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Major Problems of His Holiness Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) in the Time of his Imamate

Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Imamate began in 183/799 with the martyrdom of his noble father and lasted for twenty years, i.e., until 203/818.

During this period, his holiness encountered various problems proportionate to the time.

At the beginning of his Imamate, the big excruciating problem of Waqifites (*Waqifiyya*)¹ happened, which got the Shi'a community engaged for a long time.

The First Problem: Waqifites and Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Struggle against them

The Waqf Sect and the Reason behind its Creation

After the martyrdom of Imam al-Kazim (a.s.), in that sever crisis during which the then government had martyred the leader of the society and the Shi'a community was in a distressing situation, all of a sudden one of the greatest divine tribulations occurred, i.e., Waqifite misconception (*shubha*) which caused the deviation, disintegration, and weakening of many of the Shi'as.

Severity and expansion of this *shubha* was due to the fact that the founders of this fabricated school of thought were from among the legal representatives of Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) and the well-known people in the Shi'a community, whom people would refer to during the time when his holiness Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) was in prison and a lot of the Imam's properties were accumulated with them.

After the martyrdom of Imam al-Kazim (a.s.), in order to appropriate the properties, they claimed that the Imam had not been martyred and that he was alive and he was in fact the awaited Imam who would rise up after a while!

Shaykh Tusi (may God sanctify his spirit) said, "The first who promulgated this school were three people named 'Ali b. Abi Hamza al-Bata'ini, Ziyad b. Marwan al-Qandi, and ʿUthman b. 'Isa. They did this because of the worldly gains and bought off a group of people such as Hamza b. Bazi', Ibn al-Mukari, and Karram al-Khath'ami and made them conform to them.²

Yunus b. 'Abd al-Rahman said, "When Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) deceased, there was a lot of property gathered with each one of his administrators; Ziyad b. Marwan, seventy thousand dinars and 'Ali b. Abi Hamza, thirty thousand dinars and this caused the *waqf* (stand still and stop) and denial of the holy Imam's martyrdom.

When I got to know the truth and began to call people to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.), those two ('Ali b. Abi Hamza and Ziyad b. Marwan) protested to me and said, 'If you intend to acquire money, we will make you free from need.'

They offered me ten thousand dinars to keep me silent, but I told them: 'It is related from Imam al-Sadiq and Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) that when innovations (*bid'a*) appear, it is upon the scholars to surface their knowledge, otherwise their faith will be taken away from them. [So] I will not abandon *jihad* in the way of Allah in no way, that is why they became my enemy."³

Most of the Shi'as Deviated due to the Waqf Misconception

The Waqifite misconception was in the beginning very widespread for the reason explained above, to the extent that it deviated many of the Shi'as and put Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) in a lot of trouble. However, little by little the extensive endeavors of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) and his loyal companions caused its containment and the Waqifites were exposed. Unfortunately, many of the dignitaries such as 'Abd al-Rahman b. al-Hajjaj, Rifa'at b. Musa, Yunus b. Ya'qub, Jamil b. Darraj, Hammad b. 'Isa, Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Abi Nasr, Hasan b. 'Ali al-Washsha', and others⁴, were among their members, who realized their own mistakes and woke up to the truth.

Ahmad b. Muhammad said, "Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) told me out loud: 'O Ahmad! When the Apostle of Allah (S) passed away, people made great efforts to put out the light of Allah, but Allah was intent on perfecting His light through Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (a.s.). When Abu al-Hasan (Musa b. Ja'far – a.s.) passed away, 'Ali b. Hamza and his comrades tried to put out the light of Allah, but Allah's intention was to perfect His light.

Verily, when someone joins the people of Truth, they become glad but when someone leaves them, they will not show impatience since they are certain about their faith; however when someone joins the people of falsehood, they become glad and when someone leaves them they become impatient because they are doubtful about their own faith. The Exalted and Glorified Allah says:

the enduring abode (fa mustaqarr) and the place of temporary lodging (wa mustawdi')

[abode]. Qur'an: 6/98.

And Abu ‘Abd Allah said, ‘*mustaqarr* is the (one who is) enduring (in faith) and *mustawdi*’ is the (one whose faith is) temporary;⁵ that is to say, no one should become shaky and doubtful for the deviation of the companions of Imam al-Kazim (a.s.), since their faith had been temporary.

Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) Measures against the Waqifites

His holiness made widespread attempts to fight off this misconception and confront this deviant and perilous group; sometimes, he would debate with their chiefs or followers and guided some groups through showing them certain miracles and sometimes, exposed them and disclosed their treacheries and lying.

Sometimes, he would prohibit the Shi‘as from associating with them and other times he would strongly curse and remonstrated them.

Imam al-Ridha’s (a.s.) Negotiation with the Chiefs of the Waqifites

It is related that three of the Waqifite chiefs by the name of ‘Ali b. Abi al-Hamza, Ahmad b. Sarraj, and Husayn b. Hashim, also known as Ibn al-Mukari went to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.).

‘Ali b. Abi Hamza said to the holy Imam: “What happened to your father?” The Imam answered: “He passed away.” He asked: “Through death?” The Imam said, “Yes.” He asked: “Who did he sign his last will to?” The Imam replied: “To me.” Then, he asked again: “So, you are the Imam whose obedience is made obligatory by God?” The Imam said, “Yes.”

The other two said, “God has given you power.” The holy Imam said, “Woe on you! What power? Do you want me to go to Baghdad and say to Harun that I am the Imam whose obedience is obligatory? By God, this is not my duty.

What I told you was because I was informed that you have disunited; I wanted that your secret would not get into the hands of the enemies.” ‘Ali b. Hamza said, “You have unveiled something that none of your forefathers would not have unveiled and uttered.” His holiness said, “It is not so.

By God, the best of my forefathers, the Apostle of Allah (S) uttered this when Allah commanded him to warn his close of kin and he invited forty people of his relatives and told them that he was the messenger of Allah to them; and the one who denied and attacked him most of all was his uncle Abu Lahab.

The Prophet (S) told them: ‘If Abu Lahab inflicts a single scratch on me, I am not a prophet; and this is the first sign of my Prophet hood that I express to you.’ (Then the holy Imam said) and I also say if Harun inflicts a single scratch on me, I am not an Imam; and this is the first sign of my Imamate that I express to you.”

‘Ali b. Abi Hamza said, “We have a *hadith* from your forefathers that the Imam’s affairs (funeral and

burial practices and saying funeral prayer over the body) is undertaken only by an Imam (meaning: if you were an Imam, you should have done these things for your father Imam Musa b. Ja'far, although you were in Medina and he was in Baghdad)."

The holy Imam said, "Was Husayn b. 'Ali an Imam or not?" He said, "Yes." The Imam asked: "Who was to undertake his affairs." He said, "'Ali b. al-Husayn." The Imam asked: "Where was 'Ali b. al-Husayn? Was he not in 'Ubayd Allah b. al-Ziad's captivity?" He said, "Yes, but he secretly came and undertook his father's funeral practices and returned.

The Imam said, "If 'Ali b. al-Husayn (who was captive in prison) was able to come to Karbala and carry out his father's funeral, the possessor of this authority – i.e., Imam al-Ridha – is also able to come (from Baghdad) to Medina and undertake his father's affairs and return, although he is not captive in prison."⁶

Commanding to Distance from the Waqifites

Muhammad b. 'Asim said, "His holiness Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) said, 'I was informed that you are associating with the Waqifite.' I said, 'May I be your ransom! I am associating with them, but I am not of the same opinion with them.'

The holy Imam said, 'Do not associate with them; the Almighty and Glorious Allah says:

Certainly He has sent down to you in the Book that when you hear Allah's signs being disbelieved and derided, do not sit with them until they engage in some other discourse, or else you] too [will be like them (Q. 4: 140)."⁷

This noble *hadith* and its like is a lesson for the followers of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) to avoid associating with those who oppose religion and/or the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and do not attend their sessions.

Some of the Miraculous Acts of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) for Guiding the Shi'as

A person named Ibn Abi Kathir said, "After the demise of Musa b. Ja'far, people ceased to follow Imam al-Ridha (a.s.). That year, I went on to Hajj pilgrimage and all of a sudden saw Imam al-Ridha (a.s.); this *aya* struck my mind:

Are we to follow a lone human from ourselves?(Qur'an: 54/24)

Suddenly Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) came to my side in a flash and (having read my mind) said, 'By God, I am the one that you have to follow!' I said, 'I apologize to God and you.' And he said, 'You are forgiven.'⁸

In another instance, 'Abd Allah b. Mughayra said, "I was an advocate of the Waqifites while I went on to the Hajj and next to the House of God and I said, 'O God! You know what I am after. Guide me to the best Religion. After that, it came to my mind to go to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.). I came to Medina, went to his

holiness' house door, and said to his retainer: 'Tell him a man from Iraq is at the door.'

All of a sudden, I heard his holiness say: 'O 'Abd Allah b. Mughayra! Come in!' When I entered, he said, 'God responded to your prayer and guided you to His religion.' I said, 'I bear witness that you are Allah's Authority (*Hujja*) and His Trustee over His creatures.'⁹

The Fate of some Followers of the Waqifites in Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Words

Ibrahim b. Yahya said, "Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) told me: 'What did that wretched, Hamza b. Bazi', do? I answered: 'He has come.' The Imam (a.s.) said, 'He imagines my father is alive; today, they are doubtful and tomorrow, they will die in heresy.'¹⁰

The holy Imam cursed one of the heads of the Waqifites, namely Ibn Mihran, and said, "May God remove the light of your heart and bring poverty to your house."¹¹ He also cursed 'Ali b. Abi Hamza, the head of the Waqifites and called him a damned infidel.¹²

Husayn b. 'Ali al-Washsha' (who was at first doubtful and later welcomed the truth by a miraculous act of Imam al-Ridha – a.s.) said, "My master Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) summoned me in Marv and said, 'O Hasan! Today 'Ali b. Abi Hamza died (in Kufa) and they now laid him in grave; two angels went down to him and asked: 'Who is your lord?'

He said, 'Allah.' They asked: 'Who is your Messenger?' He said, 'Muhammad (S).' They asked: Who is your guardian (*wali*)?' He said, "Ali b. Abi Talib.' They asked: 'After him?' He said, 'Al-Hasan.' They asked: 'After him?' He said, "Ali b. al-Husain.'

They asked: 'After him?' He said, 'Muhammad b. 'Ali.' They asked: 'After him?' They said, 'Ja'far b. Muhammad.' They asked: 'After him?' He said, 'Musa b. Ja'far.' They asked: 'After him?' His tongue began to tremble. They asked him again angrily: 'After him?' He kept silent. They asked: 'did Musa b. Ja'far commanded this to you?' Then, they beat him with a fiery club so that his grave is on fire till Resurrection!"

Husayn b. 'Ali al-Washsha' said, "I left the presence of the Imam and wrote down the date of that day. After several days, I received a letter from Kufa that Bata'ini ('Ali b. Abi Hamza) had died on that same day and had been laid in the grave at that same hour that the holy Imam said."¹³

The Second Problem: Delay in Imam al-Jawad's (a.s.) Birth

Among the issues that made Divine trials difficult for the Shi'as in the time of Imam Al-Ridha (a.s.) and increased the enemies' pretext for their opposition with his holiness and perplexed the simple-hearted was that the birth of Imam al-Jawad as his first child took place in the last decade of his noble life, when past forty, namely, over ten years after his Imamate started at the age of 35.

This led some people to find fault with his holiness for not having a successor, and therefore the Imam emphasized that God would give him a child. Kalim b. 'Imran addressed the Imam: "Ask Allah to grant you a child." His holiness replied: "I will be given a child, who will be my heir."[14](#)

A man asked al-Bazanti (one of the Imam's companions): "Who will be the Imam after your master (Imam al-Ridha)?" "Ask it from his holiness." He went to the Imam and asked him.

The Imam said, "The Imam (after me) is my son." Then, he added: "Can anyone say my son while having no son?" After some time, his holiness [Imam] al-Jawad (a.s.) was born.[15](#)

'Aqabat b. Ja'far told Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): "You have reached such an age but you have no child?" His holiness said, "The possessor of this authority will not die until he sees his successor."[16](#)

Another person said to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.): "Will your Imamate be handed over to an uncle?" the Imam said, "No." "What about to a brother?" "No." said the Imam. The man added: "Then, who will it be given to?" (That is, that you have no son at present.) The Imam answered: "To my son." However, he did not have a son that day.[17](#)

The Imam was frequently asked in this regard, and he would say: "Allah will grant me a son."[18](#)

Husayn b. Qiyama who was one of the heads of Waqifites, asked Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) if he was an Imam. His holiness said, "Yes." He said, "I take Allah as witness that you are not an Imam!"

At this moment, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) lowered his head and scratched the ground with his fingers for a long time; then, he raised his head and said, "How did you know that I am not an Imam?" he answered: "I heard from Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) that an Imam is not childless, whereas you have reached such an age and still have no child."

Again the Imam (a.s.) lowered his head for a longer time than before and then said, "I take Allah as witness that days and nights will not pass until Allah will grant me a child."

The narrator said, "No longer than a year had passed when his holiness Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) was born."[19](#)

After the birth of Imam al-Jawad and the fulfillment of his holiness Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) prediction (two reasons proving Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Imamate), Ibn Qiyama was told: "Is this evidence not sufficient for you?" he admitted and said, "I swear by Allah that this is a great sign."

However, he used a *hadith* as an excuse and refused to retreat from his deviated opinion.[20](#)

That is why the birth of Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) was very crucial for the Shi'as; therefore, Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) named his son the blessed newborn.

A man called Yahya al-San'ani said, "I entered the presence of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) in Mecca; I saw

his holiness peeling off a banana for his son to give it to him.

I asked: 'May I be your ransom! Is he that blessed newborn?' He said, 'Yes, O Yahya! This is the newborn that no other newborn has been born in Islam more blessed for the Shi'as than he.'²¹

The author says: "It becomes clear from the questions and the protests concerning the birth of Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) that most of these people were not sufficiently aware of their Imams and their programs in general.

Of course, the inappropriate propagation climate of the time was also highly effective in this unawareness, otherwise, according to various traditions, the issue of Imamate of the Imams, their practical programs, even their names were all determined by God and declared by the Prophet (S).

Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said, "The issue of succession (*Wasiyya*) – Imamate – was revealed to the Prophet (S) in writing, despite the fact that no other issue had been revealed in sealed writing to the Prophet (S) than this, which was handed over to him by Gabriel so as his holiness would convey it to 'Ali (a.s.) and his children.

That writing had some seals and Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (a.s.) was ordered to break one of the seals and act according to what was enjoined in it; and he did so. Then, Imam al-Hasan (a.s.) did as instructed and then handed it over to Imam al-Husayn (a.s.); when he broke the seal, he found it written: 'Rise up along with a group [of others]; there is no martyrdom for them but with you; and sell your soul to the Almighty and Glorious Allah.'

His holiness did so, and handed it over to 'Ali b. al-Husayn (a.s.). When he opened it, he saw it written: 'Cast your head down, keep silent, sit at home, and worship your God until your death arrives.' His holiness did so, and handed it over to his son, Muhammad b. 'Ali (a.s.).

When he opened it, it read: 'Recite *hadith* to people and give *fatwa* (legal judgment) and have no fear of anyone except the Almighty and Glorious Allah, as no one has access to you.' His holiness did so and then gave it to his son, Ja'far.

When his holiness opened the seal, it was mentioned in it: Recite *hadith* to people, give *fatwa*, spread about your household's sciences, confirm your noble forefathers, and have no fear of anyone except the Almighty and Glorious Allah; you are in safety and this will continue for all the Imams until Imam Mahdi (a.s.).

The Third Problem: The Issue of Imam al-Ridha's (a.s.) Heir Apparency

The mysterious event that the Abbasid Ma'mun had plotted, was a divine trial that the Shi'as were afflicted with; for, not a long time had passed since so many crimes and suppressions by the Abbasids,

in particular by Harun (Ma'mun's father) and the massacre of the Prophet (S)'s children and Shi'a's, especially the martyrdom of Imam al-Kazim (a.s.), that Ma'mun's proposing heir apparenacy to Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) bewildered everybody.

The hatred that the Shi'as in general had towards the despotic ruling system, in particular Harun al-Rashid, because of the latter's animosity with the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and the crime of killing Imam al-Kazim's (a.s.) as a martyr, caused them not to agree with the Imam's (a.s.) decision to accept Ma'mun's proposal, and although his holiness had been forced to accept it, this unprecedented task sounded extremely controversial to a group, particularly the deviated Waqifites seized the opportunity to intensify their propaganda.

That was how the simple-hearted and unaware people began to protest instead of conceding to their Imam, frequently saying to the holy Imam: "Why did you enter Ma'min's court?" And his holiness would answer: "For the same reason that my forefather, Commander of the Faithful 'Ali (a.s.) entered the *Shura*." [22](#)

Once in a response to one of these protesters, the Imam (a.s.) said, "Is the Prophet *Afdhal* (superior) or the successor?" "The Prophet," said the protester. The Imam (a.s.) asked again: "Is a Muslim superior or a polytheist?"

The man answered: "The Muslim." The Imam (a.s.) said, "Potiphar was a polytheist and Joseph was a prophet; Ma'mun is a Muslim and I am a *wasi* (successor). Joseph personally asked Potiphar (as described in the Qur'an) to give him *wilaya* (mastership), but I was forced to." [23](#)

[1.](#) Lit: "the ones who stand still" or "those who stop, put an end to the line of Imams", because they let the succession of Imams end with Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) and contested the transfer of the imamate to his son ʿAli b. Musa al-Ridha (a.s.)"

[2.](#) Al-Ghayba, p. 42.

[3.](#) Ibid, p. 43

[4.](#) See Rijali (Biographical) books, such as Rijal of Najashi, Shaykh Tusi, Ibn Abi Dawud, etc.

[5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 48, p. 261.

[6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 48, p. 261; Ikhtiyar al-Rijal, p. 463.

[7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 48, p. 264.

[8.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 38.

[9.](#) Ibid, p. 39.

[10.](#) Ibid, vol. 48, p. 256.

[11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 48, p. 261.

[12.](#) Ibid, p. 257.

[13.](#) Ibid, vol. 49, p. 38.

[14.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, p. 15.

[15.](#) Ibid, p. 21; ibid, p. 22, from al-Kafi, and al-Irshad.

[16.](#) Ibid, p. 35.

[17.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, p. 21.

[18.](#) Ibid, p. 35.

[19.](#) Ibid, vol. 49, p. 34.

[20.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 49, p. 68.

[21.](#) Ibid, vol. 50, p. 35.

[22.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, nol. 49, p. 140. Shura, (Arabic: “consultation”), in early Islamic history, the board of electors that was constituted by the second caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khattab (12/634–23/644), to elect his successor.

[23.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, nol. 49, p. 136.

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