

Chapter 6: The Issue of Imam al-Rida ('a) as the Crown Prince (Session 1)

Our discussion today, is a historical debate and of the secondary issues related to Imamate (the leadership of *Ahl al-Bayt*) and caliphate. This issue is better known as Imam al-Rida "as the crown prince".

Ma'mun brought Imam al-Rida from Medina to Khorasan (Marv) of that time and appointed him as his crown prince. Even the words "heir" or "crown prince" which are both used for the same meaning, are definitions not only relative today but also linked to that time.

A couple of years back, I was trying to find out when these words appeared. These words were not used at the beginning of Islam and such issues were basically not raised; therefore, such words were not required.

The act of introducing a successor by the Caliph during his time and taking oath of allegiance from his successor was first carried out during the time of Mu'awiyah for Yazid. It, however, did not carry the name "giving oath of allegiance to Yazid as the crown prince". Even though I focused on this issue, I do not remember seeing this definition in the period after him. But here we see this word is used and is also continuously repeated. Therefore, we shall use this definition because it has been stated in history and we should inevitably use it.

As in the case of Imam al-Hassan's peace, there are also suspicions in this issue even though the appearance of the affair resembles these two issues as opposite and contradictory. This is because Imam al-Hassan abandoned the caliphate or as history or even the Imam himself defines it: he submitted the affairs. Here, it is the opposite.

The issue was not leaving the job but the opposite—taking it. The following question can cross one's mind: what are the Imams supposed to do then? When they leave the job they get criticism and if others want to hand over the job to them and they accept, they will still be criticized? What therefore must be

done?

However, the critics have one issue in common; they all agree that in both cases, of handing over leadership and acquiring it, there is a kind of agreement. Handing over was a form of coming to terms with the present Caliph who had, for sure, taken over the caliphate unjustly and the acceptance of the position of successor was also ultimately a form of agreement.

Those who criticize say: Imam al-Hassan should not have handed over the affairs and come to term in the situation. He should have fought until he was killed. And in the case of Imam al-Rida, he should not have accepted. He should have resisted and fought as until he got killed, even if he was forced to accept it.

We shall now analyze the issue of succession, which is a very important historical issue, so that the matter is made clear. The peace of Imam al-Hassan was to an extent discussed previously.

We must first investigate the historical view point irrespective of the issue why and how Imam al-Rida accepted this offer, to see what the story was.

The 'Abbasid attitude towards the 'Alawis

Ma'mun is the heir to the 'Abbasid caliphate. Since the first day the 'Abbasids came to power, their plan was to fight the 'Alawis and kill them. The crime the Abbasids committed towards the 'Alawis when they were in power was not little and even worse in some aspects.

However, because of the tragedy of Karbala (where Imam al-Husayn is the one they dealt with) takes place in the time of the Umayyads, the course of events really gets heated. Otherwise, apart from the tragedy of Imam al-Husayn, the disasters they created for the 'Alawis was nothing less than the tragedy of Karbala and it was at time even worse.

What did Mansur, the second 'Abbasid Caliph, do with the 'Alawis, with Imam al-Hassan's children to whom he gave oath of allegiance? He killed many of them and took them to really hideous prisons. That was where he took a large group of these poor *sayyids* (the children of the Prophet) to a prison where he gave them no water, no bread and even no permission to go out and go to toilet. This was a form of gradual torture. When he wanted to kill them, he would say: go and destroy the roof on their heads.

Anyone, who came after Mansur, did the same thing. During Ma'mun's time, five of the Imam's children rebelled, whose names are mentioned in "*Murawwij al-Dhahab*" by Mas'udi and "*Kamil*" by ibn Athir. During the time of Harun and Ma'mun, seven to eight of the 'Alawis rebelled. Therefore, hatred and enmity between the 'Alawis and 'Abbasids is not a small issue.

The 'Abbasids did not refrain from any action for gaining power over the caliphate. Even if someone from their own dynasty became their rival, they would not hesitate and immediately killed him. This was true in

the case of Abu Muslim, who had served them so much, but who was killed as soon as they felt the slightest bit of threat from him. All the service the Barmakis gave to Harun and all the cordiality these two had towards each other (the cordiality between Harun and Barmak had become a historical proverb)¹ did not do any good for the Barmakis. Suddenly, Harun got rid of them for a very little political issue and scorched their family. Even His Excellency Ma'mun got into a fight with his brother Amin. These two brothers fought each other and Ma'mun won and his brother got killed in a terrible manner.

Now, the question is how Ma'mun, who had such a personality, prepare to call up on Imam al-Rida from Medina and order for Imam al-Rida to be brought to him?

When they brought Imam al-Rida, he suggested to the Imam to accept the caliphate from him.² What was his motivation for this? What was going on? It is not easy to analyze this event historically.

Jurji Zaydan in the fourth volume of his book, entitled "*Tarikh-e Tamaddun*" (the History of Civilizations), discusses this issue with a special perception which I will talk about later. But he confesses to a matter that the 'Abbasids used to keep their policies a secret even from their very close people and their policies are still unknown.

The issue of Imam al-Rida's successoral and historical citations

The secrets, however, will ultimately not stay hidden as they should. In our (Shi'ah) view, the secrets of this story are up to a large extent very clear. In our reports and narrations, that is the historical quotes that have reached us through Shi'ah scholars and not the narration that have been narrated by the Imams, like what Shaykh Mufid has quoted in the book "*Al-Irshad*" or what Shaykh Saduq has quoted in the book, "*Uyun al-Akhbar al-Rida*". There are many points about the successoral of Imam al-Rida especially in the book "*Uyun al-Akhbar al-Rida*". Before I refer to these Shi'ah historical resources, I will firstly name a book as evidence from Sunni references which is called "*Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*" by Abu al-Faraj Isfahani. He is originally an Umawi and from the Umayyad generation and this is a fact. He lived in the age of "Al-e Buyeh" and because he was residing in Isfahan he became famous as Abu al-Faraj Isfahani.

This man was not a Shi'ah so we could claim he has written his books based on Shi'ah emotions. He is definitely a Sunni. He also was not a very pious person either so that we could claim that he was influenced by the reality of events. He is the author of the book called, "*Al-Aghani*". *Aghani* is plural for *Ughniyyah* and *Ughniyyah* means songs.

He has explained the history of music in the Muslim World and in proportion to that, a lot of other histories in this book which is apparently about eighteen thousand big volumes. They say Sahib ibn 'Ubbad who was contemporaneous with him, used to take two or three loads of books wherever he went. But when he had Abu al-Faraj's book he would say: I am no longer in need of a library. This book is so comprehensive that even though its writer is Abu al-Faraj and it is about music and musicians, a

group of traditionalist such as the late ‘Allamah Majlisi and the late Shaykh ‘Abbas Qummi continuously quoted from the book of Aghani by Abu al-Faraj.

We said that Abu al-Faraj has a book that is considered as a valid Islamic history book and is called, “*Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*”. It is the history of the killings of the sons of Abu Talib. In this book, which is still now available, he has gathered the history of ‘Alawi rebellions and the murder and martyrdom of the children of Abu Talib, who were, of course, mostly ‘Alawi. He has exclusively attributed about ten pages of this book to Imam al-Rida and has said the story of Imam al-Rida’s successoral.

When we study this book, we see that it is in accordance with the history quoted by the Shi‘ah scholars. I paid exceptional attention when comparing “*Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*” with what has been mentioned in “*Al-Irshad*” by Shaykh Mufid. They were very similar, as if they were both the result of a merger of the same historical evidence into one source which they have been written from. Therefore, our comments in this regard have been taken from not only Shi‘ah sources.

Now let’s investigate Ma’mun’s motivation to figure out what really forced him to raise this issue. Was Ma’mun really thinking of handing the job over to Imam al-Rida that in case of his death or murder, the caliphate would be transferred to the ‘Alawi family and to Imam al-Rida? If he really had this belief, did it remain with him till the end? In that case, we must not then accept that Ma’mun poisoned Imam al-Rida

We should accept the words of those who claim that Imam al-Rida died a natural death. They thought that Ma’mun had good intentions from the beginning and that his good intentions stayed with him until the end is not acceptable by Shi‘ah scholars. Most westerners have such beliefs. They believe that Ma’mun was truly a Shi‘ah and truly fond of ‘Ali’s family.

[Ma’mun and the Shi‘ism](#)

Ma’mun was the most knowledgeable of the caliphs and perhaps the most knowledgeable of kings in the world. It may not be possible to find a king from among those in the world who is more erudite and knowledge loving.³ Again, there is no question of Ma’mun’s intellectual and spiritual inclinations towards the Shi‘ism.

He repeatedly took part in meetings where Imam al-Rida spoke about the Shi‘ism or the meetings where other Sunnis were present. One famous Sunni scholar by the name of Ibn ‘Abd al-Birr has quoted a story, which has also been mentioned in Shi‘ah books, in his famous book which goes as follows:

Once, early in the morning Ma’mun summoned forty of the greatest Sunni scholars to come to him. He told them that he wanted to discuss the issue of caliphate with you. Some of this discussion has been quoted by Mr. [Muhammad Taqi] Shari‘ati in his book called, “*Khilafat wa Wilayat*” (Caliphate and Leadership). I have definitely seen very few scholars of religion to have argued the issue of the caliphate as well Ma’mun has. He discussed the issue of ‘Ali’s caliphate with all of them and overcame them all.

It has been narrated in Shi'ah books and the late Aqa Shaykh 'Abbas Qummi has also quoted in the book titled, "*Muntaha al-Amal*": Once somebody asked Ma'mun, "Who did you learn Shi'ism from?" He said, "From my father Harun." He then told a detailed story about his father's inclinations towards the Shi'ism. He had this kind of reverence towards Musa ibn Ja'far.

This was how fond of him he was. But at the same time he treated Musa ibn Ja'far in the worse possible manner. Once I asked my father, "If you have so much regard for this man why are you treating him like this?" He said, "Kingdom is sterile (an Arabic proverb) which means that a kingdom does not take into account his own child, let alone other things." He then said, "My little boy! Even if you, my child, fight with me over the caliphate, I will take of your body whatever carries your eyes, meaning I will separate your head from you body."

Thus, there is no doubt that Ma'mun was fond of the Shi'ism, however, he was famous for being "an *imam*-killing Shi'ah". Was it not true that the people of Kufah had Shi'ah inclinations yet they took part in killing Imam al-Husayn? There is no doubt that Ma'mun was an erudite and knowledge-loving man and this is the reason why westerners believe that he had plans to transfer the caliphate to Imam al-Rida out of sincerity, belief and good intentions. They believe that events in Imam al-Rida's life stopped him and that he died a natural death. This, in their belief, was how the issue was terminated.

But, of course, Shi'ah scholars believe that this is not acceptable. The evidences are also contrary to this belief. If the matter was this serious, Imam al-Rida's reaction towards accepting the caliphate would not have been the way they were. We see that Imam al-Rida did not regard this matter as a serious one.

[The views of Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Saduq](#)

Other assumptions which are also not improbable, since people like Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Saduq have accepted it, are that in the beginning Ma'mun had sincere intentions but he later changed his mind.

It has also been mentioned in history (quoted by Abu al-Faraj and in more detail by Shaykh Saduq and Shaykh Mufid) when Ma'mun gave this suggestion, he said, "Once my brother, Amin, summoned me (Amin was the Caliph even though part of the kingdom had been handed over to Ma'mun, who was also crown prince). I did not go." He then sends an army after me to take me with my hands tied. Upheaval had taken over parts of Khorasan and I sent an army there that was later defeated. I noticed that the leader of my army had a weak spirit which gave me certainty that I would not have the power to resist my brother and that I would be captured and handed over to him handcuffed only to face an ominous future.

One day I repented. He shows a room to the one he was talking to and says, "In this very room, I ordered for some water to be brought to me. First I washed my body, purified myself (I am not sure whether it is ironical to *ghusul* or the just washing). I then ordered for clean white clothes and in this very place I read the parts of the Qur'an which I had memorized. I prayed four *rak'ahs* of prayer and made a

vow to Allah to return the caliphate to its rightful owners if he were to keep me safe and sound and make me victorious over my brother, I did this with pure sincerity. From there onwards, I felt the disentanglements in my affairs open. After that, I was never defeated. I had sent a group to the front in Sistan and I received news of their glory. I then sent Tahir ibn al-Husayn to my brother. He also became victorious; one victory after another. Because my prayers were granted by Allah, I wanted to fulfil my promise.”

Shaykh Saduq and others have approved of this story. The only motivation driving Ma'mun was the oath he had made to Allah. This is one probability.

[The second probability](#)

Ma'mun basically had no power over this event. The initiative was not Ma'mun's. The initiative was from al-Fadl ibn Sahl Dhu al-Riyasatyan (Ma'mun's Minister)⁴ who came and said, “Your father treated 'Ali's family very badly. They did such and such, now it would be proper for you to bring the best of 'Ali's family and make him your crown prince.” Ma'mun was reluctant to do this but he saw no other options because Fadl had requested this of him.

Therefore, if we again assume this to be Fadl's initiative, then why would he do it? Was Fadl a Shi'ah? Did he do this because of the belief he had in Imam al-Rida? If so, then why did he still accept his Zoroastrian beliefs? Were his intentions only to transform the caliphate even though he was not a Shi'ah of Imam al-Rida and he was bad? And, therefore, if his plans worked, the danger would mostly be towards Ma'mun's government, because Ma'mun was ultimately a Muslim caliph. However, maybe they wanted to separate Iran from the Muslim World and take it towards Zoroastrianism.

Everything I am saying are all questions, I do not want to imply that history has given definite answer to these questions.

[Jurji Zaydan's view](#)

Jurji Zaydan is one of the people who believe this transferral plan was initiated by Fadl ibn Sahl. He also believes that Fadl ibn Sahl was a Shi'ah and did this because of his beliefs. This statement, however, is neither true nor correct because it is not consistent with history. If Fadl was as sincere and truly wanted for the Shi'ism to prevail over the Sunnis, Imam al-Rida's reaction towards the transfer of caliphate would not have been the way it was. On the contrary, it has been mentioned in Shi'ah history and narrations that Imam al-Rida strongly opposed Fadl even more than he opposed Ma'mun. He was against Fadl ibn Sahl and considered him a danger. He would sometimes say to Ma'mun, “Fear him! He and his brother are dangerous.”

It has also been mentioned that Fadl ibn Sahl constantly vilified Imam al-Rida.

We have so far pointed out two probabilities. One is that Ma'mun initiated for this transfer to take place in sincerity because of the oath he had made but was led astray, which is acceptable by Shaykh Saduq and others. Or that he kept his sincerity until the end which is what the orientalist believe.

The second probability is that the initiative was basically not Ma'mun's but that Fadl ibn Sahl initiated it. Some have said that Fadl was a Shi'ah and was sincere, others agree that he had dangerous intentions.

The third probability

A) To attract the attention of Iranians:

The other probability is that the initiative was Ma'mun's and that he had no sincerity from the beginning, considering this issue a 'kingdom policy'. What was that policy? Some have said that it was aimed at attracting the attention of the Iranians because the Iranians generally preferred the Shi'ism and 'Ali's family and had risen against the 'Abbasids from the beginning under the title "Al-Rida" or "Al-Radi" from Muhammad's family. Therefore, based on history and not traditions, the title al-Ridawas given to Imam al-Ridaby Ma'mun, meaning the day he appointed Imam al-Ridaas the crown prince, he said, "From now on, we call him by the title 'al-Rida'." He wanted to show the Iranians that he had satisfied their ninety-year-old request they had when they rose under the title "al-Ridafrom Muhammad's family" or "al-Radi from Muhammad's family". He thought to himself, "We will please them and deal with Imam al-Ridalater."

There was also the issue of the difference between their ages, Ma'mun was a young man of less than thirty years whereas Imam al-Ridawas about fifty years old (as Saduq and others have suggested that the Imam had forty seven years of age which is probably more correct). Ma'mun thinks to himself, "On the surface, this individual's leadership can not pose a threat to me. He is at least twenty years my senior. Even if he does continue to live for another few years, he will still die before me."

There is, therefore, another view that the transfer of caliphate to Imam al-Ridawas Ma'mun's policy. It was initiated by Ma'mun political intentions to calm the Iranian nation down and attract their attention.

B) To destabilize rebellions by the 'Alawis:

Some have suggested another reason for Ma'mun's initiative. They believe that the reason behind it was to destabilize the uprising of the 'Alawis. The 'Alawis had become an issue themselves. Every few years or sometimes every year there would have been an uprising in one corner of the land which was most likely led by an 'Alawi.

Ma'mun came up with this initiative in order to please the 'Alawis and keep them quiet or at least to disarm them in front of the people. When he brings the leader of the 'Alawis into his system, they would definitely think that they too have a share of the government. Ma'mun forgave most of them even though, in his opinion, they had committed enormous crimes. This included Zayd al-Nar, Imam al-Rida's

brother, who was pardoned by Ma'mun. Ma'mun thought to himself, "I will eventually please them and stop their uprising." He, in fact, wanted to give them a share of the government so they would calm down and the people around them disintegrate. He wanted to disarm the 'Alawis so wherever they go to assemble an uprising against the Caliph, people tell them, "You also have a share in the government. Imam al-Ridais now the crown prince. Do you want to rise against Imam al-Rida?"

C) Imam al-Rida's disarmament

The other probability in relation to Ma'mun's initiative was the policy to disarm Imam al-Ridahimself. It is in our narrations that one day Imam al-Ridatold Ma'mun, "This is what you intend." You know, one way to disarm people who criticize a system is to give them a post in that system. Then, whatever the situation, if people were still unhappy, their dissatisfaction could no longer be put to use. On the contrary, the dissatisfied people will get provoked against them (i.e. if Imam al-Ridahad a post in the government, those people who claimed that the caliphate rightfully belonged to 'Ali's family, or that the world would be a garden if they became Caliphs, or that justice would be established, etc., they would turn against him). Ma'mun wanted to select Imam al-Ridaas the Crown Prince so that people would say afterwards, "No, the situation did not change. Nothing happened." Or maybe he wanted to accuse 'Ali's family and say, "They say so and so when they have no access to anything, but when they gain access, they become silent and do not act."

It is very difficult for one to reach a definite conclusion from Ma'mun's point of view using historical stand points. Was this Ma'mun's initiative? Or was it Fadl ibn Sahl's initiative? If it was Fadl's initiative, what was it based on? And if it was Ma'mun's initiative, were his intentions sincere or not? If he had sincerity, did he revert from it at the end or not? And if he did not have sincerity, what was his policy? From historical points of view, these matters are uncertain.

Most of these, of course, have a reason but not ones that we could say are one hundred percent definite. Maybe what Shaykh Saduq and others believe is correct even though it may not seem palpable to the Shi'ahs to say that Ma'mun had pure intentions from the beginning but later he changed his mind. Just as people make decisions by reverting to the truth when they are faced with difficult situations but forget about their initial intentions when they are freed from those difficulties.

"And when they mount upon the ship, they pray to Allah, making their faith pure for Him only, but when he bringeth them safe to land, behold! They ascribe partners (on to Him)." [5](#)

The Qur'an says when people get entrapped in the four sea waves, they become very pure and devoted but once they are out, they gradually forget. Ma'mun was also stuck in these four sea waves. He made this oath at first and decided to fulfil it. But, gradually he forgot and reverted from it completely.

It is better to analyze the matter through Imam al-Rida's own words. In my opinion, if we analyze the situation from his point of view, especially by taking into consideration the historical facts, then a lot of questions, even those related to Ma'mun, will be answered.

The historical facts

1) Summoning Imam al-Rida from Medina to Marw

Summoning Imam al-Rida to Marw from Medina was decided without previous consultation with him. No single person has written about any previous negotiation or correspondence with Imam al-Rida in Medina about the reasons why they needed him there.

Ma'mun summoned the Imam without clarifying the issue at stake. He ordered for not only the Imam but a large group of 'Ali's relatives to be brought from Medina, under surveillance and despite of their free will. Even the route they chose to take Imam al-Rida through was one specifically chosen so that the Imam would not pass through Shi'ah neighbourhoods. He ordered them not to take the Imam through Kufah but through Basrah and Khuzistan towards Neyshabur. He had defined the route for journey.

Those chosen to complete this mission were hand-picked from among people who had extreme hatred towards the Imam and who were the strongest of all. The general appointed for this task was a man called "Jaludi" or "Juludi" (apparently an Arab) who was very loyal to Ma'mun and opposed Imam al-Rida to such an extent that when Ma'mun informed him of his plans in Marw he said, "I disagree." However much Ma'mun told him to shut up he still said, "I do not agree." Because of this, he along with two other people was put in prison and was later killed for the sake of this matter. This was done one day when Ma'mun had summoned them along with Imam al-Rida and a group including Fadl ibn Salh Dhu al-Riyasatayn. He again asked them for their opinions on this matter. They disagreed with utmost bluntness and gave a very sharp response. He decapitated the first one. He asked the second one who insisted on his response. Ma'mun decapitated him as well. He then turned to Jaludi. ⁶ Imam al-Rida was sitting next to Ma'mun, he whispered to Ma'mun, "Skip this one." Jaludi said, "Oh the Commander of the Faithful! I have a request from you. For God's sake do not accept this man's word about me." Ma'mun said, "Your oath is practicable that I will never take this man's word about you." (He (Jaludi) did not know that the Imam was interceding for him). He was beheaded right there.

In any case, they brought the Imam to Marw in that state. They placed everyone from 'Ali's family in one place and Imam al-Rida in a special place, under surveillance and under arrest. It was there that Ma'mun discussed the matter with the Imam. This is among the historical facts.

Imam al-Rida's refusal

Apart from not discussing this issue with Imam al-Rida beforehand in Medina, when it was brought up in Marw, the Imam strongly rejected it. Abu al-Faraj has written in *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*, "Ma'mun sent Fadl ibn Sahl and al-Hassan ibn Salh to Imam al-Rida. These two raised the issue. The Imam rejected and was not intending to accept. At the end, they said, 'What are you saying? This is not optional. We have the order to behead you if you refuse (this has repeatedly been quoted by Shi'ah scholars).' Faraj then says that the Imam still refused to accept. They went to Ma'mun. Ma'mun negotiated with the Imam

again and threatened to murder him. Once he said, ‘Why do you not accept?7 Was it not your grand father, ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib who participated in that council?’”

He was trying to say that the matter did not violate the Imam’s family customs, since it was similar to the time when ‘Ali participated in the council which had congregated to choose a caliph. It meant that he had temporarily withdrawn from the right, which he considered was bestowed upon him by Allah and surrendered to the situation so that he could see what the situation was and how the conditions were from the people’s point of view.

Will the job be handed over to him or not? ‘So if the council had given the caliphate to your father he would have accepted it. You should accept it, too.’ The Imam finally agreed because his life was threatened; that is, if he had not accepted it, he would have been killed. Of course, the question whether or not Imam al-Rida’s refusal to accept the position of ‘crown prince’ was worth the cost of his life will remain for you to decide. Is this similar to the oath of allegiance Yazid wanted from Imam al-Husayn? We shall discuss all these questions later.

Imam al-Rida’s condition

Another historical fact is that Imam al-Rida made a condition and secured its approval that was, ‘I will accept under the condition that I do not interfere in anything and not take the responsibility for anything.’

He actually did not want to take responsibility for Ma’mun’s actions and as they say today continue his opposition, insisting on the fact that ‘We (us and them) do not go together and can not cooperate.’ Of course, Ma’mun accepted this condition. The Imam was not even participating in the *‘Id* Prayers. Until that famous event, when Ma’mun requested that Imam al-Rida perform an *‘Id* prayer. The Imam said, “This is against my condition and promise.” He said, “Your not accepting any responsibilities have made people say things behind us. You have to accept.” The Imam replied, “All right! I will accept this prayer.” He accepted it in a way that made Ma’mun and Fadl regretful and they said, “If he reaches the place, a revolution will take place there.” They came and stopped the Imam and returned him and did not let him go out of the city.

The Imam’s attitude after the issue of acceptance

The other issue which is again a historical fact and quoted by the Sunnis as well as the Shi’ahs (quoted by Abu al-Faraj as well as citations in our books) is the Imam’s attitude after the issue of acceptance of the position of ‘Crown Prince’. The speech the Imam gave in Ma’mun’s meeting (the acceptance of heir-apparency meeting) was especially amazing and interesting.

In my opinion, the Imam clarified his position in this one and half sentence speech. He read a sermon and in that sermon he made no mention of Ma’mun and did not thank him one single bit. The norms are to mention his name and, at least, thank him a little.

Abu al-Faraj Says, "They finally set a day and said, 'On this day, people can come and give oath of allegiance to Imam al-Rida.' People came. Ma'mun made a seat for the Imam and sat him next to himself. The first person he ordered to come and give oath of allegiance was his son, 'Abbas ibn Ma'mun. The second person was one of the 'Alawi *sayyids*. Then, on the same pattern, he called one 'Abbasi and one 'Alawi to come and give oath of allegiance to the Imam and gave them lots of prizes and they left. When they were coming to give oath of allegiance, the Imam was holding his hand in a certain way towards people. Ma'mun said, 'Extend your arm so they can come and give oath of allegiance.' The Imam said. 'No, this is how my grandfather, the Prophet, used to take oath of allegiance and held his hand this way when people place their hand on his.'

Then, poets and rhetoricians, who are subject to situation and condition changes, came and started to read sermons, read poems, speak in praise of Imam al-Rida, speak in praise of Ma'mun and eulogize these two people. Ma'mun then told Imam al-Rida, 'Stand up and give a speech yourself to the people.' Ma'mun definitely expected the Imam to endorse him and his government. It is written, 'He first praised Allah and...' [8](#) 

- [1.](#) I, of course, do not want to defend the Barmakis just like many of the so-called Iranian worshippers, only because they were Iranian. They were on the same level as the 'Abbasids. Barmak did not have the slightest amount of difference (spiritually or by nature) with caliphs like Harun.
- [2.](#) This, however, is not certain according to all the historians but it is as such in writing of most of the historians.
- [3.](#) This does not mean the encourager of scholars.
- [4.](#) Ma'mun has a vizier called Fadl ibn Sahl. They (the Sahls) are two brothers: al-Hasan ibn Sahl and Fadl ibn Sahl. They both are pure Iranians and originally Zoroastrians. During the Barmak Period (who the generation before) Fadl ibn Sahl who was clever, intelligent and educated and especially had some information about the science of astrology, entered the Barmak system and became a Muslim by them (some say their father became a Muslim and some others say, no, they were Zoroastrians and became Muslims there and then). Later on, his job flourished and he reached a level where he became Ma'mun's vizier and occupied two positions at the same time. First of all, he was the vizier (the vizier in those days was like the prime minister today, meaning he was the boss because in those days there were no council of ministers, one person was the vizier who was in power and authority after the Caliph), in addition to this he was as it is so called today the head and commander in chief of the army. This was the reason they called him Zoroastrian because he was in the ministry position and the commander in chief position. Ma'mun's army are all Iranians (there are very little Arabs among them) because Ma'mun was in Khorasan; the war between Amin and Ma'mun also was a war between Arab and Iranian. The Arabs supported Amin and the Iranians especially the Khorasanis (as Khorasan was the centre) supported Ma'mun. Ma'mun is Iranian from his mother's side. Mas'udi has written in both *Murawwij al-Dhahab* and *Al-Tanbih wa al-Ashraf* (others have also written) that Ma'mun's mother was a Badqisi woman. This went as far as Fadl ibn Sahl's dominance over everything and turned Ma'mun into a tool without will power.
- [5.](#) Surat al-'Ankabut 29:65.
- [6.](#) Jaludi had a bad record after an uprising by one of the 'Alawis who was later defeated, Harun had apparently ordered this very Jaludi to seize all the belongings of the Abi Talib family, 'Do not even leave any jewellery for their women, and take all their clothes except for one set out of their homes.' He came to Imam al-Rida's house; the Imam blocked his way and said, 'I will not let you in.' He said, 'I have a mission, I must go and take off the women's clothes myself and not leave other than one set of cloth for them.' The Imam said, 'I will do whatever you are saying but I will not let you enter.' No matter how much he insisted the Imam did not let him in. Afterwards, the Imam himself went and told the women, 'Give everything you have to him so he leaves.' He then collected their clothes and even their earrings and bangles then left.
- [7.](#) They knew very well what their intentions were and why Imam al-Rida was not accepting. Imam al-Rida refused to

accept, because later he himself told Ma'mun, 'Whose property are you giving away?' Imam al-Rida questioned whose property Ma'mun was giving away? And accepting this position from him meant approving of him. If Imam al-Rida considered the caliphate a right bestowed upon him by Allah, he tells Ma'mun, 'You have no right to make me the crown prince. You must hand over the leadership and agree that you had no rights until now.' This was our right and if choosing the Caliph was the people's responsibility, again what business was this to him?

[8](#). [Unfortunately the last few minutes of this speech were not recorded on the tape].

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/survey-lives-infallible-imams-murtadha-mutahhari/chapter-6-issue-imam-al-rida-crown-prince-session-1#comment-0>