

Chapter 7: Shi'ah Precedence In Writing About Ethics

The first to write on this topic is the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a). On returning from Siffin he wrote a book on this subject and sent it to his son Hasan or Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah. It was a lengthy book comprising of all the topics on ethics, the ways of moral training, noble traits, steps necessary for spiritual deliverance (*al-munjiyat*), destructive behaviours (*al-muhlikat*) and the way of deliverance from the latter. Scholars from both sects (Sunni and Shi'ah) have mentioned this book, showing the commendation which it deserves.

Among our scholars, al-Kulayni has related it through different ways in *Kitab al-Rasa'il*. Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Abdullah ibn Sa'id al-Askari has also elaborated on it in his *Kitab al-Zawajir wa al-Mawa'iz* (Book of Upbraiding and Preaching). He states: "If there is a word of wisdom that deserves to be written in gold it is this." He adds: "A group of people narrated the book to me" and then mentioned his chain of transmission.

The first Shi'ah to compile a work on morals is Ismail ibn Mahram ibn Abi Nasr Abu Yaqub al-Sukuni. He wrote *Kitab Sifat al-Mumin wa al-Fajir*. Also to his credit is a collection of sermons and wise sayings of the Commander of the Faithful. Both books have been mentioned by Abu Amr al-Kishshi and Abu al-Abbas al-Najashi in his *Fihrist* of Shi'ah authors. They state that he has narrated from a number of al-Sadiq's disciples, and lived till the time of Imam al-Ridha' ('a) from whom also he narrated. He was among the second century scholars.

Other early generation Shi'ah who wrote about ethics include Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Ali ibn Al-Hasan ibn Shu'bah al-Harrani (may Allah be pleased with him). He was among the third century scholars. He wrote *Kitab Tuhaf al-Uqul*, a book containing wise sayings, preaching and noble traits reported from the Prophet's family. It is a splendid work which is relied on by notable Shi'ah scholars such as Sheikh al-Mufid who used to quote from it. Some of our scholars even said that the like of *Kitab Tuhaf al-Uqul* has never been written. Ali ibn Ahmad al-Kufi (d. 352) compiled *Kitab al-Adab* and *Kitab Makarim al-Akhlaq* on ethics. Abu Ali ibn Miskawaih the scholar previously mentioned wrote *Kitab*

Tahzib al-Akhlaq wa Tathir al-A'raq comprising six essays discussing the ways of moral refinement. It is really a masterpiece.

I have mentioned the categories of the masters of this discipline and their works in the original version of this book.

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