

KARBALĀ' MADE IMMEDIATE: THE MARTYR AS MODEL IN IMĀMĪ SHĪ'ISM

In the scholarly fecund area of Imāmi Shī'ite Islami, one important subject that has previously received scant attention is the figures of the *shuhadā-yi mu'addad* (enumerated martyrs). In the formal sense a *shahid* (martyr) is one who has died while performing *jihād*, or as it is commonly referred to, "Holy War." However, *jihād* has been one of the more misinterpreted and misunderstood terms in Islam. As A. Ezzati has stated,

Most non-Muslim scholars, intentionally or unintentionally, have defined *jihād* as only the Holy War, and thus have understood neither *jihād* nor *shahāda* [martyrdom]. The Muslims, mostly taking into consideration the martyrs of the early days of Islamic history, define martyrdom in terms of the fatalistic death of those dear to Allāh and do not see the close link between continuous struggle in the cause of Allāh (*jihād*) and martyrdom.¹

Jihād, going back to its etymological significance, entails striving or effort. This, of course, may include striving or effort within the sphere of Holy War for the explicit purpose of promulgating or defending Islam. But, *jihād* has come to mean more than just this. It also may entail, as E. Tyan puts it,

... an effort directed upon oneself for the attainment of moral and religious perfection. Certain writers, particularly among those of the Shī'ite persuasion, qualify this *djihād* [*jihād*] as "spiritual *djihād*" and as "the greater *djihād*," in opposition to the *djihād* which ... is called "physical *djihād*" or "the lesser *djihād*."²

The idea of "spiritual *jihād*" is even found in the writing of the Sūfi apologist Abū Hāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), who states,

Every one who gives himself wholly to God ... in the war against his own desires (*nafs*), is a martyr when he meets death going forward without turning his back.³

On the popular level, the criteria for martyrdom in Islam have been looser. In part this may be due to a more permissive attitude toward what activities fall

¹ A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam." *Al-Serāt*, 12.1 (1986): 118.

² E. Tyan, "*djihād*," EI².

³ As quoted in A. J. Wensinck, "The Oriental Doctrine of the Martyrs," *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen Afdeling Letterkunde* 53 (1923): 155.

within the category of *jihād*. For instance, women are precluded from participating in *jihād* when it falls within the sphere of Holy War. So, at least one *hadīth* (Prophetic Tradition) indicates that the *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) is an acceptable substitute for women.⁴ This allowance seems to have come to include men as well. The redoubtable Sir Richard F. Burton (1821–1890) witnessed some men who expired while performing the *Hajj* and he notes that, “Those who die on a pilgrimage become martyrs.”⁵ This was apparently a popular belief in mid-19th century Arabia. Jaffur Shurreef gives a much more liberal list of the criteria for martyrdom,

1. If a man expire[s] in the act of reading the *Qoran* [Qur’ān];
2. if in the act of praying;
3. if in the act of fasting;
4. if on the pilgrimage to Mecca; if on a Friday. . . ;
6. if in the defence of his religion;
7. if through religious meditation;
8. if he be executed for speaking the truth;
9. if he endure[s] death by the hands of a tyrant or oppressor with patience and submission;
10. if killed in defending his won property;
11. if a woman die[s] in labour or child-bed;
12. if murdered by robber;
13. if devoured by tigers;
14. if killed by the kick of a horse;
15. if struck dead by lightning;
16. if burnt to death;
17. if buried under the ruins of a wall;
18. if drowned;
19. if killed by a fall from a precipice, or down a dry well or pit;
20. if he meet[s] death by apoplexy, or a stroke of the sun.⁶

Martyrdom, *shahāda*, does have a deeper significance than what might be indicated in the above exposition. Ezzati looks back to the original verbal root of *shahāda* to extrapolate what he feels is the ultimate significance of the *shahīd*,

The word *shahāda* is derived from the Arabic verbal root *shāhada*, which means to ‘see’, to ‘witness’, to ‘testify’, to ‘become a model and paradigm’. *Shahāda* therefore literally means to ‘see’, to ‘witness’, and ‘to become a model’. A *shahīd* is the person who sees and witnesses, and he is therefore the witness, as if the martyr witnesses and sees the truth physically and thus stands by it firmly, so much so that not only does he testify it verbally, but he is prepared to struggle and fight and give up his life for the truth, and thus become a martyr. In this way, and by his struggle and sacrifice for the sake of the truth, he becomes a model, a paradigm, and an example for others, worthy of being copied, and worthy of being followed.⁷

In Shī‘ite Islam the *shahīd* as model or paradigm finds its ultimate expression in the figure of Imām Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī, commonly referred to as *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* (Prince of the Martyrs). The Shī‘ite ethos is shaped by the suffer-

⁴ Wensinck 154.

⁵ Sir Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madīnah and Meccah* vol 2. (London: Tylston and Edwards, 1893) 183, note 2.

⁶ Jaffur Shurreef, *Qanoon-E-Islam*, trans. G. A. Herklots. (London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1832) 71–72.

⁷ Ezzati 119.

ing and martyrdom of Ḥusayn on the battlefield of Karbalā' while facing a numerically superior Umayyad force in 41/680. Imām Ḥusayn's martyrdom is especially paradigmatic when taking into account his staunch idealism in rejecting the perceived disregard for Islam by the Umayyad rulers of the time. The traditional Shī'ite view is that Ḥusayn's selfless concern for Islam and filial piety led him to place himself and his companions into a situation that would result in their deaths.⁸ As Mahmoud Ayoub puts it,

... the death of Ḥusayn has been regarded as a sacrifice in the struggle (*jihād*) in the way of God for the right against wrong, for justice and truth against wrongdoing and falsehood.⁹

Coupled to the paradigmatic aspect of Ḥusayn's martyrdom is its soteriological significance in the Shī'ite ethos. Peter Chelkowski explains,

The tragedy of Karbalā' is viewed by the Shī'a as the greatest suffering and redemptive act in history. Actually it transcends history into meta-history, having acquired cosmic proportions.¹⁰

Imām Ḥusayn's selfless act has come to be seen as preordained; adding to its sacrificial nature. It is redemptive in that the reiteration of Ḥusayn's suffering and martyrdom during *majālis* (commemorative assemblies), *ta'ziyah* (passion plays), and other ceremonies of Muḥarram call for his intercession on the Day of Judgement.

Thus, in Shī'ite Islam, martyrdom has a cosmic, soteriological sense as all martyrs become part of a sacred history that has as its central event the martyrdom of Imām Ḥusayn. The model or paradigm of Imām Ḥusayn as martyr *par excellence* in turn influences, shapes, and even supersedes all those martyrs proceeding him.

As indicated above, martyrdom has as its ultimate criterion the sacrificing of one's life while promulgating or defending Islam (*jihād*). Shī'ite Islam does not restrict *jihād* to physical conflict alone. *Jihād* may be done through polemic. All the enumerated martyrs have a common background of Shī'ite polemical writing that ultimately resulted in their execution or assassination at the hands of their enemies. This leads Muḥammad Taqī 'Alī 'Ābidī to conclude,

... the only difference is that those who were martyred due to their writings receive high rank; not only because of their very martyrdom but also due to their positions as scholars and proselytizers of the Truth.

⁸ I refer the reader to S.H.M. Jafri's polemic, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*, (London: Longman, 1979) for a thorough study of the events leading up to Ḥusayn's martyrdom.

⁹ Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978) 141.

¹⁰ Peter Chelkowski, "Popular Shī'ī Mourning Rituals," *Al-Serāf*, 12.1 (1986): 209.

Perhaps for this reason they received the designations First, Second, Third, and so on.¹¹

There is, however, no universal list of these enumerated martyrs to be found. That is to say, all those who are accepted as enumerated martyrs in the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, etc.) are not accepted as enumerated martyrs in South Asia and visa versa. In his work *Shahīdān-i Rāh-i Fazīlat* (Tehran, 1943), 'Allāmah 'Abdulhusain Amīnī Najafī gives biographies of 132 Shī'ite religious scholars who were martyred. Out of these the following are chronologically enumerated:

1. *Shahīd-i Awwal* (The First Martyr): Shamsuddīn Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn Makkī al-'Āmilī al-Jizzīnī (d. 1384)
2. *Shahīd-i Sāni* (The Second Martyr): Zaynuddīn ibn 'Alī al-'Āmilī al-Jaba'ī (d. 1558)
3. *Shahīd-i Sālis* (The Third Martyr): Shahābuddīn Tūstarī Khurāsānī (d. 1588-9)
4. *Shahīd-i Rābi'* (The Fourth Martyr) Muḥammad Mahdī Isfahānī (d. 1802-3) Or: Muḥammad Taqī Barghānī Qazwīnī (d. 1847-8)

The latter, according to 'Allāmah 'Abdulhusain, is sometimes considered to be *Shahīd-i Sālis*. According to S.A.A. Rizvi, this is corroborated by Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Tunikābunī in his *Qisṣat al-'Ulamā'* (Tehran, 1896).¹²

Muḥammad Taqī 'Alī 'Ābidī presents those martyrs who are accepted in South Asia. Interestingly the list diverges after the above first two martyrs. The following individuals are accepted as enumerated martyrs after them:

3. *Shahīd-i Sālis*: Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstarī (d. 1610)
4. *Shahīd-i Rābi'*: Ḥakīm Muḥammad Kāmil (d. 1819)
5. *Shahīd-i Khāmis* (The Fifth Martyr): Ayatullāh Muḥammad Bāqir al-Šadr (d. 1980)¹³

A simple explanation for the differences in these lists might be that the particular author of whatever biographical compendium has selected and numbered certain martyrs as such. Over time his particular enumeration of martyrs is accepted on the popular level. However, this explanation proves inadequate in resolving the differences in the Shī'ite world over who should be the Third and subsequent enumerated martyrs. This explanation also proves inadequate in indicating why there is no consensus among the Middle East-

¹¹ Muḥammad Taqī 'Alī 'Ābidī. "Shahīd-i Sālis Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstarī." *al-Wā'iz* 63.3 (1986): 29-33.

¹² S. A. A. Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isnā 'Ashari Shī'is in India*. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1986) I: 342, note 1.

¹³ I also will note that in 1989 there was discussion among Shī'ite scholars in Lucknow, India, about the possibility of Mahdī al-Ḥakīm Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1988) assuming the position of *Shahīd-i Sādis* (The Sixth Martyr).

ern Shī'ites about who should be the third and fourth martyrs while their South Asian co-religionists are all in agreement about which martyrs are enumerated. Also, this explanation does not answer the question as to why South Asian Shī'ites continue to enumerate martyrs and Middle Eastern Shī'ites do not. I propose that the enumerated martyrs offer a particular paradigmatic model to the Shī'ite Muslims of South Asia; all the richer and more immediate when a Martyr's shrine is local, as is the case of *Shahīd-i Sāliḥ* Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī (buried in Agra). The enumerated martyrs are to be seen as pious individuals who devoted their lives to scholarship and the advocacy of the universal truth of Shī'ite Islam despite the dangers they faced in an environment hostile to such ideas. In the end they made the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. This paradigm is of value for the South Asian Shī'ite community who perceive themselves as a beleaguered religious minority both in Pakistan and in India; their ethos akin to that of the Shī'ite Muslim community throughout much of their history. More importantly, such a paradigm has soteriological benefit when the martyr is seen as a "model" of Imām Ḥusayn and so ritually remembered.

In this article I shall focus on the development of Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī as *Shahīd-i Sāliḥ*. I will show that his designation as *Shahīd-i Sāliḥ* was not simply an insular, conscious fixing of a formalized symbol upon an individual whose historical profile fits the criteria demanded by the symbol. I submit that his designation was, and is, a part of an ongoing, complex process that has at its core the perception and utilization of a multivalent symbol, with its ancillary rituals, by the Shī'ite community of South Asia. In other words, they see Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī as a "model" of Imām Ḥusayn.

What does "model" mean in the above context? The answer to this question may be found in an article which utilizes a unique phenomenological methodology: Earle H. Waugh's "The Popular Muhammad: Models in the Interpretation of an Islamic Paradigm."¹⁴ In this work, Waugh discusses the pitfalls of applying phenomenological methodologies, especially to the subject of Islam. Waugh sees two basic problems that have occurred; both arising from the tendency by many phenomenologists of religions to compile observed phenomena and extract coherent structures with the intention of presenting some of the inner dynamics of the faiths studied. The first problem is that the phenomena that the scholar may have observed and compiled may not be considered truly representative or "orthoprax," if you will, by an individual professing the faith. This, Waugh feels, has led to a reluctance by some scholars to apply such history of religions methodologies to the nominally orthoprax faith of Islam.

¹⁴ In Richard C. Martin, ed. *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985) 41-58.

The second problem with this variety of history of religions methodology is that, as Waugh has it, the patterns discerned by the historian of religion appear to say more about the abstracting abilities of the scholar than they do about the faith itself.

Waugh suggests a solution to the above outlined problems. Instead of extracting coherent structures from observed phenomena, he feels that the historian of religions could instead choose models as the locus of investigation. He indicates that such a methodology is much more applicable to Islam, a faith that has undergone much structural change, not the least of which can be exemplified in the great differences in the Sunni versus Shi'ite ethos. I understand Waugh's perception of a model to be an archetypical frame of reference. He states:

Models. . . are not just imaginary perceptions brought to bear upon unsuspecting data, but insights into the true nature of things which, though they may appear to contradict what is normally held to be true, say something meaningful about the reality from which they arise.¹⁵

Models are then, in his estimate, images of a religious reality that, due to their nature, have a potential to elicit a response from a follower of a particular religious tradition. This may surmount the problems inherent in extracting coherent structures from religious reality.

In his article, Waugh juxtaposes the term 'paradigm' with the term 'model.' The relationship between these two expressions are to be found in his statement,

At the very least the paradigms, those crucial elements of a belief system, are altered in content or in relation to one another within the system.¹⁶

What I gather from this is that a model may be developed from a paradigm. This clarifies the emphasis he puts on the model as an image of religious reality; an image that is alterable. It might become even more clear if the phrase 'paradigmatic model' was used in the context of the model theory that Waugh proposes, keeping in mind that the paradigmatic model is an image created by a follower of a religious tradition.

Waugh applies his model theory to the popular image of the Prophet Muḥammad's life as it has been portrayed at various points in history. This has proved to be extremely edifying for me in regard to approaching the subject of this thesis. Waugh shows how a historical figure (the Prophet Muḥammad) is seen to offer a paradigm to a believing community. An important feature of the paradigmatic model that Waugh identifies is its ability to evolve

¹⁵ Waugh 45.

¹⁶ Waugh 47.

as the community evolves in history, facing new challenges that require the Muslim community to reevaluate its religious resources. This methodology is extremely useful in an attempt to explain the ways in which Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī has been transformed into *Shahīd-i Sālis*, modeled on Imām Ḥusayn. This transformation of Qāzī Nūru'llāh into the paradigmatic *Shahīd-i Sālis* may be found in the sacralization of Qāzī Nūru'llāh and his grave, the accounts of miracles which have occurred at the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sālis* (Shrine of the Third Martyr, Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī), as well as the soteriology of *ziyārat* (visitation) to this shrine. All this has been accomplished through a number of hagiographies of *Shahīd-i Sālis*.

It should be stressed that the mere application of the epithet *Shahīd-i Sāli* was not enough to insure the sacralization of Qāzī Nūru'llāh and his shrine. It was necessary to prove that the individual buried at the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sālis* was an exemplary martyr and thus deserves attention. Therefore it is hardly a coincidence that with the increase in projects to develop and improve the shrine and its environs in the first four decades of this century, there was also a plethora of hagiographies of Qāzī Nūru'llāh being produced. These hagiographies served to popularize Qāzī Nūru'llāh by sanctifying his life and demonstrating why he was enumerated over others who fall in the general category of martyrs. They also may well have served as a form of advertising the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sālis*. Whether some of these hagiographies were commissioned by those in charge of the shrine is open to conjecture. It is known that the author of *Shahīd-i Sālis*, Muḥammad Hādī 'Azīz, was an intimate of the shrine's first *sarparast*, Nāṣir Ḥusayn, and the latter wrote a laudative preface to the 1935 edition of this work.¹⁷ It cannot be argued that Āl-i 'Abā Ja'fri's *Yādgar-i Nūr* also served to advertise the planned program of the newly created *Anjuman-i Yādgar-i Shahīd-i Sālis* (Memorial Society of the Third Martyr).¹⁸

The sacralization of *Shahīd-i Sālis* Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī was accomplished in several ways. One was to present a pious history in which Qāzī Nūru'llāh was a selfless and effective defender of Shī'ite Islam in the face of great dangers. An example of this is to be found in the short work *Shaheed-e-Sālis* distributed by the Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust. The anonymous author of this hagiography offers an embellished account of Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī's migration to India in response to a threat to Islam in the Mughal Emperor Akbar's court,

The religious fancies of Akbar and the intrigues of bigots had puzzled the true lovers of religion. A dark future was lurking for Islam. None could dare to revert or prevent Akbar from these orgies. . . . The only person who took a positive step towards alleviating this pain was Hakim Abul

¹⁷ See Muḥammad Hādī 'Azīz, *Shahīd-i Sālis* (Lucknow: n.p., 1935) preface.

¹⁸ Āl-i 'Abā Ja'fri, *Yādgar-i Nūr*, (Agra: n.p., 1935).

Fatha Gilani. . . [He] calculated the dangers of this situation and extended an invitation to Sayed Noorullah Shoostari.

When the invitation reached Sayed Noorullah he read it and surveyed the situation. He surmised the griefs he would have to suffer and the sacrifices he would have to make. After considering all the consequences he made a firm decision to serve and protect Islam in India and left Shoostar for good. . . Had he not arrived in India at that time Islam would have changed its form in India and Shiaism would have been completely uprooted.¹⁹

This account serves the purpose of having Qāzī Nūru'llāh become a brave *mujāhid* (holy warrior), defending Islam and sure to become a martyr upon his death.

Some hagiographies create a dramatic picture of his martyrdom, filling in unsubstantiated details where history had left off. Most build from an apocryphal story of Qāzī Nūru'llāh as found in Muḥammad 'Alī Kashmīrī's *Nujūm al-Samā'*,

When Jahāngīr succeeded Akbar, Qāzī Nūru'llāh continued to work in his old post. Ultimately some *ūlamā'* who were hostile to him but favourites of Jahāngīr were able to discover that the Qāzī professed the Imāmiyya faith. They complained to the Emperor that he followed the Shī'a Imāmiyya faith, for he did not adhere to anyone of the four schools of jurisprudence and issued decrees only in accordance with that particular school of jurisprudence which suited Imāmiyya faith. The Emperor getting displeased at this conversation said, "This is no proof of his Shī'ism for he was appointed subject to the condition that he would issue decrees in accordance with all the four schools of jurisprudence." Consequently the *ūlamā'*, hostile to him, began to wait for an opportunity to prove him a Shī'a and then to obtain orders for his execution from the Emperor. In pursuance of their objective they devised a trap and sent to the Qāzī one of their own men who posed as a Shī'a and became the Qāzī's disciple. He lived for a long time with the Qāzī and became his favourite. He got scent of *Majālisu'l-mu'minīn*²⁰ and after great efforts and entreaties took the book to his own house, copied it out and secretly passed it on to the *ūlamā'*. Making that work as their instrument, they conclusively proved before the Emperor that the Qāzī was a Shī'a and added that he deserved nothing short of death sentence [sic] for having written such and such objectionable things in it.²¹

One hagiography continues the account in this manner,

¹⁹ *Shaheed-e-Salis*, (Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, n.d.) 37-40.

²⁰ One of Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstari's more important polemical writings.

²¹ Kahmīrī 15-16 as quoted in Rizvi 1:382-3.

... at the Sikandar Lodh Mosque [in Agra] a council of *mullās*²² (*mullās* who had been thirsting for his [Qāzi Nūru'llāh's] blood for some time) sat to decide his fate. They had already received the emperor's permission so what was there to do but to affix their seals to the document calling for the death-sentence. Forty-two seals were affixed; May these seals be burned into the foreheads of those who affixed them! What were the punishments called for?

1. Tongue pulled out through a cut in the upper throat.
2. Molten lead poured down the throat.
3. Whipping with a cat-o-nine-tails.
4. Beheading.²³

Faced with his imminent death, Qāzi Nūru'llāh seeks permission to perform his formal prayers, and,

At this point he requested pen and ink and on a potsherd wrote the following verse from the Qur'an:

Oh Lord, I am helpless! Aid me!²⁴

and threw it into the air. After a bit the potsherd fell before him and written on the other side of it were the words:

If you truly be My servant, suffer patiently.

He then calmly offered his formal prayers. . . .²⁵

All hagiographies agree that after his execution Qāzi Nūru'llāh's body was unceremoniously dumped in an uninhabited spot outside Agra. A few, however, continue with accounts of other miracles, adding to the sanctity of Qāzi Nūru'llāh's martyrdom. One account speaks of a portentous dream had by the emperor Jahāngīr,

One evening Jahāngīr had a dream in which an outraged Prophet Muḥammad said, "The chosen of God are being oppressed during your reign and you do not give permission for the burial of my son Nūru'llāh, even after his murder. Do you wish a Greater Oppression to befall you and destroy your throne and crown? Immediately order that the Mu'minīn [Shī'ites] bury the body of my son Nūru'llāh." The emperor was terrified by these words and bolting out of bed, ran panting from his bedroom. He immediately gave the order, "Proclaim throughout the city that those who are the Qāzi's co-religionists are to proceed with his burial."²⁶

²² Jurists, though colloquially this term carries with it the suggestion of ignorant bigotry.

²³ Saḡhīr Ḥasan, *Saifah-yi Nūr*, (Delhi: Muḍīr Akhbār Iṣnā 'Asharī, 1919) 23.

²⁴ Qur'an 54:10.

²⁵ Ḥasan 27.

²⁶ Shabbīr Ḥasan Muḡsin, *Zikr-i Ḥamīd dar Ahwāl-i Nūru'llāh Shāhīd*, (Lucknow: Maṭba' Iṣnā 'Asharī, 1912) 12-13.

If the intercession of the Prophet Muḥammad was not enough, another tradition has it that,

... a newly arrived Iranian merchant saw Fātimah in a dream and she commanded him, "The body of my son Nūru'llāh lies ignored, without benefit of coffin or internment." Thus informed, the merchant joined in the burial [of Qāzī Nūru'llāh].²⁷

I was told an alternate account that is still current among Shī'ite Muslims—and Hindus—of Agra: Qāzī Nūru'llāh's body laid undiscovered for three days until some herdsmen were drawn to it by the sweet odor that it exuded. They were surprised to discover that the body had not decomposed.²⁸ When the authorities were informed of this miracle, internment was allowed. Another version has it that,

... his corpse was discarded in a place filled with horrible smells where the offal of slaughterhouses and butchers was dumped. But, blood that contains the essence of purity cannot be affected by mundane impurities. The result of this was that where his body laid, all the stench was transformed into a sweet smell. The soul of the martyr displayed its supernatural power. As the odor spread throughout the wilderness, so the news of this miracle spread throughout the city. Large groups of people began to perform pilgrimages to the site.²⁹

I was also told that when Hāmid Ḥusayn (1830–1888) and his brother came from Lucknow to Agra in 1854 to locate the exact spot of Qāzī Nūru'llāh's grave by excavating various spots at the general site, they were able to ascertain its position by a sweet odor that rose from one of the holes,³⁰ relating back to traditions of the odor emanating from the Qāzī's body. The phenomenon of the sweet odor is also found in personal accounts of individuals who have visited the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Ṣāliḥ*. A letter written by Abū Ja'far and published in the April/May 1916 issue of *Risalah-yi Shi'ā* is reproduced below,

I went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of the Third Martyr and at 10:00 AM on a Friday I smelled the odor of fresh apples. Perplexed, I searched around the shrine, thinking that someone must have left some apples about, but I found nothing. I later learned that this was a miracle such as to be found at the shrine of Imām Ḥusayn where people often perceive the smell of apple. So is it at the shrine of this Martyr.

²⁷ Sibṭulḥasan, *Tazkirah-yi Majīd*, (Agra: Mazār-i Shahīd-i Ṣāliḥ, 1979) 115–116.

²⁸ This phenomenon is not limited to Islam alone. As Stephen Wilson states of Christian belief concerning the corpses of saints: "Incorruptibility of the corpse was usually, and still is, taken to be a sign of sanctity, and it is a commonplace of hagiology that saints' bodies give off sweet odours." (Stephen Wilson, "Introduction," *Saints and Their Cults*, [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983] 10.)

²⁹ Ḥasan 28.

³⁰ Sayyid Abū Ṭālib Rizvī, personal interview, Mazār-i Shahīd-i Ṣāliḥ, November 8, 1988.

I was preoccupied with this and spent most of every Friday morning at the shrine. Unfortunately, this phenomenon did not recur. Saturday, January 1, I went to the shrine to do my afternoon prayers. At exactly 1:00 PM I recited a *ziyarat* [liturgical prayer] and was saying my personal prayers when all at once I was struck by a sweet odor. I was shocked for a short while and then came to the conclusion that the odor was probably coming from the flowers that people had strewn upon the grave. However, the more I thought about it, the more I became certain that this was not the odor of flowers but in fact that of apples. At that point I also included Qāzī Nūru'llāh in my prayers.³¹

Mahmoud Ayoub gives an account of the significance of the smell of apple as it is to be found at the shrine of Imām Ḥusayn,

One day as the two little boys [Imāms Ḥasan and Ḥusayn] were prancing around the angel [Gabriel, God's emissary to the Prophet Muḥammad], he stretched out his hand as though reaching for something, and handed them an apple, a pomegranate and a quince. The Prophet told them to take the fruits and share them with their parents. He later joined them and they all ate of the fruit; but whatever they ate was miraculously replaced. Thus the three fruits of paradise remained as they were after the death of the Prophet, and neither changed nor diminished until Fātimah died. With her death the pomegranate disappeared. Ḥusayn, the authority of this tradition, said that when his father 'Alī was martyred, the quince also disappeared, but the apple remained as it had been. So when Ḥasan was poisoned, only the original apple remained: it was in Ḥusayn's possession, but the tradition implied that it had lost the power to multiply itself. Ḥusayn used to smell it whenever he faced hardship and found in it much consolation and relief. When he was prevented from reaching the waters of the Euphrates at Karbalā', he smelled it both for relief and to quench his thirst. An hour before he died, his son 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn saw him biting it in desperation, a sign that his death was near. After his father's death, he sought the apple but could not find any trace of it. He asserted, however, that its sweet fragrance continued to emanate from his father's tomb, and only the sincere follower of the Holy Family can smell it before dawn.³²

This tradition of the smell of apples at the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sālis*, drawn, as it were, from the reservoir of images contained within the paradigm of Ḥusayn, implies an equivalency of both the shrine of Qāzī Nūru'llāh and the shrine of Ḥusayn. This implicit linkage of the two shrines is not limited to miraculous smells. An interesting account is to be found in Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nawgānwī's *Taẓkirah-yi Bī Bahā fi Tarājim al-'Ulamā'* that the author re-

³¹ Muḥsin, 20-21.

³² Ayoub 45-46.

produces from the April 15, 1919 issue of the newspaper *Isnā Ashari* that was published in Delhi. One Abū Jaʿfar relates,

For many months this year I suffered from piles and could find no medical relief. I then humbly sought a cure at his [Qāzī Nūruʿllāh Shūstari’s] shrine. One Friday, when I was walking away from the cenotaph, my heart was suddenly filled with an unexplained joy. I addressed the cenotaph, saying, “I have been here for two months but as of yet my entreaties have not been answered. At the same time my heart is at peace, although my illness continues.” And my affliction continued, though I remained uncomplaining. Then a friend from Shahabād in Bihar requested some soil from the grave of the Qāzī. I spoke with the *khādīm* who said, “Take some [ashes] from the censer.” I informed the *khādīm* that this would not do and the real thing was the best. That night I had a dream in which I saw an Irānī gentleman standing at the head of the grave. He took a pinch of ash from the censer and gave it to me, saying, “This will cure all manner of illnesses.”³³

In the above report, Abū Jaʿfar relates that a friend had requested that he obtain some soil from the Qāzī’s grave but in the end was advised in a dream by a figure—the implication being that it was Qāzī Nūruʿllāh himself—that ashes from the censer in the shrine had the actual miraculous healing powers. This concept of the soil of Qāzī Nūruʿllāh’s grave, or for that matter, ashes from the shrine’s censer, having miraculous powers of healing might be inordinate if the concept was not already imbedded in the Shīʿite consciousness. The source of this notion is *sayyid al-shuhadāʾ* Ḥusayn and the place of his martyrdom, Karbalāʾ. As Ayoub explains,

... the sanctity of Karbalāʾ rendered its soil a course of blessing and healing... Many traditions enjoin the faithful to apply the sacred soil to their sick members, or to drink it mixed with water in case of internal ailment.³⁴

Dwight Donaldson, who was at Karbalāʾ in the early 1930s, witnessed a brisk trade in clay tablets made from the soil there. Commenting on Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisi’s treatise, *Tuhfāt al-Zāʾirīn* (A Gift for Pilgrims) he states,

This book specifies very particularly that it is only the clay from the sacred area around the tomb of the Imam Husain that has healing properties. The seventh Imam, Musa ibn Jaʿfar, is said to have declared that people should not take the clay from his grave, or from the graves of any of the other Imams, except only the grave of the Imam Husain, for he maintained that God had given that particular clay healing value for the

³³ Muḥammad Ḥusayn Nawgānwī, *Tagkirah-yi Bi Bahāʾ fi Tarājīm al-ʿUlamāʾ*, (Delhi: n.p., 1934) 415.

³⁴ Ayoub 182.

Shī'ites and their friends. . . [and] the eighth Imam, Ali Riḍa, said, "To eat the clay from a tomb is generally forbidden, for it is like eating the blood of a corpse, except in the case of the Imam Husain, when it is a remedy for every disease."³⁵

Accordingly, the content of Abū Ja'far's dream is quite correct in its stipulation that the ashes of a censer are more fit than the soil from Qāzī Nūru'llāh's grave. Behind all the action of Abū Ja'far's account is an implicit understanding that there must be some link between the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sāliḥ* and the shrine of Ḥusayn at Karbalā' in terms of the mechanism of miracle.

With the possible equivalency of the two shrines, the soteriological implications of performing *ziyārat* to the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sāliḥ* are a necessary consideration not ignored in the hagiographical literature concerning Qāzī Nūru'llāh Shūstārī. A study of this does require a discussion of the soteriological implications of *ziyārat* in Shī'ite Islam.

The soteriological value (most often termed *ṣawāb*, or 'merit') of a visitation to the graves of the Imāms, including Ḥusayn's, is well known to most—if not all—Shī'ite Muslims. Ayoub brings together several traditions that directly address the *ṣawāb* of *ziyārat* to the shrine of Ḥusayn at Karbalā', some moderate, some extreme. The more moderate traditions place Karbalā' on par with Mecca as a terminus of pilgrimage. In one tradition, the fourth Imām, Zayn al-Ābidīn, states,

God made the spot of Karbalā' a sacred and safe *ḥaram*³⁶ 24,000 years before he created the earth of the *Ka'bah*³⁷ and made it a sacred and secure *ḥaram*. When, moreover, God (exalted be He) shall cause the earth to quake and be melted [on Judgement Day], Karbalā' shall be lifted up as it is, luminous and pure, and placed in the highest gardens of paradise. It shall be made the most exalted above wherein only prophets and apostles shall dwell.³⁸

More extreme traditions go as far as to place Karbalā' above Mecca as a religiously charged locus due to the former being the site of the martyrdom and burial of Ḥusayn. The sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Šādiq, relates a tradition that has God speaking to the spot on which the *Ka'bah* rests,

Had it not been for the sake of him whom the earth of Karbalā' contains I would never have created thee or the house on which thou pridest thyself. Be quiet therefore and hold thy peace, be a humble earth, meek

³⁵ Dwight Donaldson, *The Shi'ite Religion* (London: Luzac & Company, 1933) 90.

³⁶ *Ḥaram* in of itself means sacred precinct.

³⁷ The cubical building in Mecca; the *axis mundi* of Islam.

³⁸ Ja'far ibn Muhammad bin Qawlawayh al-Qummī, *Kamāl al-Ziyārat*, ed. Mirzā 'Abdullāh al-Ḥusayn al-Amānī al-Tabrizī, (Najaf: Murazawīyyah, 1937), 263 as quoted in Ayoub 81.

and humiliated before the spot of Karbalā', or I will cause thee to melt and be thrown into the fire of hell!³⁹

With Karbalā' having a higher status than Mecca, it is not surprising that soteriologically *ziyārat* to Karbalā' is greater than performing the *Ḥajj* to Mecca. Traditions also exist that speak directly of this. They, too, run the gamut of moderate to extreme. The basic soteriology of *ziyārat* is found in a conversation between the Prophet Muḥammad and his grandson Ḥusayn,

. . . O father, what shall be the reward of those who visit our graves, scattered as they will be in the earth? (The Prophet answered) These will be the men and women of my community who would make pilgrimage to your grave seeking blessing by this act. It will be incumbent upon me to seek them out on the Day of Resurrection and save them from the awful fears of that hour and from all their transgressions: and God would cause them to dwell in paradise.⁴⁰

Confronted with the *ṣawāb* of *ziyārat* to the shrine of Ḥusayn at Karbalā' as well as the incumbency of *Ḥajj* to Mecca, Shī'ite Muslims needed some comparative valuation of the two. Ayoub relates two traditions that address this need,

To a certain man who came on a pilgrimage to the grave of Ḥusayn from far-off Yemen for no reason but to visit the sacred tomb and offer supplications to God, the Sixth *Imām* [Ja'far al-Ṣādiq] declared that one pilgrimage to the tomb of Ḥusayn equals 30 pilgrimages [*hajjs*] in the company of the Apostle of God [Muḥammad], with all their rites of *umrah*, the lesser pilgrimage. . . . The fifth *Imām*, al-Bāqir, was even more generous than his son. He declared in a long dialogue with one of his followers that one pilgrimage to Karbalā' on the day of *Āshūrā'*⁴¹ is equal to a thousand *Ḥajj* pilgrimages and an equal number of engagements in the holy war with the prophets.⁴²

About the same figures are given in a tradition that is to be found in *Tuḥfat al-Āwām*, a religious manual for Shī'ites that is available throughout South Asia. In this, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq quantifies the *ṣawāb* of *ziyārat* to Karbalā' at, ". . . a thousand *Ḥajjs*, a thousand *umrahs*, and a thousand *jihāds* with the Prophet."⁴³

The implicit linkage of the two shrines in the sphere of the miraculous has been discussed above. The soteriological linkage is surprisingly explicit as can be seen in the following tradition:

³⁹ Ibn Qawlawayh 267 as quoted in Ayoub 182.

⁴⁰ Ibn Qawlawayh 52 as quoted in Ayoub 184.

⁴¹ The death anniversary of Ḥusayn.

⁴² Ayoub 188.

⁴³ *Tuḥfat al-Āwām*, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, ed., 14th ed. (Lucknow: Tej Kumār Press, Pvt Ltd, 1975) 299.

THE MERIT OF PERFORMING A PILGRIMAGE TO THE QĀZĪ'S TOMB

It is commonly known that a young man, a resident of an Agra suburbs, departed for Karbalā' to perform a pilgrimage to the shrine of Imām Ḥusayn. He left behind his old and infirm mother. After arriving in Karbalā', he had no desire to return home. His mother (and it is said his family) was so disturbed by his absence that they lamented day and night, attending majlis-s, clutching standards, pulpits, and representations of Ḥusayn's tomb, praying that he be returned to them. In this way a year passed. Then one night the young man was visited by Imām Ḥusayn in a dream who told him, "Your mother and family are sorely troubled by your absence. Return home and gladden their hearts." The young man awoke but considered the dream just that and said nothing of it. The next night he again saw Imām Ḥusayn in a dream and again received the same command. However the young man still considered this a mere dream. On the third night Imām Ḥusayn again came to him in a dream, commanding him to return to his homeland. This time the young man submitted, "I humbly accept your Holiness's command and shall return to my homeland on the morrow. However, I am grieved that I shall be distanced from your holy grave and be deprived of the merit of this pilgrimage." Hearing this, the Imām retorted, "The shrine of Qāzī Nūrullāh is in India. Performing a pilgrimage to the shrine of this descendent of mine in Agra will avail you the same merit as a pilgrimage to my own," and he passed on the signs that would show the location of the grave. Till then the young man was ignorant of the Qāzī's name. He returned to his homeland and rejoined his family and destitute mother, telling them of his dream. His mother, following the signs given by the Prince of the Martyrs and relayed by her son, went to the shrine of the Qāzī and found all to be accurate. She received the blessing of being a pilgrim. After she passed away she was buried near the shrine of Qāzī Nūrullāh.⁴⁴

The idea of visiting the shrine of Qāzī Nūrullāh instead of the shrine of Ḥusayn at Karbalā' is still current in the minds of many Shī'ites in India. Once at the *Mazār-i Shahīd-i Sālis*, I spoke with three businessmen from Bombay who had stopped off in Agra while on the way to Delhi. Upon my enquiry as to why they were visiting the shrine, one replied, "We cannot afford the trip to Karbalā', so we come here."

Conclusion

A paradigm such as Ḥusayn necessarily carries with it a universal vocabulary of symbols that are accessed through particular images; images

⁴⁴ Muḥsin, 19-20.

that refer to episodes in his sacred biography. Because of Ḥusayn's penultimate position as *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'*, the reservoir of images connected with his paradigm is drawn from to embellish the sacred biographies—both oral and written—of other martyrs who have followed him. When these images appear within the biographies of other martyrs, the audience is immediately taken back to the image's source, i.e. Ḥusayn, and the martyr at hand fades into the background. It might also be said that in one respect the martyr's paradigm is a model, in every sense of the word, of the paradigm of Ḥusayn and serves as a point of access to the latter. This has been the case with *Shahīd-i Sālis Qāzī Nūrullāh Shūstārī*. His evolution from a historical figure, to an Enumerated Martyr, and finally, to a model of Ḥusayn has been a natural process within the Shī'ite ethos of South Asia.

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