

## Remembering Shaheed al-Sadr

Monday, 05 April 2010 13:08 **Maulana Sayyid Ali Murtaza Zaidi**



If we want to talk about Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's personality, we could very easily say that he was without any doubt a genius, without a doubt a personality who was ahead of his time! If in the worldly sense we call Einstein a genius, or before him it is said that Leonardo Da Vinci was a genius, in the same sense we could very easily say with the complete consensus of the religious scholars that Shaheed al-Sadr was a man much ahead of his time.

Shaheed al-Sadr lived for 45 years, which according to the average life span of our scholars (*ulama*) is a very short period of time. In 45 years, anyone studying Islam is still considered "young". But in these 45 short years, Shaheed al-Sadr revolutionized the academic and political aspects of his society in a way that very few do. Very rarely do personalities such as Shaheed al-Sadr's appear in history. Rarely does anyone have such an impact in such a short period of time, at such a young age, and at a time that was one of the worst in the history of Islam.

Saddam led one of the most brutal and tyrannical reigns in the history of the world. It was in this time that Shaheed al-Sadr raised his voice. In this time, he established a political process. Establishing a political process requires sacrifice, and the way in which Shaheed al-Sadr sacrificed, the way in which he did his work, in an environment where there was no energy for it, no strength for it – he rose up in that environment and tried to lift a nation from zero. He did that all alone with exceptional bravery. In his personality, everything was amazingly impressive, especially in the sense that he was doing all these activities while he was at the level of a *Marja Taqleed*. Being at that position, he sacrificed in a way that when he was put under house arrest, there was no food at his house at times.

### **Early Life and Education**

The Shaheed was born on March 1, 1935 and was martyred on April 9, 1980. He was 45 at the time. Shaheed al-Sadr was born into the Sadr family. This family is Kadhimi by descent, and he was born in Kadhimiyya. At the age of 10, he went to the holy city of Najaf. Shaheed al-Sadr, like Imam Khomeini, had suffered the pain of being an orphan. He lost his father at the age of two. In those ambiguous times, it is uncertain if his father was also martyred. We don't have much information about how he passed away, but regardless, his death in 1937 left Shaheed al-Sadr an orphan. Shaheed al-Sadr was under the care of some great scholars of the time from his well known Sadr family.

Haider al-Sadr was the name of the father of Shaheed al-Sadr. He was considered among the God-conscious and pious scholars. Shaheed al-Sadr studied under various teachers in Najaf. Among his teachers were Ayatollah Sayyid Abul Qasim al-Khoei and Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim. At the age of 25, he himself started teaching at the level of *Ijtihad*. Truly a great achievement! That is, not only was he a *Mujtahid* himself, but he was teaching other scholars to become Mujtahids at such a young age. Basically, at the age that most students become capable of attending *Dars al-Kharij*, Shaheed al-Sadr was teaching Dars al-Kharij! He wrote *Our Philosophy*, which we will talk about a little later, at the age of 24.

Sometimes I feel that his personality is parallel to Imam Khomeini's. The influence of these two personalities was fairly similar. Imam Khomeini wrote his book *Forty Hadith* at the age of 24, and Shaheed al-Sadr wrote *Our Philosophy* at the same age; although Shaheed al-Sadr was much younger during the time of Imam Khomeini.

Shaheed al-Sadr was also, in some sense, lucky to have some great students. In a very short period of time, he raised some great scholars under his teaching. He raised scholars who became world renowned for their intellectual and political achievements. Sayyid Baqir al-Hakim was among Shaheed al-Sadr's students. Sayyid Kadhim Haeiri, who is considered among the top scholars of Iraq, was also his student. Another of his students was Sayyid Kamal al-Haideri, who is currently considered to be among the great teachers of the *Hawza*. Perhaps studying the books of Shaheed al-Sadr was the reason for my personal attachment to his personality such as *Our Philosophy* and *Our Economy*. Another reason could be that I have had the immense honor of being a student of all these three personalities, the students of Shaheed al-Sadr. This also contributed to my strong connection with him.

Sayyid Kamal al-Haideri once told us that a panel of university teachers came to Ayatollah al-Udhma al-Khoei and told him that the education system at the Hawza is not strong. Ayatollah Khoei asked them if their university has a better, more effective system. They said that we graduate PhDs from our university. Sayyid Khoei asked how many PhDs are graduated from their university. They said even if one PhD graduates, that is enough for the university. In response, Sayyid Khoei said that I will introduce you to one of my students.

You may invite all your PhDs to question him about any field that they feel they have expertise in. Without any hesitation, Sayyid Khoei called for Shaheed al-Sadr. Sayyid Khoei challenged them to a debate and claimed that they would not find anyone more knowledgeable in any field more than Shaheed al-Sadr – ask him about mathematics, geography, philosophy, history, any field in which you possess expertise. If you think you have mastery over the social sciences such as economics, politics, psychology, or any other field, bring them on the table. You will realize the true command and mastery Shaheed al-Sadr has over all these fields!

### **The Halaqaat**

So let us now begin to talk of Shaheed al-Sadr's intellectual works. Shaheed al-Sadr's method of working on a topic was that he would never use a pattern or foundation built by someone else. None of his works are like that. If you study any of his works, you will realize that he has never worked on a foundation built by others before him.

Let us first look at his works in principles of jurisprudence (*Ilm al-Usul*). This is one of the most fundamental subjects taught to the students of the seminary in which they learn how to derive laws. He wrote a book in this field called *Halaqaat al-Usool*. The reason why he wrote this book was that the syllabus for *Ilm al-Usul* was very academic and scholarly. It was like assigning Louis Pasteur's book to an undergraduate student of chemistry. Instead, Shaheed al-Sadr really simplified this field.

When I was a student in the seminary, these *Halaqaat* were still new to the syllabus. So we had the chance of comparing the old syllabus with Shaheed al-Sadr's work to see what new ideas Shaheed al-Sadr brought to the table. When we read Shaheed al-Sadr's work, we truly understood what authority, power, and uniqueness this series had. He presented some of the

most profound ideas in so few words. Even today this book is used in the seminaries of Najaf and Qom.

### **Our Economy and Our Philosophy**

Shaheed al-Sadr's academic achievements came at a time when the Hawza was weak in the eyes of the world. Communism was at a height in Iraq. In his book *Iqtisaduna* (Our Economy), Shaheed al-Sadr gives references of Communist and socialist philosophers. Some books were such they were available in Russian and Arabic only. There wasn't even a copy of those books in English. From this, you can imagine at what level the Communists and the socialists worked on the Arab society. There wasn't any fundamental book of Communism and socialism, no matter how profound and deep, that was not translated in Arabic.

Another evidence of their efforts on the Arab community was that they made *Ba'ath* parties in many Arab countries, even though they were not always very organized. Each Ba'ath party worked separately in its respective area. There were branches of the Ba'ath party in Syria, Iraq, Jordan, even in Lebanon. *Ba'ath* means to stand up to perform an action. Obviously, this *Ba'ath* was for the Shaitan, not for God. The Baath Party was very academic in their efforts. They used to present socialism in great depth and the people who learned socialism in Iraq learned it extensively and in great depth.

Since the most fundamental and deep books of Communism were translated in Arabic and were in circulation among the general masses, the general people would criticize Islam from the lens of those books. At the time, there were no outstanding scholars in the Hawza who could respond to these criticisms and solve the confusions in the young minds.

Shaheed al-Sadr began his mission here. At the age of 24, he wrote *Falsafatuna* (Our Philosophy). When we used to study *Falsafatuna*, we used to say that this book does not deal with Islamic philosophy at all. It deals with everything but Islamic philosophy. He chose *Our Philosophy* as the title of his book but in reality this was a criticism on the Eastern and Western philosophies. For example, what Communists say in their philosophy, he criticized it. What the Western Capitalists say, he criticized it. What their philosophy tells us, he criticized it. And even in philosophy, he basically touched on one area. There is one field that has a very important position in philosophy that he presented in a special way.

That topic of philosophy is what we call *Ilm al-Marifa* (epistemology or the theory of knowledge). This topic is something that you might say is the first topic in philosophy. It is a debate on the question: How do we know what we see is reality? For example, if I look at something and say that its color is black, how can I prove that this thing is, in reality, black? An average observer will say, well that is obvious. You can 'see' that it's black. But the discussion is not whether we can see if a thing is black or not. The discussion is on how we prove that what we are seeing is correct.

This is where we get into the topic of *Ilm al-Marifa* or *shanakht shanasi* (in Farsi) – the debate on how to prove what we know and what we have learned is valid. That is, is this knowledge correct or incorrect? There are many thoughts and arguments on this that philosophers have written. Their main focus was to prove that human mind is not capable of understanding reality. Even if people understand something, it's a subjective knowledge, which cannot be proven in an objective way. That is what they wanted. Why? If you prove that God exists and they cannot refute your argument, they will say, you believe in God because you are a Muslim, and that's why you make such arguments, and in response, they

will say that God does not exist. And you cannot refute that because all knowledge is subjective. Such a skeptic view becomes possible once they are able to de-value the possibility of verifying objective knowledge.

Shaheed al-Sadr, Shaheed Mutahhari, and Allama Tabatabai and the like – these philosophers were known as Realist Philosophers. Their job was to prove that what a human mind knows is reality. There is an in-depth discussion on this in *Our Philosophy*. The works of scholars of socialism and Communism, even those of Chinese socialists like Mao Zedong, are included, studied, and ultimately proven wrong in *Our Philosophy*.

Now, let's consider his other book, *Our Economy*. In it he talks about Islamic economics. If you were to go anywhere in the world and ask anyone, Shia, Sunni, Muslim, or non-Muslim, about the best book on Islamic economics – it has been 30 years since Shaheed al-Sadr's martyrdom, but without any doubt or hesitation, they will say that there is no book like *Our Economy*.

When the curriculum of the Islamic economics department of the Islamic University in Islamabad, Pakistan, was being designed, an Egyptian scholar suggested using *Our Economy* as the basis. When the Saudi scholars immediately rejected the suggestion of using a book from a Shia scholar, the Egyptian scholar challenged them to suggest another book for the curriculum. There was not another book that could be presented as an alternative. This is proof of the fact that when Shaheed al-Sadr wrote *Our Economy*, there was not even a single book on the topic of Islamic economics with comparable caliber!

*Our Economy* is a wonderful book. Shaheed al-Sadr first tried to dismantle socialist economics. In doing so, he had to discuss socialist philosophy, more specifically the aspect known as Dialectic Materialism. Socialism had constructed five stages of human history – when humans first appeared, they had a certain type of economic system, then it changed into agriculture, then capitalism, and now is the time for socialism, and next stage will be that of communism. They argued this was inevitable. The main point here was Dialectic Materialism.

Shaheed al-Sadr wrote exhaustive comments on each and every aspect of this philosophy. He commented on both Dialectic Materialism and Determinism. He would always start by explaining what the people opposing him were saying. First, he would describe socialism from the point of view of its proponents. If they are talking about Dialectic Materialism, he will talk about what it really means and its true interpretation. So much so that a student of Shaheed al-Sadr told me that the socialists of Iraq took material from Shaheed al-Sadr's description of socialist thought and printed a separate book. They would give that book to other socialists to learn socialism from, since it was best explained there!

Shaheed al-Sadr would build up socialism so strongly, then when he would begin countering those arguments he would shred them to pieces. That's the beauty of this book. Another interesting point about Shaheed al-Sadr's *Our Economy* is that in the beginning, he said that there are two ways of attaining true knowledge of Islamic economics. We will have to adopt one of the two paths. We can come up with the theory, and when God allows us the opportunity, we'll put it into practice – at that time, the Islamic republic had not been established. So he said, let us come up with the theory (*Ilm*), and when God allows, we'll put in practice.

The other way is to wait and see if perhaps God would grant us a government. Then we would implement these principles one by one according to the wishes of Islam. If we do so, in about 50-60 years we'll have the complete system. God granted his second wish: a government was established where slowly and one by one some of these economic principles are being implemented. Those people who criticize and say why the Islamic economic system has not been established after 30 years – systems like these don't come about in 25-30 years! Capitalism struggled for 200 years before it took the form of a system. We will have to give this system time and give many sacrifices in its way to even partially establish the true Islamic economic system.

Another book Shaheed al-Sadr wrote on Islamic economics was called *Bank La Rabbawi Fil Islam* (Islamic Banking without Interest). The story of that book is as follows. The government of Kuwait realized that the money they were getting from the profits made from the oil industry is being invested by interest. They wanted to find a way to avoid paying interest. In order to answer this question, they organized a conference of Muslim scholars. Shaheed al-Sadr was also invited, as were many of the Saudi scholars. The Saudi scholars did their level best to stop Shaheed al-Sadr from coming. As a result, the invitation given to Shaheed al-Sadr was revoked. Shaheed al-Sadr was disappointed, but he wrote a book and sent it to conference. They managed to stop Shaheed al-Sadr from coming, but they couldn't stop the book from reaching the conference. When the book was reviewed at the conference, there was no book even closely of the same caliber. The whole conference had to acknowledge that he should have been present at the conference.

Such was his personality! He made up his mind to work on a new concept and wrote a book about it with an entirely new approach. Now just imagine: this man was sitting in the streets of Najaf, where he did not have access to any banks. He had no access to any international banks and apparently should not have had any insight in the banking system of the world. And yet he wrote a book on banking, took up a unique topic, and till now the world is baffled at his genius.

### **Interpretation of the Qur'an**

Shaheed al-Sadr did some work in the exegesis or interpretation of the Qur'an (*Tafsir*) as well. Before starting on the actual Tafsir, he divided Tafsir into two types. One of these he called Tafsir by sequence, in which you work on Tafsir one verse after another in sequence. The other kind of Tafsir is Tafsir by topic (or topical or thematic Tafsir). According to this method, you compile a Tafsir by analyzing how the Qur'an as a whole deals with this topic. He gave preference to Topical Tafsir.

The topic he chose was such that very few scholars have looked into it. What was the topic? He said he wanted to know which Divine laws govern societies. He wanted to know which laws rule over societies. So he wrote a book of Tafsir on this topic. Fortunately, this book has been translated into Urdu, Farsi, English, and various other languages.

Even more interesting is the fact that his *Taudhihul Masail* (the book of legal Islamic rulings) was also written in a unique fashion. He did not start it from the point that it is obligatory on every adult Muslim to do Taqleed. Instead, he chose to begin that book from the fundamentals of belief (*Aqa'id*). "Why should we live our lives according to the religion of Allah" – this is where he started from! He devoted almost 70-80 pages of the Arabic edition on this topic.

### **Historiography of Fadak**

Shaheed al-Sadr had a very deep respect for the Ahlul Bayt (peace be upon them). He used to spend hours thinking and pondering at the shrine of Imam Ali (peace be upon him). According to a source, when due to unfavorable conditions of the time Shaheed al-Sadr did not come to Imam Ali's shrine for a few days, the Imam appeared in the dream of a respected scholar and asked him to inquire from Shaheed al-Sadr as to why he had not been coming to Imam's lecture. The meaning and symbolism of this dream show the great source of Shaheed al-Sadr's very high intellectual caliber.

Expressing his deep respect for Lady Fatima Zahra (peace be upon her), he wrote the book *Fadak fi Tareekh* (Fadak in History). The book examines the issues and the circumstances in which Lady Fatima stood up and spoke truth to power. Shaheed al-Sadr wrote the book in his characteristically cogent and accessible style. I think he felt being indebted to Sayyeda and wanted to serve her, and he felt that elaborating and defending her cause may be the best way to do that, knowing that some great scholars of his time will be attracted to his book, and maybe his book on this issue will open the closed files of Sayyeda's case in the eyes of those scholars.

### **Social and Political Activism**

Shaheed al-Sadr was one of those scholars who did not limit himself to the field of knowledge. He considered himself responsible for the lives of his fellow man. He took upon himself the responsibilities of the society. He had to face the system of the tyrant Saddam.

Sayyid Kamal Haideri once told us that he went to meet Shaheed al-Sadr when he was in house arrest. He would give only a few people the permission to meet him. Kamal Haideri said to Shaheed al-Sadr that he would give the ultimate sacrifice, but it would bear no fruit in this land. Iraq will not rise up. Everyone knew that Shaheed al-Sadr had the intention of sacrificing himself for the cause. Sayyid Kamal says that Shaheed al-Sadr summed his intentions to him in one sentence, a strange sentence: "Every nation requires a Hussain for the revolution to come." Every nation has to shed the pure blood of a Hussain. They would have to give a sacrifice. He agreed to be the Hussain of his era. He knew they would not rise immediately, but their children would rise after him. His blood would bear fruit!

Shaheed al-Sadr knew that his blood would not be spilled in vain. He would give sacrifice, and slowly but surely, the youth will awaken. Those youth will grow old. I met and spent time with the Iraqis during 1987-89. In those 2-3 years I spent a lot of time with Iraqis. At that time, it had been eight years since his martyrdom. At that time, the youth were starting to wake up from their sleep of apathy. At that time, the youth's consciousness and sense of self-respect was awakening. People who worked with Shaheed al-Sadr realized then what a great loss they had suffered by losing him.

Shaheed al-Sadr was a man of action. *Islamic Dawa Party* (Hizb ud-Daa'wa), the group that he was associated with, was created by people before him. It was created in 1957 by some very notable and pious people. Shaheed al-Sadr started giving his full support and tried his level best to make it intellectually strong around 1968 when he joined it.

While working for Islamic Dawa Party, he used to publish a magazine called *Risalat al-Islamiyah* (The Message of Islam). In a very short time, that magazine was banned. The articles that he wrote for that magazine were compiled and published as a book called *Risalatuna* (Our Message).

This book talks a lot about social work or activism, that is, how we are supposed to continue our societal efforts. How we should work in our societies, what methods we should use, what was done in various societies when Shiism came there, how those efforts were continued, etc. It is a very good book for someone who wants to look at some of the fundamental principles of how to do work for the society. He analyzed the basic aspects of Shiism and laid out certain goals for the communities to work on.

### **Khilafat al-Ummah**

Shaheed al-Sadr held a view in political matters which was called *Khilafat al-Ummah*. The Western thinkers are always trying to show how two philosophers have opposing views. So they made up a false contradiction that they claimed existed between *Khilafat al-Ummah* and the concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih*. Anyhow, these allegations were rubbish.

What Shaheed al-Sadr meant by *Khilafat al-Ummah* was that Allah has made human beings His vicegerent on Earth. He said that mankind will live up to that oath and that position once their leadership comes into the hands of one who knows the *Deen* (religion). In other words, if humans want to strive towards upholding his position as the vicegerent of Allah, the leadership of the society must be in the hands of a pious individual, a scholar of law (*Faqih*). This concept of Leadership of the Islamic Nation is derived from the fact that Allah is the ultimate leader of everything (*Khilafat al-Ilahiyah*). To become the *Khalifa* (vicegerent) of Allah, you must be steadfast on the Path of Allah.

When Shaheed al-Sadr brought this idea to the forefront, he saw that Imam Khomeini was the ideal personality who was completely fits this view. Therefore, it was as if he had chosen Imam Khomeini. When Imam Khomeini was in Iraq, very few scholars were bold enough to come and sit next to him. They knew that if they sat next to him, neither Saddam nor the Shah of Iran would let them live. But Shaheed al-Sadr had the courage to still do it. Wherever Imam Khomeini was present, Shaheed al-Sadr would not be far behind, and only he had the courage to do so among so many scholars of the time. Not only that, he would acknowledge and give his entire support to Imam Khomeini. He used to say: *Zubbu fi Khomeini, kama zabba huwa fil Islam*. (Dissolve in Khomeini, just like Khomeini dissolved in Islam.)

He stood at the frontlines to sacrifice and invite the whole of Iraq to follow Imam Khomeini's example. The reason for that was perhaps the fact that Iraq was the country that had the potential to be most influenced by Imam Khomeini's views. Perhaps that is why the enemies started the war in Iraq.

Anyhow, the work that Shaheed al-Sadr began didn't stop after him. The Islamic Dawa Party continued the good work. They say that the followers of Imam Hussain after his martyrdom didn't find any desire to live. In a similar manner, the followers of Shaheed al-Sadr felt that the spirit of their lives was no more there.

People truly loved this great personality. They understood the meaning of his name and were ready to give their lives for him. In 1970, the Islamic Dawa Party became stronger under the leadership of Shaheed al-Sadr. In 1972, the government banned his magazine. In 1973-74, the Baathi government cracked down on the party and martyred 75 of Islamic Dawa Party's top leaders. In 1977, the Party was banned, as well as the Arbreen procession it used to organize every year. In 1980, it became clear that the government was going to try to kill Shaheed al-Sadr. On many occasions, he was taken to prison and then released. He was continuously

being tortured. There wasn't a moment in which he wasn't going through severe torture – mentally, physically, and psychologically. Usually, when Shaheed al-Sadr would be in jail, his sister Bint al-Huda would mobilize people and continue the work in his absence.

### **His Martyrdom**

In February of 1980, Shaheed al-Sadr was taken to prison for the last time. It was decided that he should be killed along with Bint al-Huda. There were things that happened to the women in the prisons that I cannot even describe, because it would be too shameful and embarrassing for me to do so. Not one or two cases, tens of thousands of cases. By God, the true nature of Saddam's atrocities has not been revealed to the world yet.

Bint al-Huda was taken with Shaheed al-Sadr to such a prison. Saddam gave orders to have both of them killed. Someone very close to Saddam asked him to kill Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr, but to spare Bint al-Huda. Saddam said, "Kill the brother and let the sister live? Should I make the same blunder that Yazeed did?!"

We say to him, Yes, you have still made the same mistake, O Saddam, that Yazeed did! He thought that once Imam Hussain was dead, that was it. You think you won? This is history. Shaheed al-Sadr did not misunderstand history. He knew that his blood would bear fruits. When Saddam was hanged, there was only one chant that was heard: "Long Live Shaheed al-Sadr!"

Why wouldn't his blood produce effects?! Pious, God-conscious, Marja', scholar, knowledge, and Taqwa, he had all of that and more. Why wouldn't his blood produce the results?! The blood had to show its effects. And wait and see, the effects of his blood are still revealing themselves. This is only the beginning. This is only the beginning of the journey of love. This is only the beginning of the victory. There is still much to come.

Those who refused to help Shaheed al-Sadr have been debased in this world and are still being disgraced. And those who were among his supporters have been honored and are still remembered highly. Sayyid Baqir al-Hakim was among his supporters. He was one of Shaheed al-Sadr's close students; therefore, he got the highest honor of martyrdom. "One who will support us will receive martyrdom, one who will not support us will never get honor," the Chief of Martyrs Imam Hussain said to the people of Medina. Shaheed al-Sadr's message was the same.

How was Shaheed al-Sadr martyred? Most probably, after inhumane torture, he was killed by hammering nails through his skull. His and his sister's bodies were then set aflame. After that, their bodies were released to his family. In the same darkness of the night, they were buried.

### **The Legacy of Shaheed al-Sadr**

We have many sentiments and emotions about the Iraqi nation. But I am telling you with firm conviction that the Iraqi nation has their own way, their own direction, and they are moving towards a specific destination. They will continue moving towards that direction. Behind the apparent troubles, inflictions, and problems of the Iraqi nation is a hidden movement. There is a very positive force behind the scenes.

In my own view, I think we should understand the situation in two layers – one layer that is apparent and the other layer which is hidden. On the surface – the first layer – people would appear to be humiliated. But those who are part of the hidden layer would become the people



of honor and dignity. Somehow we have to reach that hidden layer and learn from them. Learn from them the price of honor and glory. Iraq teaches us many lessons but in its unique way. The person looking at the apparent state of affairs will not attain any good lessons. But the one who takes lessons from the hidden layer will earn a great lesson. That layer has courage, martyrdom, power of selflessness, sacrifice, and by the power of Allah, their names are high and honored, like the name of Shaheed al-Sadr.

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<http://www.islamicinsights.com/religion/clergy-corner/remembering-shaheed-al-sadr.html>