

## Chapter 5: His Debates And His Arguments

The time of the Imam, peace be on him, is famous for the debates and arguments which spread among the great figures of religions, of Islamic schools, and of others. Violent discussions took place among them on numerous theological researches, especially as it concerns the fundamentals of religion. Theology books and others are full of different kinds of such an ideological conflict accompanied by evidence which the theologians have produced in support of their own beliefs.

One of the matters which led to violent arguments and discussions between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis was that of the Imamate. The Shi'ites maintained that the Imamate was similar to the Prophecy, which was not subject to the choice and election of the community; rather it was decided by Allah, the Exalted, Who chose for it whomever He willed from among His righteous servants whose hearts He examined for faith. Also they made a condition that the Imam should be infallible of errors, the most learned of the community, and the most knowledgeable of it in the affairs of Islamic law and all sciences of life.

However, the Sunnis denied that in general. It is worth mentioning that the debates during the time of the Imam took place among the great figures of Islamic schools in the palaces of the kings and of their ministers. For example, the Bara'mika held meetings in their own palaces and summoned to them theologians from among the Sunni (religious) scholars.

The theologians debated with the great scholar, Hisha'm b. al-Hakam, and discussed with him the matter of the Imamate, and he disproved their vague errors with firm argument and inclusive proof. Without doubt the Bara'mika held such sessions and discussed such a matter not because of some scientific reasons; rather they wanted to understand the definite evidence which the Shi'ites produced in support of their beliefs in the Imamate.

Al-Ma'mu'n appointed Imam al-Ridha', peace be on him, as his heir apparent. However, he was not sincere in this purpose; nor did he believe that the Imam was more appropriate than him for the caliphate. He (al-Ma'mu'n) ordered all his governors in Islamic world to summon the great (religious) scholars, who were experienced in different kinds of science, to go to Khurasa'n in order to question the Imam about the most difficult scientific matters. When they came to him (al-Ma'mu'n), he mentioned the

matter before them and promised to enrich those who would question the Imam and render him incapable of answering them. Generally speaking, he appointed him as his heir apparent for the following political reasons:

1. Al-Ma'mu'n intended to destroy the beliefs of the Shi'ites and to efface their traces. (He wanted the religious scholars) to render Imam al-Ridha', peace be on him, incapable of answering them, that he might use his incapability as means to cancel the beliefs of the Shi'ites, who maintained that the Imam should be the most learned of the people of his time and most knowledgeable of them in all kinds of science. Of course, if the Imam had been incapable of disproving the scholars' beliefs, he would have shaken the entity of the Shi'ites and abrogated their beliefs in the Imams of the members of the House, *Ahl al-Bayt*, peace be on them.
2. If the Imam had been unable to answer the religious scholars' questions, al-Ma'mu'n would have been able to remove him from regency. In other words al-Ma'mu'n would have been able to achieve his political aims through the Imam, for he had told the people that he nominated him for that important office because he was the most learned of the community, and when he had concluded that he was not the most learned of it, he removed him from the office. Meanwhile, his mass media would have announced that the Imam had fallen short of answering the scholars' questions, that it might respond to the 'Abba'sid family's feelings. It is worth mentioning that the members of this family were displeased with al-Ma'mu'n when he nominated the Imam for regency, so they removed him from the caliphate and pledged allegiance to Ibra'him, the singer, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

Anyhow, the leading scholars had prepared the most difficult scientific questions and asked the Imam about them, and he skillfully answered them with. The narrators have mentioned: "He (Imam al-Ridha') was asked about more than twenty thousand questions in different times to the extent that al-Ma'mu'n's palace became a scientific center, that the leading scholars admired the Imam's talents and abilities, that they announced to the people the Imam's great abilities in knowledge and excellence, and that most of them believed in his Imamate. So Al-Ma'mu'n prevented the scholars from debating with the Imam lest they admired him." The narrators have mentioned some questions. We will mention them along with the Imam's answers to them as follows:

## **'Umra'n al-Sa'bi'i's Questions**

'Umra'n al-Sa'bi'i was a great philosopher and was the spiritual leader of the tribe of the Sa'bi'a during the time of the Imam, peace be on him. He was summoned by al-Ma'mu'n in order to examine the Imam, and he had prepared for him the most difficult and vaguest philosophical questions. The researcher, Shaykh Muhammad Taqi al-Ja'fari, has explained 'Umra'n's questions and commented on them, saying: "This debate contains the most important and vaguest theological questions about transcendental wisdom, which tires researchers' intellects when they reflect on it.

Experts have not given enough answers to these questions, for other questions may arise from the

questions, and the arising questions may be vaguer than the previous ones themselves. ‘Umra’n, in this narration, raised these vague questions and they were answered by Imam ‘Ali b. Musa’ al-Ridha’, peace be on him, the eighth of Allah’s proofs over His servants and of His testamentary trustees on His earth. What the Imam explained during this debate is a clear way which cannot be effaced by the dust of the material veils which are raised by limited reasons in the fortress of dark, sensible things. In this manner the realities which incomplete reason cannot recognize manifest themselves to those who cling to the beliefs of the members of the House of Prophethood, the source of Message, the place of the angles who came one by one, and descending place of Revelation.”

We will mention al-Sa’bi’i’s questions along with the Imam’s answers to them just as al-Shaykh al-Sadu’q has mentioned in (his book) *‘Uyu’n Akhba’r al-Ridha’*. We will also mention some extracts of al-Shaykh al-Ja’fari’s commentaries on them. The delegation who accompanied ‘Umra’n (al-Sa’bi’i) presented a group of questions. After the Imam, peace be on him, had answered the questions of the delegation including eminent Christian and Jewish (religious) scholars, he said to them: “People, if any of you is familiar with Islam and wants to question (me), then let him question (me) without any shame.”

‘Umra’n al-Sa’bi’i, an expert in theology, addressed the Imam with politeness and admiration, saying: “O Scholar of the people, were it not for that you invited (me) to question you, I would not question you. I entered Ku’fa, Basrah, Syria (Sha’m) and al-Jazira. There I met some theologians but none of them was able to establish for me that the One, namely Allah is One who has no second, not other than Him standing through his oneness. May I question you?”

(‘Umra’n) al-Sa’bi’i put forth his deep question, and (said) that the (religious) scholars of Ku’fa, Basrah, Syria (Sha’m) and al-Jazira were not able to answer it. He asked the Imam to answer it. The Imam smiled at him, saying: “If there is (a person called) ‘Umra’n al-Sa’bi’i among the group (of the people), then you are he.”

“I am he,” replied ‘Umra’n.

“‘Umra’n, question (me). You must be just. Beware of nonsense and injustice,” declared the Imam.

(‘Umra’n) al-Sa’bi’i bowed his head, and then he said to the Imam with politeness and magnification: “By Allah, my master, I want nothing except that you establish for me a thing to which I will cling and (which I) do not pass.”

(‘Umra’n) al-Sa’bi’i expressed his good intention, for he wanted to understand the reality and nothing else.

The Imam, peace be on him, said: “Question (me) whatever you desire.”

The session was full of (religious) scholars and leaders; among them was al-Ma’mu’n. They kept silent, that they might listen to ‘Umra’n al-Sa’bi’i’s questions and to the Imam’s answers to them. Then

(‘Umra’n) al–Sa’bi’i put forth his questions as follows:

Question1: “Can you tell me about the first being and about what he created?” As for the thing about which (‘Umra’n al–Sa’bi’i) questioned, it is the first thing and the first material from which Allah created all things. The thing about which he questioned was not the existence of Allah, the Almighty Originator. That is because Allah’s existence can easily be recognized by those who have awareness and will, and have no doubt, for all things in the universe display the existence of their Creator, and for it is impossible for effect to exist without any cause. Now, let us listen to the answer of the Imam, peace be on him, to this question:

Answer1: “As for the One, He has always been One Being; He has neither limits nor accidental qualities; and He will always remain so. Then He created unprecedented, different creatures with accidental qualities and different limits, (i.e. He created them) not through a thing which He established nor through a thing which He limited nor according to a thing which He imitated or adopted as a previous exemplar for them. Then, after that, He made the creatures, choice and non–choice, different and harmonious (in) types and tastes. He (created them not) for a need of them nor for an excellent rank which He did not attain but through them nor did He see for Himself an increase or a decrease in what He created.”

This paragraph gives an account of the answer of the Imam, peace be on him, as follows:

Firstly, Allah, the Exalted, is One; there is nothing with Him; He has neither limits nor accidental qualities like those possible being; He is One Being; He has always been and will always remain so. His Oneness is neither numeral nor qualitative nor generic; rather it means that He is not associated with material and immaterial things. He occupies the most perfect rank; none of possible beings is like Him, for they are ascribed to Him as made things ascribed to maker, so Blessed is Allah!

Secondly, the view of the Bedouins was that every image should depend and occupy a certain matter. This view is right regarding things other than the Necessary Being, the Most High. As for Him, He does not create things from previous things nor from things which He had created. Rather He says to thing ‘be’ and it is. He originated the creation of things not according to thing which He imitated or adopted as a model. He has the greatest power which originates the creation of things of which He has no need, for He is the Only Source of favor toward creatures.

The Imam, peace be on him, turned to ‘Umra’n (al–Sa’bi’i) and asked him: “‘Umra’n, did you understand this (matter)?”

“Yes,” he replied, “by Allah, master.”

“The Imam added:” “Know, ‘Umra’n, that if He had created what He created for a need, He would have not created anything except those whom He asked for the help in His needs, and that He should have created a hundred fold of what He created. That is because the more the helpers are, the more powerful their leader (*sahib*) is. As for need, ‘Umra’n, it is impossible, for whatever He creates, other needs arise,

but you can say that the creatures need each other. As a result I can say that He did not create the creatures for a need, and He preferred some of them to others while He had no need of those whom he had preferred; nor had He a vengeance on those whom He had abased.”

This statement completes that which is before it (and shows) that Allah, the Exalted, created the creatures while He had no need of them; rather they have need of His favor, His mercy, and His bestowal. He is absolutely munificent, so he spreads mercy and beneficence over all beings and creatures. An example of His bounty is that He prefers some of His creatures to others while He is in no need of those whom He prefers; nor has He a vengeance on those whom He abases.

Question2: “Master, was the Being known to Himself by His Own Self?”

This question is very deep. Al-Shaykh al-Ja‘far has explained it as follows: “You may get a thing and establish it as reality through a scientific discovery. That thing divides into its own identity and dismisses other than it, and thus it is bounded. Stone cannot be obtained scientifically unless the nonexistence of all its opposites is added its identity. (In other words), the scholar cannot recognize and attain being unless he dismisses all things except it. This was the reason for ‘Umra’n’s question about whether He, the Exalted, recognized Himself by Himself. At that time, if the Imam’s answer had been ‘Yes’, ‘Umra’n would have asked another question: “Did recognizing Himself by Himself require dismissing reasonable beings other than Him?”

Answer 2: Imam, peace be on him, said: “Knowledge is acquired by something which negates its opposites, so that the thing itself would be existing through what it is negated, without the existence of anything which contradicts its existence, a need arises to negate that thing about itself by defining what is known about it.” Then the Imam turned to ‘Umra’n and asked Him: “‘Umra’n, did you understand?”

“Yes, by Allah, master,” replied ‘Umra’n. The result of the answer of the Imam, peace be on him, was that what al-Sa’bi’i had mentioned would be correct if the known being was compared with many things opposing it, so it required dismissing those things in order to get the known (being). However, as for Allah, the Exalted, Creator of the universe and Giver of life, He had nothing to compare Himself with it, so He was in no need of dismissing it in order that He might decide His will through that dismissal.

Question 3: “Tell me, then, by what means did He come to know what He knew— with mind or without mind?”

By this question al-Sa’bi’i intended to force the Imam to confess that Allah, the Exalted, was compound, for He had mind.

Answer 3: “If it had been by mind, would He then find anyway not to appoint for that mind a bound where knowledge ended?”

The Imam wanted (to say) that it was necessary for mind to recognize His reality and essence. Then he

asked him the following question: “Then what is that mind?”

Al-Sa’bi’i kept silent and was unable to say anything, for the Imam did not leave any room for him to establish his belief. Then the Imam turned to him and said: “Is it all right if I ask you about the mind and you define it by another mind? If you answer in the affirmative, then you would make both your claim and statement void.”

The Imam established perfect argument and definite proof of the voidness of the belief of al-Sa’bi’i, who thought that Allah, the Exalted, could be recognized by mind. Accordingly, there should be another mind to recognize the selfness of Him, the Exalted. This mind depends on another mind, and so on. This matter leads to an endless chain. If the second mind depends on the first mind, it will result in vicious circle. The philosophers and theologians have unanimously agreed that both matters (i.e., endless chain and vicious circle) are not corrupt because they result in corrupt matters. Then the Imam completed his argument and his proof, saying: “‘Umra’n, is it not incumbent on you to know that the One cannot be described by mind, and it is not said that He has more than one deed, work, and make. None imagines that He has views and members like those of the creatures. Therefore, understand that and correct (your beliefs) with it as long as you have come to know of (it).”

The Imam, peace be on him, wanted (to say) that Allah’s different deeds and works were not similar to those of possible beings who were in need of means and mediations such as intellect and all manifest members to carry them out; it is impossible for Allah, the Exalted, to have such means and mediations.

Question 4: “Do you not tell me how the bounds of His creatures are?”

‘Umra’n questioned (the Imam) about the bounds which distinguish the creatures from each other. The Imam answered him:

Answer 4: “You have asked, then know that the bounds of His creatures are of six kinds: touched, weighed, seen, that which has no taste (soul), seen but has no weight nor touch nor sense nor color nor taste, ordination, accidental qualities, shapes, length, width. Among them are act and movements which make things, do them, change them from state to state, increase them, and decrease them. As for works and deeds, they set out, for they have no time more than that which is ordained for their need. When it (deed) finished by thing, it sets out with movement, and effect remains. It takes the same course of speech which goes and its effect remains.”

The Imam’s answer is full of mentioning characteristics and qualities by which things are distinguished, whether they are living beings or not.

Question 5: “Master, will you not tell me about the Creator? If He is One, there is nothing other than Him and nothing is with Him, has He not changed (His Essence) through His creating the creatures?”

This question means that the natural realities founded by Allah, the Exalted, require changing the

Almighty Creator due to their change. This means that they are united with Him in His selfness; this is impossible.

Answer 5: "He (Allah) is Eternal. He, the Great and Almighty, does not change through His creating the creatures, but the creatures change through His changing them."

The result of the answer of the Imam, peace be on him, is that the Almighty Creator is the Maker and Founder of all things and is Eternal, so He requires no change out of the change of possible beings and creatures.

Question 6: "Master, with what have we recognized Him?"

Answer 6: "With other than Him."

All seen and the unseen things in the universe are evidence for the existence of the Almighty Creator. We have recognized Him through His creatures, and believed in Him through His marvelous make. He has become manifest and clear during this time in which man has invaded outer space. The great make of Him, the Exalted, has manifested itself for mankind through what He has deposited in this space, such as the stars which are neither counted nor numbered, and which move according to regulation and accuracy. If they oppose their course, they will collide and disappear, and no trace of them will remain. So glory belongs to Allah, the Wise Originator!

Question 7: "Which thing is other than Him?"

Answer 7: "His desire, His name, His attribute, and the like. All these are originated, created, managed."

We have recognized Allah, the Exalted, through His will, His name, and His attributes, which are evidence for Him, may He be glorified. In the Supplication for the Morning, (it has been mentioned): "Oh He who demonstrates His Essence by His Essence." All the beings in the universe depend on Him as the made depend on the maker.

Question 8: "Master, which thing is He?"

Answer 8: "He is light, namely He guides His creatures from among the people of the heaven and the earth. You have no right against me than my professing His oneness."

Through his question, 'Umra'n intended to know the reality of Allah, the Exalted. He imagined that He, the Exalted, was like the rest of possible beings. This is impossible. Man does not know his own body and the small systems therein, so how can he know the essence of the Almighty Creator, the Shaper and Originator of the worlds? The Imam answered that he came to know of Allah through His manifest attributes, such as His guiding His creatures and other clear proofs which demonstrate the existence of their Almighty Creator.

Question 9: “Master, was He not silent before (creating) the creatures and then He spoke?”

Answer 9: “Silence is not except out of utterance before it. An example of that it is not said that the lamp is silent and does not utter; nor is it said that the lamp shines, so what does it want to do toward us, for light is from the lamp, not out of an act or make from it; it is not a thing other than it. When it shines for us, we say: ‘It has shined for us, so that we may seek light through it.’ In this manner you can understand your affair.”

The meaning of the answer of the Imam, peace be on him, is that silence and utterance follow one another in a matter which accepts them like the succession of talent and non-talent. As for the utterance of Allah, it is not like the utterance of those speakers from among possible beings. In other words utterance and silence do not hold good for Him as they hold good for possible beings. The Shi‘ites believe that utterance is one of the attributes of action, and that it does not persist in the essence of Him, the Exalted, as the persisting of the essential attributes. That is because it is He, the Exalted, who creates utterance and speech when He wills (to create them). Imam al-Ridha’, peace be on him, gave an example of that through the lamp, for it is not said that the lamp is silent, does not utter and, also ascribing the addition to the lamp, it is not optional for it (to utter). This is one of the possibilities regarding the explanation of the speech of the Imam, peace be on him.

Question 10: “Master, the knowledge I have says that the Being is changed in His essence by His action of creating.”

Answer 10: “‘Umra’n, does your statement mean that the being does not in any way change its essence except when it affects its own essence in a way which changes it? Can you say that the fire changes its own nature, or that the heat burns itself, or have you seen anyone seeing his own vision?”

‘Umra’n had already mentioned this question; nevertheless the Imam, peace be on him, answered it, and he, peace be on him, increased it in explanation. He said to him: “The being does not in any way change its essence. For example, the actions which issue from soul do not bring about increase therein nor decrease. Yet, there is another example which is the eye. Though vision issues from it, it does not bring about increase therein nor decrease.”

Question 11: “Will you not tell me, master? Is He in the creatures or are the creatures in Him?”

Answer 11: “He is above all that, ‘Umra’n. He is not in the creatures; nor are the creatures in Him; He is exalted above that. I will teach you what you do not know, and there is no strength except in Allah. Tell me about the mirror: are you in it or is it in you? If neither one of you is in the other, then how did you come to see your own reflection in it, ‘Umra’n?”

The Imam, peace be on him, made it impossible for Allah, the Exalted, to exist in His creatures or they exist in Him. He gave an example of that through the reflection in the mirror; it is not in the mirror; nor is the mirror in it; rather it is light which brings about seeing the reflection in the mirror and it is not in any

way in it. Ibn al-Fa'rid says:

Through His Unity all many (things) has lasted for it, so  
it has become correct and every cause has come to it.

The essence of union has become single for Himself, even  
if its units fall under it.

I looked but did not see (anything) except pure unity  
already covered by many (things) without any partner. Regarding this matter there are deep  
philosophical researches, but we have not mentioned them lest the book should be too long.

Question 12: "Through the light between myself and it?"

This question is related to that which is before it, and we have explained it.

Answer 12: "Can you see of that light more than what you can see with your own eyes?"

"Yes," replied 'Umra'n.

"Then show it to us," demanded the Imam.

'Umra'n kept silent, not knowing what to say. For the Imam did not leave any room for him to defend his  
own beliefs. Then the Imam continued his talk, saying: "I do not see the light except leading you and the  
mirror to come to know each other without being in either one of you. There are many such examples  
which the ignorant simply cannot observe, and the greatest example belongs to Allah."

## **The Debate is being postponed**

The time of the prayer came. It was necessary for the Imam to postpone the debate, so he turned to al-  
Ma'mu'n and said to him: "(The time of) the prayer has just come." 'Umra'n feared that the debate  
between him and the Imam would not be resumed, so he said to him: "Master, do not interrupt my  
questions, for my heart has sympathized (with you)."

The Imam, peace be on him, promised him to resume the debate, then he rose and performed the  
obligatory prayer.

## **The Debate is being resumed**

The session returned. It was attended by al-M'mu'n, the eminent religious scholars, and high ranking  
commanders. Then the Imam turned to 'Umra'n and said to him: "'Umra'n, question me."

Question 13: “Master, will you tell me about Allah, the Great and Almighty? Does He exist in His reality or in description?”

Answer 13: “Verily, Allah is the Originator, the One, the First Being. He has always been One. There is nothing with Him. He is single without a second with Him. He is neither known (i.e. in His reality) nor unknown nor clear nor ambiguous nor remembered nor forgotten nor a thing to which the title of a thing is applied nor from a time He was nor to a time He will be nor on a thing He stood nor on a thing He stands nor on a thing He depends nor in a thing He is hidden. All that was before the creation.<sup>1</sup> As for the whole you have applied to Him, it was attributes which appeared later, and translation through which understands he who understands.

“Know that the meaning of origination (*ibda’d*), will, and intention is one, but their titles are three. The first was His origination (*ibada*”), His will, and His intention which He made the origin of all things, evidence for all perceived things, separator for all vague things. All things were separated by these words, such as the name of right and wrong, action, done, meaning other than meaning. All affairs gathered on them. When He originated the words, He did not make meaning for them other than themselves. They came to an end and had no existence, for they were originated with an origination.

“The light in this place, which is the light of the heavens and the earth, is the first action of Allah. As for the letters, they are the done (thing) which the speech concerns. All the acts of worship were from Allah, the Great and Almighty. He taught them to His creatures. They are thirty-three letters. Twenty-eight letters of them indicates the letters of Arabic. Twenty-two of the twenty-eight letters shows the letters of Assyrian and Hebrew. Five letters of them were changed (and are) in the rest of the languages of non-Arabs in the regions. These five letters were derived from the twenty-five letters, so the letters became thirty-three. As for the five different (letters), it is not permissible to mention them more than what we have mentioned. Then He made the letters after He had counted them and numbered them firmly. So His sign was like these words of Him, the Exalted: *‘Be and it is.’* Make, be from it, and the made be from it. So the first creature of Allah, the Great and Almighty, was the origination which had neither weight nor movement nor hearing nor color nor sense; the second creature was the letters which had neither weight nor color. They were heard and described; (none) looked at them. As for the third creature, it was all the kinds which were sensed, touched, with taste, and seen. As for Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, was before the letters which indicate nothing other than themselves.” Al-Ma’mu’n admired (this answer) and did not understand most meanings of these deep words which we will leave without any explanation, for it takes us a long time to explain them. Then he asked the Imam: “How they (i.e. the letters) indicate nothing other than themselves?”

The Imam answered him and explained the matter for him, saying: “Surely, Allah, the Blessed and Most High, never gathered a thing from them for another meaning. When He created from them four or five or six words or more than that or less than that, He created them for a certain meaning, and they were not for anything except for an originated meaning, which was nothing before that (time).

Question 14: “How can we come to know of that?”

Answer 14: “As for the way and explaining knowledge, it is (as follows): You mention the letters when you want nothing other than themselves. You mention them one by one when you say: *Alif, ba”, ta” tha”, jeem, ha”, kha”*, until you finish them. You will find no meaning other than them. When you gather them and make from them letters and make from them the name and adjective for a certain meaning, you will not seek the meaning of what you have meant. They are proof of their meanings and the cause of the thing described by them. Did you understand them?”

“Yes,” was the answer.

The Imam continued his speech about explaining the meanings of the letters when they were put together, saying: “Know that it (the letter) is not an adjective of that which is not described nor a bound of that which is not bounded. As for the attributes and the names, they indicate perfection and existence, not an example of encompassment, as the bounds, which are <sup>2</sup>squaring, making triangle, and making hexagon. That is because Allah, the Great and Almighty, is known by the attributes and the names, not by limits, such as length, width, littleness, muchness, color, weight, and the like. Nothing of these limits is applied to Allah, that His creatures may know Him through knowing themselves, according to the necessity which we have mentioned.

“However, Allah, the Great and Almighty, is indicated by His attributes, known by His names, and His creatures are proofs of Him, that the willing seeker concerning that may be in no need of the vision of an eye nor hearing of an ear nor touching of the palm of hand nor encompassment of a heart. If His attributes, great be His laudation, do not indicate Him; His names do not summon to Him; the knowledge of the creatures does not perceive His core; the creatures will worship His names and His attributes, not His core. If this is such, then the one god will be other than Allah, for his attributes and his names are other than him. Did you understand, ‘Umra’n?”

“Yes, master, increase me,” replied ‘Umra’n.

The Imam continued his interesting speech after he had gained mastery over those who attended the session. He said: “Beware of the statement of the ignorant from among the of blindness and error who claim that Allah, the Great and All-holy, exists in the hereafter for reckoning concerning reward and punishment, and He is not in the world for the acts of obedience and hope. If Allah, the Great and Almighty, has defects in this world, he will never be in the next. However, the people have gone astray, become blind, and deaf toward the truth while they do not know. That is according to the words of Him, the Great and Almighty: *And whoever is blind in (the world), he shall also be blind in the hereafter and more erring from the way.*<sup>2</sup> I mean that he is blind toward the existing realities. Those who have intellects know that the proof of what is there (in the next world) is not but through what is here (in the world). He who takes the knowledge of that (world) according to his own view, seeks its existence and perceiving it through his own soul, and not through other than it, increases himself nothing of the

knowledge of that (world) but fairness, for Allah, the Great and Almighty, has placed the knowledge of that (world) with special group of people who think, know, and understand.”

Question 15: “Master, tell me about origination: Is it creation or other than creation?”

Shaykh al-Ja‘fari commented on this question, saying: “This is also one of the questions which have tired the minds and reasoning of mankind, for it is (the question) which has brought about the disunity of the different ways and sects. Some of them say: Origination such as materials, images, reasons, souls, and the like is absolutely impossible whether it is from the Necessary Being or from the possible being. Others have absolutely regarded it as possible. Others have confined the possibility of origination to Allah, the Exalted, in general, namely that He, the Exalted, is powerful to originate any being He wills without any material before it, and change befalls it. They have also said: ‘It (origination) requires His absolute power and the ability of the object. Yet others follow other ways.<sup>3</sup>”

Answer 15: “Rather it (origination) is still creation and is not perceived through stillness. It becomes creation for it is something originated. It is Allah who originates it and it becomes His creature. Allah, the Great and Almighty, creates it, and there is no third (thing) between them, and no third (thing) is other than them. So what Allah, the Great and Almighty, creates is His creature. Perhaps, the creature is still, moving, different, harmonious, known, and ambiguous. All the bounded things are the creatures of Allah, the Great and Almighty. Know that all the things which the senses find for you are meanings perceived by the senses, and every sense demonstrates what Allah, the Great and Almighty, has placed in its perception, and the heart understands all of that. Know that the One who is standing without any ordination or bounds created creatures ordained by bounds and ordination, and what He creates is two creatures: the ordination and the ordained. In each of them there is neither color nor weight nor taste. He makes one of them perceive the other and makes them perceive in their nature. He does not create a single thing standing in its nature without other than it which He wills to be proof of His selfness and His existence, so Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, is Single and One; there is no second with Him in order to make Him stand, to support Him and to hide Him. The creatures hold each other through the permission and will of Allah, the Exalted. Men have differed over this subject to the extent that they have gone astray, become perplexed, and sought salvation from darkness with darkness through their describing Allah, the Exalted, with their own qualities, so they have become very far away from the truth. If they describe Allah, the Great and Almighty, with His own attributes, and describe the creatures with their own qualities, they will profess understanding and certainty, and will not defer over (Him). When they seek that toward which they are perplexed, they become confused. *Allah guides whomever He wills to the straight path.*”

Question 16: “I witness that He is just as you have described. However, I have another question.”

“Question whatever you desire.”

“I want to question you about the All-wise (Allah): In which thing is He? Does anything encompass Him?”

Does He change from state to state? Is He in need of a thing?"

Answer 16: "I will tell you, 'Umra'n, so understand Whom you have questioned about. He is the most ambiguous matter which the creatures face. As for those whose reasons are different and whose clemency is distant, they do not recognize (Him). As for those who are just and have reasons, they are able to recognize (Him). As for the first (thing) of that: If the creation of what He creates is out of His need of it, it is permissible for one to say: He changes according to what He creates because of His need of that. However, He, the Great and Almighty, does not create anything out of need, and He is still firm, not in a thing nor on a thing, but it is the creatures which hold each other, enter in one another, and come forth from each other. As for Allah, the Great and All-holy, He holds the whole of that through His power. He does not enter a thing and comes out of it. The preservation of it does not tire Him, nor is He incapable of holding it. None of the creatures knows how that is except Allah, the Great and Almighty, His messengers whom He informed of it, the people of His secrets, those who keep His command, and His guardians who undertake His Law. Rather His command is like the twinkling of an eye. If He wills a thing, He only says to it: *Be, so there it is*, in accordance with His desire and will. Nothing is nearer to Him than a thing; nothing is farther from Him than a thing. Did you understand, 'Umra'n?"

"Yes, master," replied 'Umra'n.

Whatever knowledge is given to man, he is incapable of understanding his own soul and his wonderful small systems, so how can he recognize or encompass the Almighty Creator, the Originator of the worlds and Giver of life. Ibn Abu' al-Haddid says:

Intellect has become perplexed concerning You, O Wonder of the universe!

Whenever my mind comes a span of the hand nearer to You, it becomes a mile far.

You have perplexed the possessors of reason and confused brain.

Surely, the human brain is limited, so how can it recognize the reality of Allah, the Exalted. Yes, we have recognized Him and believed in Him through His creatures, for every atom in this universe displays the existence of the Almighty Creator, Who knows all things in the heaven and the earth.

## **Al-Sa'bi'i becomes Muslim**

'Umra'n al-Sa'bi'i acknowledged the many scientific abilities of the Imam, peace be on him, such as his definite answers to the most difficult philosophical questions, which none was able to answer except the testamentary trustees of the prophets whom Allah endowed with knowledge and sound judgment.

Accordingly, he embraced Islam and began saying: "I witness that Allah, the Most High, is as you have described, and witness that Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, is His Servants sent with guidance and the religion of the truth."

Then he prostrated himself in prayer before Allah and submitted to Him. The religious scholars and the theologians admired the Imam's knowledge and talents, hence they told the people about his excellence and abundant knowledge. As for al-Ma'mu'n, he drowned in pain, harbored malice against the Imam, envied him, and then left the session.

## Muhammad Fears for the Imam

Muhammad b. Ja'far, the Imam's uncle, feared al-Ma'mu'n for the safety of the Imam. He attended the session and saw the Imam's domination over 'Umra'n al-Sa'bi'i, who was an excellent philosopher of the time, so he summoned al-Hasan b. Muhammad al-Nawfali, the Imam's companion, and said to him: "Have you not seen what your companion (the Imam) brought?" "No, by Allah," said al-Nawfali, "I think that 'Ali b. Musa' al-Ridha' has never gone into anything, and we do not know him through it. He always speaks about theology in Medina and the theologians gather before him."

Then al-Nawfali informed him of the Imam's knowledge and excellence, saying: "The pilgrims come to him and ask him about the lawful and the unlawful, and he answers them. Perhaps he goes into theology when someone comes to him and debates with him."

However, Muhammad expressed his fear of al-Ma'mu'n for his nephew, saying: "I fear that this man (i.e. al-Ma'mu'n) will envy him, give him poison (to drink), and creates an affliction against him. So advise him to refrain from these things."

As for al-Nawfali, he had good opinion of al-Ma'mu'n, did not fear him for the Imam, so he said to Muhammad: "The Imam (i.e. al-Ma'mu'n) wants nothing except to examine him, that he may know whether he (the Imam) has something of the knowledge of his fathers."

Muhammad was not satisfied with al-Nawfali's statement, for he thought that al-Ma'mu'n was wicked, so he said to al-Nawfali: "Say to him (al-Ridha'): Your uncle dislikes this chapter (of theology) and asks you to refrain from these things for several reasons...."

The Imam's uncle was right in his intuition, for he knew that the 'Abba'sid family harbored malice against the members of the House (*Ahl al-Bayt*), peace be on them, and showed enmity toward them. Moreover, ('Umra'n) al-Sa'bi'i's questions and his adopting Islam at the hand of the Imam moved the spites of al-Ma'mu'n and he assassinated him, as we will see in the chapters that follow.

Al-Nawfali related to the Imam, peace be on him, Muhammad's words, and he thanked him for them and prayed for him.

## The Imam honors 'Umra'n

Through his debates, the Imam made 'Umra'n adopt Islam. (This was a great achievement), for the latter was the most prominent scholar of his time. The Imam sent for him. When he came, the Imam ,

welcomed and received him with honor. Then he gave him garments and ten thousand dirhams. ‘Umra’n was pleased with that, so he prayed for the Imam and thanked him for that, saying: “May I be your ransom, you have followed the deeds of your grandfather, the Commander of the faithful.”

‘Umra’n came frequently to the Imam and made use of his abundant knowledge. After that, as the historians say, he became a summoner to Islam. The theologians from among the possessors of statements and innovations came to him and asked him about the most important questions. He answered their questions to the extent that he made them avoid him. Al-Ma’mu’n gave him ten thousand dirhams and, in addition, al-Fadl gave him some money. Then he appointed him as a governor over the charities of Balkh, and he did right things.<sup>4</sup>

## The Questions of Sulayma’n al-Maruzi

As for Sulayma’n al-Maruzi, he was skilled in philosophy and experienced in theological researches. He was the most prominent religious scholar in Khurasa’n. Al-Ma’mu’n invited him, met him with friendly reception and honor, and said to him: “My cousin, ‘Ali b. Musa’ al-Ridha’, peace be on him, has come to me from al-Hija’z. He likes theology and theologians. Will you come to us on the 8th day of Dhu al-Hijja (*yum al-Tarwiya*) in order to debate with him.”

Sulayma’n was afraid of that. He thought that the Imam would be unable to answer his questions, and that the ‘Alawides would harbor malice against him. Accordingly, he apologized to al-Ma’mu’n, saying: “I dislike to question him in your session and among a group of the Ha’shimites. The people will regard him as defective when he debate with me on theology. Defects are not permissible for him.”

Al-Ma’mu’n made covenant with him and promised that no harm or detested things would befall him. He said (to him): “I have invited you because I know that you are learned (in theology). I have no intention except that you silence him (Imam al-Ridha’) in one argument.”

This statement demonstrates that al-Ma’mu’n had evil intention toward the Imam, harbored malice against him, and showed enmity toward him. Sulayma’n felt safety from any aggression against him, and then he said to al-Ma’mu’n: “(I will be) sufficient, Commander of the faithful, bring us together and do not dispraise me.” Meanwhile al-Ma’mu’n sent his messenger to the Imam and asked him to come in order to debate with Sulayma’n. The Imam responded to that and attended along with a delegation from among his eminent companions including ‘Umra’n al-Sa’bi’i, who became a Muslim at the hand of the Imam. Then a debate took place between Sulayma’n and ‘Umra’n al-Sa’bi’i on *al-bida*”. Sulayma’n denied *al-bida*” while ‘Umra’n confirmed it. Then Sulayma’n sought the Imam’s view about it and he confessed it. He established it through some verses from the Holy Qur’an. Then al-Ma’mu’n turned to Sulayma’n and said to him: “Question Abu’ al-Hasan about whatever you desire. You must listen well and be fair.” Sulayma’n asked the Imam the following questions:

Question 1: “What is your view about Him whom has made will as name and attribute such as All-living,

All-hearing, All-seeing, and All-powerful?”

Answer 1: “You want to say that things were originated and became different because He desired and willed, and you do not want to say that things were originated and became different because He is All-hearing and All-seeing. This is proof of that they (i.e. will and desire) are not similar to All-hearing, All-seeing, and All-powerful.”

Sulayma'n interrupted the Imam, saying: “He has always been willing.”

The Imam answered him: “Sulayma'n, His will is (something) other than Him.”

Sulayma'n numbered (some attributes) to show that Allah, the Exalted, was united with His intention. So, the Imam disproved Sulayma'n's vague error, saying:

“You have proved along with Him something other than Him which has always been.”

“I have not proved (that),” replied Sulayma'n

“Is it (the will) originated?” asked Sulayma'n.

“No, it is not originated,” answered the Imam.

The Imam confused Sulayma'n and he began saying contradictory statements. He (Sulayma'n) sometimes said that will was eternal and sometimes said that it was originated. Therefore, al-Ma'mu'n shouted at him and asked him not to show obstinacy and to show fairness in his speech, saying: “You must be fair. Do you not see that the people of consideration are around you?”

Then al-Ma'mu'n turned to the Imam and said to him: “Abu' al-Hasan, debate with him on theology, for he is the theologian of Khurasa'n.”

The Imam asked him: “Is it (the will) originated?”

Sulayma'n denied the origination of the will, so the Imam answered him:

“Sulayma'n, it is originated. If thing is not eternal, it is originated; if it is not originated, it is eternal.”

Sulayma'n interrupted (the Imam) saying: “His (Allah's) will is (part) of Him just as His hearing, His sight, and His knowledge are (parts) of Him.”

The Imam disproved his statement, asking: “Did He will Himself?”

“No,” was the answer.

The Imam began confuting his statement, saying: “Therefore, the willing is not like the All-hearing and the All-seeing.”

Sulayma'n (answered) at random, for the Imam left no room for him to defend his own vague errors. He (Sulayma'n) said: 'Surely, He willed Himself just as He heard Himself, saw Himself, and recognized Himself.'

The Imam confuted his statement, asking: "What is the meaning of that He willed Himself? Did He will to be a thing? Did He will to be All-living, All-hearing, All-seeing, and All-powerful?"

Sulayma'n did not know what to say, so he answered: "Yes."

"Did that occur through His will?" asked the Imam.

"Yes," was the answer.

The Imam began refuting Sulayma'n's statement and showing the contradiction therein, saying: "Your statement: 'He willed to be All-living, All-hearing, and All-seeing,' has no sense. Was that through His will?"

As the matter was deep, Sulayma'n said: "Yes, that was through His will."

The people in the session burst into laughter. Al-Ma'mu'n laughed at the contradictory speech of Sulayma'n. However, the Imam turned to the people and asked them to show gentleness toward Sulayma'n. Then he asked him: "Sulayma'n, do you think that He (i.e. Allah, the Exalted) has altered from state to state and changed due to it? This is something through which Allah is not described."

Sulayma'n became feeble and kept silent, so the Imam turned to him in order to establish proof against him, saying: "Sulayma'n, I want to ask you a question."

"Question (me), may I be your ransom," replied Sulayma'n.

"Tell me about you and your companions: Do you debate with the people on theology according to what you understand and know or according to what you do not understand and know?"

"Rather, according to what we understand and know," answered Sulayma'n.

The Imam began establishing proof against Sulayma'n's vague errors, saying: "The thing which the people know is that the willing is other than will, that the willing is before will, that the doer is before the thing done. This (statement) disproves your statement: 'Will and the willing is one thing.'"

Sulayma'n said: "May I be your ransom, isn't that of Him as the people know and understand?"

The Imam continued refuting Sulayma'n's vague errors, saying: "I think that you have claimed the knowledge of that without knowledge and said: 'Will is like hearing and seeing.' If you have such a view, then it is something which is neither known nor is understood."

Sulayma'n became perplexed and was unable to answer because of the many scientific abilities of the Imam, peace be on him. The Imam resumed his debate in order to complete proof against him, saying:

"Sulayma'n, does Allah know all those who are in the Garden and the Fire?"

"Yes," Sulayma'n retorted.

The Imam opposed him, saying: "Is what Allah, the Exalted, knows (part) of that?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"If it is to the extent that nothing of it remains but is, will He increase them or cut them off from it (the fruit of the Garden)?"

"Rather, He increases them," replied Sulayma'n.

The Imam disproved his statement, saying: "From your statement I see that He increases them what is not in His knowledge that it will be."

Sulayma'n said: "May I be your ransom, the willing has no limit."

The Imam continued disproving Sulayma'n's vague errors, saying: "In your view, is that His knowledge does not encompass what therein (in the Garden) if He does not know the limit of that (which is in the Garden). If His knowledge does not encompass what therein, He does not know what is therein before it is. Allah, the Great and Almighty, is High above that!"

Sulayma'n began apologizing and putting right his view, saying: "Verily, I said that He did not know that, for it has no limit, and for Allah, the Great and Almighty, described them (the people of the Garden) with everlastingness, and we hated to make cessation for them."

The Imam went on refuting his vague errors and his descriptions, saying: "His knowledge of that does not bring about His cutting them from it, for He may know that; then He increase them; then He does not cut them off from it. This is what Allah, the Great and Almighty, has said in His Book: ***So oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement.***<sup>5</sup> And He said to the people of the Garden: ***A gift which shall never be cut off.***<sup>6</sup> And He, the Great and Almighty, said: ***And abundant fruit, neither intercepted nor forbidden.***<sup>7</sup> Therefore, He, the Great and Almighty, knows that, so He does not cut them off from increase. Have you seen that He renews what the people of the Garden eat and drink?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Does He cut them (the people of the Garden) off from it (fruit), while He puts (another) in the place of it?" asked the Imam.

“No,” was the answer.

The Imam, peace be on him, continued establishing his beliefs, saying: “If He puts (another) in the place of it, then it (the fruit) is everlasting; therefore they are not cut off from it.”

Sulayma’n went on clinging to vague errors and imaginations which the Imam had already disproved through undeniable proofs, saying:

“Yes, He cuts them off from it and does not increase them.”

The Imam opposed that and confuted it with these words of him: “Therefore, He destroys (them) therein. This (statement), Sulayma’n, cancels everlastingness and opposes the Book, for Allah, the Great and Almighty, says: ***They have therein whatever they wish and with Us is more yet.***<sup>8</sup> And He, the Great and Almighty, says: ***A gift which shall never be cut off.***<sup>9</sup> And He, the Great and Almighty, says: ***Nor shall they be ever ejected from it*** (the Garden).<sup>10</sup> And He, the Great and Almighty, says: ***Abiding therein forever.***<sup>11</sup> And He, the Great and Almighty, says: ***And abundant fruit, neither intercepted nor forbidden.***”

Sulayma’n was silent, not knowing what to answer after the Imam had closed before him all avenues of argument. Then the Imam asked him: “Sulayma’n, tell me about will: Is it an action or not?”

“Rather, it is an action,” replied Sulayma’n.

“Therefore, it is originated, for all actions are originated,” declared the Imam.

All possible beings are effects, made, and originated. As for the Necessary Being, the Most High, it is impossible for Him to have the qualities of the possible being. Sulayma’n was unable to say anything and began contradicting himself, saying:

“It (i.e. will) is not an action.”

As for Sulayma’n, he had already admitted that it was an action. As a result, the Imam turned to him and asked him: “Is there anyone besides Him who, too, is eternal?”

Sulayma’n dodged and did not answer the Imam’s question, saying: “Will is the bringing forth.”

The Imam answered: “This is the thing because of which you criticized Dira’r<sup>12</sup> and his companions, saying that everything Allah, the Great and Almighty, has created in heaven or earth, ocean or land—such as dog or pig, monkey, human or an animal—is Allah’s will, and that Allah’s will lives, dies, goes away, eats, drinks, marries, feels pleasure, wrongs, commits immoral acts, disbelieves, becomes a polytheist, so He renounces it and repeats Himself through it, and this is its bound.”

The Imam, peace be on him, demonstrated Dira’r’s corrupt viewpoints which Sulayma’n and his companions had criticized. He refuted all these corrupt viewpoints before Sulayma’n, but the latter did

not understand the Imam's statement and said: "It (i.e. will) is like hearing, seeing, and knowledge."

Sulayma'n repeated what he had already said that will was like hearing and seeing. The Imam had already confuted this corrupt statement, yet he, peace be on him, asked him: "Tell me: Are hearing, seeing, and knowledge made?"

"No," was the answer.

The Imam criticized Sulayma'n for his contradictory statement, saying: "How did you negate Him? You sometimes said that He did not will and sometimes you said that He willed, and that it (i.e. will) was not one of His actions."

Sulayma'n said at random: "Surely, that is like our statement: He sometimes knows and sometimes does not know!"

The Imam answered with inclusive proof, saying: "That is not the same, for negating the known is not like negating knowledge; negating what is willed is (not like) negating will, for if the thing is not willed, there will be no will. Knowledge may be established even if the known is not like seeing. Man may be knowing even though he is not the one who enlightens (others). Knowledge may be established even if it is not the known."

Sulayma'n answered: "It (i.e. will) is made."

The Imam invalidated Sulayma'n's statement, saying: "Therefore, it (will) is originated and is not like hearing and seeing, for hearing and seeing are not made, and this is made."

Sulayma'n said: "It (will) is one of His eternal attributes."

The Imam answered him, saying: "Therefore man must be eternal, for his quality is eternal."

Sulayma'n began dodging in his speech and said: "No, because He did not do it (will)."

As a result, the Imam criticized him for that and said: "Khurasa'ni, what numerous your errors are! Are things not according to His will?"

Sulayma'n insisted on his error, saying: "No."

The Imam answered him: "If things are not according to His will nor His desire nor His command nor His practice, then how are they? High is Allah above that!"

Sulayma'n became perplexed. He was unable to say anything. Then the Imam continued confuting Sulayma'n's vague errors and imaginations, asking him: "Will you not tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: *And when We wish to destroy a town, We send Our commandment to the people of it who lead easy lives, but they transgress therein?*<sup>13</sup> Does He not mean by that that He

creates His own will?”

“Yes,” Sulayma’n retorted.

The Imam answered him: “If He creates His own will, then your statement is that will is He or a futile thing of Him, for it is not (possible) for Him to create Himself and does not change His state. Exalted is Allah above that.”

Sulayma’n opposed (the Imam), saying: “By that He does not mean that He creates His own will?”

“So what does He mean?” asked the Imam.

“He means doing a thing,” was the answer.

The Imam rebuked him, saying: “Woe unto you! How many times have you repeated this matter? I told you that will is created, for the action of a thing is originated.”

“Therefore will has no sense,” declared Sulayma’n.

“Do you think that He describes Himself with will which has no sense? If will has no old or new meaning, then your statement, ‘Allah, the Great and Almighty, has always been willing’ is groundless.”

Sulayma’n began clinging to vague errors, saying: “I mean that will is one of Allah’s eternal actions.”

The Imam answered him, saying: “Do you not know that thing is not done and eternal and new at the same time?”

Sulayma’n became perplexed after the Imam had disproved all his vague errors and made clear for him that every possible thing was created and not eternal, and that the will of Allah was not like the qualities of the possible being.

The Imam continued establishing his proofs against Sulayma’n, saying: “There is no harm on you. Complete your questions.”

“Will is one of His attributes,” declared Sulayma’n.

The Imam criticized him for repeating this statement, saying: “How many times have you said that it is one of His attributes? Is His will originated, or has it always been so?”

“Originated,” was the answer.

The Imam said: “*Alla’hu Akbar!* You are telling me that His attribute is originated. Had it been one of His attributes, an eternal one, then He willed nothing, for the thing which has always been so is not done.”

Sulayma’n began contradicting himself, saying: “Things are not a will, and He did not will anything.”

The Imam answered him, saying: “You have hissed, O Sulayma’n! He did and created as long as His will and His creation are eternal! This is the attribute of someone who does not know what he is doing. Exalted is Allah above all of that.”

Again Sulayma’n contradicted himself and said: “Master, I have already informed you that will is like hearing, seeing, and knowing.”

As a result, al-Ma’mu’n shouted at Sulayma’n, saying: “Woe unto you, Sulayma’n! How you have erred and how often you have repeated yourself? Stop it and take another (matter), for you seem to be unable to provide any answer better than that.”

The Imam turned to al-Ma’mu’n and said to him: “Leave him, Commander of the faithful. Don’t interrupt his questions, for he will regard it as an argument (against me).”

Then the Imam looked at Sulayma’n and said to him: “Speak, Sulayma’n.”

Sulayma’n continued saying: “I have already informed you that will is like hearing, seeing, and knowing.”

The Imam replied to him: “There is no harm, tell me about the meaning of this. Is it one meaning or different meanings?”

“One meaning,” came the answer.

“Is the meaning of will one?” asked the Imam.

“Yes,” was the answer.

The Imam answered him with an irrefutable answer, saying: “If its meaning is one, then it will be the will of standing, sitting, life, and death. If His will is one, parts of which do not go ahead parts, and parts of which do not oppose parts.”

Sulayma’n replied, saying: “Surely, its meaning is different.”

The Imam understood that Sulayma’n was uncertain, so he asked him: “Tell me about the willing: Is He the will or other than it?”

“Rather, He is the will,” replied Sulayma’n.

The Imam answered him: “In your view, is the willing different when He is the will.”

“Master, the will is not the willing,” explained Sulayma’n.

Yet the Imam understood that Sulayma’n was not sure, so he said to him: “Will is originated; otherwise there is (something) other than Him along with Him.”

“Will is one of His names,” said Sulayma’n.

“Did He name Himself with that?” asked the Imam.

“No,” replied Sulayma’n, “He did not name Himself with that.”

“Therefore, you have no right to name Him with what He did not name Himself,” said the Imam.

Sulayma’n dodged and said: “He described Himself that He was willing.”

The Imam said: “His attribute is not His selfness. That He is willing is telling of that He is will and is not telling of that will is one of His names.”

“That is because His will is His knowledge,” declared Sulayma’n.

The Imam asked: “If He knows thing, does He lose (His) will.”

“Yes,” was the answer.

“If He does not will thing, does He not know it?” asked the Imam.

“Yes,” replied Sulayma’n.

The Imam began explaining Sulayma’n’s corrupt views, saying: “From where did you say that? What is the evidence for that His will is His knowledge? He may know what He does not will by no means, and that is these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: *And if We will, We should certainly take away that which We have revealed to you.* [14](#) Therefore, He knows how He takes it away, but He never takes it away.”

Sulayma’n said: “That is because He finished the affair, so He did not increase anything therein.”

The Imam replied, saying: “This is the statement of the Jews. So why did He, the Exalted, say: *Call upon Me, I will answer you.* [15](#)”

As for Sulayma’n, he denied that and said: “By that He meant that He had power over it.”

The Imam asked him: “Does He promise what He does not fulfill? Why did He say: *He increases in creation what He wills?* [16](#) And He, the Great and Almighty, said: *Allah makes to pass away and establishes what He wills* [17](#), while He finished this matter.”

Sulayma’n became perplexed after the Imam had closed before all avenues of argument. Wherever he went, the Imam faced him with an irrefutable argument and inclusive proof in order to invalidate his viewpoints. Then the Imam, peace be on him, continued confuting Sulayma’n’s vague errors, saying: “Sulayma’n, did He know that a human being would be and He did not will to create a human being by no means? That a human being will die today and He will not make him die today?”

“Yes,” retorted Sulayma’n.

The Imam hastened to refute these contradictory words of Sulayma’n, asking: “Does He know that what He wills exists or does He know what He will not exist?”

Sulayma’n opposed the Imam, saying: “He knows that both of them exist.”

The Imam answered him according to his contradictory statement, saying: “Therefore, He knows that man is living and dead, standing and sitting, blind and seeing at the same time. This is impossible.”

Sulayma’n began saying more contradictory statements regarding the questions of the Imam, saying: “May I be your ransom, He knows that one of them exists.”

The Imam said: “There is no harm (on you), which of them exists—the one which He wills to be or the one which He wills not to be?”

Sulayma’n began saying at random, not knowing what to say, and not knowing his contradictory statements: “He wills what He wills to be!”

The people including al-Ma’mu’n burst into laughter. As for Imam al-Ridha’, he smiled at Sulayma’n and said to him: “You have erred and left your statement: He knows that a person will die today and He does not will to make him die today, that He wills to create creatures and He will not to create them. If your knowledge is not enough (to understand) what He wills not to be, then He knows only what He wills to be.”

Sulayma’n tried to correct his statement, saying: “My statement is that will is neither He nor a thing other than Him!”

The Imam indicated Sulayma’n’s contradiction, saying: “If you say that will is not He, then you have regarded it as (something) other than him. If you say that will is not (a thing) other than Him, then you have regarded it as Him.”

Sulayma’n asked: “Does Allah know how He creates thing?”

“Yes,” replied the Imam.

“Surely, this establishes thing.”

The Imam answered him with a wise answer, saying: “You have said something impossible. That is because man may build a wall even if he does not build, sew even though he does not sew, make thing well despite he does not make it. Sulayma’n, do you know that He is One without anything with Him?”

“Yes,” was the answer.

“Does this establish thing?”

As for Sulayma'n, he denied what he said previously, saying: “He does not know that He is One without anything with Him.”

“Do you know that?” asked the Imam.

“Yes,” came the answer.

“Therefore, You, Sulayma'n, more knowledgeable than Him!”

“The matter is impossible,” declared Sulayma'n.

The Imam asked him: “Is it impossible in your view that He is One without anything with Him, that He is All-hearing, All-seeing, All-wise, All-powerful...?”

“Yes,” was the answer.

The Imam answered with a wise answer, saying: “How did He, the Great and Almighty, say that He was One, All-living, All-hearing, All-seeing, All-wise, All-powerful, All-knowing, All-aware, while He did not know that and His being accused of lying? Exalted is Allah above that.”

The Imam added, saying: “How does He will to create that which He does not know how to create and what it is? If creator does not know how to create thing before he creates it, then he is perplexed. Exalted is Allah above that, a great exaltation!”

Sulayma'n said at random: “Will is power.”

The Imam replied: “He, the Great and Almighty, always has power over what He will. There is no escape from that, for He, the Blessed and Exalted, said: *And if We will, We should certainly take away that which We have revealed to you.* If will is power, He will take it away because of His power.”

Feebleness appeared on Sulayma'n's face, and he stood perplexed before this Ocean of knowledge and merit. As a result, he kept silent. Al-Ma'mu'n turned to him and praised the Imam's talents saying: “Sulayma'n, this is the most learned of the Ha'shimites!”

This debate contains very important theological researches which show that the Imam has great scientific abilities which demonstrates the beliefs of the Imami Shi'ites, who maintain that the Imam should be the most learned of the people of his time. This debate aborted the attempt of al-Ma'mu'n, who intended to render the Imam incapable of answering even one question, that he might use his incapability as means to defame the beliefs of the Shi'ites concerning the Imam. Shaykh al-Sadu'q, may Allah make shine his grave, has commented on this debate, saying: “Al-Ma'mu'n brought to Imam al-Ridha' the theologians of the sects and misleading inclinations in order to disable him through one of them. That is because of his envy toward him and his scientific position. All those who debated with him

(al-Ridha') on theology acknowledged his merit and his arguments against them. That is because Allah, may His name be blessed, refuses (everything) except raising His word, completing His light, and making shine His proof. In this manner He, the Blessed and Exalted, promised in His Book, saying: *Most surely We help our apostles and those who believe in this world's life.* [18](#) By *who believe* He means the leading Imams and their followers who know them and learn from them through helping them with argument against those who oppose them as long as they live in the world. In this manner He will behave toward them in the next world. Surely, Allah, the Great and Almighty, does not break promise. [19](#)"

## The Imam debates with Abu' Qurra

Imam al-Ridha', peace be on him, disproved the vague errors which were raised about Islam. Abu' Qurra headed for Khurasa'n in order to examine the Imam, peace be on him. He asked Safwa'n b. Yahya', a close associate of the Imam, to ask the Imam for permission to come in to him. The Imam gave him permission. When Abu' Qurra was honored by standing before him, he asked him about things concerned the lawful, the unlawful, religious duties, and (Islamic) precepts, and he answered them. Then he asked him about some matters concerned the Oneness of Allah, which are as follows:

Question 1: "Tell me, may Allah make me your ransom, about the words of Allah to Musa' (Moses)."

Answers 1: "Allah knows better with which language He spoke to him, in Assyrian or in Hebrew."

Abu' Qurra took out his tongue and said: "I am asking you about this tongue. The meaning of that: Did He speak to him with a tongue like that of man?"

The Imam disproved Abu' Qurra's vague error, saying: "Glory belongs to Allah! He is free from the things you are ascribing to Him! I seek refuge in Allah! He is not like His creatures nor does He speak in the same manner in which they speak. However, there is nothing like Him, the Blessed and Exalted; nor there are speakers and doers like him."

"How is that?" asked Abu' Qurra.

He, peace be on him, said: "The speech of the Creator to the creature is not like the speech of a creature to a creature. He (Allah) does not speak through the opening of a mouth and a tongue. However, He says (to the thing): "Be." The command and prohibition through which He addressed Musa' was with His will without any hesitation in (His) heart."

The speech of Allah, the Exalted, is not through the organ (i.e. the tongue) just as the speech of man, for it is impossible for Him to speak with tongue. There is nothing like him.

Question 2: "What is your view of the Books?"

Answer 2: "The Torah, the Bible, the Zabu'r (David's Psalms), the Qur'an, and all the revealed Books

are the words of Allah. He sent them down to men as light and guidance. All of them are originated and are other than Allah, Who says: ***Or that He may produce a reminder for them.***<sup>20</sup> And He says: ***There comes not to them a new reminder from their Lord but they hear it while they sport.***<sup>21</sup> Allah originated all the Books which He sent down.”

Question 3: “Will the Books perish?”

Answer 3: “The Muslims have unanimously agreed that all things except Allah will perish. (Everything) other than Allah is the action of Allah. As for the Torah, the Bible, the Zabur (David’s Psalms), the Qur’an, are the action of Allah. Do you not hear that the people say: ‘The Lord of the Qur’an,’ that the Qur’an will say on the Day of Resurrection: ‘My Lord, I made so-and-so thirst by day and sleepless by night, so accept my intercession for him.’ As for the Torah, the Bible, and the Zabur, they are also created and have Lord. They were originated by Him whom nothing resembles. They are guidance for those who have minds. As a result, he who claims that they are as eternal as He is, then he manifests: Allah is not the first, not eternal, not one, speech as eternal as He is and has no beginning, and He is not Allah.”

Question 4: “We have been told that all the Books will come on the Day of Resurrection while men are on one level standing for the Lord of the worlds and looking until they (the Books) return into Him, for they are part of Him and He is part of Him; therefore, they come to Him?”

Answer 4: “In this manner the Christians said that al-Masih (i.e. Jesus Christ) was the Spirit of Allah, part of Him, and would return into him. In this manner the Magians said that the fire and the sun were part of Him and would return into him. Exalted is our Lord above that He is parted and different. It is the parted which is different and harmonious. That is because every parted thing is imagined. As for plenty and smallness, they are created and demonstrate the creation of their Creator.”

Question 5: “We have been told that Allah divided ocular vision and (His) speech between two prophets. He gave His speech to Musa’, and His vision to Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family?”

Answer 5: “Who brought the message from Allah to the *thaqalayn* (i.e. the jinn and men): the eyes attain Him not; they comprehend Him not in knowledge; there is nothing like Him? Wasn’t Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, (who brought these beliefs?)”

“Yes,” was the answer.

The Imam, peace be on him, made clear the matter to him and explained to him what was vague, saying: “How does a man come to all creatures and tells them that he has come from Allah, that he summons them to Allah through Allah’s command and says: ‘The eyes attain Him not; they comprehend Him not in knowledge; and there is nothing like Him.’ And in spite of all that, he should still claim, ‘I have seen Allah with my own eye; I have comprehended Him in my knowledge; and Allah has the form of a man?’ Do you not feel any shame? Even the unbelievers could not charge the Prophet with first bringing

one thing from Allah and then, in a different way, announcing some other thing quite contrary to the first.”

Question 6: “He (Allah) says: ***And indeed he (the Prophet) saw Him in another descent?***[22](#)”

Answer 6: “After this verse there is another verse which demonstrates what the Prophet had seen, and in which Allah says: ***His heart does not lie of what he saw***. Allah says that the heart of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, did not belie of what his eyes did see. He says: ***Indeed he (the Prophet) saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord***. Therefore the signs of Allah are other than Allah. He says: ***They do not comprehend Him in knowledge***.[23](#) Now, if eyes could see Allah, then people could comprehend Him in knowledge.”

Question 7: “Do you deny the traditions?”

Answer 7: “When the traditions are contrary to the Qur’an, I deny them. (Besides) all Muslims unanimously believe that Allah cannot be comprehended by knowledge, that the eyes do not attain Him, and that there is nothing like Him.”

The Imam, peace be on him, appointed a measure for the correctness and incorrectness of the traditions. The measure is that if the tradition agrees with the Qur’an (in meaning), then it is correct; otherwise it is incorrect.

Question 8: “What is the meaning of these words of Him, the Exalted? ***Glory belongs to Him Who made His servant go on a night from the Sacred Mosque to the remote mosque of which We have blessed the precincts***.[24](#)”

Answer 8: “Allah, the Exalted, told that He made him go, and then He (i.e. Allah) told (us) why He made him go—namely Allah told (us) about the reason for this travel by night, saying: ***So that We may show to him some of Our signs***.[25](#) Therefore, the signs of Allah are other than Allah. Allah has shown the reason and explained why He did that toward him and what he (the Prophet) did see. And He said: ***Then in what announcement would they believe after Allah and His communications?***[26](#)”

Question 8: “Where is Allah?”

Answer 8: “The ‘where’ is a place. This is the question of one who is present about one who is absent. As for Allah, the Most High, is not absent; nor was there an eternal thing before Him. He is everywhere. He is Director, Creator, Keeper, the Holder of the heavens and the earth.”

Question 9: “Is Allah not on the heaven, not on other than it?”

Answer 9: “Allah is in the heavens and in earth. *And it is He Who in heaven is Allah and in earth is Allah. It is He Who shapes you in the wombs as He likes*. He is with you wherever you are. *It is He Who directed Himself to the heaven, and it was a vapor. It is He Who directed Himself to the heaven, so He*

*made them seven complete heavens. It is He Who sat Himself upon the throne* (of authority). He was while there was no creation. He was just as He was when there was no creation. He does not move with those who move.”

Question 10: “Why do you raise your hands toward the heaven when you pray?”

Answer 10: “Surely, Allah has enslaved His creatures with kinds of acts of worship. There are places of flight to Allah, so they flee to Him and are enslaved. He has enslaved His servants through words, knowledge, action, guidance, and the like. He has enslaved them through directing the prayer toward the Ka’ba. He has also directed toward it the *hajj* and the *Omra*. He has enslaved His creatures during the supplication and request. As for imploring through stretching out the hands and raising them toward the heaven, it (shows) the state of submission (to Allah) and the mark of exclusive devotion and servility to Him.”

Question 11: “Who are nearer to Allah—the angels or the inhabitants of the earth?”

Answer 11: “If you mean the span of the hand and the arm, then all things are the same (for Him) and are His action. He does not busy Himself with some of them (and leaves the rest). He directs the highest of the creatures and the lowest of them. He directs the first of them and the last of them without any trouble, toilsomeness, burden, consultation, and fatigue. If you mean that which of them is nearer to Him due to means, then the most obedient to Him. You know that the servant is close to Allah when he prostrates himself in prayer. You know that four angels met. One of them was from the highest creatures, one of them was from the lowest creatures, one of them was from the east of the creatures, and one of them was from the west of the creatures. They asked each other. All of them said: ‘(We have come) from Allah. He has sent me with so-and-so. This is evidence for that (nearness to Allah) is in position without comparison and resemblance.’”

Question 12: “Do you admit that Allah is (in the state of) being carried?”

Answer 12: “Everything carried is (passive) i.e., acted upon by someone else, and is indeed (of others). The word ‘carried’ in itself connotes deficiency and need. On the other hand the carrier is (active) i.e., the one who acts. The word ‘carrier’ signifies analogy within itself, just as the word above, below, the very high and very low are generally used by speakers. Allah has also said: ‘And to Allah (alone) belongs (all) the most beautiful names, so call him by them.’<sup>27</sup> And He has never said in His Book that He has been carried. Rather He has said that He carries on land and at sea. And it is He Who holds the heavens and earth lest they remove. And everything which is carried is always apart from Allah. It has never been heard that anyone who believes in Allah and His Majesty called Him (Allah): ‘O the carried!’”

Question 13: “Do you deny the tradition narrated (to us) which says: ‘Verily when Allah becomes angry His wrath is known through (the increased) weight (which the angels feel) on their shoulders while carrying the Throne. (At that moment) the angels prostrate themselves (in prayer). When (Allah’s) wrath subsides, the weight of the Throne lightens, and the angels return to their former positions?’”

Answer 13: “Tell me, whether Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, has or has not become wrathful ever since He cursed Iblis (Satan), and (tell me) when he became pleased with Iblis, his friends and followers.”

Abu’ Qurra confirmed the Imam’s statement, saying: “Yes, He is wrathful with him.”

The Imam opposed him, saying: “Woe unto you! How do you dare to associate with Allah the attribute of changing from state to state? And how do you dare to apply to Him (the Creator) what is applicable to the created while Allah is glorified and far above this? Allah does not perish along with the things which perish; nor does he alter along with things which alter.”

Abu’ Qurrah was astonished, was unable to answer, and escaped from the session while he was defeated. He was angry with the Imam and harbored malice against him.

## His debate with the Catholic

Al-Ma’mu’n took other measures to examine the Imam, that he might be successful through defeating him (in one session). He ordered his minister al-Fadl b. SAhl to summon the prominent theologians from among the rhetoricians and the religions such as the Catholic Archbishop, the High Rabbi, the Hindu High Priest, followers of Zoroaster<sup>28</sup>, Nestus the Roman medical scientist, and the rest of the theologians. Al-Fadl gathered them in al-Ma’mu’n’s palace, and then he made them come in to him. Al-Ma’mu’n received them with hospitality and honor. Then he presented before them what he intended, saying: “I have gathered you for (something) good and wanted you to debate with my Medinan cousin, who will come to me. Come to me tomorrow, morning. None of you should be absent.”

“We listen and obey you,” they answered him.

Al-Ma’mu’n ordered Ya’sir, the retainer, to summon the Imam to debate with the scholars of the religions. Ya’sir hurried to the Imam and informed him of al-Ma’mu’n’s statement. As for the Imam, he responded to that, then he turned to al-Hasan b. Muhammad al-Nawfali and said to him: “Nawfali, you are an Iraqi, and the heart of an Iraqi is not severe; so, what can you gain from causing your cousin to require us to meet with the polytheists and rhetoricians?”

Al-Nawfali understood al-Ma’mu’n’s intention, so he said to the Imam: “May I be your ransom, he wants to put you to test, and he loves to know how much knowledge you have. He has, indeed, built his assumption on a shaky foundation, and evil, by Allah, is what he has built.”

“And what has he built?” asked the Imam.

Al-Nawfali explained to the Imam what he was wary of and feared for him from them, saying: “The theologians and the heretics are the opponents of the scholars. That is because a scholar does not deny the undeniable, whereas rhetoricians, theologians, and polytheists are people who deny and try to prove what is not true. If you argue with them and tell them that Allah is One, they would say: ‘Prove His

Oneness,' and if you say that Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, is the Messenger of Allah, they would say: 'Confirm his Message,' then they would press their lies on a person while he tries to disprove their lies, and they would continue to prove that he is mistaken till he abandons his argument; so, beware of them, may I be your ransom."

Al-Nawfali expressed his fears of those with whom the Imam would debate, for they would not intend to reach the reality and to know the truth; they would depend on fallacies in order to achieve their cheap objectives.

The Imam removed al-Nawfali's fears, saying: "Nawfali, do you fear that they will disprove my argument?"

"No, by Allah," replied al-Nawfali, "I have never worried about you, and I hope that Allah will enable to have victory over them, Allah willing!"

"Would you like to know when al-Ma'mu'n will feel remorseful?" asked the Imam.

"Yes," al-Nawfali replied.

The Imam explained: "When he (al-Ma'mu'n) hears me argue with the people of the Torah quoting their own Torah, with the people of the Gospel quoting their own Gospel, with the people of the Psalms quoting their own Psalms, with the Zoroastrians arguing in their Persian language, with the Romans in their own Latin, and with the rhetoricians using their very rhetoric. So, if I closed the avenues of argument in the face of each arguing party and disproved his claim, making him renounce his statement from its onset and referring to my own statement, then al-Ma'mu'n will realize that he will not achieve what he aspires. It is then that he will feel regretful. And there is no strength save in Allah, the Most High, the Almighty."

Through these words the Imam, peace be on him, announced that he had boundless scientific abilities and that he was able to argue with all the people of the religions and beliefs, to refute their imaginations, and to show them the way to the truth. He decided to make al-Ma'mu'n feel remorseful over those measures he took against him.

On the following day, al-Fadl b. SAhl went in a hurry to the Imam, peace be on him, and said to him: "May I be your ransom, your cousin (i.e. al-Ma'mu'n) is waiting for you. The people has gathered. What is your view of going to him?"

The Imam answered him that he was ready to attend (the session) and that he was going to al-Ma'mu'n. He went out (walking) with solemnity toward which faces were humble. He remembered Allah and came in to al-Ma'mu'n. The session was attended by the Ta'libiyyin, the Ha'shimites, the military commanders, Muslim and non-Muslim scholars. When the Imam came, al-Ma'mu'n and all those who were in the session stood up for him, received him with honor and magnification. The Imam sat while the people

were still standing in order to show respect for him. A–Ma’mu’n ordered them to sit and they sat down. All the people in the session kept silent as a sign of respect for the Imam, and then al–Ma’mu’n turned to the Catholic Archbishop and said to him: “Catholic, this is my cousin ‘Ali b. Musa’ b. Ja’far. He is on of the children of F’a’tima, daughter of our Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and of ‘Ali b. Abu’ Ta’lib, peace be on him. I would like you to debate with him on theology, argue with him, and show justice toward him.

“Commander of the faithful, how can I argue with a man who argue with me through a Book which we have denied and a Prophet whom I do not believe?” asked the Catholic.

The Catholic thought that the Imam, peace be on him, would produce evidence in support of his beliefs through some verses of the Holy Qur’an or through some words of the Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family. As he had no faith in the Qur’anic verses and the Prophetic traditions, he asked the Imam to give proof of his beliefs from their own Books, and the Imam answered him saying: “Christian, if I give proof from your Gospel, will you admit it?”

“Yes,” retorted the Catholic, “By Allah, I will admit it. Can I repel what the Bible speaks about?”

“Question (me) whatever you desire and hear (my) answers,” declared the Imam.

Question 1: “What is your view of the Prophethood of ‘Isa’ (Jesus Christ) and his Book? Do you deny anything of them?”

Answer 1: “I admit the Prophethood of ‘Isa’ (Jesus Christ) and his Book, of what he brought good news to his community, and the disciples admitted it. He who does not admit the Prophethood of Muhammad and His Book and does not bring good news of them to his community denies the Prophethood of ‘Isa’.”

“Aren’t precepts proved through two just witnesses?” asked the Catholic.

“Yes,” replied the Imam.

“Therefore, name two witnesses from other than the people of your religion and from among those whom the Christians do not deny, that they might (confirm) the Prophethood of Muhammad. And ask us for the like of that from among other than the people of our religion,” demanded the Catholic.

The Imam believed his statement, for he brought justice, saying: “Now, you have brought justice. Do you not accept from me the just one who was given preference (over the others) by al–Masih b. Maryam (Jesus, son of Mary)?”

“Who is the just one? Name him for me,” asked the Catholic.

“What is your view of Yohanna’ al–Daylami?” asked the Imam.

“Bravo! Bravo!” retorted the Catholic, “You have mentioned the most lovable of the people to al–Masih.”

Imam al-Ridha', the Prophet's grandson, asked him: "I challenge you to swear (by Allah), does the Bible say that Yohanna' says: Verily al-Masih has told me of the religion of Muhammad, the Arab, given me good news of him, he will be (a prophet) after him, so I (Yohanna al-Daylami) gave good news of him to the disciples and they believed him."

The Catholic was unable to deny the Imam's statement, but he said: "Yohanna' did not name him for us, that we may recognize him."

The Imam asked him: "If we bring you someone who recites the Bible and recites to you Muhammad's name, his Household, and his community, then will you believe him?"

"A sound suggestion," the Catholic answered.

The Imam turned to Nestus, the Roman, and asked Him: "Have you memorized the third Book of the Bible?"

"I have thoroughly memorized it," was the answer.

The Imam, peace be on him, addressed the Catholic, saying: "Don't you recite the Bible?"

"Yes," he said.

The Imam said: "Therefore (I will) recite to you (some verses from) the third Book. If Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, his Household, and his community has been mentioned in it, then bear witness to me? If they have not been mentioned wherein, then do not bear witness to me."

The Imam recited to him some verses from the third Book. When he reached the reference to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, he turned to the Catholic and asked him: "I challenge you to swear by al-Masih and his mother, did you know that I had knowledge of the Bible?"

"Yes," came the answer.

The Imam recited to him some verses from the third Book concerning the reference to the Prophet, his Household, and his community. Then he asked him: "What is your view? This is the statement of 'Isa' b. Maryam. If you deny what the Bible says, then you will deny Musa' and 'Isa'. If you deny them, then it is obligatory (on people) to kill you, for you have denied your Lord, your Prophet, and your Book."

The Catholic said: "I do not deny the clear things in the Bible; rather I admit them."

The Imam turned to those who were present and asked them to remind the Catholic of his own words, and then he said to the Catholic: "Catholic, question me whatever you desire."

Question 2: "Tell me about the disciples of 'Isa' b. Maryam: How many were they? (Tell me) about the scholars of the Bible: How many were they?" the Catholic asked.

Answer 2: “You have found the expert! As for (the number of) the disciples, they were twelve men. The best and the most learned of them was loqa’. As for (the number of) the scholars of the Christians, it was three men: Yohnna’, the greatest–Ya’hi–, Yohanna’ (Baqriqisiya), and Yohanna’ al–Daylami (Bazikha’r), who had the reference to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and his Household; it is he who gave good news to the community of ‘Isa’ and the children of Isra’il of him (the Prophet).”

The Imam added, saying: “By Allah, we believe in ‘Isa’ who believed in Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family. We have nothing against ‘Isa’ except his weakness and the paucity of his fasting and prayer.”

When the Catholic heard the last words of the Imam’s statement, he shouted: “By Allah, you have corrupted your knowledge! Your affair has become weak! I thought that you were the most learned of the Muslims!”

The Imam faced him calmly, asking: “Why?”

The Catholic lost his mind, so he began saying: “Because of your statement (which is) that ‘Isa’ was weak with little fasting and praying, (while) ‘Isa’ never broke fasting by day and never slept by night. He always fasted by day and prayed by night.”

The Imam got ready to disprove the Christian belief which said that al–Masih was a god other than Allah and was served! He asked the Catholic: “For whom did he (al–Masih) fast and pray?”

The Catholic did not answer, not knowing what to say. So the Imam turned to him, saying : “I want to ask you a question.”

“Ask,” said the Catholic, “I will answer you if I have knowledge of it.”

“Did you not deny that ‘Isa’ gave life to the dead with Allah’s permission?” asked the Imam.

“I had denied that before,” the Catholic answered, “he who gives life to the dead, heals the blind and the leprous is a lord worthy of being served.”

The Imam disproved his statement, saying: “Indeed al–Yasa’ did just as ‘Isa’, peace be on him, did: he walked on the water, gave life to the dead, healed the blind and the leprous. Why did his community not adopt him as a lord? Why did not anyone serve him (as a god) other than Allah? He gave life to thirty–five men sixty years after their death. Catholic, you find in the Torah that these (men) were among the youths of the children of Isra’il whom Bukht Nasr (Nebuchadnezzar) chose from among the children of Isra’il when he invaded Jerusalem, that he took them and headed for Babylon, and that Allah, the Great and Almighty, dispatched al–Yasa’ for them and he gave life to them. This (statement) is in the Torah. None denies it except an unbeliever.”

The Catholic admired the Imam’s knowledge of their Books, and then he said: “We have heard of it and

recognized it.”

The Imam turned to a Jew who was in the session and asked him to recite some verses of the Torah and he recited them, and there was in them a reference to some prophets. Then the Imam turned to the Catholic and asked him: “Were these (prophets) before ‘Isa or was he before them?”

“Rather they were before him,” was the answer.

The Imam began reciting to them some miracles of his grandfather, the greatest Prophet, the last of the prophets, saying: “Quraysh gathered around Allah’s Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and asked him to give life to their dead. He sent with them ‘Ali b. Abu’ Ta’lib and said to him: ‘Go to the cemetery and call out at the top of your voice to the people about whom they have asked: So–and–so, so–and–so, Muhammad Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, say to you: Rise with the permission of Allah, the Great and Almighty! They rose and dusted off their heads. Quraysh walked toward them and asked them about their affairs, and then they told them that Muhammad was appointed as a prophet. They (the people who rose from the dead) said: ‘We would that we knew him and believed in him!’ He (the Prophet) healed the blind, the leprous, and the mad. The beasts, the birds, the jinn, and Satan spoke to him, but we did not adopt him as a lord other than Allah. We do not deny the favor of any of these (prophets). If you have adopted ‘Isa’ as a lord, then it is permissible for you to adopt al–Yasa’ and Hizqal as two lords, for they did just as ‘Isa’ b. Maryam did such as giving life to the dead. Then a group of the children of Isra”il left their own homeland in thousands out of fear of death of plague. Allah made them die within one hour. The people of the village fenced them, and they remained wherein until their bones became decayed. One of the prophets of the children of Isra”il passed by them; he was amazed when he saw their many decayed bones. Allah revealed to him: ‘Would you like (Me) to bring them to life and you warn them?’

“ ‘Yes,’ was the answer.

“Allah revealed to him that he should call them out, and he said: ‘Decayed bones, rise with Allah’s permission.’ All of them rose and dusted off their heads. Then Ibra’him, Allah’s bosom friend, took the birds, cut them into pieces, and put each piece on a mountain. He called them out and they came toward him walking. Then Musa’ b. ‘Umra’n and his seventy companions whom he chose. They went with him to the mountain and said to him: ‘You have seen Allah, then make us see Him.’

‘I have not seen Him,’ he said to them.

They said: ‘*We will not believe in you until we see Allah manifestly.* The thunderbolt overtook them, and all of them burnt. Only Musa’ remained (alive).’

He (Musa’) said: ‘My Lord! I chose seventy men from among the children of Isra”il and brought them (to the mountain). Shall I return by myself? How shall my people believe what I will tell them about? If only You willed and perished them along with me before! Shall you perish us due to what the foolish did?’

“So Allah, the Great and Almighty, gave life to them after their death. You cannot deny all these things which I have mentioned to you, for the Torah, the Bible, the Zabur (David’s Psalms) the Furqan (Qur’an) have mentioned them. If all those who gave life to the dead, healed the blind, the leprous, and the mad were adopted as lords other than Allah, than you adopt them as lords. What is your view, Christian?”

The Imam criticized the Christians for their adopting al-Sayyid al-Masih as a lord other than Allah, for he gave life to the dead, healed the blind and the leprous, while such miracles happened through the master of the prophets, the Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and through some great prophets, but they were not adopted and served as lords other than Allah, the Most High.

After the Catholic Archbishop had heard these brilliant words of the Imam, he addressed him, saying: “My view agrees with yours, and there is no god but Allah.”

The Imam turned to the High Rabbi and said to him: “Turn to me; I want to ask you about the ten verses which were sent down to Musa’ b. ‘Umra’n. Have you found written in the Torah the news of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, and his community, (which says): When the last community and the followers of the Rider of the Camel (who) glorify the Lord very, very (much), (with) a new glorification in the new churches (he meant the mosques), then let the children of Isra’il flee toward them and their dominion, that their hearts may be tranquil, for there will in their hands swords with which they will take vengeance on the unbelieving communities in the regions of the earth. In this manner it has been written in the Torah?”

The Rabbi was amazed and began saying: “Yes, we have found that (written) in this manner.”

The Imam, peace be on him, turned to the Catholic and asked him: “What about your knowledge of the Book of Sha’ya’?”

“I know it letter for letter,” was the answer.

The Imam addressed the Catholic and the Rabbi and said to them: “Do you know that this (statement) is of his speech: O People, I have seen the picture of the Rider of the Donkey. He was wearing the gowns of light. And I have seen that the light of the Rider of the camel is like that of the moon.”

They began saying: “Sha’ya’ did say that!”

The Imam turned to the Catholic and asked him: “Did you know that ‘Isa’ said: ‘I am going to my Lord and your Lord, and the *Paraclete* is coming who shall testify to my truth just as I testified for him, and he shall explain everything to you, and he shall be the one to expose all the sins of nations, and he shall be the one to smash the pillar of unbelief.’?”

The Catholic became amazed and said: “We admit all what you have just quoted of the Bible.”

Then the Imam made him confess that through the Bible, saying: “Have you found that established in the Bible?”

“Yes,” came the answer.

“O Catholic, could you tell me about the first Bible, how you lost then found it, and who put your existing Bible together?” asked the Imam.

The Catholic said at random: “We did not lose the Bible except for one single day then we found it fresh; Yohanna’ (John) and Matti (Matthew) brought it back to us.”

The Imam answered him, saying: “How little your knowledge of the Bible and its scholars is! If such is your claim, then why do you dispute with each other about the Bible? Rather, controversy has always revolved around the Bible which is in your hands today. Had it been the same as the first one, you would not have thus dispute (with one another) about it, but I shall inform you of such controversy myself: Be informed that when the first Bible was lost, the Christians gathered around their scholars and said to them: ‘Isa’ b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary) has been killed, and we do not know where the Bible is. You are the scholars; so, what do you have with you?’

“Aluqa’ (Luke), Marqa’nu’s (Mark), and Yohanna’ (John) said to them: ‘We have learned the Bible by heart; so, do not grieve in its regard, and do not forsake the churches, for we shall recite to you one Gospel after another on each Sunday till we put it all together.’”

The Imam added, saying: “Aluqa’ (Luke), Marqa’nu’s (Mark), Yohanna’ (John), and Matti (Matthew) put this Bible of yours after you had lost the first (original) one. These four men were students of the early (disciples); are you aware of that?”

The Catholic admired the Imam and confessed to him that he had no knowledge of that, saying: “This I did not know and now I have learned from you things with which I was familiar and to which my heart testifies to be the truth. I have, therefore, gained a better understanding.”

The Imam, peace be on him, turned to al-Ma’mu’n and those who were present from among his family and others than them. He said to them: “Bear witness to what he has just said.”

“We testify,” they said.

The Imam addressed the Catholic, saying: “I challenge you to swear by the son and his mother whether you know if Matti (Matthew) had said concerning the lineage of ‘Isa’ : ‘The Messiah is Da’wud (David) son of Ibra’him (Abraham) son of Isha’q (Isaac) son of Ya’qu’b (Jacob) son of Yahu’d (Yehuda) son of Khadrin, and that Marqa’nus (Mark) said about the lineage of ‘Isa’ that he was the word of Allah which he placed in the human body, so it became human, and that Alu’qa’ (Luke) said that ‘Isa’ b. Maryam (Jesus son of Mary) and his mother were humans of flesh and blood, so the Holy Spirit entered into them.’ Then you testify that ‘Isa’ had himself said the following about his creation: ‘I will tell you the truth:

None ascends the heavens except him who descends therefrom except the Rider of the Camel, the seal of the prophets, for he shall ascend to the heavens then shall he descend.’ What do you say about that?”

The Catholic admitted what they said about the Messiah and what the Messiah said concerning his creation. He said: “This is the speech of ‘Isa’, and we do not deny it.”

The Imam said to him: “If so, what do you say about the testimony of Alu’qa’ (Luke), Marqa’nu’s (Mark), and Matti (Matthew) with regard to ‘Isa’ and what they had attributed to him?”

“They lied about him,” was the answer.

The Imam turned to the leaders and the scholars who were present in his session and said to them: “People, has he not (a moment ago) testified to their truthfulness and said that they were the scholars of the Bible and what they said is the truth?”

Defeat appeared on the Catholic’s face, and he asked the Imam not to question him, saying: “Scholar of the Muslims, I would like you to excuse me from discussing these men.”

The Imam excused him, and then he said to him: “Question me whatever you desire.”

The Catholic admired the Imam’s knowledge, which was a natural extension to that of his grandfather, the master of all creatures, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family. Then he said to the Imam with submission and admiration: “Let someone other than me ask you. By Allah, I did not think that there was a scholar like you among the Muslims.”

The Catholic bowed his head, and the session shook with saying: “There is no god but Allah! Allah is greater!” Al-Ma’mu’n and the others came to know that Allah had given the Imam to this community as a gift just as He had given his grandfathers to it and supplied them with abundant knowledge.

## **The Imam debates with the High Rabbi**

The High Rabbi represented the Jewish sect in the session which al-Ma’mu’n prepared for testing the Imam.

The Imam asked him: “Shall you question me or shall I question you?”

“Rather I shall question you,” replied the Rabbi, “ and I shall not accept any proof from you except from the Torah, the Bible, Da’wud’s Zabur (David’s Psalms), the scriptures of Ibra’him and Musa’.”

The Imam agreed to this condition, saying: “Do not accept any proof from me except what the Torah says by the tongue of Musa’, the Bible by the tongue of ‘Isa’ b. Maryam, and the Zabur by the tongue of Da’wud, peace be on them.”

Question 1: "How can you prove the Prophethood of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family?"

Answer 1: "He bore witness to the Prophethood of Musa' b. 'Umra'n, 'Isa' b. Maryam, and Da'wud, the vicegerent of Allah on earth."

The Rabbi asked the Imam to prove that, saying: "Provide evidence of the speech of Musa' b. 'Umra'n."

The Imam said: "Did you, Jew, know that Musa' said to the children of Isra'il: 'A prophet will come to you concerning him. Believe in him and hear from him?' Did you know that the prophet Isra'il had brothers other than the sons of Isma'il? Did you know the kinship between Isra'il and Isma'il and the lineage between them through Ibra'him?"

The Rabbi admitted that, saying: "This is the speech of Musa', and we do not deny it."

"Did one of the brothers of the children of Isra'il other than Muhammad come to you?"

"No," was the answer.

"Is this not correct in your view?"

"Yes," replied the Rabbi, "but I want you to make it correct from the Torah."

The Imam recited to him a verse from the Torah, saying: "Do you deny that the Torah says to you: 'The light came from Mount Sina', shone for the people from Mount Sa'ir, and became public for us from Mount Fa'ra'n."

The Rabbi admitted these words (of the Imam), but he asked him to explain them to him, and he, peace be on him, said: "I will tell you about them. As for his statement: 'The light came from Mount Sina', it is the revelation of Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, which He sent down to Musa' on Mount Sina'. As for his statement: 'Shone for the people from Mount Sa'ir,' it is the mountain where Allah, the Great and Almighty, revealed to 'Isa' b. Maryam. As for his statement: 'Became public for us from Mount Fa'ra'n,' it is one of the mountains of Mecca, between which and us is a day or two-day-(journey).

"Sha'ya', the Prophet, said in the Torah concerning what you and your companions say: 'I have seen two riders to whom (He) illuminated earth. One of them was on (the back of) a donkey and the other was on (the back of) a camel.' Who is the Rider of the Donkey, and who is the Rider of the Camel?"

The Rabbi did not know that though it was in the Torah, so he asked the Imam to explain it to him, and he, peace be on him, said: "As for the Rider of the Donkey, he is 'Isa'; and as for the Rider of the Camel, he is Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family. Do you deny that this (statement) is not in the Torah?"

"No, I do not deny it," came the answer.

“Did you know Habqu’q, the Prophet?” asked the Imam.

“Yes, I know him,” was the answer.

The Imam, peace be on him, recited to him what was narrated on his authority, saying: “He said, and your Book says it: ‘Allah, the Most High, brought the Baya’n from Mount Fa’ra’n; the earth was full of the glorification of Ahmed and his community. He will carry his horses in the sea just as he will carry (them) on the land. He will brought us a new Book (i.e. the Qur’an) after the destruction of Jerusalem. Did you know this (statement) and believe in it?”

The Rabbi admitted that. Then the Imam turned to him and gave to him another proof of the good news which had been mentioned in the Zabur about the greatest Messenger, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, saying: “Da’wud said in his Zabur, and you read it: ‘O Allah, send him who will establish the Sunna (practice) after the cessation (of the prophets).’ Did you know that a prophet other than Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, established the Sunna after the cessation (of the prophets)?”

The High Rabbi dodged and denied the truth, saying: “This is the speech of Da’wud. We know it and do not deny it. However, he meant ‘Isa’ by that, and the cessation was before him!”

The Imam asked him: “Did you not know that ‘Isa’ endorsed the Sunna (practices) of the Torah until Allah lift him up to Himself. And in the Bible it has been written that Ibn al-Ba’rra (the son of the pious woman, i.e. ‘Isa’) will go, and the *Paraclete* will come after him. It is he who will preserve the bonds, explain everything to you, and testify to my truth just as I testified for him. I have brought you the examples, and he will bring you the interpretations. Do you believe that this (statement) is in the Bible?”

“Yes,” replied the Rabbi, “I do not deny it.”

“I want to question you about your prophet Musa’,” demanded the Imam.

“Question,” was the answer.

“What is the evidence for the Prophethood of Musa’?” asked the Imam.

The Rabbi began producing evidence in support of the Prophethood of Musa’, saying: “He brought what the prophets before him had not brought.”

“Could you give me an example of what he brought?” asked the Imam.

The Rabbi replied: “He split the sea, turned the cane into a snake running, cleaved the stones so that springs gushed forth from them, took out his hand shining white for the onlookers, and other signs the like of which the creature are unable to bring.”

The Imam confirmed his statement, saying: “You are right; they are proof of his Prophethood. He

brought the like of which the creatures were unable to bring. Is it obligatory on you to believe him who claims Prophethood and performs something which all creatures are unable to perform?”

The Jew denied the Imam's statement, saying: “No, because there is none like Musa', because of his position with his Lord and his nearness to Him. It is not incumbent on us to profess the Prophethood of him who claims it unless he brings us knowledge similar to that brought by Musa'.”

The Imam disproved the Jew's statement, saying: “Then how come you admit the prophet of the other prophets who preceded Musa' who did not split the sea; nor did they cleave the stone so that twelve springs would gush forth from them; nor did they take their hands out shining white as Musa' did; nor did they turn the rod into a snake running.”

The Jew replied: “I told you that if they performed signs as evidence for their Prophethood all other creation were unable to perform, if they brought something the like of which Musa' had brought or they followed what Musa' had brought, then it is incumbent on us to believe them.”

The Imam, peace be on him, disproved his argument, saying: “High Rabbi, what has prevented you from professing (the Prophethood of) 'Isa' b. Maryam who brought the dead to life, healed the blind and the leprous, determined out of dust like the form of a bird, then he breathed into it and it became bird with Allah's permission?”

The Jew dodged and said: “It is said that he did that, but we did not see it.”

The Imam answered him with a conclusive argument, saying: “Did you see the signs which Musa' performed? Weren't Musa's trustworthy companions who gave an account of that?”

“Yes,” came the answer.

The Imam forced him (to admit that) through a decisive argument, and then he said: “In this manner the successive accounts about what 'Isa' b. Maryam had done also came to you. So why do you believe in Musa' and do not believe in 'Isa'?”

The High Rabbi kept silent, and feebleness appeared on his face, for the Imam had closed before him all avenues of argument and established a decisive proof against him. The Imam, peace be on him, added: “Such is the matter of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, what he brought, and every prophet whom Allah sent. Among his (Muhammad's) signs are: He was a poor orphan and wage shepherd. He did not learn (reading and writing); nor did he studied under a teacher. Then he brought the Qur'an in which are the stories of the prophets, peace be on them, and their accounts letter for letter, and which reports about the bygone (communities) and those who will remain until the Day of Resurrection. Then it gives accounts of their secrets and what they did in their houses; therein are many verses (in this connection).”

The Rabbi interrupted the Imam's speech, saying: “Neither the account about 'Isa' nor the one about

Muhammad is correct with us, and it is not permissible to admit (their Prophethood) through what is not correct (with us).”

The Imam, peace be on him, confuted the Jew’s speech, saying: “Is the witness who testified ‘Isa’ and Muhammad false?”

The High Rabbi kept silent and looked for a vague error in order to back his groundless viewpoints.

## **The Imam debates with the Hindu High Priest**

The heads of the creeds failed to render the Imam incapable, and feebleness appeared on their faces. There was none except the Zoroastrian high priest, so the Imam turned to him and asked him: “Tell me about Zoroaster, whom you claim that he is a prophet; what is your evidence for his Prophethood?”

The Hindu high priest said: “We did not see him, but the tales of our ancestors informed us that he had legalized for us what no other person before had made legal.”

The Imam asked him: “You believed in the tales which came to you about him, so you followed him, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” he answered.

The Imam established against him undeniable argument, saying: “This is the case with all other nations. Tales had come to them about what the prophets had accomplished, what Musa’, ‘Isa’, and Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, had all brought them, so why did you not believe in any of these prophets, having believed in Zoroaster through the tales that came to you about him informing that he brought forth what others did not?”

Perplexity and astonishment dominated the Zoroastrian high priest; he was perplexed and had nothing to say. Accordingly, the Prophet’s grandson (i.e. al-Ridha’) turned to the chief representatives of those creeds and said to them: “People, if there is among you someone who opposes Islam and wants to question (me), let him put forth any question (to me) without any shame![29](#)”

These debates silenced the anti-Islam forces and clearly established the great scientific abilities with which Allah endowed the Imam, and which demonstrated the correctness of the creed of the Shi’ites, who maintained that Allah endowed the Imams of the *Ahal al-Bayt*, peace be on them, with scientific abilities, and that the Imams were the most learned of that community, not only in the legislative fields but also in all scientific ones.

The associations in Khurasa’n took great care of these debates through which Imam al-Ridha’, peace be on him, overcame the chief representatives of the creeds. Meanwhile the debates moved al-Ma’mu’n’s feelings and sentiments, and he harbored malice and enmity against the Imam, peace be on

him. That is because he intended to render the Imam incapable of answering during the debates in order to use his incapability as means for defaming him and removing him from the office of regency. As a result, al-Ma'mu'n spared no effort to get rid of Imam al-Ridha'. He thought that he had no means to get rid of him except assassinating him by putting poison in food. We will explain the matter of assassinating the Imam by giving more details in the chapters that follow.

## The Imam debates with an Atheist

An atheist, experienced in atheism and unbelief, hurried to attend Imam al-Ridha's session in which was a group of people. The Imam turned to the atheist and asked him: "Do you see that if the correct view is your view and it is not your view then are we not equal? All that we have prayed, fasted, given the alms and declared of our convictions will not harm us?"

The atheist kept silence because of this undeniable argument, for if the matter was as the atheists said that there was no god, then prayer and fasting would not harm the monotheists.

After that the Imam added, saying: "If the correct view is our view and it is our view then have you not perished and we gained salvation?"

The Imam wanted to say that if the atheists came to know that there was Almighty Creator, they would be perished, bring disgrace on themselves, and face a painful punishment. As for the believers and the pious, they would be successful.

The atheist asked the Imam, peace be on him, the following questions:

Question 1: "May Allah have mercy on, let me know how is He (Allah) and where is He?"

Answer 1: "Surely the opinion you have adopted is mistaken. He (Allah) determined the 'where' and he was when there was nowhere; He fashioned the 'how' and He was when there was no 'how'. So He is not known through 'howness' or 'whereness' or through any form of sense perception; nor can He be gauged by anything."

Indeed Allah is the Light of the heavens and earth, for it is impossible for Him to be distinguished by the 'where', 'how' and the rest qualities of the possible being who will perish sooner or later. As for Allah, the Glorified, He is not perceived by the senses; nor is He gauged by anything.

Question 2: "So then He is nothing if He cannot be perceived by any of the senses?"

Answer 2: "Woe unto you! When your senses fail to perceive Him, you deny His lordship. But when our senses fail to perceive Him, we know for certain that He is our Lord and that He is something different from other things."

The perception of the senses is limited in quantity and quality as well as the senses do not perceive

many possible beings. For example, they do not perceive the reality of soul, then how do they perceive the Necessary Being, the Exalted, the Holy?

Question 3: "Tell me, when He was?"

Answer 3: "Tell me when He was not, and then I will tell you when He was."

The Imam, peace be on him, criticized the atheist for his question, for Allah, the Exalted is a brilliant reality which every one comprehends through His signs, His great creation, and His marvelous creatures. He is in every stage of existence, and it is impossible to say: "When He was?"

Question 4: "Then what is the proof of Him?"

Answer 4: "Surely when I contemplate my body and it is impossible for me to increase or decrease its breadth and height, or to keep unpleasant things away from it or draw benefits to it, then I know that this structure has a maker and I acknowledge Him—even though that which I had seen of the rotation of the celestial sphere through His power, the producing of clouds; the turning about of the winds; the procession of the sun, the moon and the stars; and others of his wondrous and perfectly created signs, had already made me know that (all) this has a Determiner and Producer."

Surely, every atom of this world is a proof of the existence of the great Creator, who has made them.

If man carefully considers his own body and the wonderful systems and cells wherein, he will certainly believe in Allah, the Most High, just as it has been mentioned in the tradition: "He who knows his own body knows his Lord." Allah, the Exalted, created man in the best manner. It is impossible that there is increase or decrease in his organs. It is well known that this surprisingly accurate creation of man is evidence for the existence of Allah, for effect is proof of cause as logicians say.

Among the signs of Allah are the rotation of the celestial sphere, the producing of clouds; the turning about of the winds; the procession of the sun and the moon. He, the Exalted, says: "*Neither it is allowable to the sun that it should overtake the moon, nor can the night outstrip the day; and all float on in a sphere.*" Glory belongs to Allah! Many signs are evidence for His existence.

Question 5: "Then why does the sense of sight not perceive Him?"

Answer 5: "Because of the difference between Him and His creatures, who are perceived by the vision of the eyes, whether their own or others. Then He is greater than that sight should perceive Him, imagination encompass Him, or the power of reason delineate Him."

The sense of sight and rest of man's senses are limited, then how can they, perceive, see, and encompass the Almighty Creator? Rather they perceive and comprehend some possible beings.

Question 6: "Then define His limits for me."

Answer 6: “He has no limits.”

Limitation belongs to possible beings. As for the Necessary Being, it is impossible for Him to be limited.

Question 7: “Why?”

Answer 7: “Because every limited thing ends at a limit. If limitation is possible, then increase is possible. If increase is possible, then decrease is possible. So He is unlimited. He neither increases nor decreases. Nor is He capable of being divided or imagined.”

The Imam, peace be on him, provided evidence of that it was impossible for man to define the limits of the Almighty Necessary Being. That is because limitation, as we have mentioned, is one of the qualities of the possible beings.

Question 8: “Then tell me about your saying that He is Subtle, Hearing, Seeing, Knowing, and Wise. Can He be the Hearing without ears, the Seeing without eyes, the Subtle without working with the hands and the Wise without workmanship (*san‘a*)?”

Answer 8: “Surely a person among us is subtle in accordance with (his) skill in workmanship. Have you not seen the man who undertakes a task and is subtle in his handling of it, so that it is said: ‘How subtle is so and so!’ Then how should it not be said of the Majestic Creator that He is subtle, when He creates a subtle and majestic creation, places in its living creatures their souls, creates every kind different in form from its own kind, and none resembles another? Each possesses in the composition of its form a subtlety from the Subtle and Aware Creator.

“Then we look upon the trees and their bearing of delicate things, whether edible or inedible, and we said at that: ‘Surely our Creator is Subtle, (but) not like the subtlety of His creatures in their workmanship.’ And we said: ‘Surely He is Hearing, for not hidden from Him are the sounds of His creatures between the Throne and the earth, from a mote to what is larger than it, and in the land and the sea. And their words are not confused by Him.’ At that we said: ‘Surely He is Hearing, but not through ears.’

“Then we said: ‘Surely He is Seeing, but not through eyes, for He sees the trace of a black speck on a dark night on a black stone. He sees the tracks of an ant on a pitch-black night. He sees what is harmful for it and what beneficial, and the result of its cohabitation, and its young and descendants.’ And at that we said: ‘Surely He is Seeing, but not like the sight of His creatures.’<sup>30</sup>”

## **The Imam debates with ‘Ali Bin al-Jahm**

Among the Imam’s debates with the rhetoricians and men of religions is that which took place between him and ‘Ali b. al-Jahm, who asked the Imam, peace be on him, saying: “Do you believe in the infallibility of the prophets?”

“Yes,” replied the Imam.

He opposed the Imam with these verses, saying:

“What do you say about these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: ***And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so his life became evil (to him)***<sup>31</sup>, these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: ***And (remember) Dha’ al-Nu’n when he departed in wrath; he imagined that We had no power over him***<sup>32</sup>, His words, the Great and Almighty, concerning Yu’suf: ***And (with passionate lust) did she desire him, and he would have desired her***<sup>33</sup>, His words, the Great and Almighty, concerning Da’wud: ***And Da’wud was sure that We had tried him*** <sup>34</sup>, and His words, the Exalted, concerning His Prophet, Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family: ***And you concealed in your soul what Allah would bring to light?*** <sup>35</sup>”

The Imam criticized ‘Ali b. al-Jahm for interpreting the verses according to his viewpoints without knowledge of their explanation and interpretation. He recited to him their interpretation, saying: “Woe unto you, ‘Ali! Fear Allah. Do not ascribe transgressions to the prophets, and do not interpret Allah’s Book according to your opinion, for Allah, the Great and Almighty, says: ***And none knows its interpretation except Allah and those deeply grounded in knowledge.***’<sup>36</sup>”

The Imam began interpreting these verses, saying: “As for these words of Him, the Great and Almighty, concerning Adam: ***And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so his life became evil (to him)***, surely Allah, the Great and Almighty, created Adam as argument on His earth and vicegerent in His land. He did not create him for the Garden. Adam’s transgression took place in the Garden, not on earth, and his infallibility in question should be on earth, that the ordinations of Allah’s command may be complete. When he was descended to earth and was appointed as an argument and vicegerent, he was protected from transgression with these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: ***Allah did indeed choose Adam and Nu’h, the family of Ibra’him, and the family of ‘Umra’n above all people.***<sup>37</sup>

“As regarding His words, the Great and Almighty: ***And (remember) Dha’ al-Nu’n when he departed in wrath; he imagined that We had no power over him***; the meaning of ***he imagined that We had no power over him*** is that he realized that Allah was not going to sustain him. Have you not heard these words of Him, the Exalted: ***But when He tries him (differently), then straitens to him his means of subsistence?*** <sup>38</sup> Had he thought that Allah was unable to overpower him, then he would have committed apostasy (*kufr*).

“As for His words, the Great and Almighty, concerning Yu’suf: ***And (with passionate lust) did she desire him, and he would have desired her***, they are that she wanted to commit a sin while he desired to kill her if she forced him; therefore, Allah saved him from the deed of killing her and its terrible consequences, and this is His words, the Great and Almighty: ***Thus (it was) that We might turn away from him evil and indecency***, meaning killing and fornication.”

The Imam turned to ‘Ali b. al-Jahm and asked him: “What did those before you say about him?”

'Ali b. al-Jahm started reciting to the Imam what had been handed down from them on interpreting the verse, saying: [They said:] "Surely Da'wud, peace be on him, was praying in his *mihrab*. Iblis appeared in front of him in the form of the most beautiful bird. Da'wud cut his prayer and went to take the bird. The bird went out to the house, and then it went out to the top (of the house). Da'wud descended looking for it. The bird alighted in the house of Uryah b. Hana'n. Da'wud followed the tracks of the bird, and suddenly there was Uryah's wife washing. When he looked at her, he fell in love with her. As for Uryah, he had been on a raid. Da'wud wrote to his companion: 'Place Uryah in front of the coffin,' and he was placed in front of it. Uryah defeated the polytheists. Da'wud found that difficult, so he wrote to him again in order to place Uryah in front of the coffin. Uryah was placed in front of it and he was killed, so Da'wud married his wife."

In this narration fornication and the forbidden have been attributed to one of the prophets of Allah, the Most High. Besides the narration contains a fable which is that Da'wud followed the bird. As for the Imam, peace be on him, he was displeased with this narration when he heard it and said: "We belong to Allah and to Him is our return! You have ascribed one of Allah's prophets to neglecting his prayers and (accused him of) going out and looking for the tracks of the bird, fornication and killing!"

'Ali b. al-Jahm asked the Imam to explain the matter to him, saying: "Son of Allah's Apostle, what was Da'wud's sin?"

The Imam told him about the true story of Da'wud, saying: "Da'wud thought that he was more learned than the rest of Allah's creatures, hence Allah, the Great and Almighty, sent him some angels and they climbed the *mihrab* and said to him: ***When they entered in upon Da'wud and he was frightened at them, they said: Fear not; two litigants, of whom one has acted wrongfully towards the other; therefore, decide between us with justice, and do not act unjustly, and guide us to the right way: Surely this is my brother; he has ninety-nine ewes and I have a single one; but he said, make it over to me, and he has prevailed against me in discourse.*** Da'wud hurried to decide the case for the plaintiff when he said: ***Surely he has been unjust to you in demanding your ewe (to add) to his own ewes.*** He did not ask the plaintiff for the evidence for that; nor did he turn to the defendant and asked him: 'What do you say?' It was an error only within the framework of the case and was not as you thought. Have you not heard that Allah, the Great and Almighty, say: ***Da'wud, surely We have made you a ruler in the land; so judge between men with justice and do not follow desire.***"

Ibn al-Jahm asked the Imam to tell him about the story of Da'wud with Uryah, saying: "Then, son of Allah's Apostle, what is Da'wud's story with Uryah."

The Imam, peace be on him, started explaining to him Da'wud's story, saying: "In the days of Da'wud, a widow never get married after the death of her husband. Da'wud, peace be on him, was the first man whom Allah permitted to marry the widow whose husband had been killed. Accordingly, he married Uryah's wife after he had been killed, and her waiting period had been over. This made the people accused Da'wud of killing Uryah."

As for Muhammad, peace be on him, and these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: ***And you concealed in your soul what Allah would bring out to light, and you feared men, and Allah had a greater right that you should fear Him*** [39](#), surely Allah made His prophet know the names of his wives in this world and the next, and that they were the mothers of the believers. One of them whom Allah made him know was Zaynab daughter of Jahsh, who was then the wife of Zayd b. Ha'ritha. He (the Prophet) concealed her name in his soul and did not declare it, lest a hypocrite would say: 'He (the Prophet) says that one of his wives, who are the mothers of the believers, is in a man's house (i.e. she is still the man's wife). He feared the words of the hypocrites, hence Allah, the Great and Almighty, said to him: *and you feared men, and Allah had a greater right that you should fear Him*, namely in your own soul. Allah, the Great and Almighty, never undertook marrying any of His creatures except marrying Hawua" (Eve) to Adam, and Zaynab (daughter of Jahsh) to Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, by the virtue of His words: ***But when Zayd had accomplished his want of her, We gave her to you as a wife***, and Fa'tima to 'Ali, peace be on him."

When 'Ali b. al-Jahm heard that, he wept and said: "Son of Allah's Apostle, I am going to return to Allah, the Great and Almighty, in repentance and will never say after this day of mine anything about the prophets of Allah except what you have mentioned.[40](#)"

These are some of the Imam's debates with the leading philosophers and scholars of various religions. The debates have established his supremacy over them, and they admitted his excellence and admitted their feebleness before him, for he, the peace of Allah be on him, had abundant scientific abilities.

## **Al-Ma'mu'n questions Imam al-Ridha'**

Al-Ma'mu'n asked Imam al-Ridha', peace be on him, some questions. More likely, he wanted to test him. The Imam answered these questions which are as follows:

Question 1: "Son of Allah's Apostle, do you not say that the prophets are infallible?"

"Yes," replied the Imam.

"What is the meaning of these words of Him, the Exalted: ***And Adam disobeyed his Lord, so his life became evil (to him)?***" asked al-Ma'mu'n.

Answer 1: "Surely Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, said to Adam: ***O Adam, dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat from it a plenteous (food) wherever you wish and do not approach this tree.*** And He pointed to the tree of wheat ***for then you will be of the unjust.*** He did not say to them: 'Do not eat from this tree or from its kind.' They did not approach the tree; nor did they eat from it; they ate from other than it. When Satan whispered (evil) to them and said: 'Your Lord has not forbidden you from this tree; rather He has forbidden you from approaching other than it. He has not forbidden you from eating from it except that you may not both become two angels or that you may (not) become of the immortal.'

And he swore to them both: ‘Most surely I am a sincere adviser to you.’ Adam and Hawua” (Eve) did not see before that anyone who swore by Allah in a false manner. Then he caused them to fall by his deceit and they ate from the tree because they trusted his swearing by Allah, and that was before Adam was considered as a Prophet, and that was not a big sin through which he deserved entering the Fire; rather it was one of the sins which could be forgiven and could be committed by Prophets before the revelation (*wahy*) came down to them. When Allah chose him and made him a prophet, he became infallible, and was not permitted to commit a sin, minor or major. Allah, the Great and Almighty, said: *Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and allow himself to be seduced. But his Lord chose (for His grace); He turned to him, and gave him guidance.*[41](#) And He, the Great and Almighty, said: *Allah did indeed choose Adam and Nu’h, the family of Ibra’him, and the family of ‘Umra’n above the people.*[42](#)”

Question 2: “What is the meaning of these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: *But when He gives them a good one, they set up with Him associates in what He has given them?* [43](#)”

Answer 2: “Hawua” born Adam five hundred males and females, so Adam and Hawua” promised Allah, the Great and Almighty, prayed to Him, and said: *If You give us a good one, we shall certainly be of the grateful ones.*

“When He gave them a good one of progeny, sound creature free from illness and defect. He gave them two types: a type of males and of females. the two types attributed partners to Allah, may His name be Exalted, in what He had given to them, and they did not thank Him as their parents thanked Him, the Great and Almighty. Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, said: ***But high is Allah above what they associate (with Him).***[44](#)”

Question 3: “I witness that you are the son of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, tell me about the words of Him, the Great and Almighty, concerning Ibra’him: ***When the night covered him, he saw a star. He said: This is my Lord.***[45](#)”

Answer 3: “Surely Ibra’him lived in a society where three types of worship dominated: the worship of Venus, the worship of the moon, and the worship of the sun. That was when he came out of the cave where he was concealed. ***When the night covered him,*** he saw Venus and said: ***This is my Lord.*** He wanted to deny (such a type of worship) and to ask (his fellows about it). When it (the star) set, he said: ***I do not love those that set.*** That this because setting is an attribute of the created not of the Eternal (Being). ***When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said: This is my Lord.*** He wanted to deny (such a type of worship) and to ask (his fellows about it). ***But when it (the moon) set, he said: Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.*** He said: ‘Unless my Lord had guided me, I would have been among those who went astray.’ When he entered upon morning and saw the sun rising in splendor, he said: ***This is my Lord; this is the greatest*** of Venus and the moon. He wanted to deny (such a type of worship) and to ask (his fellows about it), not to tell them about it and not to admit it (as a lord). When it (the sun) set, he said to the three types of men who worshipped Venus, the moon, and the sun: ***O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of ascribing partners to***

**Allah. For me, I have set my face firmly and truly towards Him, Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I attribute partners (to Allah).** By the virtue of what he said, Ibra'him simply wanted to indicate to them the invalidity of their religion and to establish to them that worship did not belong to those things like Venus, the moon, and the sun; rather it belonged to their Creator and the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The argument which he used against his people was among what Allah had inspired him and gave to him, just as Allah, the Great and Almighty, said: **And this was Our argument which We gave to Ibra'him against his people.**"

Question 4: "How good you are, son of Allah's Apostle! Tell me about these words of Ibra'him: **And when Ibra'him said: My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead, He said: What! and do you not believe. He said: Yes, but that my heart may be at ease.**[46](#)"

Answer 4: "Surely Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, had revealed to Ibra'him that He would take one of His creatures for a bosom friend. If he asked Him to give life to the dead, He would respond to him. Ibra'him thought that he would be the bosom friend, and hence he said: **My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead, He said: What! and do you not believe. He said: Yes, but that my heart may be at ease. He (Allah) said: Then take four of the birds, then train them to follow you, then place on every mountain a part of them, then call them, they will come to you flying; and know that Allah is Mighty, Wise.** As a result Ibra'him took an eagle, a peacock, a duck and a rooster. He cut the birds into pieces and mixed them. They were ten pieces. Then he placed each piece of them on the mountains around him, and put the beaks between his fingers. He put seeds and water beside him. Then he called them by their names, so those pieces flew to each other until they became sound bodies. Then each body came and joined its neck and head. Then Ibra'him, peace be on him, released their beaks. The birds flew and then they alighted. They drank from that water, ate from those seeds, and said: 'Allah's Prophet, you have given life to us, may Allah give life to you!' Ibra'him said: 'Rather it is Allah who gives life to (creatures) and make (them) die, and He is powerful over all things!'"

Question 5: "Allah bless you, Abu' al-Hasan! Tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: **So Musa' struck him with his fist and killed him. He said: This is on account of Satan's doing.**[47](#)"

Answer 4: "Musa' entered one of Fir'awn's (Pharaoh's) cities when its inhabitants were heedless of him. That was between the sunset and the evening. **So he found therein two men fighting, one being of his party and the other of his foes, and he who was of his party cried out to him for help against him who was of his enemies.** Therefore Musa' killed the enemy. Allah, the Exalted, mentioned: **So Musa' struck him with his fist** and he died. **He said: This is on account of Satan's doing.** This means that the fighting which took place between the two men (was *on account of Satan's doing*), not the killing which Musa' had committed. (The world) 'he' means **Satan (who) is an enemy, openly leading astray.**"

Question 6: "What is the meaning of these words of Musa': **My Lord, surely I have done harm to myself, so do You protect me.**"

Answer 6: “This means that he put himself in other than its place when he entered this city. **So do You protect me**, meaning conceal me from Your enemies lest they should find me and kill me, **so He protected him; surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful**. Musa’ said: **My Lord, because You have bestowed a favor on me**, through the strength so that I killed a man with striking him with my fist; **I shall never be a backer of the guilty**; rather I shall fight on Your path with this strength until You are content (with me). As a result Musa’ was in the city **fearing, awaiting, when lo! he who had asked his assistance the day before was crying out to him for aid** against another person, so **Musa’ said to him: You are most surely one erring manifestly**. You killed a man the day before and this day you want to kill (another man), hence I shall hurt you. He wanted to strike him. **So when he desired to seize him who was an enemy to them both, he said: O Musa’, do you want to kill me as you killed a person yesterday? You desire nothing but that you should be a tyrant in the land, and you do not desire to be of those who act aright.**”

Question 7: “Abu’ al-Hasan, May Allah reward you well on behalf of His prophets! What this the meaning of these words of Musa’ to Fir’awn (Pharaoh): **I did it then while I was of those unable to see the right course?**<sup>48</sup>”

Answer 7: “Fir’awn said to Musa’ when he came to him: **And you did (that) deed of yours which you did, and you are one of the ungrateful** for me. Musa’ said: **I did it then while I was of those unable to see the right course** through my entering one of your cities. **So I fled from you when I feared you, then my Lord granted me wisdom and made me one of the apostles**.

“Allah, the Great and Almighty, said to His Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family: **Did He not find you an orphan and gave you shelter?** <sup>49</sup> He (Allah) says: ‘**Did He not find you lonely and He made the people seek shelter in you? And find you unable to see and show the way** to your people? **So He guided**, namely He guided them to knowing you. **And find you in want and make you be free from want?**’ He (Allah) says: ‘He has made you free from want when He has made your supplication accepted.’”

Question 8: “Allah bless you, son of Allah’s Apostle! What is the meaning of these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: **And when Musa’ came to our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said: My Lord, show me (Yourself), so that I may look upon You. He said: You cannot (bear to) see me**. How is it permissible that Musa’ b. ‘Umra’n, the Interlocutor of Allah, peace be on him, did not know that Allah, may His name be Blessed and Exalted, could not be perceived? Why did he make such a request?”

Answer 8: “Musa’ b. ‘Umra’n, the Interlocutor of Allah, knew that Allah, the Exalted, far above to be perceived by eyes, but when Allah, the Great and Almighty, spoke to him **and made him draw nigh holding communion** (with Him), he returned to his people and told them that Allah, the Great and Almighty, spoke to him, **made him draw nigh**, and whispered to him, but they said: **We will not believe in you** until we hear His words as you heard them.’ They were seven hundred thousand men, so he

chose seventy men from them to the appointed time of their Lord. He took them and went to Mount Sina”. He made them stay at the foot of the mountain. As for Musa’, he climbed the mountain, asked Him to speak to him and make them hear His words. As a result Allah, may His name be Exalted, spoke to him, and they heard His words from top, bottom, left, right, behind, and before (them). That is because Allah, the Great and Almighty, created His words in the Tree and made them come out of it to the extent that they heard them from all directions; yet they said: **‘We do not believe that what we have heard is (His) words until we see Allah manifestly.’** When they said this dangerous statement, became arrogant and tyrant, Allah sent down upon them thunderbolt, and it overtook them because of their transgression. They died, so Musa’ said: ‘My Lord, what shall I say to the children of Israel when I return to them and they say: ‘You took them and killed them, for you were not truthful when you claimed that Allah, the Great and Almighty, would speak to you?’ According, Allah gave life to them and sent them with him. They said: ‘If you ask Allah to make you look upon him, He will respond to you; you will tell us how He is, then we will be fully aware of Him.’ Musa’ said: ‘People, the eyes cannot perceive Him, and He has no howness; rather He is recognized through His signs and is known through arguments.’ Yet they said to him: *‘We will not believe in you until you ask Him.’* Musa’ said: ‘My Lord, You have indeed heard the statement of the children of Israel and You know better how to put them right.’ So Allah, the Great and Almighty, revealed to Musa’: ‘Request from Me what they requested from you, for I will not punish you because of their ignorance.’ Then Musa’ said: ***My Lord, show me (Yourself) so that I may look upon You. He said: You cannot (bear to) see Me, but look at the mountain, if it remains firm in its place –while falling down– then will you see me; but when his Lord manifested (His glory) to the mountain, He made it crumble and Musa’ fell down in a swoon; then when he recovered, he said: Glory be to You, I turn to You.*** He said: ‘I have returned to my knowledge of You and (left) the ignorance of my people of You. ***I am the first of the believers in that none can see You.***”

Al-Ma’mu’n admired the Imam’s talents and abundant knowledge, saying: “How good you are, Abu’ al-Hasan!”

Question 9: “Tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: ***And certainly she made for him, and he would have made for her, were it not that he had seen the manifest evidence of his Lord.***[50](#)”

Answer 9: “She made for him, were it not that he had seen the manifest evidence of his Lord, he would have made for her just as she made for him, but he was infallible, and the infallible did not think of sin; nor did he commit it. Indeed my father related to me on the authority of his father al-Sa’diq, who said: ‘She intended to do, and he intended not to do.’”

Question 10: “How good you are, Abu’ al-Hasan! Tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: ***And Dha’ al-Nu’n when he departed in wrath; he imagined that We had no power over him.***[51](#)”

Answer 10: “That was Yu’nus b. Matti. He departed in wrath to his people. ***He imagined***, meaning that

he was sure **that We would not straighten him**, namely We will not going to sustain him, and of it is these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: **But when He tries him (differently), then straightens to him his means of subsistence.**[52](#) Or straightened and ordained. **So he called out among the shadows**, namely the shadows of the sea and of the stomach of the whale. **There is no god but You! Glory belongs to You; I was indeed wrong** through my leaving this worship to which You have given me free time in the stomach of the whale, so Allah answered him, and He, the Great and Almighty, said: **But had it not that he was of those who glorify (Us), he would certainly have tarried in its stomach to the day when they are raised.**[53](#)”

Question 11: “How good you are, Abu’ al-Hasan! Tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: **Till the apostles gave up hope and thought that they were surely accused of lying, Our help then came to them.**[54](#)”

Answer 11: “Allah, the Great and Almighty, said: **Till the apostles gave up hope (of their people) and (their people came to) think that they proved them to be liars, Our help then came to them.**”

Question 12: “How good you are, Abu’ al-Hasan! Tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: **That Allah may forgive your community their past faults and those to follow.**[55](#)”

Answer 12: “The Meccan polytheists thought that there was none greater in sin than Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. That is because they worshipped three hundred and sixty idols other than Allah. When he (the Prophet), may Allah bless him and his family, came to them and summoned them to the Oneness of Allah, they regarded that as big and great, and then they said: **What! makes he the gods a single God? A strange thing is this, to be sure! And the chief persons of them break forth, saying: Go and steadily adhere to your gods; this is most surely a thing sought after. We never heard of this in the former faith; this is nothing but a forgery.**[56](#)

“When Allah, the Great and Almighty, enabled His Prophet to conquer Mecca, He said to him: Muhammad, **surely We have given to you a clear victory, that Allah may forgive your community their past faults and those to follow**, (the faults) of the Meccan polytheists through your summoning (them) to the Oneness of Allah, their past faults and those to follow. That is because some Meccan polytheists became Muslims; some of them went out of Mecca; as for those of them who remained were not able to deny the Oneness of Allah against him (the Prophet) when he summoned the people to it, so their faults were forgiven because of his mastery over them.”

Question 13: “How good you are, Abu’ al-Hasan! Tell me about these words of Him, the Great and Almighty: **Allah pardon you! Why did you give them leave?** [57](#)”

Answer. 13: “This is part of that which was revealed by the virtue of: I mean you and listen, O neighbor! Allah, the Great and Almighty, addressed His Prophet with that, but He meant by that his community. Similar to this (verse) is these words of Him, the Exalted: **Surely if you associate (with Allah), your work would certainly come to naught and you would certainly be of the losers** [58](#), and these words

of Him, the Great and Almighty: ***And had it not been that We had already established you, you would certainly have been near to incline to them a little.***[59](#)”

Question 14: “Allah’s Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, went to the house of Zayd b. Ha’ritha b. Shara’hil al-Kalbi for a thing he wanted. He saw his wife washing and said to her: Glory belongs to Him who has created you!”

Answer 14: “By that he meant to free the Creator, the Great and Almighty, from the statement of those who said: ‘The angels are the daughters of Allah.’ So Allah, the Great and Almighty, said: ***What! has then your Lord preferred to give you sons, and (for Himself) taken daughters from among the angels? Most surely you utter a grievous saying.***[60](#) When Zayd returned to his house, his wife told him about the coming of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and his saying to her: ‘Glory belongs to Allah!’ Zayd did not understand what the Prophet meant by that. He thought that the Prophet said that because he admired her beauty. So he came to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and said to him: ‘My wife is in her creation, and I want to divorce her.’ ‘Keep your wife to yourself,’ said the Prophet to him, ‘fear Allah.’ Allah had made the Prophet know the number of his wives. As for this woman, she was one of them, but he concealed that in his own soul and did not show it to Zayd. He feared that the people would say that Muhammad said to his retainer: ‘Your wife will be my wife,’ and that they would criticize him for that. As a result Allah, the Great and Almighty, revealed: ***And when you said to him to whom Allah had shown favor and to whom you had shown favor: Keep your wife to yourself and be careful of (your duty to) Allah; and you concealed in yourself (what) Allah would bring to light, and you feared men, and Allah had a greater right that you should fear Him.***

“Then Zayd b. Ha’ritha divorced her, and she had completed her waiting period, so Allah, the Great and Almighty, married her to His Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, and with this regard He revealed (a verse in) the Qur’an, and He, the Great and Almighty, said: ***But when Zayd had accomplished his want of her, We gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be no difficulty for the believers in respect of the wives of their adopted sons, when they have accomplished their want of them; and Allah’s command shall be performed.***

“Then Allah, the Great and Almighty, knew that the hypocrites would criticize the Prophet for being married to her, so He, the Exalted revealed: ***There is no harm in the Prophet doing that which Allah has ordained for him.***[61](#)”

With this (answer) the Imam concluded this debate, which is evidence for his great scientific abilities and his comprehensive knowledge of the Great Book of Allah. The Imam freed the magnified prophets of Allah from committing transgression and established their infallibility through this explanation backed by undeniable proof and evidence.

## Al-Ma'mu'n lauds the Imam's Talents

Al-Ma'mu'n lauded Imam al-Ridha's talents and said: "You have quenched my thirst, son of Allah's Apostle, and explained what was hidden from me, may Allah reward you well on behalf of His prophets and of Islam."

Then al-Ma'mu'n left the session. He took Muhammad b. Ja'far, the Imam's uncle, by the hand and asked him: "How did you see your nephew?"

Showing his admiration toward the Imam, Muhammad said: "He (Imam al-Ridha') is a scholar; we have never seen him frequent any of the men of knowledge."

Al-Ma'mu'n agreed with him on this reality and said: "Surely, your nephew is from among the Household concerning whom the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, said: 'Verily, the pious of my family and the good ones of my offspring are the most forbearing of the people when they are young and the most knowledgeable of the people when they are old; therefore, do not teach them, for they are most learned than you. They do not bring you out of guidance; nor do they make you enter a door to error.'"

Then 'Ali b. al-Jahm related to the Imam al-Ma'mu'n's laudation and praise and what Muhammad b. Ja'far said concerning him. So the Imam smiled and said: "Do not be deceived by what you heard from him (al-Ma'mu'n), for he will assassinate me; and Allah, the Exalted, will take vengeance on him out of his (evil) deed toward me.<sup>62</sup>"

The matter was just as the Imam, peace be on him, had predicted. That is because al-Ma'mu'n's harbored malice against him and was jealous of excellence and abundant knowledge given by Allah to him. Accordingly, al-Ma'mu'n committed the most horrible crime in the history of Islam when he put poison into food and gave it to the Imam to eat. In this manner he was able to assassinate the Imam, who was the Prophet's grandson, source of knowledge and wisdom on earth.

## Ibn al-Sikit's Questions

Abu' Yu'suf Ya'qu'b b. Isha'q al-Dawraqi, better known as Ibn al-Sikit, was a great scholar in the time of the Imam. He came to Imam al-Ridha', peace be on him, and asked him the following questions:

"Why did Allah send Musa' with a white hand, 'Isa' with miraculous medicine, and Muhammad with miraculous speech and oratory?"

The Imam answered him about the reason for these things, saying: "Allah sent Musa' (with the white hand) because sorcery dominated the (minds) of the people of his time, so he brought them from Allah something which they never had, nor could they bring about anything like it, thus rendering their sorcery void and proving his argument against them.

“Allah sent ‘Isa’ with medicine during a period of time when chronic diseases became widespread, and the people were in dire need of cure, so he (‘Isa’) brought them from Allah something which they never had, bring the dead back to life, healing the blind and the leprous with Allah’s permission, proving his argument against them.

“Allah sent Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, with speech and oratory during the time when speech and oratory dominated (the minds of) the people.<sup>63</sup> So he (Muhammad) brought them from Allah warnings and precepts through which he could disprove their statements and proved his argument against them.”

Ibn al-Sikit admired the Imam’s knowledge and said: “By Allah, I have never seen anyone like you! What is the argument against people these days, then?”

The Imam answered him: “Reason. Through it can you come to know who tells the truth about Allah, so you believe in him, and who tells lies about Allah, so you disbelieve in him.”

“This, by Allah, is the (right) answer,” declared Ibn al-Sikit.<sup>64</sup>

Allah created reason and made it argument over man. Reason brings about mercy to man when he obeys it, and it brings about unhappiness to him when he disobeys it. Through reason we can distinguish the truthful from the untruthful, the true from the untrue.

## **The Imam debates a Man**

A man, whose name the historians have not mentioned, came in to Imam al-Ridha’, peace be on him. When the man sat down, he turned to the Imam and asked him: “Son of Allah’s Apostle, what is the evidence for the creation of the world?”

The Imam answered him with definite evidence: “You were not, then you have been. You know that you had not created yourself; nor had the like of you created you.<sup>65</sup>”

## **The Imam’s Debate Concerning the Prophet’s Family**

Yet this is another debate in which the Imam has provided evidence of that Allah chose the pure family (of the Prophet). The debate took place in the presence of al-Ma’mu’n and a group of scholars from Iraq and Khurasa’n. Al-Ma’mu’n asked the scholars about the meaning of this verse: “Then We gave the Book for an inheritance to those whom We chose from among Our servants.<sup>66</sup>”

“Surely those whom Allah chose were all Muslims,” retorted the scholars.

Al-Ma’mu’n turned to the Imam and asked him: “What do you say, Abu’ al-Hasan?”

“I do not say as they said,” replied the Imam, “but I say that Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, meant the

pure family (of the Prophet), peace be on them.”

The Imam’s words moved al-Ma’mu’n, and he asked: “How did Allah mean the Prophet’s family apart from the community?”

“If Allah meant the community,” replied the Imam, “then all of it would enter the Garden, while He, the Exalted, says: ***But of them is he who makes his soul to suffer a loss, and of them is he who takes a middle course, and of them is he who is foremost in deeds of goodness by Allah’s permission; this is the great excellence.***<sup>67</sup>”

The Imam added, saying: “As a result the inheritance belongs to the Prophet’s pure family, not to other than them. It is they whom Allah has described in His Book and said: ***Verily Allah intends to keep off from you every kind of uncleanness. And to purify you, people of the House, with a thorough purification.*** It is they concerning whom Allah’s Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, said: ‘I leave behind me among you two things, if you cling to them, you will never go astray—that is the book of Allah and my offspring from my family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). They will never scatter (from you) until they lead you to me at the (scared) waters (of Heaven). Take care how you will follow me with regard to them. People, do not try to teach them, for they are more knowledgeable than you.’<sup>68</sup>”

The scholars hurried to say at one time: “Abu’ al-Hasan, tell us about the offspring (*’itra*): are they the family (*a’l*) or other than the family?”

“They are the family (*a’l*),” answered the Imam.

They opposed the Imam, saying: “It has been narrated on the authority of Allah’s Apostle, who said: ‘My community is my family(*a’l*).’ And these are his companions who say with a diffused tradition which cannot be denied: ‘The family(*a’l*) of Muhammad is his community.’”

The Imam indicated that the tradition was fabricated and incorrect, saying: “Tell me, is it forbidden for Muhammad’s family to take alms or not?”

“Yes,” was the answer.

“Is it forbidden for the community to take alms or not?” asked the Imam.

“No,” came the answer.

Having proved argument against them, the Imam retorted: “This is the difference between the family (*a’l*) and the community (*umma*). Woe unto you! Which creed do you follow? ***What! shall We then turn away the reminder from you altogether because you are an extravagant people?*** Did you not know that the tradition apparently concerned those who were chosen and rightly guided apart from the rest of the people?”

“From where did you say, Abu’ al-Hasan?” asked the scholars.

The Imam began reciting to them the excellence of the pure offspring, saying: “From these words of Allah: ***And certainly We sent Nu’h and Ibra’him and We gave to their offspring the (gift of) prophecy and the Book; so there are among them those who go aright, and most of them are transgressors.***<sup>69</sup> So the legacy of prophecy and the Book was confined to those who went aright apart from the transgressors. Did you not know that Nu’h ask his Lord, saying: ***My Lord, surely my son is of my family, and Your promise is surely true?***<sup>70</sup> That is because Allah had promised him to save him and his family, so Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, said: ***Surely he is not of your family; surely he is (the doer of) other than good deeds; therefore, ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge; surely I admonish you lest you may be of the ignorant.***<sup>71</sup>”

Al-Ma’mu’n burst with anger and rage, saying: “Did Allah prefer the offspring to the rest of the people?”

The Imam retorted: “Allah, the Great and Almighty, preferred the offspring to the rest of the people in the firm text of His Book.”

“Where is that in the Book of Allah?” asked al-Ma’mu’n.

The Imam recited to him a group of the verses which lauded the excellence of the Household, peace be on them, saying: “***Surely Allah chose Adam and Nu’h and the descendants of Ibra’him and the descendants of ‘Umra’n above the nations, offspring, one of the other; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.***<sup>72</sup> And Allah said in another place: ***Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace? But indeed We have given to Ibra’him’s family the Book and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom.***<sup>73</sup> Then after this Allah addressed the rest of the Muslims, saying: ***O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you.***<sup>74</sup> He meant those whom He made inherit the Book and wisdom, and they were envied for them, according to these words of Him: ***Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace? But indeed We have given to Ibra’him’s family the Book and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom.*** He meant obedience to those chosen and pure, and ‘kingdom’ here means obedience to them.”

“Did Allah, the Most High, interpret ‘choice’ in the Book?” asked the scholars.

The Imam answered them: “He interpreted ‘choice’ in outward apart from the inward in twelve places:

“The first of that is the words of Allah: ***And warn your nearest relations*** <sup>75</sup>, ***and your loyal family*** in this manner it is in the recitation of Ubay b. Ka’b, and it has been established in the copy of the Qur’an of ‘Abd Allah b. Mas’u’d. However, when ‘Uthma’n ordered Zayd b. Tha’bit to collect the Qur’an, he omitted this verse. And this is an exalted position, great excellence, and lofty honor when Allah, the Great and Almighty, meant the family (a’l) by that. This is one (verse).

“As for the second verse concerning choice, it is these words of Allah: **Verily Allah intends to keep off from you every kind of uncleanness and to purify you, people of the House, with a thorough purification.** None can deny this excellence except him who is obstinate, for this excellence is clear.

“The third verse: When Allah distinguished the pure from among His creatures, He ordered His Prophet in the Verse of Contest of Prayer (*Ibtihā’l*) and said: **Say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our souls and your souls, then let us be earnest in prayer, and pray for the curse of Allah on the liars.**<sup>76</sup> So the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, brought out ‘Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, and Fa’tima, peace be on them, thus he associated their souls with his own soul.”

Then the Imam turned to the scholars and asked them: “Did you know the meaning of His words: **and our souls and your souls?**”

“By that he (the Prophet) meant his own soul,” they answered.

“You are mistaken,” replied the Imam, “by that he meant ‘Ali.<sup>77</sup> The proof of that is the statement of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, when he said to ‘Ali: ‘Let the Banu’ of Wulay’a<sup>78</sup> refrain from (polytheism); otherwise, I will send to them a man who is like my own soul, namely ‘Ali, peace be on him.<sup>79</sup> This is a quality which none had before him, a merit over which no man differ, and honor to which no creature preceded him, for he (the Prophet) regarded ‘Ali’s soul as his own soul. This is the third (verse).

“As for the fourth (proof), it is that he (the Prophet) brought the people out of his mosque except the offspring. When the people spoke about that, al-‘Abba’s spoke and said: ‘Allah’s Apostle, you have left ‘Ali and brought us (out of the mosque).’ ‘It was not I who left him and brought you out,’ replied Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, ‘but it was Allah who left him and brought you out.’ This explains his statement to ‘Ali, peace be on him: ‘Your position to me is as Ha’ru’n had with Musa’.”

“Where is this in the Qur’an?” asked the scholars.

“That is in the Qur’an,” replied the Imam.

“Recite it to us,” they demanded.

So the Imam recited to them these words of Allah, the Exalted: “**And We revealed to Musa’ and his brother, saying: Take for your people houses to abide in Egypt and make your houses places of worship.**<sup>80</sup> This verse demonstrates the position of Ha’ru’n with Musa’ as well as it demonstrates the position of ‘Ali, peace be on him, with Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. Besides there is a clear indication in this statement of Allah’s Apostle: ‘It is not lawful for those who are in a state of major ritual impurity and the menstruating to enter this mosque except Muhammad and the family of Muhammad.’”

The scholars denied the knowledge of that and said to the Imam: “This explanation and this interpretation does not exist. Do you, members of the House of Allah’s Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, have (such an explanation and interpretation)?”

The Imam answered them: “Who denies that while Allah’s Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, says: ‘I am the city of knowledge and ‘Ali is its gate. Then, one who wishes (to enter) the city of knowledge, then he should enter from its gate.’ We clarified and explained (‘Ali’s) merit, honor, precedence (in Islam), choice, and purity. Accordingly, none denies (these outstanding qualities) except him who is obstinate. To Allah, the Great and Almighty, belongs praise for that! This is the fourth (proof).

“As for the fifth (proof), it is these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: ***And give to the near of kin his due.***[81](#) (This is) a quality for which Allah, the Great and Almighty, singled them out, and preferred them over the community. When this verse was revealed to Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, he said: ‘Summon Fa’tima to me.’ They summoned her to him, and he said: ‘Fa’tima!’ ‘Here I am, Allah’s Apostle!’ she answered. ‘None passes (through) Fadak with horses or stirrups; it especially belongs to me apart from the Muslims; and I have granted it to you according to Allah’s command, so take it for you and your sons. This is the fifth (proof).

“As for the sixth (proof), it is these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: *Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations.*[82](#) This is a special characteristic of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, apart from the prophets, and a special characteristic of the Family apart from other than them. That is because Allah gave an account of the prophets when He mentioned Nu’h, peace be on him: *And, O my people! I ask you not for wealth in return for it; my reward is only with Allah and I am not going to drive away those who believe; surely they shall meet their Lord, but I consider you a people who are ignorant.*[83](#) He gave an account of Hu’d, saying: *O my people! I ask you not for wealth in return for it; my reward is only with Him Who created me; do you then understand?*[84](#) And He said to His Prophet: *Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations.* Allah has imposed showing love for them on people because He had known that they would never turn away from their own creed and never return to error. Another (proof): A man may love a man, but he may hate some of his own household, so he is his enemy and his heart is not sound. Allah loved that there would be nothing in the heart of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, toward the believers, for He imposed on them the love of his relations. Accordingly, he who loves Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and his Household, peace be on them, then Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, cannot hate him. He who hates Allah’s Apostle and his household, then it is incumbent on Allah’s Apostle to hate him, for he has abandoned one of the obligations imposed by Allah. Which excellence or honor is better than this (love toward Allah’s Apostle and his household)?

“When Allah sent down to His Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, (this verse): *Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations,* Allah’s Apostle, may

Allah bless him and his family, rose among his companions. He praised Allah and lauded Him, and then he said: 'People, Allah has imposed an obligation on you, then will you perform it?' None answered him. On the following day he rose among them and said the like of that, but none answered him. One the following day he rose among them and said: 'People, Allah has imposed an obligation on you, then will you perform it?' Yet none answered him. So he said: 'People, the obligation is neither gold nor silver nor food nor drink.' 'Say it,' they demanded. He recited this verse to them. 'As for this (love), we accept it,' they answered. However, most of them did not perform it."

The Imam added, saying: [My father related to me on the authority of my grandfather on the authority of his grandfathers on the authority of al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on them, who said:] "The Muha'jiru'n and the Ansa'r gathered around Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and said to him: 'Allah's Messenger, you have the right to spend on yourself and the delegations who come to you, then these are our properties along with our blood, so make decisions concerning them, may Allah be kind to you and reward you. Give whatever you desire and withhold whatever you desire without any objection.' So Allah sent down the Trusted Spirit (Gabriel) to him, and he said: 'Muhammad, *Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations. Do not hurt my relations after me. They went out and a group of them said: Allah's Apostle left what we presented before him because he wanted to urge us to show love toward his relations after him; and this is something which he fabricated at his session, so Allah revealed this verse: *Nay! they say: He has forged it. Say: If I have forged it, you do not control anything for me from Allah; He knows best what you utter concerning it; He is enough as a witness between me and you, and He is the Forgiving, the Merciful.**<sup>85</sup> As a result, the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, sent for them and asked: 'Has anything happened?' 'Yes, by Allah, Allah's Apostle,' they replied, 'some of us say dreadful words and we hated them.' Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, recited this verse to them. They wept and their weeping became intense, hence Allah, the Most High, revealed this verse: *And He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons the evil deeds and He knows what you do.*<sup>86</sup>

"As for the seventh (proof), it is that Allah says: *Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe! call for (Divine) blessings on him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation.*<sup>87</sup> When this verse was revealed, the obstinate from among them asked: 'Allah's Messenger, we have come to know how to salute you, then how shall we bless you?' He (the Prophet) said: 'You say: O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad just as You had blessed Ibra'him and the family of Ibra'him, surely You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.'"

The Imam turned to the scholars and asked them: "Is there any opposition to these (proofs)?"

All of them said in one voice: "No!"

However, al-Ma'mu'n said: "There is no opposition to them, and there is an unanimous agreement on them. Have you anything clearer than them about the family in the Qur'an?"

The Imam began giving more definite indications concerning the excellence of the Household (of the Prophet), peace be on them, saying: "Tell me about these words of Allah: *Ya'sin, and I swear by the Qur'an full of wisdom; most surely you are of the apostles, on a right way.*<sup>88</sup> Whom did Allah mean by His words 'Ya'sin'?"

The scholars said: "By that He meant Muhammad, may Allah bless him and his family, there is no doubt about that."

The Imam turned to those who were present and said to them: "Allah gave Muhammad and the family of Muhammad excellence whose essence and quality none has reached. That is because Allah never saluted anyone except the prophets, the blessings of Allah be upon them. He, the Blessed and Exalted, said: ***Peace and salutations to Nu'h among the nations.***<sup>89</sup> And He said: ***Peace be on Ibra'him.***<sup>90</sup> And He said: ***Peace be on Musa' and Ha'ru'n.***<sup>91</sup> He did not say: Peace be on the family of Nu'h; nor did He say: Peace be on the family of Ibra'him; nor did He say: Peace be on the family of Musa' and Ha'ru'n. And He, the Great and Almighty, said: ***Peace be on Aal Ya'sin*** (the family of Ya'sin)<sup>92</sup>; He meant the family of Muhammad."

Al-Ma'mu'n turned to Imam al-Ridha' and said to him: "I have come to know that this explanation and clarification is concerning the source of the Prophethood."

(Then the Imam continued giving proofs, saying:) "As for the eighth (proof), it is these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: ***And know that whatever thing you acquire in war, a fifth of it is for Allah and for the Apostle and for the near of kin.***<sup>93</sup> Allah associated His own portion with that of Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and of those near of kin. This is a difference between the family and the community, for Allah put them in one place and put all people in another place, accepted for them what He accepted for Himself, and singled them out for it. He started with Himself, then His Apostle, then the near of kin in every place of booty, and others which He, the Great and Almighty, accepted for Himself and accepted for them. He said, and His words are the truth: ***And know that whatever thing you acquire in war, a fifth of it is for Allah and for the Apostle and for the near of kin.*** As a result this is a certain verification and permanent matter for them to the Day of Resurrection in Allah's Book, which speaks (of the truth), before and behind which falsehood does not come, which is a revelation from the Wise, the Praiseworthy. As for these words of Him: ***and the orphans and the needy***, surely the orphans are not included in booty when their orphan hood terminates; they have no share in booty, and it is not lawful for them to take it. As for the share of the near of kin, it subsists to the Day of Resurrection; it is for the rich and the poor, for there is none richer than Allah and His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. He appointed a share of the booty for Himself and a share for His Apostle, so He accepted for them what He accepted for Himself and His Apostle, similar to this (booty) is the war booty gained without fighting (*fayya'*). He accepted for the near of kin what He accepted for Himself and His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. He also made it permissible for them (to take a share) of booty. He started with Himself, then His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and then them.

He associated their own share with His own share and the share of His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. He also (associated) obedience (to them with obedience to Him and His Apostle), so He, the Great and Almighty, said: ***O you who believe! obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you.***<sup>94</sup> He started with Himself, then with His Apostle, then with his Household, similar to this (verse is the verse regarding) authority (*wila'ya*): ***Only Allah is your authority (Vali) and His Apostle and those who believe.***<sup>95</sup> Accordingly, He made their authority associated with obedience to Him and the Apostle and, in addition, He made their share (of booty) associated with that of Him and of His Apostle. When the story of alms came, He, may His name be Exalted, deemed Himself far above it as well as He deemed His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family and his household, far above it. Thus He said: ***Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming of) captives and those in debts and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer; an ordinance from Allah.***<sup>96</sup> Do you find that He has appointed a share in any of these (verses) for Himself or for His Apostle or the near of kin. That is because when He deemed Himself far above alms, He deemed His Apostle and his Household far above it; rather He made it unlawful (to take alms), for it is unlawful for Muhammad and his Household (to take) alms which are the dirt of men. It is unlawful (for them) to take alms, for they were pure from every uncleanness and dirt. When Allah purified them and chose them, He accepted for them what He accepted for Himself, and He hated for them what He hated for Himself.

“As for the ninth (proof), it is that we are the followers of the Reminder, for Allah has said in the firm text of His Book: ***So ask the followers of the Reminder.***<sup>97</sup>”

The scholars objected this statement, saying: “By that Allah meant the Jews and the Christians.”

The Imam disproved their viewpoints, saying: “Is it permissible for them to summon us (to follow) their own religion and to say that their religion is better than Islam?”

Al-Ma'mu'n turned to Imam al-Ridha' and asked him for more explanation of what he said, saying: “Have you any explanation of that which opposes their statement?”

“Yes,” replied the Imam, “the Reminder is Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and we are the men of it, and that is clear in the Verse of Divorce: ***Therefore be careful of (your duty to) Allah, O men of understanding who believe! Allah has indeed revealed to you a reminder, an Apostle who recites to you clear communications.***<sup>98</sup> As a result, the Reminder is Allah's Apostle and we, his Household. This is the ninth (proof).

“As for the tenth (proof), it is that Allah has said in the Verse of Prohibition: ***Forbidden to you are your mothers and your daughters and your sisters.***<sup>99</sup>”

The Imam addressed the scholars, saying: “Tell me: If Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, was alive, was it permissible for him to marry my daughter or the daughter of my son or the offspring of my loins?”

“No,” the scholars answered.

The Imam asked them again: “Tell me: Was it permissible for him to marry one of your daughters?”

“Yes,” they replied.

“Accordingly, I am one of his family, while you do not belong to his family,” said the Imam, “if you belonged to his family, then it would be forbidden for him to marry one of your daughters just as it is forbidden for him to marry one of my daughters. That is because we belong to his family while you belong to his community. This is another difference between the family (*a’l*) and the community, for the family belongs to him whereas the community—if it is not the family—does not belong to him. This is the tenth (proof).

“As for the eleventh (proof), it is that His words in Su’rat al-Mu’min giving an account of the words of a man: ***And a believing man of Fir’oun’s people who hid his faith said: What! will you slay a man because who says: My Lord is Allah, and indeed he has brought to you clear arguments from your Lord?***<sup>100</sup> The man was the son of Fir’oun’s uncle. He (Allah) ascribed the man to Fir’oun because of his lineage and He did not add him to him because of his faith. He (Allah) has also singled us out because we belong to the family of Allah’s Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and our lineage belongs to him, while He generalized His religion, so this is another deference between the family (*a’l*) and the community. This is the eleventh (proof).

“As for the twelfth (proof), it is these words of Him: ***And enjoin prayer on your family, and steadily adhere to it.***<sup>101</sup> So He (Allah) has singled us out for this special characteristic, for He ordered us through His ordering him (the Prophet), then He has singled us out apart from the community. Accordingly, after the revelation of this verse, Allah’s Messenger would come to the door of ‘Ali and Fa’tima, peace be on them, five times a day at the timing of the prayers and said: ‘(Perform) the prayer, may Allah have mercy upon you!’ Allah did not honor any of the progeny of the prophets with this noble quality with which He has honored us and singled us out along with all the members of his Household, so this is another difference between the family (*a’l*) and the community. Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and Allah bless His Prophet Muhammad.<sup>102</sup>”

With this proof we will end our talk about some of Imam al-Ridha’s debates, which represent a side of his scientific life and his struggle for defending Islam.

<sup>1</sup> In a copy: “Before His creating the creatures.”

<sup>2</sup> Qur’an, 17, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Tuhaf al-‘Uqu’l, p. 527.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Uyyu’n Akhba’r al-Ridha’, vol. 1, pp. 168–178. Reports similar to his have been mentioned by al-Tabrasi in (his book) al-Ihtija’ji, al-Majlisi in al-Biha’r, and al-Hasan b. Shu’ba’ in Tuhaf al-‘Uqu’l.

<sup>5</sup> Qur’an, 4, 56.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11, 108.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 56, 33.

8. Ibid., 50, 35.
9. Ibid., 11, 108.
10. Ibid., 15, 48.
11. Ibid., 98, 8.
12. Dira'r is one of the Shaykhs of the Mu'tazilites in theology and belongs to the Aba'diya.
13. Qur'an, 17, 16.
14. Ibid., 17, 86.
15. Ibid., 40, 60.
16. Ibid., 35, 1.
17. Ibid., 13, 39.
18. Ibid., 40, p. 51.
19. 'Uyu'n Akhba'r al-Ridha', vol. 1, pp. 182–191.
20. Qur'an, 20, 113.
21. Ibid., 21, 2.
22. Ibid., 53, 13.
23. Ibid., 20, 11.
24. Ibid., 17, 1.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 45, 6.
27. Al-Ihtija'jj, vol. 2, pp. 185–189.
28. He was one of the disciples of a prophet. It was said that he was sent to the children of Israel by a prophet.
29. Al-Ihtija'jj, vol. 2, pp. 199–212. 'Uyu'n Akhba'r al-Ridha', vol. 2, p. 154–168.
30. There is an addition to this narration mentioned in al-Ihtija'jj. Without doubt that this narration is forged, for the expression is not accurate, and al-Shaykh al-Sadu'q has turned aside from it.
31. Qur'an, 20, 121.
32. Ibid., 21, 87.
33. Ibid., 12, 24.
34. Ibid., 38, 24.
35. Ibid., 33, 37.
36. Ibid., 3, 7.
37. Ibid., 3, 3.
38. Ibid., 89, 16.
39. Ibid., 33, 37.
40. 'Uyu'n Akhba'r al-Ridha', vol. 1, pp. 192–195.
41. Qur'an, 20, 121–122.
42. Ibid., 3, 34.
43. Ibid., 7, 190.
44. Ibid., 7, 190.
45. Ibid., 6, 76.
46. Ibid., 2, 26.
47. Ibid., 28, 15.
48. Ibid., 26, 20.
49. Ibid., 93, 6.
50. Ibid., 12, 24.
51. Ibid., 21, 87.
52. Ibid., 89, 16.
53. Ibid., 37, 143–144.
54. Ibid., 12, 110.

- [55.](#) Ibid., 48, 2.
- [56.](#) Ibid., 38, 5–7.
- [57.](#) Ibid., 9, 43.
- [58.](#) Ibid., 39, 65.
- [59.](#) Ibid., 17, 74.
- [60.](#) Ibid., 17, 40.
- [61.](#) Ibid., 33, 38.
- [62.](#) ‘Uyu’n Akhba’r al-Ridha’, vol. 1, pp. 195–204.
- [63.](#) The narrator of this account said: “I think that poetry prevailed them.”
- [64.](#) Al-Ihtija’jj, vol. 2, pp. 224–225.
- [65.](#) Ibid., 170–171.
- [66.](#) Qur’an, 35, 32.
- [67.](#) Ibid., 35, 32.
- [68.](#) Hadith al-Thaqalayn, definite, repeatedly stated tradition narrated in al-Siha’h and al-Sunan.
- [69.](#) Ibid., 57, 26.
- [70.](#) Ibid., 11, 40.
- [71.](#) Ibid., 11, 46.
- [72.](#) Ibid., 3, 32.
- [73.](#) Ibid., 4, 54.
- [74.](#) Ibid., 4, 59.
- [75.](#) Ibid., 26, 214.
- [76.](#) Ibid., 3, 72.
- [77.](#) In addition to the proof which the Imam mentioned, it is senseless that man calls his own soul, so there is no escape that he meant by that ‘Ali, peace be on him.
- [78.](#) The Banu’ of Wulay’a, a district of Kinda.
- [79.](#) In al-‘Uyu’n, by our souls he meant ‘Ali, by our sons he meant al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and by our women he meant Fa’tima, peace be on them. All the interpreters of the Qur’an have agreed on that.
- [80.](#) Qur’an, 10, 87.
- [81.](#) Ibid., 17, 26.
- [82.](#) Ibid., 42, 22.
- [83.](#) Ibid., 11, 29.
- [84.](#) Ibid., 11, 51.
- [85.](#) Ibid., 46, 8.
- [86.](#) Ibid., 42, 24.
- [87.](#) Ibid., 33, 56.
- [88.](#) Ibid., 36, 1.
- [89.](#) Ibid., 37, 79.
- [90.](#) Ibid., 37, 109.
- [91.](#) Ibid., 37, 120.
- [92.](#) Ibid., 37, 130.
- [93.](#) Ibid., 8, 42.
- [94.](#) Ibid., 4, 59.
- [95.](#) Ibid., 5, 55.
- [96.](#) Ibid., 9, 60.
- [97.](#) Ibid., 16, 43.
- [98.](#) Ibid., 65, 10–11.
- [99.](#) Ibid., 4, 23.
- [100.](#) Ibid., 40, 28.

[101.](#) Ibid., 20, 132.

[102.](#) Tuhaf al-‘Uqu’l, pp. 425–436. ‘Uyu’n Akhba’r al-Ridha’. Al-Maja’lis.

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