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Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Knowledge of Various Languages

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) scholarly character is not restricted to religious and intellectual issues and the common sciences; rather, some manifestations of his Divine knowledge was revealed to the people that indicated his connection to the unseen world, some examples of which are pointed out as follows.

1. Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Familiarity with Various Current Languages of the Time

Aba Salt Hirawi said, "Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) used to speak with people whose languages were different in their own languages. By God, he was the most fluent and knowledgeable of all people in any language."¹

One day he said to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): "O son of the Apostle of Allah! I am astonished of your mastery of different languages." His holiness answered: "O Aba Salt!" I am Allah's authority (*Hujja*) over His creatures and Allah never assigns a *Hujja* over a folk whose language he does not know.

Have you not heard Commander of the Faithful (a.s.) saying that we are given the clear proof (*fasl al-khitab*) and this is nothing but knowledge of languages?"²

Someone by the name of Isma'il Sindi had come from India to see Allah's authority (*Hujjat Allah*). He was guided to Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) presence. He said, "I went to the Imam but I did not know Arabic, so I greeted him in Sindi language, his holiness answered my greeting in my own language.

I talked to him in my language and he talked back to me in my language. I told him: 'I have come to see Allah's authority in Arabia.' He answered: 'That is me (Allah's authority) ask whatever you like.' I asked my questions and the Imam answered in my own language.

When I wanted to leave, I said, ‘I do not know Arabic; ask God to inspire Arabic language to me! His holiness rubbed his blessed hand on my lips, just then I was able to speak Arabic!’³

In Basra, when one of his opponents called ‘Amr b. Haddab wanted him to prove his claim of knowing any language and speak with the Romans, Hindus, Persians, and Turks who were in town, the holy Imam said, “Call them in.”

A number of the speakers of various languages were brought to the presence of his holiness and he talked to all of them in such fluency that all admitted to the Imam’s mastery and the people were astonished at seeing this happening,⁴ because Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) had never had a teacher in this regard and had never learned various languages with anyone, nor had he associated with these individuals in Medina so as to learn to speak so many languages with such fluency.

2. Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) Familiarity with the Language of the Birds and Animals

Various manifestations of Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) knowledge of the animals’ language is recorded, some of which are pointed out here. Sulayman b. Ja’far said, “I was with Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) in the garden when all of a sudden a sparrow came to his holiness and began to chirp.

His holiness said, ‘Do you know what it is saying?’ I said, ‘No, Allah and His messenger and his son know best.’ His holiness said, ‘She says a snake wants to eat her chicks. Take this stick, go to that house and kill the snake.’ He said, ‘When I entered the house, I saw a snake was moving around and I killed it.’⁵

A person called Harun b. Musa says: “I was in a desert with Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) when his horse neighed and the Imam let go of (the rein of) the horse; it went away (to a corner) and relieved itself and came back.

Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) – who had noticed my surprise – looked at me and said, ‘Nothing has been granted to the prophet David (a.s.) except that more also has been granted to Muhammad (S) and his Household (a.s.).’⁶ [Implying that the Prophet David knew the animals’ language; so, no wonder we know it, too.]

3. Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) Widespread Knowledge in Occult Sciences

A part of the vast knowledge of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) is manifested in the occult news reported by his holiness, some of which are mentioned as follows:

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Predictions concerning the Barmakids

His holiness frequently pointed out the annihilation of the Barmakids, who were the closest people to Harun and very influential in his court. On his journey to Hajj pilgrimage, when the Imam glanced upon the dusty face of Yahya b. Khalid Barmaki in the land of Mina, he said, "These wretched people do not know what is going to happen to them this year."⁷

Muhammad b. Fadhl said, "The same year that Harun toppled the Barmakid dynasty, I saw Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) standing to pray in 'Arafat; then he suddenly cast his head down. When he was asked why he did so, he answered: "I had prayed God to punish the Barmakids, and today my prayer was answered.

When Dawud b. Kathir heard Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) that Yahya b. Khalid had caused Imam Musa al-Kazim's (a.s.) martyrdom with poisoned dates, he said to the Imam: "May I be your ransom!

If Yahya b. Khalid is your father's murderer, I will sell my soul to God and kill him." His holiness said, "Do him nothing; what is going to befall him and his children this year will be much more severe than what you have intended to do."⁸

Harun will do no Harm to me!

His holiness frequently pointed out that no harm would be done to him by Harun. When the Imam was informed that 'Isa b. Ja'far had told Harun and sworn that he would murder the one who claims Imamate after Musa b. Ja'far and that 'Ali b. Musa al-Ridha has succeeded his father and claims to be the Imam after him and that Harun has given a negative answer, the Imam said, "There will be no harm done to me by Harun."⁹

And when it was told to the Imam: "You have been recognized as Imam and popularized as such; blood is dripping from Harun's sword!" The Imam answered: "My answer is what the Messenger of Allah (S) said.

The Prophet (S) said, "If Abu Jahl hurts me in the slightest, be witness that I am not a Prophet; I do also say that if Harun hurts me in the slightest, be witness that I am not an Imam."¹⁰ It is related in another *hadith* that when the Imam was warned about Harun, he said, "He won't be able to hurt me so much as he tries."¹¹

Various Predictions

His holiness informed that 'Abd Allah (i.e. Ma'mun) would kill Muhammad (i.e. Amin) and when the narrator [of this *hadith*] asked with surprise: "Will 'Abd Allah, son of Harun kills Muhammad, son of Harun?!" The Imam said, "Yes, 'Abd Allah, who is in Khurasan will kill Muhammad b. Zubayda, who is in Baghdad."

And it happened as the Holy Imam (a.s.) predicted. [12](#) When Imam al-Sadiq's (a.s.) son revolted against Ma'mun in Mecca, His holiness said to him: "O Uncle! Do not deny your father and brother; this will lead you nowhere and will not end. It did happen so and after a while, he was defeated and disarmed by Ma'mun's army."

One day Ja'far b. 'Ali 'Alawi passed by a group of Hashemite youth with an unfit appearance. They humiliated him for his unfit appearance.

Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said, "You will soon see him with abundant properties and a large following. Less than a month later he was appointed as governor of Medina and his condition changed for the better. [13](#)

Awareness of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) of Children in Mother's Wombs

Someone said to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): "When I was coming – from Kufa – my wife was pregnant, ask God that our baby be a boy child!" His holiness said, "It is a pair of twins!"

"When I wanted to leave, his holiness addressed me and said, 'Name one 'Ali and the other Umm 'Umar – or 'Amr (i.e. they are not both boys).' When I returned to Kufa I found out there were a boy and a girl born to us. [14](#)

Because of Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) advice, I named the boy 'Ali and the girl Umm 'Umar. When my neighbor (who was an adversary) heard about it said, 'Now I no longer accept the words of those who say you are a Rafidhi' [15](#)

One day, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) went to visit his uncle, Muhammad b. Ja'far, who was in his deathbed. He noticed that his other uncle, named Ishaq b. Ja'far, and some other people weeping at his bedside. His holiness left the room with a meaningful smile, so that those present were surprised.

His holiness said, "My surprise is because Muhammad b. Ja'far will recover and Ishaq b. Ja'far who is now weeping for him will die and Muhammad b. Ja'far will weep for him!" And it happened as the Imam (a.s.) had stated. [16](#)

Someone named Hasan b. Musa, two of whose handmaidens were pregnant, sent a letter to the Imam asking him to pray for his handmaidens to bear boy children. His holiness replied in a letter: "All things are in the Hands of God; if He wills, there will be a boy and a girl born to you. Name the boy Muhammad and the girl Fatima." It turned out to happen as his holiness had predicted. [17](#)

Someone else, whose eleven children had died, complained to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) about his children not to survive; the Imam lowered his head and prayed for a long while, then said, "Hopefully two sons will be born to you, one after another." The narrator goes on to say: "It turned out as his holiness had predicted; so, I named the first one Ibrahim and the second one Muhammad and both of them survived." [18](#)

After the martyrdom of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), his cunning enemy, Ma'mun, Said, "I requested something (a prayer) from the Imam for an easy and safe delivery of the baby that one of my most delightful and favorite handmaidens was pregnant with, as she had miscarried several times before.

His holiness said, 'Do not worry! She will deliver a baby boy who is most similar to his mother. However, he will have an extra finger on his right hand and one on his left foot; and it happened as he had predicted.'¹⁹

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Knowledge of How he would be Martyred and where he would be buried

His holiness had frequently talked about how he would be martyred by Ma'mun, which we will recount in detail in the chapter on his martyrdom. Following are some instances.

Sometimes he said, "I am going on a trip to Khurasan, from which I will not return."²⁰ The narrator says: "When Ma'mun invited the Imam (a.s.) to Khurasan from Medina for heir apparenacy, his holiness went to the Holy Shrine of the Prophet (S) while weeping loudly.

I greeted him and congratulated him for the heir apparenacy. His holiness said, 'They are taking me away from my grandfather and I will die in a strange land and will be buried next to Harun.'²¹ That was why he enjoined people to cry for him, when he was leaving Medina."²²

As Ma'mun ostensibly expressed interest in Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) and defended the Imamate of Imam 'Ali (a.s.) here and there, his holiness would say to his friends: "Do not let Ma'mun deceive you; by God, no one but him would kill me; and I have no choice but let what is destined be fulfilled."²³

Another narrator reports: "I saw Harun, the Abbasid Caliph, leaving through one of the gates of Masjid al-Haram and Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) from another. His holiness said, 'How far is home and how near is the meeting; [the city of] Tus will gather me and him [in one place]'.²⁴ And as we know the Harun's tomb is next to Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.)."

Sometimes in Medina Mosque, while Ma'mun was lecturing, the Imam (a.s.) said, "You will see me and him buried in one place."²⁵ On another occasion he said, "Harun and I would be like these two", showing his middle and index fingers. The narrator says: "We did not figure out the meaning of the Imam's words until his holiness was buried next to Harun."²⁶

^{1.} 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), 2/27.

^{2.} Ibid.

^{3.} Kashf al-Ghumma, 3/91; Al-Khara'ij wa al-Jara'ih, 1/340; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 50.

^{4.} Al-Khara'ij wa al-Jara'ih, 1/341; Al-Thaqib fi al-Manaqib, 186; Bihar al-Anwar, 49/73.

^{5.} Basa'ir al-Darajat, p. 365; Dala'il al-Imama, p. 343; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 88.

^{6.} Manaqib Al-i Talib, vol. 4, p. 334; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49. P. 57.

^{7.} Al-Irshad, vol. 2/258; Al-Kafi, 1/491.

- [8.](#) Dala'il al-Imamiyya, 327.
- [9.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), 1/245.
- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 59; Manaqib Al-i Abi Talib, 4/368.
- [11.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), 2/245.
- [12.](#) Al-Manaqib, 4/363 (A'lam al-Hidaya, p. 22).
- [13.](#) Al-Fusul al-Muhimma, 247.
- [14.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, vol. 3, p. 98.
- [15.](#) Al-Thaqib fi al-Manaqib, p. 216; Al-Khara'ij wa al-Jara'ih, 1/361; Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 54; Kashf al-Ghumma, vol. 3, p. 98. Rafidhi is a name that the Sunnis have given to the zealous Shi'as. By this term they mean someone who rejects (yarfuduna) Islam, but as Kulayni quotes from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) it was bestowed on the Shi'a by God and is preserved in both the Torah and the Gospels.

According to Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.), there were seventy men among the people of Pharaoh who rejected their master and chose to join Moses instead. God therefore called them Rafidha, i.e. those who rejected evil, and ordered Moses to write this word, in the original Arabic, in the Torah. After Muhammad's death, when most of the early adherents of Islam began to stray from the path of truth, only the Shi'as rejected evil. They thus became the successors of the original Rafidha. (Kulayni al-Kafi, edit by ʿAli Akbar al-Ghaffari, 1375-7, Tehran, vol. 8, p.34. – Editor.

- [16.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 1, p. 223.
- [17.](#) Ibid, p. 236.
- [18.](#) Ibid, 240.
- [19.](#) Al-Ghayba, Shaykh Tusi, p. 52; 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 1, p. 241.
- [20.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha (a.s.), vol. 1, p. 233.
- [21.](#) Ibid, p. 234.
- [22.](#) Ibid, p. 235.
- [23.](#) Ibid, p. 199
- [24.](#) Al-Ittihad bi Hubb al-Ashraf, 59.
- [25.](#) Ibid.
- [26.](#) Ibid.

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