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Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Historical Emigration

Due to many letters from Ma'mun and frequent referrals by his agents to him, and while he was reluctant to take this trip and knew that this trip is without a return, His holiness Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) prepared for it.^{[1](#)}

[Farewell to Medina](#)

Several times the holy Imam went to the grave of his forefather, the Apostle of Allah, (S) to say farewell, acting in a way that repugnance and sadness [for leaving Medina] was obvious in his countenance.

When bidding farewell, he would weep out loud and when someone called Mukhawwal Sajistani congratulated him for the journey he was about to set out, the Holy Imam said, "Leave me to myself; I am separating from the proximity of my forefather and will pass away in a foreign land."

Before leaving Medina, the Imam (a.s.) called all his relatives together and told them: "Cry for me, for I will not return to Medina ever again!"^{[2](#)}

He took *hadhrat* Jawad (a.s.), who was a child then, to Masjid al-Nabi and while *hadhrat* Jawad (a.s.) was embracing the Prophet (S)'s tomb, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said, "O Apostle of Allah! I leave him with you." Then, he told all his ministers and delegates to listen to his words and not to oppose him; and asserted his Imamate and succession to the trustworthy among his companions.^{[3](#)}

[Imam al-Ridha's \(a.s.\) Itinerary](#)

There are controversies as to how and where had the Imam's (a.s.) travel route from Medina to Marv been. For instance, did his holiness first go to Mecca and thence set out his journey or did he enter Kufa?

The Imam's (a.s.) itinerary seems to have been arranged for him so that it could prevent any movement by Shi'as and 'Alawis; therefore, according to some traditions, he passed by Kufa without entering it.^{[4](#)}

Nabaj Village

Along the way, his holiness arrived in Nibaj, a village at a distance of ten *manzils* (35–50 km?) from Basra. Abu Habib al-Nibaji said, “I saw in a dream that the Apostle of Allah (S) came to Nibaj and entered the mosque where the Hajj pilgrims stay every year.

I went to his presence and greeted him. There was a large dish of Sayhani dates before him; his holiness gave me a fistful of the dates. I counted them and I found they were eighteen. I woke up and interpreted that dream as my living on for eighteen more years!

Twenty days passed when I was informed that Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) has come to Nibaj and settled in the mosque. I went toward the mosque and saw people hastening to join his holiness’ audience. I went to his presence, too, and saw him sitting exactly where I had seen the Prophet (S) was sitting in my dream and there was a straw mat under his feet similar to the mat which was under the Prophet (S)’s feet and that there was a large dish of Sayhani dates before him.

I greeted him; he greeted back and called me forth and gave me a fistful of those dates. I counted the dates and found they were the same number that the Prophet had given me in my dream. I said, ‘O Son of *Rasul Allah* [S]! Grant me more!’ His holiness said, ‘If *Rasul Allah* had granted you more, I would grant you more too.’^{[5](#)}

Ahvaz

According to the traditions, his holiness fell sick in Ahvaz. Abu Hashim Ja’fari had a meeting with the Imam. It was summer time and extremely hot. They called in a physician and the Imam introduced an herb as medicine to the physician and told him the properties.

But the physician said, “This herb cannot be found in this time of the year.” His holiness said, “Bring in some sugar cane.” The Physician said, “This is even more difficult than the first to find since it is not the time for sugar cane.”

The Imam said, “Sugar cane and that herbal medicine are both available in this land. Pass by that tent, there is a man with a dark skin next to the mill, ask him.” They sent out someone to that place to get those two.

When Raja’ b. Abi al-ahhak (the man in charge of the Imam’s journey) found out about it, he said to his companions: “If we stay here longer, people will be enchanted by him.” Then, they left the place.^{[6](#)}

While his holiness was leaving Ahvaz, Ja’far b. Muhammad al-Nawfili attended his presence near Arbaq bridge and said to his holiness: “May I be your ransom! Some people imagine your father is alive.”

The Imam answered: ‘They are telling lies; may Allah’s curse be upon them; if my father had been alive, his inheritance would not have been divided and his wives would not have gotten married.

By God, my father tasted death as did ‘Ali b. Abi Talib.’ I asked: ‘What is my obligation (after you)?’ the Imam answered: ‘It is upon you to follow my son, Muhammad ...’ and then continued: ‘My tomb and that of Harun are like these,” showing his two fingers stuck together.’[7](#)

Departure toward Fars

Departure toward Fars[8](#)

Some have talked about his holiness’ sojourn in Bihbahan (Arjan) and his praying in the mosque there.[9](#) There is also a footprint in that city called *qadamgah* (footprint) of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.).[10](#)

On his way, the holy Imam (a.s.) passed through Yazd and Abarquh, which has a well-known *qadamgah*, and then through Dehshir, which is apparently the same as Farashah (presently known as Islamiyya).

There is a place called *qadamgah* in this city, too. The way from Shiraz to Yazd also passes through that route, i.e., Taft and Islamiyya in which *qadamgah* is located. Islamiyya’s *qadamgah* comprises of a building complex, which according to an inscription in its niche, has been constructed by Garshasb b. ‘Ali in 512/1118.

Known then as Masjid-i Mashhad-i ‘Ali b. Musa al-Ridha (a.s.), this building has a date stone, inscriptions, internal ornaments, and other mementos.[11](#)

Moving toward Khurasan

Shaykh al-Saduq (*ra*) related: “When Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) entered a house in Fozz quarter,[12](#) in Nayshabur he planted an almond seed, which turned into a tree and fruited within a year. The people were informed and whoever got sick would eat from the almonds of that tree and would get healed; the ones who had sore eyes, the women who would run into difficulty giving birth to their babies, or the animals which would come down with colic were all cured by the almond or a twig of the tree.

Then, a man named Abu ‘Umar cut down the tree, as a result of which he lost his abundant properties and wealth; his two sons also took out the root left in the ground in order to fix their house and both of them came down with a severe illness and died within a year.[13](#)

Muhaddith Qummi (*ra*) quotes one of the camel-drivers of Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) caravan as saying: “When, together with his holiness we arrived in our village (Karand or Karmand in Isfahan), I asked the Imam to write down a *hadith* in his own handwriting for me. His holiness bestowed the following *hadith* as a gift to me:

“Be a loving friend of the household of Muhammad (S), although you are impious; and be a loving friend of their loving friends, although they are impious.”[14](#)

Nayshabur

In 200/815, his holiness entered Nayshabur, where the people along with Abu Ya‘qub Ishaq b. Rahuwayh, an eminent figure of the town, went out to welcome him in Mu‘ayyidiyya village near Nayshabur.

Although an old man, Abu Ya‘qub carried the bridle of the Imam’s camel on his shoulder down to the city of Nayshabur. [15](#) There was a bath-house in Nayshabur, which, later on became famous as *Hammam-i Ridha* (a.s.); there was a pond in the bath which was filled with spring water.

Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) performed *ghusl* (major ablution) there and said prayer beside it; the people noticed this and thereafter began to perform their *ghusl* in it; they would drink water from it for its blessing, would say prayers beside it, and would ask God for their needs to be fulfilled and they would be fulfilled.

Shaykh al-Saduq (*ra*) said, “That spring is renowned as Kahlan and from that time on the people have attended it and sought healing from its water. [16](#)

His holiness Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) stayed in Nayshabur for several days, on one of which he went to pay a pilgrimage to Imam-zade Muhammad Mahruq, one of Imam al-Sajjad’s (a.s.) grandsons.

The ruler of Nayshabur said, “Imam al-Ridha said, ‘One of our household members is buried here, we go to pay a pilgrimage to his tomb.’ And then he went to the mausoleum of Sultan Muhammad Mahruq in Talajird and paid a pilgrimage to that holy tomb.” [17](#)

Hadith of Silsilat al-Dhahab

When Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) was leaving Nayshabur, a group of scholars of *hadith*, including Muhammad b. al-Rafi‘, Ahmad b. al-Harith, Yahya b. al-Yahya, and Ishaq b. al-Rahuwayh held the bridle of Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) camel and said, “We swear you to your purified forefathers to narrate a *hadith* from your father to us.” It is also related in a *hadith* that Abu Zar‘a and Muhammad b. Aslam, both memorizers of Prophetic traditions, said to his holiness: “O noble son of the noble! O Imam Son of the Imams! O pure and praiseworthy summation of the prophets! We swear you to your purified forefathers and your noble ancestors to show us your blessed face and recite a *hadith* from your forefathers to us as a keepsake from you.”

At this time, the Imam’s camel halted, the curtain [of the camel litter] was pulled away and the Muslims’ eyes glistened at the sight of his blessed radiant face. The hair hanging from both sides of the Imam’s head was like those of the Prophet (S); some of the (excited) people who were standing there were crying and weeping and tearing their clothes and prostrating on the ground.

Some were kissing the bridle of his camel and others were stretching their necks to better see the face

of his holiness. The people waited there until noon, as tears were rolling down their eyes like little brooks.

The dignitaries and judges shouted: ‘O people! Listen and surrender your hearts; do not disturb the Prophet (S.A.W.) concerning his household. Then, while 24 thousand pens were ready to write down, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said,

“I have heard my father – that competent servant of God – Musa b. Ja‘far (a.s.) saying that he heard from his father Ja‘far b. Muhammad al-Sadiq (a.s.) saying that he heard his father Muhammad b. ‘Ali (a.s.) saying that he heard from his father ‘Ali b. al-Husayn (a.s.) saying that he heard from his father al-Husayn b. ‘Ali (a.s.) saying that he heard from his father ‘Ali b. ‘Abi Talib (a.s.) saying that he heard from the Holy Prophet (S) saying that he heard from Gabriel saying that Allah told him: ‘I am God. There is no god but Me. Worship Me then. The phrase *La ilaha illa Allah* is My fortress, whoever sincerely utters it, may enter My fortress, and whoever enters My fortress shall be secure from My punishment’. When they moved on, the Imam (a.s.) said out loud: ‘There are certain conditions to this (the entrance to the fortress) and I am one of its conditions.’”[18](#)

Healing a Sick Person in Rubat Sa‘d

A caravan from Khurasan was on its way to Kerman when it was attacked by the highwaymen in the mountains near Kerman. They held up the man whom they thought possessed a lot of wealth and tortured him so that he might save his life by giving out his properties.

They kept him in snow and filled his mouth with snow, until a woman freed him from bondage and he managed to escape, but his mouth and tongue had become so numb that he could hardly talk.

In Khurasan, he heard that Imam al-Ridha is in Nayshabur. In a dream he heard someone telling him: “The son of the Apostle of Allah is in Khurasan, tell him about your illness to suggest some medicine to you to heal.”

The man said, “In my dream, I went to the Imam and told him my story. His holiness told me to grind cumin, thyme, and salt and put the mixture in my mouth and I would be cured!”

When he woke up he set out for Nayshabur without following the instructions or telling anyone about it. At the entrance to Nayshabur, he was told that Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) had left the city and was in Rubat Sa‘d.

He went to the Imam and (with much difficulty) told him what he wished. His holiness said, “Did I not instruct you in your dream what to do? Go and get that medicine.” The man said, “Tell me again if possible!” Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) repeated that same instruction; the man used the medicine and was cured.

Abu Hamid Ahmad b. ‘Ali al-Tha‘alibi said, “I heard from Abu Ahmad ‘Abd Allah b. ‘Abd al-Rahman, also known as Safwan, who said that he saw that man and heard this story from him personally.”[19](#)

[Dihsurkh \(al-Hamra\)](#)

On his way from Nayshabur to Tus, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) arrived in Dehsurkh or Al-Hamra’ village. ‘Abd al-Salam b. Salih al-Hiravi (Aba Salt) said, “The people told Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): ‘O son of the Apostle of Allah! It is prayer time.’

The Imam dismounted the camel and said, ‘Bring some water.’ They said, ‘We have no water with us.’ His holiness dug the ground with his own hands and water flew out so much as he and those with him performed ablution; and the trace there is still visible today.”[20](#)

While passing through Dihsurkh toward Tus, his holiness passed by the mountain (called Kuhsangi, from which they make stone pots today) and said, “O God! Please bless this mountain, make it useful to people, and bless what they make from it.” Then he ordered some pots to be made from it for him, and said, “Do not cook any food for me unless you cook it in these pots.” His holiness used to eat slowly; he would also eat very little.

From then on, the people found their way to it and made stone pots from it; and God gave blessings to that mountain for the Imam’s prayer.[21](#)

[Tus](#)

Then, in continuing his journey, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) arrived in Tus and stayed in the house of Humayd b. Qahtaba[22](#), which was a big garden where Harun’s grave, was located. That was the place where the Imam had frequently talked about and informed about his being buried there. When his holiness entered the house, he went by the grave of Harun, drew a line on one side of the grave, and said, “This is the place of my tomb; I will be buried here and soon Allah will cause this place to be frequented by my followers (Shi‘as) and friends.

By God, if a Shi‘a pays a pilgrimage to me and sends greeting upon me, they will certainly benefit from our – the Ahl al-Bayt’s – intercession and the mercy and forgiveness by Allah.”

Then, his holiness turned his face toward *Qibla*, said prayer, and made supplication; then, he made prostration in which he recited 500 *tasbih* (saying *subhan Allah* = Glorious is Allah) and then left the place.[23](#)

[Sarakh](#)

It is implied from some reports that his holiness Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) had been under close surveillance in this town, where nobody had been allowed to meet him. In the following report, the Imam’s house is

construed as a prison.

‘Abd al-Salam b. al-Salih said, “I went to the door of the house where Imam al-Ridha was under home arrest (incarcerated) and asked the guard to get in. He said it was not possible. I asked the reason. He said, ‘because he performs a thousand *rak‘as* of prayers every night and day.’

And then he went on to tell a little more of the quality of his holiness’ acts of devotion. I told him: ‘Ask his holiness to grant me permission to meet him.’ He went in and asked permission for me. I got in and saw his holiness sitting in his prayer niche, deliberating. I said, ‘O son of the Prophet (S), what is it that the people are quoting from you?’ He asked: ‘What is that?’ I said, ‘They quote you as saying that “people are our slaves!”

His holiness said,

***“O Allah! Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the sensible and the Unseen...
(Qurʾan: 39/46),***

O Aba Salt! You are witnessing that I have never said this, nor have I heard any of my forefathers to have said so.

You know the tyrannies that this *umma* have imposed upon us; these words are of the same tyrannies.” Then, he said, “O ‘Abd al-Salam, if as they say people are our slaves, who are we inviting them to?”

I said, “O son of the Apostle of Allah (S) you are right.” His holiness said, “O ‘Abd al-Salam, do you deny, as others do, what the Exalted Allah has made incumbent upon you concerning our *Wilaya* [and Imamate]?” I said, “I take refuge in God! No, I acknowledge your *Wilaya*.”[24](#)

However, the Imam’s incarceration in his journey to Marv seems to be improbable in view of Ma’mun’s plot for heir apparency, his apparent honoring the Imam, and his recommendations for respecting his holiness.

However, it is possible that the narrator has construed certain limitations imposed on the Imam as incarceration; or, as some others have presumed, this incidence had taken place during the Imam’s next trip, i.e. his return from Marv, when Ma’mun’s policies had changed.

Concerning Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) leaving Sarakhs, Ahmad b. al-‘Ubayd says: “My grandfather said, ‘I was appointed to serve Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) while he was in Nayshabur and escorted him until a day’s journey (*manzel*) after Sarakhs and intended to escort him to Marv.

One *manzel* after Sarakhs, his holiness took his head out of the camel litter and said, ‘O servant of God! Go back! You have fulfilled your duty about us and treated us well; there is no fixed distance for escorting (that is to say, you have been rightly rewarded.)...[25](#)

Marv

Having endured a four months' journey, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) eventually arrived in Marv in the first half of the year 201/816.²⁶ When Imam al-Ridha arrived in Marv, the people welcomed him warmly and with great enthusiasm to the extent that Marv had never witnessed such joy and excitement to that day.

Huge crowds thronged on the outskirts of the city to welcome him. After passing through the dense crowds of people, the Imam (a.s.) settled in a house near the state palace that had been prepared for him.²⁷

1. Al-Kafi, vol. 2, 207.
2. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 217.
3. Ithbat al-Wasiyya p. 349; Ibn Shahrashub, Manaqib, p. 196.
4. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 149.
5. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 457.
6. Musnad al-Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 1, p. 175.
7. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 463.
8. Ibid, vol.3, p. 149; Al-Irshad, 2-255; Al-Kafi, 2/402 & 407.
9. Mir'at al-Buldan, Vol. 1, p. 368; see: Jughrafiya-yi Tarikhi Hijrat-i Imam Ridha (a.s.).
10. Ibid.
11. Jughrafiya-yi Tarikhi Hijrat-i Imam Ridha (a.s.), p.107. The author says: I am honored that a number of my relatives, including my great grandfather Hujjat al-Islam Sayyid Abu al-Qasim Farashahi who was from among the dignitaries and noble scholars of that place and capable of miraculous acts is buried along with some of his children in qadamgah and the vicinity. Also my grandfather Ayatollah Sayyid 'Abd al-Hayy, who was one of the great scholars of Yazd and the Islamic judge there, is buried in the Mausoleum of Imam-zade Ja'far. May God have mercy on them all.
12. A quarter in Nayshabur (see Yaqut Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Buldan, edited by Wüstenfeld, Leipzig, 1868, vol. 3 p.890). (Trans)
13. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 374.
14. Muntaha al-Amal, 2/177.
15. Khalifa Nayshaburi, Tarikh-i Nayshabur, p. 177; see: Jalil 'Irfanmanish, Jughrafiya-yi Tarikhi Hijrat-i Imam Ridha (a.s.), p. 132.
16. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 376.
17. Tarikh-i Nayshabur, p. 17; see: Imam 'Ali b. Musa al-Ridha (a.s.), p. 82.
18. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 132, (a combination of traditions 1, 2, 3, and 4).
19. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 458.
20. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 376.
21. Ibid.
22. A governor and general of the Abbasid period, died in Khurasan in 159/775. (Encyclopedia of the World of Islam)
23. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 376.
24. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 426.
25. Athar wa Akhbar-i Imam Ridha (a.s.); see: Jughrafiya-yi Tarikhi Hijrat-i Imam Ridha (a.s.), p. 151.
26. 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 2, p. 149.
27. Al-Irshad, vol. 2, p. 250.

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