

Imam Sajjad's (as) Responsibilities

Given the circumstances, what were the responsibilities of Imam Sajjad? If he decided to follow that goal, he would feel three burdens on his shoulder:

Firstly, he should impart the teachings of his religion to the people of his time. It is not possible to establish an Islamic government without acquainting the people with the religious teachings. Hence, the first task was to acquaint the people with the Islamic teachings.

Secondly, the issue of Imamate, which had been isolated and secluded, should be reinterpreted and explained for the people once again. What is the meaning of Imamate? Who was an Imam in the people's viewpoint? Who was the leader of the society?

I will explain the concept of Imamate as understood during the early years of the development of Islam.

During those days, both the supporters and opponents used the concept of Imamate in the same sense that we use today in the Islamic Republic of Iran: the Imam of the Ummah, the leader of the nation; the religious guide and the political ruler. Our understanding of the Imam during the recent two, three centuries was different: we thought that there is a ruler in the society who levies taxes, leads the wars, makes peace, runs the affairs, and establishes the government and its offices.

On the other hand, there is a spiritual guide who takes care of the religious aspects, teaches prayers and other similar issues to the people; he is a cleric or a spiritual guide. The Imam during his time was like the cleric in later centuries. The Caliph used to rule, and the Imam took care of the religious or ethical aspects.

This had been our understanding of the role of Imam over the past few centuries, while in the early years of the development of Islam, the general understanding of the Imam's role was different from this approach. Imam means the leader of the society, the leader of the religious and worldly affairs. The Umayyad and Abbasside claimed this kind of leadership.

The very drunk people who were deeply involved in the worldly revelry too claimed this kind of leadership and considered themselves as Imams – I will discuss this issue later. Hence, the society had

an Imam and its Imam was Abdul Malik.

Under the circumstances, Imam Sajjad (as) had to explain the meaning of Imamate, its direction, and the indispensable qualifications of an Imam for the people.

Finally, the third task of the Imam was to announce that he was the true Imam, that is, the right person for that position. These were the three tasks Imam Sajjad (as) had to undertake. Imam devoted most of his efforts to the first task, for the situation did not allow him to pay attention to the other two tasks. The ground was not prepared for him to announce himself the Imam of the society. In the first place, he had to correct the people's religion and ethics.

The people must have been rescued from the whirlpool of corruption and licentiousness. The Imam had to revive the spiritual aspects of the society, which was the core and true spirit of the religion. Hence, Imam Sajjad's life and statements were entirely devoted to asceticism. Even when he decided to deliver a speech on political issues, he began with admonishment about asceticism: "Verily, the signs of those who are ascetic in their worldly affairs and are interested in the hereafter are as follows..."¹

In one of his short speeches, the Imam describes the world, its attractions and enchantment as follows: "First of all, is there any person who is ready to leave the leftovers for those who like it? Bear in mind that there is nothing less than paradise awaiting you, therefore, do not transact it with anything less than that."²

The statements of Imam Sajjad (as) are mainly devoted to asceticism and religious teachings. He even explains the religious teachings in the form of invocations and supplications. Indeed, due to the repression and oppression prevailing during the Imam's era, he could not talk to the people in an explicit manner. Not only the system did not allow him, the people too were not interested in such issues.

The society was basically a depraved, corrupt, and decadent one. It should have been reconstructed. Between 61 and 95 hijra, about three decades of the Imam's life were devoted to the revival of spiritualism in the society.

However, by the passage of time, the situation improved to some extent. This is why in the tradition I already mentioned about the situation after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, Imam Sadiq adds: "later the people joined and their numbers increased."³ The situation really improved and as a result of the 35-year hard work of Imam Sajjad (as), we observe a better situation during the time of Imam Baqir (as).

¹. Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 78, P. 128, Tradition 1

². Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 1, P. 144

³. Bihar-ul-Anwar, Vol. 46, P. 144, Tradition 29

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