



Alahazrat and his Taqwa

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Alahazrat Imam Ahmad Rida's entire life was adorned with meticulous following of the Shari'ah and Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and his taqwa had reached an elevated level. I shall present some incidents from his life that show that he not only had *taqwa* but had also attained the rank of *wara'a*.¹ In accordance to the verse, *No men can be its guardians except the pious*, he was a perfect *muttaqi*² and a gnostic.

1. The last Ramadan in his life was in 1339 AH. The weather in Bareilly was very hot and he was weak and ill, as these were his final years. The Shari'ah exempts an old man³ from fasting and expiate by charity instead and for the ailing, they are allowed to expiate when they are healthy again.⁴ Despite these dispensations, Alahazrat's taqwa demanded otherwise. This was not his fatwa but his taqwa. He said:

The hot weather in Bareilly will not allow me to fast but the weather in mountainous regions is cooler. Nainital is not far from here and I can fast in the mountains of Bhowali.⁵ And I am able to go there; hence, it is obligatory for me to do so.

He spent the whole of Ramadan there and fasted the whole of Ramadan.

2. He passed away on the 25th Safar 1340 AH. He was ill for months and in the last months, he could not even walk. The Shari'ah permits that in such conditions, one can pray at home but Alahazrat would pray in the congregation. Four men would carry him on a chair to the masjid and he continued to participate thus as long as he was physically able to do so.

¹ Abandoning a part of the permissible for fear of falling into the impermissible

² One with fear of Allah. Pious and Godfearing

³ Al-Shaykh al-Fānī: an old man who cannot fast now, and cannot hope to expiate in the future either

⁴ To fulfil an obligation at a later time

⁵ 83 miles north of Bareilly

3. I have narrated the following incident in the marginalia of *Jumal al-Nur fi Nahyi al-Nisa' 'an Ziyarat al-Qubur*⁶ from my teacher, Hafiz e Millat Shah Abd al-Aziz Muradabadi.⁷

At one time, there was no one to take him to the masjid and it was time for the congregation. He was disturbed by this and eventually, he came to the masjid, staggering and dragging himself and offered his prayer in the congregation.

In our times, in spite of good health, strength and the means, people carelessly miss the congregation; this incident should serve as an eye opener to such people.

4. Alahazrat was away from home and staying in one of his lands. He would periodically suffer from severe bouts of tormina.⁸ One day he was all alone by himself; and describes that incident himself thus:

The pain started during the time of Dhuhur. I performed the ablution howsoever I could [with difficulty] and then stood up for prayer but was unable to do so. I supplicated to Allah and sought help [of intercession] from the Prophet ﷺ. Allah surely hears the call of the distraught. I intended to pray the sunnah and the pain disappeared. As soon as I concluded the prayer with the salām,⁹ the pain came back and when I made intention for the fard, it went away again. When I concluded the prayer with the salām, it came back again. I prayed the sunnahs after fard and the pain stopped, and came back yet again after the salām. I now expected the pain to stay until Asr. Just as I feared, I lay on the bed tossing and turning but the pain remained.

It can both be said that the pain was relieved during the prayers or that he was so attentive towards Allah and absorbed in worship that he would not feel it. Regardless, it is proof of Alahazrat's divine acceptance and his gnosis.

Imam Abu Hanifa rahimahullah would spend his whole day in academic pursuits and systemising and organising fiqh; he would still perform supererogatory worship at night and resting for some part in the night. He was once going somewhere when there was someone pointing towards him saying: “*This person worships all through the night.*” Thereon, he began worshipping all through the night.

5. Similarly, someone wrote to Alahazrat and alongside various epithets, he also wrote *Hāfiẓ*. At the time, Alahazrat was not a *Hāfiẓ al-Qur'an* even though most verses were on the tip of his tongue (and pen) and he had the ability to derive rulings from them at will. Mawlana Hashmat Ali Khan gives an eyewitness account from 29th Sha'ban 1337 AH that when Alahazrat saw a

⁶ Alahazrat's monograph on the impermissibility of women travelling to shrines

⁷ Passed away in 1396 AH. Brief biography of the Shaykh is found at:

<http://files.aqdas.webnode.com/200000030-a81bba9153/hafizemillat.pdf>

⁸ Acute, colicky pains; gripes

⁹ To end the prayer

letter with the title *Hāfiẓ* used for him, his eyes welled up and the fear of Allah caused his heart to pound. He said:

I am fearful that on the day of judgement, I will be amongst those people for whom the Qur'an says, *love to be praised for what they have not done.*¹⁰

Thereafter, he made the intention to memorise the whole Qur'an. He would make ablution for Isha and before the congregation, someone would recite one part [of the thirty parts] to him and he would repeat it. He began on the 29th of Sha'ban and finished memorising the whole Qur'an by the 27th of Ramadan and he also led the tarawih prayers.

This incident closely follows that of Imam Abu Hanifa. The Imam began praying the whole night because someone had a good opinion of him; and for Alahazrat, someone called him *Hāfiẓ* while he did not qualify to be called a *Hāfiẓ*. When one has fear of Allah, such things are not difficult and the heart accepts these things fully and finds rest only when they are fulfilled.

There are many such incidents of his gnosis, fear of Allah and abstinence. Below are some more anecdotes that exemplify these traits within him. They show various types of taqwa. All these incidents should be viewed with the subject of taqwa in mind.

1. Alahazrat's heart was always heedful of rights of men.¹¹ He even wrote a monograph entitled *A'ajab al-Imdad fi Mukaffarati Huquq al-'Ibad*. Mawlana Ja'far Shah Phulwari recounts an event from a few days before Alahazrat's demise. He writes:

After Juma' prayer, in a state of illness and weakness, he spoke in moving and saddening voice. He said something like this:

Convey my salām to all Sunni Muslims and if I have wronged anyone, then I seek their forgiveness with utmost humility. Forgive me for the sake of Allah or seek recompense from me.

His *Wasāya*¹² also has an account of words he spoke a few months before his demise to a gathering of people. In the end, he said:

None of you has ever caused me any discomfort. You did my work for me and did not allow me to do it myself. May Allah reward you all. I am hopeful that in my grave, I will not face any discomfort because of any of you. I have forgiven all Sunnis and my rights upon them. I ask you with folded hands¹³ and implore you to forgive me; and forego any of your rights that I did not fulfil; and it is necessary for all those present here to seek for my forgiveness [on my behalf] from those who are absent.

¹⁰ 3:188

¹¹ Huquq al-'Ibād

¹² Final Testament

¹³ In the subcontinent, a mark of humility and an idiom to say: 'I implore'

2. Alahazrat did not tolerate pictures or photographs in the house. At the time of his demise, he even asked for currency notes and coins¹⁴ to be removed; so that no doubt remains that angels of mercy have entered.
3. His modesty and humility were such that a train was once delayed when travelling to Pilibhit¹⁵ so he was given a chair to sit upon. He said:

Sitting on this chair comfortably would be in the fashion of the arrogant and haughty.¹⁶

He sat on the chair but did not lean on it and remained engrossed in his litanies.

4. In one of Alahazrat's gatherings, a man had to sit next to a barber; so he stopped coming to his place. Alahazrat remarked:

I too have no liking for such arrogant folk.

5. It is difficult to find an exemplary son in his duty and obedience to his parents. After the demise of his father,¹⁷ Alahazrat handed over the charge of his affairs to his mother.¹⁸ He did not even perform a supererogatory hajj without her permission. Whatever money he had, he would hand it to her and would not even purchase books without her consent.
6. He was immensely respectful to Islamic scholars and did not show irreverence in any way. He disagrees or comments with opinions of intellectual giants such as Imam Ibn 'Abidin Shami but does so with utmost respect and self-effacing manner; whereas today, people point fingers at such luminaries as if they are schoolchildren even though these people have not a fraction of Alahazrat's knowledge.

For example, in *Radd al-Muhtar*, Imam Shami remarks somewhere that he could not figure out the answer to a particular objection. Upon this, Alahazrat wrote in his *Jadd al-Mumtar*¹⁹:

وظهر لنا ببركة خدمة كلماتكم

The answer occurred to me, by the blessings of serving your words

¹⁴ Coins and notes often bear pictures of people

¹⁵ 33 miles north-east of Bareilly

¹⁶ Because it would recline and one would have to stretch their legs in the manner considered disrespectful and condescending.

¹⁷ Mawlana Naqi Ali Khan [1246-1297 AH], one of the foremost scholars of his era

¹⁸ Husayni Khanum

¹⁹ Supercommentary to *Radd al-Muhtar* in 5 volumes

Alahazrat wrote an ode²⁰ in which he writes about the rank of scholars:

إِذَا حُلُو تَحَصَّرَتِ الْبِرَادِي إِذَا رَا حُو أَقْصَارِ الْمَصْرُ بِيْدَا
When they pass by deserted stead, they turn it into dwellings
When they depart from towns, they cause them to be deserted

Malik al-‘Ulama Mawlana Zafar al-Din Bihari said, *this seems to be poetic exaggeration*, but Alahazrat said:

It is reality. When Mawlana Abd al-Qadir Badayuni came to a city, there would hustle and bustle therein and a strange feeling of tranquility and happiness could be felt; and when he left, it would seem as though there was desertion even though apart from him, everyone else would still be present.

7. There are many examples of his truthfulness and staunchness upon the religion. He once attended the ‘Urs²¹ of Mawlana Fadl al-Rasul Badayuni during which he heard a speech by Maulawi Siraj al-Din Anolwi, who was a Mawlid reciter. During his speech he said, *Firstly, the angels will put the soul in the body of the Prophet ﷺ*. As these words of his were against the unanimously agreed upon belief of Sunnis that prophets are alive in their graves,²² the expression on the face of Alahazrat changed and he said to Mawlana Abd al-Qadir:

If you permit me, I will take him off the pulpit.

Mawlana Abd al-Qadir stopped the speech and said to Mawlana Abd al-Muqtadir, *Do not allow such ignorant people to lecture in the presence of Mawlana Imam Ahmad Rida, because anyone who speaks in front of him has to keep a close eye on his knowledge and be careful in his speech.*

Alahazrat said in this regard:

These are the reasons why I have stopped attending the speeches of today’s speechmakers and Mawlid reciters.

Alahazrat said about Shah Ali Husain Ashrafi Miyan Kichochawi:

Hadrat²³ is from amongst those people whose speech I listen to with pleasure.

8. When a person serves the religion, the praise of friends can cause vanity and self-admiration; the calumny of foes would result in anger and thirst for retribution. But Alahazrat was above such feelings as he has says:

²⁰ In praise of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir Badayuni and his father Fadl ar-Rasul.

²¹ Gathering to commemorate the anniversary of the passing of a saint

²² Hayat al-Nabi

²³ Hadrat or Hadhrat (Hadrah, Arabic: *قَرَضَ ح*; or Hazret or Hazrat) is an honourific Arabic title used to honour a person

By Allah, I do not strut at the praise of senior scholars and saints, nor am I angered at the castigation and slander of the enemies of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ. I thank Allah that He has made this lowly person able to tolerate their insults for protecting the honour of His beloved ﷺ. Because, as long as they keep swearing at me, they do not speak against my master ﷺ.

The motto of his life, in his own words, was:

نه مرا نوش ز تحسین نه مرا نیش ز طعن
نه مرا گوش به مدحی نه مرا بوش ذمے
I flatter none, nor others deride
*No praise I heed; no curse or chide*²⁴

It is not easy to describe all his habits, character and strict adherence to the Shari'ah in a short article. Another eyewitness account is by Mawlana Sayyid Abu Salman Muhammad Abd al-Mannan Qadri, who was initially an opponent of Alahazrat. He writes that Alahazrat was, *a living example of the manners of the Prophet ﷺ. It was when I saw him that it was well and truly evident that the praise is deserving, and not enough.*

9. He took so much care in his speech that if a certain answer contained even the slightest mistake, he would abstain from deeming it *Sahīh*. Sayyid Ayyub Ali sent the prayer timetable for Ramadan 1339 AH to Alahazrat which he returned after ten or fifteen minutes with corrections. Wherever there was a mistake, he marked it incorrect and whatever was correct, he marked it as such. In one cell, instead of *Sahīh*, it said *Khayr*²⁵. When analysed, the timing in this cell was out by a thousandth of a second which did not affect the prayer timing at all but a mistake is nevertheless a mistake; hence, Alahazrat did not write *Sahīh* but only *Khayr*.
10. He once went with Muhaddith Surati²⁶ to meet a famous sage in Pilibhit, known as Shah Ji Muhammad Sher Miyan rahimahullah. Alahazrat saw that Shah Ji was taking bay'ah²⁷ from women without veil and neither any partition in between. Due to his extreme scrupulousness in observing the Shari'ah, he came back without meeting Shah Ji. Anyone other than Shah Ji would have been offended by this but he was a humble man and readily accepted the truth; it was therefore that he accompanied Alahazrat to the train station and the following morning, he expressed regret over the incident and said, *Mawlana, in the future, I will only take bay'ah from women behind a veil.* Alahazrat shook hands and embraced him.
11. It is impermissible to drop used ablution water in the masjid even if it is just dripping from the limbs. At one time, the weather was extremely cold and the

²⁴ Translation by Abu Hasan al-Ridawi, who also made important changes to this article

²⁵ Satisfactory, acceptable

²⁶ Brief biography at <http://files.aqdas.webnode.com/200000041-1016a11104/surati.pdf>

²⁷ Oath of allegiance

rain was pouring heavily. Alahazrat was mu'takif²⁸ and he could not go out to make his ritual ablution. Hence, he folded a quilt blanket four times and performed ablution sitting on it and did not let a single drop of water fall in the masjid. And now because the blanket was wet, he spent the whole night shivering in the cold.

12. He always entered the masjid, with his right foot first. He would even step on every row with his right foot first and thus reach the mihrab.²⁹ He would never perform the obligatory prayers without a turban on his cap.

Discharge from ailing eyes nullifies ablution. Alahazrat once suffered in his eyes, and he would get someone to inspect his eye and check whether there was discharge immediately after prayer; if it did, he would say, he would have to repeat the prayer.

Alahazrat literally followed the Divine Command, *And walk not upon Earth in arrogance*³⁰ to an extent that often, it would be difficult to hear his footsteps. Many a time, people would only know of his arrival when he came very close and saluted himself.

He used to sleep in the fashion that his body would spell the letters of the name *Muhammad* ε. He always paid special attention to make the poor happy. He never rejected invitations of sincere and poor people nor would he complain of anything afterwards. People used to wonder how he could eat such food but he would say:

If I am invited sincerely, I will accept them; even if it is every day.

When combing his beard, he would use his own scissors and a mirror.

He would not stretch his legs towards the Qiblah nor spit in that direction.

Indeed, such habits are reminiscent of great predecessors like Imam Abu Hanifah rahimahullah.

13. In compliance with the hadith, he would abstain from places that would lead to suspicion and slander. Since Kerosene³¹ gives off a bad smell, it is forbidden to burn it in a masjid. Once, Haji KifayatAllah³² filled a lantern with castor oil³³ and lit it. Alahazrat said:

Haji Sahib! Either take it outside or keep telling people that it is not kerosene but castor oil. People walking past will think that we forbid others to burn it³⁴ in their masjids but we burn it in our own.

²⁸ Secluding oneself in the masjid, I'tikāf

²⁹ Niche

³⁰ 17:37, 31:18

³¹ Paraffin. Known colloquially as 'Mitti kā teyl'

³² Alahazrat's attendant

³³ Colloquially, 'Arandi kā teyl'

³⁴ Kerosene

Thereafter, Haji Sahib removed it from the masjid. A scholar once stayed in the masjid with the intention of performing I'tikāf. He ate betel leaves and also had a spitting vessel.³⁵ Some people who were unaware of his intention of I'tikāf objected. Alahazrat was sent a question. He gave the ruling to the objectors and whilst explaining the rank of a scholar, he wrote:

Even if they have a correct intention, scholars should abstain from performing certain actions in front of the public that would cause them to be confused. This causes two problems: The one who is not an admirer will object and fall into backbiting and deprive himself from the blessings of the scholar. Secondly, the admirer will begin to do the same action without the proper intention. This scholar is not from the Malāmatiyya sect³⁶ that see benefit in making the public dislike them. He is on the seat of guidance³⁷ and it is beneficial for him to draw the public towards himself as the hadith commands:

رأس العقل بعد الإيمان بالله التودد إلى الناس

After professing faith, it is capital sense, to be endearing with people

Another hadith says:

بشروا ولا تنفروا

[invite people] by giving glad tidings, not by making them despair

In the case that performing such actions is necessary, he should announce his intention to the public and also tell them the ruling of Shari'ah upon it.

14. Hadrat Mahdi Miyan³⁸ had good relations with Hamid Ali Khan, the Nawab of Rampur. Once, he was travelling with the Nawab on a train and he wanted him to meet Alahazrat. He sent the aide de camp³⁹ from the railway station to Alahazrat with a gift of Rs.1500 and a message that Miyan sahib had sent this gift and wishes you to meet the Nawab. In reply, Alahazrat stood at his doorstep and said:

After conveying my salām, ask him, why the converse gift? It is I who should present a gift to Miyan sahib and not vice versa.⁴⁰ Take back whatever you have brought to me. The home of this lowly person is not worthy to host a ruler [hence, he is not welcome;] and nor am I aware

³⁵ Ugāldān

³⁶ Believing in the value of self-blame, that piety should be a private matter, and that being held in good esteem would lead to worldly attachment, they concealed their knowledge and made sure their faults would be known, reminding them of their imperfection (Encyclopædia Britannica)

³⁷ Masnad-e-Hidayat

³⁸ Miyan: an informal title of respect, to mean 'master'.

³⁹ Madār-ul-Muhām

⁴⁰ Rs.1500 equates to approximately Rs.75,000 today

of the etiquette of conducting oneself in the presence of rulers, so I cannot visit him.

15. A man joined the spiritual order⁴¹ and asked for a litany. His beard was shorter than the minimum requirement in the Shari'ah⁴² so Alahazrat said:

When your beard is of the right length, a litany will be granted.

After some days, he again requested a litany and Alahazrat said:

There is no need to ask. When your beard is according to the Shari'ah, a litany will be granted automatically. That is, Wajib comes before Nafl.

The opinion of neighbours towards a person is an important indicator of his character. People have discord with their neighbours from time to time. Therefore, it is seen that if people suffer some worldly loss, they begin to speak ill of their neighbours, even without a reason and even if they are good. Yet, Alahazrat's neighbours had nothing but praise for him.

16. Muhammad Shah Khan, known as Haji Muntahan Khan, was a respected land owner and Alahazrat's neighbour and he was also older than Alahazrat. One day, Sayyid Ayyub Ali Shah and Sayyid Qana'at Ali saw that despite his old age and his respectable standing as a landlord, he was sweeping the yard of Alahazrat's residence. Sayyid Qana'at Ali could not bear this and rushed to snatch the broom from his hands. Haji Sahib refused to let go and said: "My son! It is a matter of pride for me to sweep at the residence of my Shaykh.⁴³ I am older than the Shaykh.⁴⁴ I have seen his childhood, his youth and now I am seeing his old age. At every juncture, I found him to be unique and therefore pledged allegiance on his hand.⁴⁵ Everyone becomes pious in their later years but I have seen Alahazrat to be exemplary and unique even in his childhood."

Wa'l Hamdu Lillah. We ask Allah ta'ala to forgive us and make us pious and righteous for the sake of his beloved ones.

والحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على سيد المرسلين
وعلى آله وصحبه وأهل بيته أجمعين

⁴¹ Silsila

⁴² In the Hanafi madh'hab, a fistful.

⁴³ Sayyid Ayyub Ali and Sayyid Qana'at Ali were yet unaware that he was part of the silsila

⁴⁴ An honourific Arabic title used to honour a person

⁴⁵ Pledge of allegiance to join a spiritual order