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Lesson 43: The Sixth Imam (Ja'far bin Muhammad)

Name: Ja'far.

Agnomen: Abu 'Abdillāh.

Title: As-Sādiq.

Father: Muhammad bin 'Ali.

Mother: Umm Farwah.

Birth: 17th Rabi I, 83 AH in Medina.

Death: 25th Shawwāl 148 AH in Medina.

1. Birth & Early Days

Imam Ja'far as-Sādiq, son of the fifth Imam, was born in 83 A.H./702 C.E. After the death of his father in 114 A.H., he became Imam by Divine Command and decree of the Imam who came before him.

2. His Imamate: Continuation of Scholarly Jihād

During the 34 years of imamate of as-Sādiq (a.s.) greater possibilities and a more favorable climate existed for him to propagate religious teachings. This came about as a result of revolts in Islamic lands, especially the uprising of the Muswaddah to overthrow the Umayyad caliphate, and the bloody wars which finally led to the fall and extinction of the Umayyads. The greater opportunities for Shi'ite teachings were also a result of the favourable ground the fifth Imam had prepared during the twenty years of his imamate through the propagation of the true teachings of Islam and the sciences of the Ahlu 'l-Bayt of the Prophet.

Imam as-Sādiq took advantage of the occasion to propagate the religious sciences until the very end of his imamate, which coincided with the end of the Umayyad and beginning of the Abbasid caliphates. He instructed many scholars in different fields of the intellectual and transmitted sciences, such as Zur'ārah,

Muhammad ibn Muslim, Mu'min at-Taq, Hisham ibn Hakam, Aban ibn Taghlib, Hisham ibn Salim, Hurayz, Hisham Kalbi Nassabah, and Jabir ibn Hayyan, the alchemist. Even some important Sunni scholars such as Sufyan Thawri, Abu Hanifa (the founder of the Hanafi school of law), Qadi Sukuni, Qadi Abu 'l-Bakhtari and others, had the honor of being his students. It is said that his classes and sessions of instruction produced four thousand scholars of hadith and other sciences. Referring to the two years that he spent as a student of Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.), Abu Hanifa used to say: "If it had not been for those two years, Nu'man¹ would have perished."

The number of traditions preserved from the fifth and sixth Imams is more than all the hadith that have been recorded from the Prophet and the other ten Imams combined. That is why the Shi'a school of laws in Islam is known as "Ja'fari".

3. Students & Companions

Hamran bin A'yan: Some of the students of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) had reached such heights of excellence that they earned the complete trust of their teacher. Once a Syrian (who those days were usually against the Ahlu 'l-Bayt because of the Umayyad propaganda) entered the gathering of the Imam.

Upon inquiring the purpose of his visit, he said, "I have been told whatever the people ask you, you have an answer for that. So I have come to debate with you."

Imam (a.s.): "On what issue would you like to debate with me?"

Syrian: "About the Qur'an."

Imam pointed towards Hamran bin A'yan and said, "Go and debate with him."

Syrian: "I have come to challenge you and debate with you, not with him."

Imam (a.s.): "Defeating Hamram would be like defeating me!"

So the Syrian went to Hamran and had a debate with him about the Qur'an. Hamran answered all questions satisfactorily until the Syrian ran out of them. He finally conceded his own defeat.

Mufazzal bin 'Umar: He is well known for a treatise which the Imam dictated for him on the subject of tawhid. Here we will just mention one incident which shows that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq was also actively working for peace and social harmony among his followers.

One day Mufazzal saw that two Shi'as were arguing and fighting with one another on the division of the estate of their relative. Mufazzal took both of them home and after discussion, resolved their conflict. In bringing about the resolution he had to add four hundred dirhams from himself. As the two Shi'as were leaving, Mufazzal said, "You should know that the money I have used to resolve your conflict is not my own money; it belongs to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) who had given it to me with the instruction that whenever I see conflict among his followers, I should try to maintain peace among them by using that money."

Upon hearing the news of the Imam's martyrdom, Mansur wrote to the governor of Medina instructing

him to go to the house of the Imam on the pretext of expressing his condolences to the family, to ask for the Imam's will and testament and read it. Whoever was chosen by the Imam as his inheritor and successor should be beheaded on the spot. Of course, the aim of Mansur was to put an end to the whole question of the imamate and to Shi'ite aspirations. When the governor of Medina, following orders, read the last will and testament, he saw that the Imam had chosen five people rather than one to administer his last will and testament: the caliph himself, the governor of Medina, 'Abdullah Aftah, the Imam's older son, Musa, his younger son, and Hamidah, his wife. In this way the plot of Mansur failed.

Abu Basir, a close companion of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.), went to the Imam's house for expressing condolences on the death of the Imam. Umm Hamidah, the wife of the Imam, said, "O Abu Basir, if you had been at the Imam's side when he died, you would have been surprised. In his last moments, the Imam opened his eyes and asked that all family members come close to his bed. When everyone had gathered around him, he said, 'Verily, the person who considers the salat as a trivial issue, he will not deserve our intercession.'"

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This lesson has been written and compiled by Sayyid M. Rizvi by using the following sources.

1. *Shi'a Islam* of Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn at-Tabataba'i.
2. *Pishway-e Shishum: Hazrat Imam Ja'far-e Sadiq (a.s.)* by Dar Rah-e Haq.

The main sources have been extensively edited in order to fit the requirements of our course. Also, for the sake of brevity, we have not included the references quoted by our sources. Those who are interested to know the sources may refer mentioned above.

Question Paper on Lesson 43

Question 1: [20 points]

True or False:

- (a) The imamate of Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) was for thirty four years.
- (b) The holy Imam's imamate began in 141 A.H.
- (c) Abu Hanifa studied under Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq for two years.
- (d) 'Umar bin 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz, the most just of the Umayyads ruled during the imamate of the sixth Imam.
- (e) Mufazzal used four thousand dirhams to resolve the dispute between two Shi'as.
- (f) Marwan al-Himri, the last Umayyad ruler, arrested the sixth Imam and brought him to Damascus.
- (g) Abu Hanifa said, "If it had not been for those two years Nu'man would have perished."

(h) “Ja‘fari” is the name for the Shi‘a school of Islamic laws.

(i) The ‘Abbāsid rulers, being cousins of the Prophet’s family, were kind and courteous towards them.

(j) The Umayyads were overthrown in the name of the Ahlu ‘l-Bayt and the massacre of Karbala.

Question 2: [20 points]

Explain why you think that the ‘Abbasid rulers, even though they came to power in the name of the Ahlu ‘l-Bayt, were always suspicious of the prominent figures of the Prophet’s family.

Question 3: [10 points]

Write your own impressions about the answer which Imam Ja‘far as-Sādiq (a.s.) wrote to Mansūr explaining why he does not visit the king.

1. Nu‘mān was the first name of Imam Abu Hanifa.

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