

Chapter 4: Imam al-Sadiq ('a) and the Issue of Vicegerency (Session 2)

As was mentioned in the previous session, the Imam who encountered the issue of ruling and caliphate was Imam al-Sadiq, so to say. By this we mean the circumstances which developed during that time causing the one who claimed power to be taken away by the flurry, except Imam al-Sadiq who essentially stepped aside.

The main characteristic of his time were the reasons which caused the transfer of government from the Umayyad Dynasty to the 'Abbasids. In addition, we see that a personality like Abu Salmah Khallal who had priority over Abu Muslim (he was called the Minister of Muhammad's Family and Abu Muslim was called the Prince of Muhammad's Family) was trying for this transfer of government to the 'Abbasids from the Umayyad Dynasty.

Of course, after the downfall of the Umayyad Dynasty and the establishment of the 'Abbasid government, he changes his mind and thinks of transferring the caliphate to 'Ali's Family. He sends two letters to Medina; one for Imam al-Sadiq and one for 'Abd Allah al-Mahd, who was the Imam's cousin and one of Imam al-Hassan's children. 'Abd Allah got thrilled and welcomed the letter. The Imam, however, paid no attention whatsoever, only placing the letter in the fire without even opening it and said, "This is the response to this letter."

We previously spoke about this and said that the issue of Imam al-Sadiq's retreat from accepting government and the caliphate was very clear. There were no signs of tendency for taking over the leadership. What was the reason for this and where was this heading to? There is no doubt that if we assume the grounds had been prepared for the Imam to take over the caliphate, he should have taken the steps.

But our aim is to say if the grounds were not fully prepared, for example, if they were fifty percent prepared, what was stopping the Imam from taking actions even if he was to get killed? Again, this is where the comparison between the situation and methodology of Imam al-Husaynis put forward.

Here, we would like to talk a bit about the characteristics and specifications of the time of Imam al-Sadiq and the Islamic activities during his time and had Imam al-Husayn been there, he would have definitely made the same decisions. We also want to compare the differences between this time and the time of Imam al-Husayn? As I mentioned before, the issue was not why the Imam refused to take action when the conditions had been prepared for him to do so. The question is why the Imam did not go as far as getting killed?

The comparison between the time of Imam al-Sadiq and the time of Imam al-Husayn

The distance between the two periods is nearly a century. Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom was in 61 AH whereas Imam al-Sadiq passed away in 148 AH. There is a difference of about seventy to eighty years between the years of their deaths. During this period, the situation in the Muslim World changed dramatically. During the time of Imam al-Husayn only one issue existed, which was the issue of rule and caliphate. The caliphate meant everything and everything meant the caliphate. This means the simple Muslim World that was created still carried its simplicity.

The argument was about who should be the one to take charge of the affairs. For this reason, the caliphate as a system had complete influence over all aspects of the government. Mu'awiyah had an impressive and intense dictatorship system. The time and situation during the time had truly prepared the conditions for him to deprive everyone of their rights.

If people wanted to quote something for each other that might have been against the government, it would not be possible for people to quote anything that was against the government's politics for each other. The historians have written that if somebody wanted to narrate a tradition that spoke about the virtues of Imam 'Ali, he would not say it before he was fully certain and confident that the listener would not disclose the issue. They would go to their storage rooms for retelling such sayings.

It was a bizarre situation. They were cursing Imam 'Ali in every Friday Prayer, during speeches on every podium in the mosques in the presence of Imam al-Hassan and Imam al-Husayn. Therefore, we see that the history of Imam al-Husayn's time during the rule of Mu'awiyah—i.e. the period starting from the martyrdom of Imam 'Ali until the martyrdom of Imam al-Hassan himself—was very vague. No one is reminded of Imam al-Husayn, no quotes, reports, traditions, conversations, sermons, not even a speech or a meeting with him has been mentioned during the time.

They were isolated in such a way that no one was able to even contact them. In such a situation if Imam al-Husayn was to live for another fifty years, there would not be any change, not even three sentences would be quoted from him. The possibility for any kind of activity was taken away from him.

During the end of the Umayyad period which led to their downfall and during the 'Abbasid period (especially the beginning) the situation changed. This change, firstly, created intellectual freedom among

people. (I do not want to put this on the magnanimity of the ‘Abbasids. It is the result of essential qualities of the Islamic society).

There is no question that freedom of thought and freedom of opinion existed at the time. The question, however, is where this intellectual freedom originated from? Was this really the result of the politics of the ‘Abbasids?

Secondly, enthusiasm and excitement are created among people on scientific issues. Such enthusiasm and excitement of a nation towards science is very rare in history. The sciences included Islamic sciences (i.e. the sciences directly related to Islam such as the science of reading (the Qur’an), the exegesis, science of traditions, jurisprudence, issues related to theology and different parts of literature, as well as sciences not related to Islam, which are so-called human sciences, for example, medicine, philosophy, astrology and mathematics.

It has been mentioned in history books that a sudden exceptional movement and progression toward sciences took place and that the means had been prepared for people to present their capabilities in the sphere of science. The same means which did not at all exist previously, at the end of Imam al-Baqir’s time and the beginning of the time of Imam al-Sadiq, were suddenly produced for those who wanted to be a part of the scientific and intellectual arena, to come and present their ideas.

There were, of course, other factors involved in affecting this movement, which the ‘Abbasids could not stop even if they wanted to. This was because other people of different races—other than the Arab race—had entered the Muslim World, the most vibrant of which was the Iranian race. Another one of such races was the Egyptian race. The strongest and most powerful and most erudite of all were the Syrians and the Mesopotamians, the regions which were centers of civilization in that era. The difference in races and nations had automatically prepared the means for intellectual exchange.

When they became Muslims, they wanted to know more about the identity of Islam. The Arabs were not accustomed to contemplation and research of the Qur’an. Other nations, however, constantly contemplated on the Qur’an and other issues surrounding it limitlessly. They would think and take into account every single word of the Qur’an.

The war of beliefs

It is during this time that we see the market of ‘wars over beliefs’ suddenly becomes heated and how heated it becomes! Firstly, discussions begin regarding the exegesis and recitation of the Holy Qur’an. A group by the name of “*qurra*” emerge whose name meant those who recite and teach the words of the Holy Qur’an in a correct way (the Qur’an was not printed the way it is today in those days). One would say: ‘I will recite and narrate my recitation from person X, who narrated it from person Y and he from person Z, who narrated it from companion so and so of the Prophet (most of which reached ‘Ali).’ The next person would say: ‘I shall narrate my own recitation from...’ and so on and so forth. They would sit

in mosques and teach the recitation to others.

Mostly non-Arabs used to participate in these circles as they were non-Arabs and did not know the Arabic language properly but had a keen interest to learn the Qur'an. A recitation teacher would sit in the mosque and numerous groups would gather around him to learn the recitation of the Holy Qur'an from him. Occasionally, differences in recitation would be observed.

On top of this, was the exegesis, i.e. stating the meaning of the Qur'an (whether it meant this or that). The debates were heated. One would say, this is the meaning of the verse and the other would disagree.

It was the same on the topic of traditions and sayings that had come from the Prophet. Whoever memorized these traditions would be very honored by it. He would say, 'I am narrating this *hadith* from this person who narrated it from that person who narrated it from the Prophet. Is this saying correct? Or is it with these wordings?'

Higher than all of these were the jurisprudent sects. People would come and ask them questions just as they do these days. Groups were formed in various centers by the name of "jurists" who had to answer people's question: 'This is permitted, that is forbidden; this is pure, that is impure; this contract is correct, that contract is void.' Medina was one such center. Kufah was also one of these centers, where Abu Hanifah was. Basrah was another. Later, during the time of Imam al-Sadiq, when Spain [Andalusia] was conquered, such centres were gradually created there. Every Islamic city was a center itself. They would say that certain jurist has this view; the other jurist had that view. They were the students of this ideology and those were the students of that ideology. A war of beliefs based on jurisprudential views had also appeared.

Most heated of all (but not the most important) were the theological discussions. From this very century, a genus by the title "the theologians" first appeared (we see such expressions used in Imam al-Sadiq's words. He says to some of his students: tell these theologians to come).

The theologians used to discuss principle issues of belief: issues concerning Allah, His Attributes, the verses of the Qur'an regarding Allah; whether a certain attribute of Allah was His essential [*dhati*] entity or if it was something other than this; whether He was an incident or if He had always existed.

They would discuss prophecy and the reality of divine revelations, about Satan [Shayṭān] and divine unity as well as dualism. They would also discuss questions concerning action as principle of faith and if no action was taken would that suggest that there is no faith as well? Or does taking action not interfere with faith? They would also discuss the issue of destiny and providence as well as compulsion and volition. The theologians had attracted extreme interest.

The most dangerous of all (I would not say hotter or more important) was the emerging of a genus called the "atheists" [*zanadiqah*]. The atheists denied Allah and religion fundamentally. For some reason, this

genus had freedom. They would even sit in the two holy places (i.e. Mecca and Medina) and even in Masjid al-Haram and Masjid al-Nabi and speak of their opinions and this was, of course, under the title that “this is an ideology after all, we are having doubts and we must discuss them.”¹

The atheists were the civilized and educated group of that period. They were a genus who was familiar with the world’s living languages one of which was the Seryani language, the scientific language of that period. Most of them knew Greek and a majority were Iranians and knew Farsi. Some were also familiar with the Hindi language and had brought atheism from India. Where did the root of atheism fundamentally appear from? This is itself another discussion. The majority believed that the root of atheism comes from Manichaeism.

The other stream, related to this time, is the Puritanical Sufism (all are extremist and negligent streams). The Sufis emerged at the time of Imam al-Sadiq and created a genus which found many supporters and, therefore, spoke its opinions in freedom. They were the other side to the pharisees. They did not speak as a sect against Islam, but would essentially suggest that the reality of Islam was what they said it was. They suggested their strange puritanical ideas and said that Islam says so. This was intolerable pharisaism.

The Kharijites and the deferrers also each had a sect of their own.

The attitude of Imam al-Sadiq with the various intellectual streams

We see that Imam al-Sadiq faced all of this and encountered with all of them. Speaking of recitation and exegesis, the Imam had his own group of students. The Imam discussed issues of recitation and exegesis of the Holy Qur’anic verses with others. He shouted and complained, “Why do they say wrong things? Do not they know this is how they must interpret the Qur’an?” He said in relation to the traditions (which were very clear), “Their words have no basis. The correct traditions are what we narrate from our fathers, who narrated them from the Prophet.”

Regarding the jurisprudential sect, the school of Imam al-Sadiq was the strongest and most powerful jurisprudential school of its time. Even Sunnis believed this. All the Sunnis, either directly or indirectly, were the students of Imam al-Sadiq or served as his apprentice. The chief Sunni leader was Abu Hanifah. Historians have written that he served as an apprentice of Imam al-Sadiq for two years. We read this sentence in their (Sunni) books, where he said,

If it was not for those two years, Nu‘man would have definitely been destroyed (Nu‘man is Abu Hanifah’s name. His full name is Nu‘man ibn Zawti ibn Marzban; his ancestors were apparently Iranians).

The other leader of the Sunnis, Malik ibn Anas, was also at the same period as Imam al-Sadiq. He also came to Imam al-Sadiq and was proud of being his apprentice.

Shafi'i was in the next generation but he served as a student of Abu Hanifah and Malik ibn Anas.

Ahmad ibn Hanbal's training also goes back to Imam al-Sadiq in a straight line as well as others. The field of Imam al-Sadiq's lectures on jurisprudence was more successful than other jurists. I will now mention the testimonies of some Sunni scholars in this regard.

The words of Malik ibn Anas about Imam al-Sadiq

Malik ibn Anas was in Medina. He had a relatively good personality. He says, "I used to go to Ja'far ibn Muhammad, and he smiled a lot (which meant that he was friendly, so to say and not grumpy). One of his attributes was that the color of his face would change when the name of the Prophet was mentioned in front of him (which meant that the name of the Prophet exhilarated him in such a way that caused a change in the color of his face) I used to socialise with him."

He then talks about Imam al-Sadiq's acts of worship, how he used to worship and how pious he was. There is a famous story quoted of Malik ibn Anas. He says,

"We went on a journey to Mecca with the Imam. When we reached al-Shajarah Mosque and put on our *ihrams*, we wanted to say *labbayk* and officially become *muhrim*, while we mounted on the horses. We all said *labbayk*. I looked at the Imam and saw that he wants to say *labbayk* but the color of his face has dramatically changed and he is shivering in such a way that he is about to fall off his horse, all out of awe for Allah. I went to his side and said, 'O son of the Messenger of Allah! You have to say eventually, there is no choice. It must be said.' He replied, 'What should I say? Whom do I say *labbayk* to? What if it is said in my response, "*La labbayk*"? What am I to do then?"

This saying has been narrated by many people including Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi and other scholars in their books. The narrator of this saying is as we mentioned Malik ibn Anas. Malik says, "No eyes have seen, no ears have heard and it has not come across anyone's hearts, a man more virtuous than Ja'far ibn Muhammad."

MuhammadShahrestani, the author of the book "*Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*", is one of the very skilled philosophers and theologians of the fifth century. He was also a very learned man. In this book, he has analyzed all the religious and doctrinal fields, one of which is the philosophical field. He mentions the name of Imam al-Sadiq in one place and says,

"He has effervescent knowledge. He was completely trained in sagacity. He was an extremely devout and virtuous person and abstained from voluptuary. He resided in Medina and imparted the secrets of knowledge to his friends. He came to Iraq as well for some time."

He then points to Imam al-Sadiq's isolation from politics and says, "He never disputed over the caliphate with anyone."

He interprets this isolation in the following way, he says, “The Imam was so deeply sunken into the sea of knowledge and wisdom that he paid no attention to such issues.” I do not want to consider his explanation as correct but my point is that he confesses that the Imam had sunk into the sea of wisdom. He says, “Whoever has been sunken into the sea of wisdom, will never drop himself into the river.” (He wants to say such things [politics] are rivers).

Whoever climbs up to the top of the mountain of truth does not have fear of falling down from it.

Shahrestani, who said these words about Imam al-Sadiq, is bitter toward the Shi'ism. He has severely criticized the Shi'ahs in his book (“*Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*”). He, however, pays this much respect towards Imam al-Sadiq and this is important.

There are many scholars in today's world who even though have extreme enmity and oppose the the Shi'ah branch of Islam, they pay respect to Imam al-Sadiq, to whom this sect is related to. Maybe they think to themselves that the views which they oppose are far from Imam al-Sadiq's views. In any case, they pay a lot of respect to Imam al-Sadiq.

[The view of Ahmad Amin](#)

One of the scholars of our time was Ahmad Amin. He had written several books entitled, “*Fajr al-Islam*”, “*Duha al-Islam*”, “*Zuhr al-Islam*” and “*Yawm al-Islam*” which are all among the very important books on sociology of this century. He is afflicted by the ‘anti-Shi'ah disease’ and it seems that he has no information about the Shi'ism whatsoever. He is very hostile towards the Shi'ism but at the same time he shows great respect for Imam al-Sadiq. I have read all his books and have not seen him showing such respect to the Sunni Imams. The words he has used regarding the Imam's wisdom and sagacity are amazing. I have not seen a Shi'ah scholar with such sayings.

[The confession of Jahiz](#)

In my view, the confession of Jahiz is most important of all. Jahiz was a true *mulla* who lived from the end of the second century until the beginning of the third century. He was not only an amazing man of literature but also a sociologist and historian of his time. He wrote a book about zoology entitled, “*Kitab al-Haywan*” which up until today has caught the attention of many European scholars.

They have found certain things in “Ahmad Amin” of Jahiz that was not heard of in the Greek or non-Greek world of the time. In that time, even though Greek sciences had not yet entered the Muslim World, certain theories were first found in the *Kitab al-Haywan* by Jahiz. Jahiz was also a prejudiced Sunni. He had debates with some Shi'ahs which caused him to be considered by some people as anti-Shi'ah [Nasibi], which (judging from certain statements in his debates) I cannot say if he was one. He is almost of the same period as Imam al-Sadiq. His interpretations with regards to Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) is as such, “Ja'far ibn Muhammad whose knowledge and expertise has filled the world. And it is said that Abu

Hanifah and Sufyan ‘Ali Thawri (one of the great jurists and Sufis of that time) were among his students.”

The view of Mir ‘Ali Hindi

Mir ‘Ali Hindi is one of our contemporary authors who was also a Sunni. This is how he expresses his thoughts about Imam Ja‘far al–Sadiq, “The spread of science in that time helped to free minds and release them from bounds. Philosophical and intellectual controversy² became prevalent in all the Islamic societies.” He then says, “We should never forget that the one who lead this intellectual movement in the Muslim World was the grandchild of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. The same man who was famous as al–Sadiq. He was a man with exceedingly open intellectual horizons. He paid extreme attention and contemplation to the sciences of his time.” He then says, “And, in fact, he was the first person to establish the intellectual school³ in the Muslim World.” He also says, “His students were not only great jurists like Abu Hanifah but also intellectual science students.”

The words of Ahmad Zaki Salih

It is quoted from Ahmad Zaki Salih in the book, “*Al–Imam al– Sadiq*” by Muzaffar (who is a contemporary author) in the magazine called, “*Al–Risalah al–Misriyyah*” that the Shi‘ah enthusiasm for science was more than any other Islamic sects (I want to state the extent up to which the contemporary authors confess to this), which itself is an issue. Iranians put this on their account and say this enthusiasm was theirs whereas this was related to the Shi‘ahs and most of the Shi‘ahs of the time were not Iranians. We will not enter this topic for the time being. This Egyptian person says,

“Whosoever is well–informed will know that the enthusiasm of the Shi‘ah sect was more than others. And, the Shi‘ism was the first Islamic school of thought that based religious issues on mind and intellect.” And by Shi‘ah he meant Imam al–Sadiq’s Shi‘ism.

The endeavour of the Shi‘ah towards intellectual issues

The best reason for stating that intellectual sciences ripened during the time of Imam al–Sadiq is that Sunni books including, *Sahih Bukhari*, *Sahih Muslim*, *Jami‘ Tirmidhi*, *Sunan Abi Dawud*, and *Sahih Nassa‘i* convey nothing but minor issues. There are the principles for ritual ablution [*wudu*], prayer, fasting, pilgrimage and holy war [*jihad*]. Points concerning the conduct of the Prophet, for example, the Prophet acted this way in that certain journey. However, if you refer to the Shi‘ah traditions, you will witness that its first subject and first book is “*Kitab al–‘Aql wa al–Jahl*” (the Book of Wisdom and Ignorance). Such issues were basically not mentioned in Sunni books.

Of course, I do not want to say that this was originated by Imam al–Sadiq. These take root from ‘Ali who is also originated from the Prophet himself. Imam al–Sadiq, however, continued this path. It was Imam al–Sadiq who found the opportunity in his time to save the inheritance from his ancestors and add more

to those heritages.

After “*Kitab al-‘Aql wa al-Jahl*”, we come to “*Kitab al-Tawhid*”. We see that hundreds and even thousands of subjects about *Tawhid* (monotheism), Allah’s Attributes, the issues related to the divine positions, destiny, providence as well as compulsion, volition and intellectual affairs are put forward in Shi‘ah books which had not been mentioned in any other books (the books of other sects). All of these has caused the Sunnis to say that the first person to establish the philosophical⁴ and intellectual schools in the Muslim World was Imam Ja‘far al-Sadiq.

Jabir ibn Hayyan

There is an issue which has recently been explored. That issue is: a man in Islamic history by the name Jabir ibn Hayyan who is sometimes called Jabir ibn Hayyan Sufi. He was also a genius. Ibn al-Nadim has recalled Jabir ibn Hayyan in his book called, “*Al-Fihrist*”⁵ which has attributed nearly hundred and fifty books to him. These books were mostly about intellectual sciences, (as they said in those days) about Alchemy (chemistry), industry, and also about the properties of things. Today, they call him “the Father (Founder) of the World’s Chemistry”. Apparently, Ibn Nadim has said, “He is one of Imam al-Sadiq’s students.”

Ibn Khalkan⁶, who is also a Sunni, points out the name of Jabir ibn Hayyan saying, “He was an alchemist and a chemistry student of Imam al-Sadiq (‘a).” Others have also made such quotations about him. Such sciences were never heard of in the Muslim World. A man by the name Jabir ibn Hayyan who is a student of Imam al-Sadiq suddenly appears and writes journals about various topics, most of which still have scientific value today. The contemporary orientalist have debated a lot about Jabir ibn Hayyan. This very Taqi-Zadeh has discussed this alot. Of course, there are still a lot not known about Jabir ibn Hayyan and are yet to be explored. At the present time, what is really strange is the absence of his name in every Shi‘ah book. That is to say there is no mention of this man’s name in any Shi‘ah authority or jurisprudence or practice books. Imam al-Sadiq had such distinguished student that no one ever had.

Hisham ibn al-Hakam

Another one of Imam al-Sadiq’s students was Hisham ibn al-Hakam who was superior to the theologians of his time (I say all these based on what Sunni books testify). Abu al-Hadhil ‘Allaf was a powerful Iranian theologian. Shibli al-Nu‘man wrote in his book entitled, “*the History of Theology*”, “No one could debate with Abu al-Hadhil on any topic. The only person he was afraid of was Hisham ibn al-Hakam.”

Nazzam, who was regarded as one of the geniuses of that time and who had some theories which are in accordance with some of the new theories of our time (for example with regards to smell and color, he believed that color and smell are separate from the object. This overrides the presumption that smell and

color are fortuitous for an object. Especially, in the case of smell, he believes that smell is something that spreads in the air). He was one of Hisham's students (it has also been written that he got this theory from Hisham ibn al-Hakam) and Hisham was one of Imam al-Sadiq's students.

Now, you can see from this entire collection the cultural foundation which was made ready for Imam al-Sadiq. Such foundations were not prepared for any other *imam* before or after him. However, similar grounds were prepared for Imam al-Rida. In the case of Imam al-Kazim, the conditions were worse when issues such as imprisonment and the like came about. The rest of the Imams died in their prime as a result of being poisoned.

They were not allowed to live; otherwise, the situations would have been better to some extent. As for Imam al-Sadiq, both of these features were present. He had a long life (nearly seventy years) and his time and the conditions surrounding him were to his favor.

Now, how many of these features prove the differences between the time of Imam al-Sadiq and the time of Imam al-Husayn? In other words, what foundations were prepared for Imam al-Sadiq that were not present during the time of Imam al-Husayn? The Doyen of Martyrs [Sayyid al-Shuhada] must have either stayed at home all his life, worshipped Allah or in fact be a prisoner, or he must have gotten killed. This was not the same for Imam al-Sadiq (that he should either get killed or be in isolation). Rather, he would have either been killed or he could have used the constructive conditions of his surroundings to the utmost.

We cannot fathom the fact that subsequent Imams proved and clarified the values of Imam al-Husayn's surprising. If there was no Imam al-Sadiq, there would be no Imam al-Husayn just as if there was no Imam al-Husayn, there would be no Imam al-Sadiq. That is to say, if Imam al-Sadiq was not there, the values of Imam al-Husayn's surprising would never have been proven or clarified.

At the same time, Imam al-Sadiq made no objection to the caliphate when everyone knew that Imam al-Sadiq never came to terms with the caliphs and that he would campaign against them surreptitiously. A kind of cold war was in the midst. News of the faults, cruelty and tyranny of the caliphs had spread in the Muslim World by Imam al-Sadiq. In this connection, Mansur made an incredible connotation about Imam al-Sadiq (a),

“Ja'far ibn Muhammad is like a bone stuck in my throat. I can neither take it out nor can I swallow it. I cannot find any evidence against him nor can I tolerate him as I am actually informed that this neutralized ideology he has adopted is against us. This is because those trained under ideology are all against us. However, I cannot find any evidences against him.”

Yes. This is Mansur's definition: a bone stuck in the throat. Neither can I take it out, nor can I swallow it.

The factors affecting scientific enthusiasm during the time of Imam al-Sadiq ('a)

We said that an enthusiasm for scientific research appeared during the time of Imam al-Sadiq which intensified the war on beliefs. It was necessary for pious Muslims to get involved in this war in favor of Islam in order to defend it. What factors influenced this scientific enthusiasm?

There were three influential factors involved. Firstly, the one hundred percent religiously motivated community of people who had been encouraged by the Prophet to seek knowledge, the invitations and encouragements of the Holy Qur'an to learn, think and contemplate were the main factors causing this enthusiasm and keenness. Secondly, the admission of various racial groups into the Muslim World who had previously experience in the field of science and thought.

The third factor which prepared these foundations was the idea of a universal Islamic homeland. Islam had fought the homelands of water and soil and gave a new definition to the world homeland. Wherever Islam was, the homeland was there. The outcome of this was the relative destruction of racial prejudice in a way that people of different races were coexisting with one another and felt brotherhood and fellowship towards one another; for example, a student from Khorasan and a teacher from Egypt or vice versa.

The lecture session would be established and the one sitting as the teacher would be, for example, a barbaric slave, such as Nafi' or 'Ikramah, slaves of 'Abd Allah ibn Abbas. This barbaric slave would see Iraqis, Syrians, Hijazis, Egyptians, Iranians and Indians participating in his lecture. This was a major factor in preparing the foundations for this progression.

And above all was what we today call religious coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims, especially with the People of the Book [*ahl al-kitab*]. This means, in order to coexist with the People of the Book, Muslims tolerated them and did not consider this against their religious principles. In those days, the People of the Book were learned. When they joined the Islamic society, Muslims welcomed their arrival and obtained their knowledge during the very early period of their arrival. In the second era, Muslims were at the pinnacle of the scientific society.

The issue of religious coexistence was a very important factor. This, itself has of course a root in traditions. We have numerous traditions in this regard. Even the late Ayatullah Majlisi quotes in *Bihar* (which is also in *Nahj al-Balaghah*) that the Prophet said (*hikmah* here means correct scientific saying), "Learn the correct scientific sayings even from a pagan." The meaning is "*hikmah* is the long lost of the faithful". What is meant by *hikmah* here is its definition in the following *ayah*,

"He gives wisdom to whomever He wishes, and he who is given wisdom is certainly given an abundant good. But none takes admonition except those who possess intellect."⁸

This carries the meanings convincing, valid, solid and correct sayings. This is an excellent definition: the long lost. If an individual has something in possession but loses it, how is it that he looks for it wherever he goes? If you have a priceless ring which you are really fond of and it gets lost, you will go through every hardship and focus on every corner that comes to your mind in order to find what you have lost.

This (*hikmah* is 'the long lost' of the faithful) is one of the best and most honorable Islamic definitions. The faithful will grab it wherever he finds it, even if it is in the hands of a pagan. This means if you lost your property, and your lost property is in the hands of a pagan, would you say "I want no business with it" or would you say "this is mine"?

'Ali says, "The faithful sees knowledge in the hands of pagan as a trust and himself as the main owner and would say, 'The pagan is not worthy of it. I am the one worthy of it'."

Some have put the issue of religious coexistence with the People of the Book on the account of the caliphs. They say that the tolerance of the caliphs demanded Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and others to include fellowship into their cultures and benefit from one another. But it was not because of the tolerance of the caliphs. It was the order of the Prophet. Even Jurji Zaydan directs this affair towards the tolerance of the caliphs. He quotes the story of al-Sayyid al-Radi and says,

"Al-Sayyid al-Radi is an amazing man. He is on the same level as the religious jurists. He is al-Sayyid al-Murtada's brother." When Abu Ishaq Sabi⁹, his contemporaneous scientist, dies he recites an ode in praise of him,¹⁰

اراييت من حملوا على الاعواد ارايت كيف خبا ضياء النادي

Did you see who they were carrying upon the coffin?

Did you realize the light of our circle has gone out?

This was a mountain that collapsed...

Some criticized him and said, why a *sayyid* (a child of the Prophet), a great Islamic scholar praised a pagan man this way! He replied, "Yes, I wailed his knowledge. He was a knowledgeable man! (In these days if somebody does such a thing, they throw him out of the city.)"

After narrating this story, Jurji Zaydan¹¹ says, "Look at the tolerance! A man of such a great spirit and an exalted position as well as knowledge praises a pagan this way." Later, he says, "These all initiate from the caliphs' imperial courts who were people with vast tolerance."

This is not related to the imperial courts of caliphs. Al-Sayyid al-Radi was the student of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and he was the one who gathered *Nahj al-Balaghah*. He is more familiar than anyone with the commandments of his ancestors, the Prophet, and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, who have said, "Knowledge and

hikmah are respectable everywhere.”

These were the factors that created this scientific enthusiasm which inevitably created the foundations for Imam al-Sadiq.

Our discussion, therefore, is that even though the basis for Imam al-Sadiq's leadership were not laid down—if they had been prepared, they would have been the best of all prepared foundations—another ground was laid down for the Imam and he used it in a way that can certainly be named a scientific movement.

The Muslim World, including both Shi'ahs and Sunnis, is linked to Imam al-Sadiq. This is noticeable in the Shi'ah school of thought. The Sunni schools also initiated from Imam al-Sadiq since the chief and head of Sunni schools, the University of al-Azhar, was established thousands of years ago by the Fatimid¹² Shi'ahs. All the rest of the Sunni schools branched from this university and they all result from Imam al-Sadiq's use of the situation of his time.

These questions are at minimum forwarded at the problem of whether or not it was better for Imam al-Sadiq to let go of these foundations, fight and get killed in combat against oppression? Islam is not only about fighting oppression. Islam consists of other issues as well. Therefore, I just mentioned this issue in order to compare the differences between the time of Imam al-Sadiq and the time of other Imams.

If Imam al-Sadiq had not used this opportunity, this question could have been asked: did the Imam not want the caliphate for the sake of spreading Islam? Why did he not use this opportunity and get himself killed? The answer is: if the grounds were suitable, they would not have disregarded it. The suitable opportunity for Imam al-Ridawas also to find a way into meetings of the faithful [*mu'minin*] and to raise his voice from there. Imam al-Ridamay have spent a year or two with Ma'mun but from everything narrated by him during that time may not have been narrated from any other period.

Question and answer

Question: Did Jabir ibn Hayyan obtain his knowledge from Imam al-Sadiq?

Answer: As I said before, some parts of the answer to this question are historically unknown. History has not yet been able to make this clear. From the evidence, it can be said that he learned these subjects from Imam al-Sadiq. Of course, there are some who do not trust him and claim that Jabir ibn Hayyan's time was slightly later than the time of Imam al-Sadiq and even those who claim that even though he came later, he was a student of Imam al-Sadiq.

But those who believe in this issue have written it down under the title that he learnt these lessons from Imam al-Sadiq. The outstanding thing is that such sciences were unheard of before him which goes to show that Imam al-Sadiq had students in various spheres. Not all people have the same spiritual and intellectual capacity. As Imam 'Ali says to Kumayl ibn Ziyad,

“Alas! I have vast knowledge but cannot find a talented individual for it.”¹³ He then says, “And when I find one, he is either talented and clever, but greedy and a cheat who wants to use religion as a materialistic tool, or he is religious and holy but stupid and has no talent for knowledge. I could not find one who is talented both in knowledge and in morals.” ☞

^{1.} Ibn Abi al-‘Awja’ has a sweet and delicate interpretation in this regard. One day he came to Imam al-Sadiq and said, “O son of the Messenger of Allah! You are the head of this affair. You are so and so, it was your grandfather who has brought this religion and had done so and so, but I am very sorry, when one needs to cough, he should cough! When mucus blocks his throat, he must cough; when doubts appear in his mind he should say, ‘I must cough my sagacious cough, let me say my words.’” The Imam Said, “Go ahead and say it!”

^{2.} The controversies based on reasoning are called philosophical controversies.

^{3.} As I have said before, when the term ‘philosophical’ is used, it refers to reasoning and rational debates. Contrary to the opinion of traditionalist’s whose main topic was only quotations and repeating sayings.

^{4.} The intention is towards the same rational traditions we have in Shi’ah books.

^{5.} “Al-Fihrist” by al-Nadim is a bibliology book of its own field which is today considered among the reliable books. He has discussed bibliology in such an academic way that, today, Europeans pay a lot of value to his book. Ibn al-Nadim lived in the fourth century AH. In this book, he not only introduces the books of the Islamic time, but also books of non-Islamic period (that were available during his time). He was essentially a genius. He was a paper- and book-seller but was such an erudite and learned man that makes one astonished when he reads his books. I have read this book from the beginning to the end. It shows the various handwritings, languages (that were popular in his time) and the roots of languages.

^{6.} Judge Ibn Khalkan lived in the sixth century AH.

^{7.} Mansur treated Imam al-Sadiq in a strange way and Imam al-Sadiq himself was the cause of it. He would sometimes go hard on the Imam, sometimes easy. Of course, he seemingly never put the Imam in prison but most times he would keep the Imam under surveillance. Once he had the Imam under surveillance for two years in Kufah, that is to say they had prepared a house exclusively for Imam al-Sadiq and controlled the Imam’s social activities. He summoned the Imam several times, vituperated and scolded him and said, “I will kill you; I will chop your neck! Are you propagandizing against me? Are you making people riot against me?” And etc. The Imam would respond in a peaceful manner.

^{8.} Surat al-Baqarah 2:269.

^{9.} Abu Ishaq Sabi was not a Muslim. He was a Sabi’i (there are a lot to be said about their ideology. Some have said that the Sabaen ideology was rooted in Zoroastrianism although it is a Christian sect. There are lots of controversies today about where it is rooted). He was a very erudite and polite man. Because he was a man of literature, he was very fond of the Qur’anic literature and used to refer to Qur’anic verses constantly. During Ramdan, he would not eat anything. He was asked, “But you are not a Muslim, why do not you eat anything?” He would reply, “Manners demand me to be concordant with the people of my time.”

^{10.} I have narrated this ode in “Dastan-e Rastan” by the Martyred Professor, vol. 2, p. 237.

^{11.} Jurji Zaydan [also spelled: Gurgi Zaydan] (1861–1914) was a Lebanese Christian emigrant. He was born into a poor Greek Orthodox family in Beirut. He wrote historical novels and biographies and became a pioneering figure in Egyptian journalism.

^{12.} . The Fatimidids, Fatimid caliphate or al-Fatimiyyun is the Shi’ah dynasty that ruled over varying areas of the Maghrib, Egypt, and the Levant from 5th January 910 to 1171. The term Fatimite is sometimes used to refer to the citizens of this caliphate. The ruling elite of the state belonged to the Isma’ili branch of the Shi’ism.

^{13.} Nahj al-Balaghah, Fayd al-Islam, wisdom [hikmah] 139.

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