionally which is beyond the scope of discussion of this article.

However, one cannot easily overlook his accomplishment in the classification of hadith and its useful impacts. In this commendable effort, he was able to separate from one another the hadith narrators at the onset of Islam, those of the period of the Infallible Imams ('a), and those of the periods of lesser and greater Occultation. He placed all the narrators in a new framework and structure, determining the classes of each period, and extended this classification to the contemporary era, classifying himself the thirty-sixth. This novel effort placed extremely worthy benefits and works at the disposal of researchers and students of narrators.[21](#)

Grounds For Thoughts Of Approximation

Knowledge Of Sunni Jurisprudence

Ayatullah Burujirdi's novel and strategic styles in the deduction of Islamic laws has facilitated the grounds for extensive research in jurisprudence of the Sunni sect as well; one must confess that with knowledge of the popular narratives and *fatawa* (rulings) of the Sunni followers during the time of the Immaculate Imams ('a), one can better and more easily understand the contents of the hadith and the assertions of the Immaculate Imams ('a). A famous sentence that has been quoted from him states: "Shi'a jurisprudence is placed on the periphery of Sunni jurisprudence."[22](#)

This is because throughout history, Shi'as had no government and administration was usually in the hands of the Abbasids; moreover, the religious verdicts of Sunnis were more common among the people. Therefore, hadith narrators and companions of the Imams ('a) would query them and the Imams ('a) would answer them using the situation governing the society in those days as a basis. In other words, Shi'a jurisprudence directed Sunni jurisprudence because the answers and words of the Imams ('a) watched over the religious verdicts of the Sunni ruler. For this reason, Ayatullah Burujirdi regarded research and study of books of the Sunni schools of thought to be necessary preliminaries for understanding Shi'a *Fiqh* and *ijtihad* (process of deriving religious rulings).

Consequently, his efforts in this field resulted in his remarkable proficiencies and knowledge of the *fatawa* of leaders of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence—i.e., Shafi'i, Hanbali, Hanafi, and Maliki—such that he had full command and information on the opinions of the Prophet of Islam's companions and great Sunni thinkers such as Layth, Thawri, Awza'i, Úahiri and others as well. At times, this knowledge was so profound and strong that when some well-known Sunni personalities would visit him, they would be astonished when they witnessed this reality in person.[23](#)

Ayatullah Burujirdi would never view the opinions and viewpoints of the Sunni followers negatively; rather, his efforts were directed more at finding out their proofs and at correctly identifying their origins. For instance, concerning the necessity of performing obligatory prayers as soon as it is due which the majority of Sunni followers abide by strictly, he does not consider it permissible to delay obligatory prayer past its initial timing , stating: "the *fatwa* of the Sunni followers goes back to the time when the Prophet

of Islam (S) was the congregational prayer leader; the congregational prayer leader needs to be present at an ascertained time in order to conduct the prayer and the Prophet of Islam (S) had chosen the initial prayer timing.

The companions of the Prophet of Islam (S) and their followers made the Prophet's action the yardstick and this was later incorporated in the doctrine of the Sunni school of thought. At times, the honourable Prophet of Islam (S) would voluntarily not observe the initial prayer timing and the Household of the Prophet of Islam ('a) have formally acknowledged this; hence, this matter is the criteria of the well-known Shi'a fatwa on the subject.”²⁴

With this explanation, he considers the perception that the Sunni followers had deliberately changed the religious decrees to be incorrect and rejects it.

Islamic Unity

Ayatullah Burujirdi believed that supporting the issue of the unity among the Islamic schools of thought was one of the vital duties of every Shi'a erudite scholar and efforts needed to be made to actualize it. It is even a well-known fact that during the last days of his fruitful life, he would at times go into a state of coma and when he regained consciousness, he would inquire: “Has Shaykh Muhammad Taqi departed for Egypt or not?”²⁵ Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Qumi was his representative at the al-Azhar University and the *Majma' Taqrib* (the Assembly for Proximity) in Egypt and had in those days arrived in Iran and was staying in Qom.

In an article entitled “Benefits and Services of Ayatullah Burujirdi”, Ayatullah Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari writes:

One of the benefits of his eminence was his keen interest on the issue of Islamic unity, understanding, and proximity among Islamic schools of thought. Because this man was familiar with the history of Islam and Islamic schools, he knew of the ramifications of the past rulers' policies in sowing discord and fanning the flames of dispute and disagreement. He was also aware that in the current era, colonial policies exploit these disagreements and in fact add fuel to the fire. Moreover, he was mindful of the fact that the Shi'a's distancing themselves from the rest of the Islamic Ummah had caused misunderstandings between the two as well as the projection of images about Shiites that were, in fact, far removed from reality. For these reasons, he was extremely interested that there should be goodwill between the Shi'as and the Sunnis so that on the one hand, Islamic unity which is the great objective of this divine religion is secured, and on the other hand, the Shi'a faith, their jurisprudence, and their treasury of knowledge be introduced to the Sunni world which comprises the majority of the Muslim population.²⁶

A few years before reaching the position of leadership and becoming the Shi'a religious authority, when with the efforts of a group of enlightened Sunni and Shi'a intellectuals the “*Dar al-Taqrif Bayn al-*

Madhabib al-Islamiyyah" (Center for the Proximity of the Islamic Schools of Thought) was established, he supported it with his heart and soul; after he came to Qom from Borujerd and took over the reins of *marja'iyyah*, he cooperated with this idea to the utmost possible extent. It is interesting that for the first time after several years, a cordial relationship was established and letters were exchanged between the spiritual leadership of the Shi'a and the spiritual leadership of the Sunni schools of thought—Shaykh 'Abd al-Majid Salim and, after his death (with a gap of two or three years), Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut. In the words of Martyr Murtadha Mutahhari, the late Burujirdi was passionately enamoured by the idea of Islamic unity and his heart throbbed violently for its realization. It is amazing that when he was stricken by the first heart-attack that rendered him unconscious for some time, immediately on regaining consciousness a little later and before taking note of his own condition and saying something on this subject, he mentioned proximity and Islamic unity saying: "I had certain aspirations in this field."²⁷

Patronage Of The Islamic Proximity Organization

At the initiative of the capable thinker, the late Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Qumi, and with the assistance of well-known erudite scholars of Al-Azhar University as well as some Shiite clergymen, in the lunar year 1368 AH (circa 1948), "Dar al-Taqrib Bayn al-Madhabib al-Islamiyyah" was established. Even though Ayatullah Burujirdi was not among its founders, he gave it his all-out support and even provided it with financial assistance. In addition to written communications with the dean of Al-Azhar, 'Abd al-Majid Salim and after him, Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, he consolidated the Shi'a world's relations with the world of Islam as far as possible and transformed many of the misunderstandings and skepticisms that existed into friendship and compassion.²⁸

As a result of this perception and good stratagem, things reached to the stage whereby Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut issued his historical fatwa and for the first time a Sunni erudite scholar officially recognized the Shi'a doctrine; moreover, he organized a teaching faculty for it at the al-Azhar University.²⁹ For knowledge of the depth of these relations as well as the positive and useful role of Ayatullah Burujirdi, the texts of two historic letters, one written by Shaykh 'Abd al-Majid Salim and the other by Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, are reproduced below:

The first letter from Shaykh 'Abd al-Majid Salim reads:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

To his holiness the eminent, Ayatullah Hajj Aqa Husayn Burujirdi (Allah be your Protector).

With greetings of peace and blessings.

The respected professor, his holiness Shaykh Muhammad Taqi Qumi, the secretary-general of the Center for the Proximity of the Islamic Schools of Thought communicated to me your verbal message which you had instructed to be delivered to me. You have expressed your pleasure and mentioned your thanks and gratitude concerning efforts we and the congress of the Proximity between Islamic Schools

of thought have undertaken towards serving Islam and the Muslims. You have also expressed your pleasure with regard to the effect of these efforts towards creating unity of Muslim expression as well as greater understanding, better coordination, and the reformation of immorality that those holding grudges have created. God is aware that this affair is my most cherished and the best of aspirations in my life and as long as I am alive, I shall work for the sake of it and for its realization. With all that I know about you and have found out, I consider your cooperation in this great divine jihad to be extremely crucial because with the knowledge, information, position and influence that you enjoy in both Iran and outside Iran, you always work at reforming the affairs of the nation of Islam. The idea of proximity between Islamic schools of thought has benefited greatly from your attention and favour and has been given valuable help and support by you on various occasions.

The foremost duty that we, the Islamic erudite scholars have, whether we are Shi'a or Sunni, is that we erase this matter from the minds and mentality of people and propagate the clear realities of Islam and the firm principles of the religion in a way so as to awaken and enlighten the people with the truth and guidance of God.

I was also informed of the passing away of the celebrated scholar, the late Sayyid Muhsin Amin-'Amili. When I heard of his knowledge, devotion, and *jihad* in the path of this religion and nation, I became deeply aggrieved at his demise. I herewith express my sincere condolences to your eminence as well as to all the Shi'a brethren followers of the twelve Imams ('a) and implore God Almighty to bless the departed soul and grant you and us the reward and compensation reserved for the patient.

With peace and blessings.

*Jumadi al-Thani, 1371 AH*³⁰

The second letter from Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut reads:

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

With greetings of peace and blessings of Allah.

I inquire about the precious health of my esteemed brother and pray that your eminence always be an authority and source of blessings for Muslims and for their unity of expression. I consider the opportunity presented by the visit of my very learned and honorable brother, professor Qumi, to be worthwhile in order to write the letter to your eminence in gratitude and appreciation of your efforts. I give you the glad tidings that our steps and actions on the path of approximation are steps that I am certain you endorse with all your strength. A selected group of al-Azhar's officials and brothers who have sincerely engaged in a sacred struggle for proximity assist and support us due to faith and conviction; and they arise and take action for the global and human religion and doctrines to which they have submitted themselves and which has become obligatory for them. I hope to be informed of our mutual aspirations and ideals.

With peace and blessings.

Dhu al-Qa'dah, 1379 AH (circa 1959 AD)[31](#)

As is evident from the text of the letters, Sunni religious leaders – and Al-Azhar University's heads in particular – had extraordinary appreciation, admiration and importance for Ayatullah Burujirdi and always viewed him with respect. It is even said that whenever Mr. Burujirdi's letter would be delivered to Shaykh Majid Salim, the former chancellor of Al-Azhar University, he would kiss it; and Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut who later became chancellor of Al-Azhar University showed the same respectful attitude for Ayatullah Burujirdi's letters.[32](#)

In any case, Ayatullah Burujirdi was extremely pleased and optimistic that the tree of grafting of Islamic sects and their approximation was proceeding towards growth and maturity; and every once in a while, he would refer to the subject in his lectures on various occasions. He would express his pleasure at the progress being made on the subject and would say: "The matter of proximity is in the process of moving ahead; and I thank God for having a share in it."[33](#)

Style Of Taqrib (Creating Proximity)

As always, the secret to the most successful solution for a problem lies in its proper analysis and diagnosis. Ayatullah Burujirdi regarded the differences between Shi'as and Sunnis to lie in two fundamental points:

- (1) the subject of 'caliphate' and succession of the prophet of Islam (S), and
- (2) the question of the validity of the sayings of the Prophet of Islam's Household ('a).

According to Ayatullah Burujirdi, the discussion on the former subject is a historical one and whatever the issue, it was of the past and there is no need to mention it again. Moreover, experience had also shown that mentioning this issue has always resulted in intense disagreement and thus has become a point of common exploitation by the enemy. Apart from this, even if this discussion has any benefit, it is intrinsically revered by both the Shi'as and the Sunnis and no individual from one of the parties can prevent the other's belief. Therefore, what is extremely important today and which, after the heavenly Qur'an, could be a point of mutual agreement between Shi'as and the Sunnis is the centrality of the Ahlul Bayt or Household of the Prophet of Islam ('a). The reason behind this commonality is the Hadith of Thaqalayn which has been quoted by all schools of thought through a series of correct documents and which all parties accept.

At a congress that was organized in Tehran to commemorate the personalities of Ayatullah Burujirdi and Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut, Mr. Hashimi Rafsanjani mentioned Ayatullah Burujirdi's 'efforts of proximity' in the following manner:

In his lectures, Ayatullah Burujirdi would say that our difference with the Sunni followers is on two issues: one is the question of the succession of the Prophet of Islam ('a) and the other is the authoritativeness of the narrations of the Imams ('a). What is important for us is the question of authoritativeness, while succession of the Prophet of Islam (S) is a historical issue that cannot be repeated today. We must discuss the issue of authoritativeness of the sayings of the Imams ('a) which is effective in our time.[34](#)

From Ayatullah Burujirdi's point of view, the aim and objective of the proximity of Islamic schools of thought and unity was never that one group should be assimilated into the other so that all of them become a single unit or a single school of thought; rather, he emphasized that by mentioning the mutual aspects of all sides, feelings of friendship, affection, and cordiality would be established between them; moreover, all of them would become a 'single hand' opposing the enemies of Islam.

In his view, achieving this sacred objective through adherence to the Hadith of *Thaqalayn* and introducing the Infallible Imams ('a) as referred to in this hadith is the best, easiest, least costly, and most logical way. On the subject he states: "If we Shi'as simply content ourselves to speak to the Sunni followers in a rational manner because we know that it is a need of Muslims today, we shall reach to a conclusion and we will be able to convince them to a certain extent."[35](#)

In practice too, Ayatullah Burujirdi would seriously pursue this vital issue such that in a major step he ordered that the traditions and documents of the Hadith of *Thaqalayn* be compiled and this was duly undertaken by the late Ayatullah Shaykh Qawam al-Din Wishnawi and published by the *Dar al-Taqrif* in Egypt. Ayatullah Burujirdi would strive to acquaint the Shi'a and Sunni erudite scholars of one another's narratives and jurisprudential principles and proofs to such an extent that as a result of his sincere efforts, many of the Sunni members and personalities of the *Dar al-Taqrif* became acquainted with Shi'a jurisprudence and basic principles; in certain instances, they even issued *fatawa* using it as a basis. It was in line with this objective that the book *al-Mukhtasar al-nafi'*, authored by 'Allamah Hilli, was printed and fully funded by Egypt's Ministry of Endowments, with the foreword written by the then Minister of Endowment, Shaykh Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri.[36](#)

Likewise, it was in line with these activities and the consequence of this attitude of approximation that King Saud of Saudi Arabia sent a copy of the glorious Quran and tapestry of the *Ka'bah* to Ayatullah Burujirdi as a gift and requested to meet him. Although Ayatullah Burujirdi was not able to accept this request due to certain reasons, it was in line with the same approximation activities that he used this opportunity to send him a detailed book of hadith from Imam Sadiq ('a) that contained almost four-hundred hadiths on the rituals of the hajj pilgrimage along with a letter of thanks.[37](#)

His objective in presenting this book of hadith, which have been narrated by Sunni followers and which have been mentioned in the *Sihah as-Sittah* (the six reliable collections of hadith in the Sunni world) and other books as well, was to show the King of Saudi Arabia as well as the academic and religious figures of the world of Islam that it was possible to organize the great rituals of the hajj according to shared narratives and religious principles accepted by both Shi'as and Sunnis. In so doing, the Muslims would

be able to work towards the best interest of the Islamic world starting at this sacred point of monotheistic manifestation. This letter was published in *Risalah al-Islam* which was affiliated with the *Dar al-Taqrīb*, and likewise in some of the newspapers and periodicals of Saudi Arabia.³⁸

Political Stances

Although examination of the political behaviour and stances of Ayatullah Burujirdi is beyond the scope of this brief article, a few of these instances can be enumerated below:

About The Shah And Marja'iyyah

Although in the era of Ayatullah Burujirdi's leadership the grounds for active revolution with the oppressive monarchy and foreign powers existed, people did not have the readiness and required awareness for enduring the ramifications of an Islamic revolution. One must confess that during the time that he was the *marja'*, a large number of potential revolutionary forces were trained that, in the end, played a critical role in the course of the movement. In the words of some political analysts, after the intense repression of Reza Khan (the first Pahlavi monarch), the prohibition of the clerical garb, and the closure of certain *madrasahs* (traditional seminary schools), *Husayniyyahs* (places of congregation for religious occasions) and mosques, one of the most significant and valuable tasks that the late Ayatullah Burujirdi performed was to expand and strengthen the Qom Theological School and other religious seminaries of the country.

In the years between 1951 and 1961 when the clergy were to some extent quiet, the Qom Theological School performed a task similar to the one performed by Imam Sadiq ('a)—namely, it trained thousands of seminary students who were well-informed and acquainted with the issues of the day and who then acted as the Revolution's reserve forces. If it weren't for them, it can be said with some certainty that the Pahlavi Monarchy would not have fallen the way that it did.³⁹

Nevertheless, wherever his eminence sensed danger, he would immediately take a stand, such as was the case when the Shah of Iran wanted to change the Persian script to Latin. He resisted this disgraceful move with his heart and soul saying: "As long as I am alive, I will not allow this to be implemented whatever the consequences."⁴⁰ He made a visit to the current prime minister once and said the following about the Shah: "His father was illiterate but had a little bit of sense; however, this man doesn't even have sense and does not understand anything."⁴¹

We therefore observe from information available that apart from providing assistance to the revolutionary forces, Ayatullah Burujirdi was also an insightful politician. He was, however, of the opinion that the people were not prepared to tolerate difficulties and if pressured by the government, they would altogether desert the Shi'a religious authorities. Thus, he did not view the time to be ripe for a direct confrontation with the royal court. On the other hand, he reckoned that leaving the Shah alone or driving him away completely would cause him to seek refuge in the lap of foreign powers. Thus, at times, he

would tolerate him so that the proud monarch would not see his position weakened nor was he induced to seek the sanctuary of foreigners.⁴²

Fighting The Political Baha'i Sect

During the time Ayatullah Burujirdi took up residence in his hometown, agents of this deviant group had intensified their activities in the city of Borujerd and its environs especially by infiltrating government offices on an extensive scale. When he became aware of this matter, Ayatullah Burujirdi left the city in protest, following which, the city's residents became agitated and marched towards the telegraph communications building. At that instant, the central government sensed serious danger and for this reason speedily facilitated the groundwork for his return. An order was passed for the cancellation of open gatherings of the Baha'i sect and that individuals affiliated to it be expelled from government offices. Only then did Ayatullah Burujirdi return to his hometown amidst a tumultuous and historic welcome accorded to him by its residents.⁴³

Likewise, during his time as the *marja'* in Qom, he raised the frontline of the battle against Baha'ism to a nation-wide level such that in the year 1956 it led to the demolition of the hub of their activity in Tehran. Similarly, in the same year he instructed the learned sermonizer, Mirza Muhammad Taqi Falsafi, to deliver a sermon at the Shah Mosque in Tehran to inform people of the reality of the ideology behind Baha'ism. This series of rational and hard-hitting speeches of the late Falsafi were also broadcasted by radio stations.⁴⁴

Lending Support To Hajj Aqa Qumi's Action

After the Shah fled the country in the year 1941, Hajj Aqa Qumi who was exiled to Karbala in the incident of the historical Goharshad Mosque uprising, returned to the country and adopted a tough stance vis-à-vis the colonial law against Hijab and demanded freedom of religious expression in primary and secondary schools. While the bureaucrats and the Shah himself were procrastinating in meeting his demands, Ayatullah Burujirdi who, at that time, was residing in his hometown of Borujerd, sent a cable in support of Hajj Aqa Husayn Qumi addressed to the prime minister. The text of the telegraph read: "The issues proposed by Ayatullah Qumi are our issues as well. In case his proposals are not accepted, I shall personally come to Tehran and those responsible for its consequences shall be those at the heads of affairs.⁴⁵ The publication of this telegraph among the public and the tribal chiefs of Lorestan province in particular, created massive support for Ayatullah Burujirdi such that the government was forced to submit to his demands in order to avoid unrest.

Likewise, Ayatullah Burujirdi was active and fully involved in supporting the oil nationalization movement, forestalling the Shah's Agrarian Reforms, and combating forms of fire-worship in Iran.

Works And Compilations

Alongside teaching and training protégés, he had undertaken extensive research and studies which have been compiled and published. In sum, his eminence's works can be divided into four groups: traditional sciences, study of narrators, Islamic jurisprudence, and rational theology. A brief list of some of the published works is mentioned below:

- 1) *Al-Ahadith al-maqlubah wa jawabatuha: Iddah min al-ahadith al-maqlubah wajha su'al 'anha ila al-maraji' al-kibar*, Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi with a preface and translation by Muhammad Ridha Husayni Jalali, Qom, *Dar al-Hadith*, 1995, 67 pages.
- 2) *Al-Badr al-zahir fi Salah al-jumu'ah wa al-musafir*; statements of Husayn Tabataba'i Burujirdi written by Grand Ayatullah Muntaziri, second edition, Qom, Ayatullah Muntaziri Library, 1996, 399 pages.
- 3) *Al-Bayan al-wafi fi ta'rif bi kitab tartib asanid al-Kafi*; al-Imam Burujirdi, Mahmud duryab al-Najafi, Qom, Grand Ayatullah Burujirdi Institute, 2001.
- 4) *Tartib asanid kitab al-tahdhib li Shaykh al-Tusi*; compiled by Husayn al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi, *Fihris kitab al-tahdhib murattaban 'ala al-huruf wa fihris kitab al-Istibsar murattaban 'ala al-huruf*, compiled by Hasan al-Nuri al-Hamadani, Mashhad, *Astanah Radhawiyyah al-Muqaddasah, Majma' al-Buhuth al-Islamiyyah*, 1414/1993, 544 pages. It needs to be mentioned that the series of *Tartib al-Asanid* or *Tajrid al-Asanid* or *Tabaqat al-rijal* books are considered to be among Ayatullah Burujirdi's initiatives in the study of narrators. In this collection, the hadith and narrators such as al-Kafi, Istibsar, Tahdhib, Amali, Khisal, and Najashi's and Tusi's *Rijal* have been separated from the main text and been researched and examined.
- 5) Statement of discussion of Sayyidina al-Ustad al-Marja' al-Dini al-Akbar al-Ayah al-'Uzma as-Sayyid Husayn at-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi *fil Qiblah wa al-Satr wa al-Satir wa Makan al-Musalla*, written by 'Ali Panah al-Ishtihardi, Qom, *Jami' Mudarrisin*, 1416/1995, 2 volumes.
- 6) *Taqrirat thalathah: al-Wasiyyatah wa munjazat al-maridh – mirath al-azwaj al-ghasb*, Husayn al-Burujirdi al-Tabataba'i, statement in, 1413/1993, 231 pages.
- 7) *Taqrirat fi Usul al-Fiqh*, Grand Ayatullah Husayn al-Burujirdi, statements by 'Ali Panah al-Ishtihardi, Qom, *Jami' Mudarrisin*, 1417/1996, 306 pages.
- 8) *Jami'at al-ahadith al-Shi'ah*, Husayn at-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi, Qom, *Madinah al-'Ilm*, 2002, 30 volumes. This invaluable collection of hadith is aimed at complementing the book *Wasa'il ash-Shi'ah* and eliminating certain shortcomings such as the scansion of hadith of the Prophet, repetition of documents, replication of topics, and largeness of volume. It has been written on the initiative of Ayatullah Burujirdi and has many valuable benefits in terms of easy accessibility to narrated traditions and inference from them. So far thirty volumes of it have gone to print.

9) *Hashiyah al-'urwah al-wuthqa*, compiled by Muhammad Kazim Yazdi with annotations by Ayatullah Burujirdi, Tehran, Islamiyyah press, 1373/1953, 746 pages.

10) *Al-Hashiyah 'ala kifayat al-Usul fi al-Usul*, Proposal of Fundamental Principles by Husayn al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi, compiled by Baha'uddin al-Hujjati al-Burujirdi, Qom, Ansariyan Publishers, 1412/1991, numerous volumes.

11) *Hashiyah 'ala wasa'il al-Shi'ah*.

12) *Al-Hujjah fi al-Fiqh: taqrirat wa tahsilat min dirasat* Husayn al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi, compiled by Mahdi Ha'iri-Yazdi, al-Risalah Institute, 'Imadzadeh Husayniyyah, 1419/1998, 7 volumes.

13) Ayatullah Burujirdi's Family, written by Ayatullah Burujirdi, preface, translation, and footnotes by 'Ali Davani, Qom, Ansariyan Publishers, 1992, 152 pages.

14) *Risalah tawdih al-masa'il* whose text conforms to the *fatawa* of Ayatullah Husayn Tabataba'i Burujirdi, with annotations by grand Ayatullahs, eminent Shi'a religious authorities, and leaders, compiled by Ghulam Husayn Rahimi Isfahani, Tehran, Javidan and Farahani Press, 1969, 592 pages.

15) Blessed Treatise of the Hajj Pilgrimage Rites, conforming to the *fatawa* of Husayn Tabataba'i Burujirdi, with the efforts and endeavours of Muhammad Kitabchi, Tehran, Islamiyyah Press, 1367/1947, 140 pages.

16) *Lamahat al-Usul: ifadhat al-faqih al-hujjah* Ayatullah al-uzma al-Burujirdi, written by Imam Khumayni, research by Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khumayni's Works, Tehran, Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khumayni's Works, 1421/ 2000, 521 pages.

17) *Al-Majdi: buhuth fi al-wasiyyah wa munjazat al-maridh wa iqrar al-maridh*, based on the teachings of 'Ali as-Safi al-Gulpaygani, Qom, Ganj-e-'Irfan Press, 1421/2002, 215 pages.

18) *Al-Manhaj al-rijali wa al-'amal al-ra'id fi al-mawsu'at al-rijaliyyah: al-ahadith al-maqlubah wa jawabatuha*, Husayn al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi, with the efforts of Muhammad Ridha al-Husayni al-Jalali, Qom, Maktab al-A'lam al-Islami, 1420/1999, 384 pages.

19) *Nihayah al-Usul*, compilation of the statements of Husayn al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi written by Husayn 'Ali al-Muntaziri, Tehran, Tafakkur Publishers, 1415/1994, several volumes.

20) *Nihayah al-taqrir fi mabahith al-Salah*, based on the teachings of Husayn al-Tabataba'i al-Burujirdi, compiled by Fadhil Lankarani. Qom, Markaz-e Fiqh al-A'immah al-Athar ('a), 1420/1999, several volumes.

Passing Away And Sunset Of Life

Gradually, as the month of Shawwal of the year 1380 AH (1961 AD) approached, illness overtook the body of the eighty-eight-years-old *marja'* of the world of Islam. It was a difficult illness that differed from his other ailments. During this time, a group of his enthusiastic followers were at his bedside. Ayatullah Burujirdi, who appeared extremely distressed, raised his head and said: "Finally, our life has passed and we are gone without having been able to send anything worthwhile in advance for our afterlife." One of those present said: "Sir, why are you saying this!? By the grace of God, you are leaving behind so many works; you have trained pious students; you have compiled valuable book; you have built mosques and libraries. It is we who need to utter such words." The devout Shi'a jurisprudent stated: "You must perform your deeds sincerely only for God because He sees everything and is aware of the motives of humankind."⁴⁶

These words deeply affected those present. A few days after this conversation, the body of this great teacher increased in frailty. Finally, the great Islamic jurisprudent of the era, after eighty-eight years of a blessed life, died on a Thursday morning of the twelfth day of the lunar month of Shawwal in the year 1380 AH (1961 AD) and departed from this world forever. His body was laid to rest in the presence of tens of thousands of aggrieved mourners and with a ceremony and homage which in those days was unprecedented; this was in close proximity to the sacred mausoleum of her Holiness Ma'sumah ('a) and next to the entrance of the *A'zam* Mosque—a mosque which he had inaugurated himself. On this occasion, all of Iran's cities went into mourning.

Black flags were hoisted over streets, lanes, and bazaars. Extraordinary mourning ceremonies took place in several Islamic countries, and especially in the cities of Karbala and Najaf. In Iran, these ceremonies continued until the fortieth day commemoration. Ambassadors and representatives of Islamic countries expressed their condolences on this sorrowful incident. Even the national flags of the embassies and consulates of the Soviet Union, the United States, and United Kingdom were flown at half-mast. Late Ayatullah Hajj Shaykh Mujtaba 'Iraqi who was responsible for performing the burial rites of the deceased says: "God granted me the honour to perform the final burial rites of his eminence. I was overcome by an amazing feeling from this event; and when I entered the grave, I remembered all the recommended non-obligatory rites of burial which I cannot recall having performed in the past."⁴⁷

The biography of that great man of contemporary Shi'a history can never be done justice to by the scope of this brief writing and inexpressive pen. Whatever has been written in this article was a pretext in tribute to that Shi'a religious authority and divine Islamic jurisprudent that God willing, has been a lesson for us and all lovers of purity and devotion. We pray that his soul rests in peace and his memory endures forever.

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- [1.](#) The biography of Shaykh Shaltut will appear in the next issue of *Taqrib*, God-willing. [Ed]
- [2.](#) For more information about his lineage, see Ayatullah Burujirdi, 1992, introductory pages.
- [3.](#) This book is taught to first-year seminary students.
- [4.](#) Suyuti's book is among the important seminary books dealing with Arabic grammar. At present, this book is taught in both Shias as well as Sunni theological schools where it is taught to second-year students.
- [5.](#) The subject of logic is also taught to second-year theological school students. In the past, the books *Sharh Shamsiyah* and *Hashiyah Mulla 'Abdullah* were among the textbooks on this subject. However, at present, the book *al-Mantiq* compiled by Ayatullah Muzaffar is taught in Shia theological schools.
- [6.](#) *Gulshan-e Abrar* (2003), v. 2, p. 662.
- [7.](#) *Hawzah Journal*, no. 53, p. 52 and 57.
- [8.](#) Davani (1993), p. 95
- [9.](#) *Hawzah Journal*, no. 43 & 44, p. 314.
- [10.](#) *Hawzah Journal*, no. 43 & 44, p. 315.
- [11.](#) Davani, 1993, p. 101.
- [12.](#) Davani, 1993, p. 102 and 103.
- [13.](#) Davani, 1993, p. 104; *Hawzah Journal*, n. 43 & 44, p. 333–337.
- [14.](#) Muhammad Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (1421/2000), p. 53.
- [15.](#) 'Ali Abadi (1980), p. 44; *Hawzah Journal*, no. 42 and 23.
- [16.](#) Davani (1993), p. 119 and 120.
- [17.](#) Abadhari (2004), p. 26 & 27.
- [18.](#) *Hawzah Journal*, no. 43 and 44, adapted from Sayyid Jawad Alawi's article.
- [19.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 128, as quoted from Ayatullah Lutfullah Safi-Gulpaygani.
- [20.](#) 'Ali Abadi (2000), and p. 83 as quoted from Ayatullah Mirza Husayn Nuri-Hamadani.
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- [22.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 84.
- [23.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 127, as quoted from Ayatullah Safi-Gulpaygani.
- [24.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 88.
- [25.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 171 and 233.
- [26.](#) Mutahhari, *Six Articles* (2001), p. 260; Mutahhari, *Social Evolution of Man* (1984), p. 204.
- [27.](#) Mutahhari, *Six Articles* (2001), p. 260; Mutahhari, *Social Evolution of Man* (1984), p. 204.
- [28.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 369–370.
- [29.](#) Mutahhari, *Six Articles* (2001), p. 261; Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 159 as quoted from Ayatullah Fadhl-Lankarani.
- [30.](#) Abadhari (2004), p. 68.
- [31.](#) Abadhari (2004), p. 72.
- [32.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 135 as quoted from Lutfullah Safi-Gulpaygani.
- [33.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 232.
- [34.](#) *Sahifah Hawzah, Jumhuri-e-Islami* daily special newsletter, Monday, January 23, 1981, p. 8.
- [35.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 91.
- [36.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 91.
- [37.](#) *Hawzah Journal*, no. 43 and 44, p. 83, quoted from Ayatullah Sayyid Ja'far Ahmadi.

- [38.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 337.
- [39.](#) Hashimi Rafsanjani (1997), v. 3, p. 379.
- [40.](#) Gulshan-e-Abrar, v. 2, p. 671.
- [41.](#) Va'iz zadeh Khurasani (2000), p. 97; Gulshan-e-Abrar, v. 2, p. 671.
- [42.](#) Gulshan-e-Abrar (2003), v. 2, p. 671.
- [43.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 342.
- [44.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 55, 141 and 190.
- [45.](#) Hawzah Journal, no. 43 & 44, p. 332 as quoted by Sayyid Jawad 'Alawi.
- [46.](#) Gulshan-e-Abrar (2003), v. 2, p. 672.
- [47.](#) Ahmadi et al. (2000), p. 179.

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