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Part 4: Husayn's Successors – Nine Infallible Imams

The hero of Karbala", Imam Husayn (ع), was succeeded by nine sinless and infallible Imams who led the Islamic nation and are still leading it to the Straight Path, the path of happiness in the life of this world and salvation in the life to come. Following is a brief account of these Imams (1ع).

1) Imam Ali Ibn Al-Husayn Zain Al-Abidin (as)

Imam Husayn (ع) was succeeded as the nation's spiritual leader by his only surviving son Ali, nicknamed "Zain al-Abidin," the best of those who worship the Almighty, and also "as-Sajjad," the one who quite often prostrates to Allah. Ali was born on the fifteenth of Jumada II, 38 A.H. (November 19, 658 A.D.) when his grandfather, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع), was administering the affairs of caliphate at Kufa. Karbala" used to be a suburb of Kufa, but it later expanded into a large city, due to the shrine built for Imam Husayn (ع), a shrine which many tyrants, including the fanatical Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia, attacked, looted, and tried unsuccessfully to obliterate, and housing a prestigious theological center.

Ali's graceful personality was the combination of Arab and Persian nobility. On paternal side, he inherited the spiritual grace of the Prophet (ص), while through his mother, Shahr Banu, daughter of the last Persian emperor Yazdajerd, he inherited the dignity of the Persian royal dynasty. How did this great-grandson of the Prophet (ص) get to have a Persian princess as his mother?! In order to get the answer to this question, we have to review history going back to the time of the Prophet of Islam (ع).

In 595 A.D., young Muhammad (ص) visited Syria for the second time for a couple of months as a businessman trading on behalf of his wealthy relative Khadija whom he married in the same year. His first visit to Syria took place in 582 A.D. in the company of his uncle Abu Talib, great-grandfather of Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع). During this second visit, one of his observations was that a feud was brewing between the then mightiest nations on earth: the Romans and the Persians, each vying for hegemony over Arabia's fertile crescent.

Indeed, such an observation was quite accurate, for after only a few years, a war broke out between these mightiest nations that ended with the Romans losing it, as the Holy Qur'an tells us in Chapter 30 (The Romans), which was revealed in 7 A.H./615–16 A.D., only a few months after the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians, just to win in a successive one. Only four years prior to that date, the Persians had scored a sweeping victory over the Christians, spreading their control over Aleppo, Antioch², and even Damascus. The loss of Jerusalem, birthplace of Christ Jesus son of Mary (ﷺ), was a heavy blow to the prestige of Christianity.

Most Persians were then following Zoroastrianism, a creed introduced in the 6th century before Christ by Zoroaster (628–551 B.C.), also known as Zarathustra, whose adherents are described as worshippers of the "pyre," the holy fire. "Persia," hence, meant "the land of the worshippers of the pyre, the sacred fire." Modern day Iran used to be known as "Aryana," land of the Aryan nations and tribes.

Some Persians had converted to Christianity as we know from Salman al-Farisi who was one such adherent till he fell in captivity, sold in Mecca and freed to be one of the most renown and cherished sahabis and narrators of hadith in Islamic history, so much so that the Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) said, "Salman is one of us, we Ahl al-Bayt (People of the Household of the Prophet)."

The war referred to above was between the then Byzantine (Eastern Roman) emperor Heraclius (575 – 641 A.D.) and the Persian king Khusrau (Khosrow) Parwiz (Parviz) or Chosroes II (d. 628 A.D.). It was one of many wars in which those mighty nations were embroiled and which continued for many centuries.

Yet the hands of Divine Providence were already busy paving the path for Islam: the collision between both empires paved the way for the ultimate destruction of the ancient Persian empire and in Islam setting root in that important part of the world. Moreover, Muhammad's offspring came to marry ladies who were born and raised at Persian as well as Roman palaces. Imam Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abu Talib (ﷺ), Muhammad's grandson and our Third Holy Imam and father of Imam Zain al-Abidin, married the daughter of the last Persian emperor Jazdagird (Yazdegerd) III son of Shahryar and grandson of this same Khusrau II.

Jazdagird ruled Persia from 632 – 651 A.D. and lost the Battle of Qadisiyya to the Muslim forces in 636, thus ending the rule of the Sassanians for good. Having been defeated, he fled for Media in northwestern Iran, and from there to Merv³, an ancient Central Asian city near modern day Mary in Turkmenistan (until very recently one of the republics of the Soviet Union), where he was killed by a miller. The slain emperor left two daughters who, during their attempt to escape, following the murder of their father, were caught and sold as slaves.

One of them, Shah-Zenan, ended up marrying our Third Holy Imam, al-Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abu Talib (ﷺ), whereas her sister married the renown scholar and acclaimed muhaddith (traditionist) Muhammad son of the first Muslim caliph Abu Bakr. Shah-Zenan was awarded a royal treatment and was given a new

name in her own Persian mother tongue: Shahr Banu, which means "mistress of the ladies of the city." The marriage between her and Imam Husayn (ع) produced our Fourth Holy Imam Zain al-Abidin, or as-Sajjad, namely Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع).

After the Battle of Qadisiyya (637 A.D.), Shahr Banu was brought in custody to Medina. With the age-old racist attitude still alive, not too many Arabs would have expressed due respect to her. But it was the humane chivalry of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) who paid full regard to this royal prisoner whom he married to his noble son Husayn (ع), as explained above. Imam Zain al-Abidin was, thus, the grandson of Imam Ali (ع) and the Persian emperor Jazdagird (Yazdegerd) III son of Shahryar, rendering him in high esteem by both Arab and Persian nations.

Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) could not enjoy the love of his mother for a long time. She died soon after giving birth to him. At the age of two, his grandfather Imam Ali (ع) was also martyred. He was, thus, brought up and instructed by his father Imam Husayn (ع) and by his uncle Imam Hassan (ع). He was twelve when Imam Hassan (ع) died and the burdens of the Imamate fell on Husayn's shoulders. The cunning of Mu'awiyah, the then Umayyad ruler of Syria, led to the tragedy of Karbala' during the reign of his son Yazid; therefore, youthful Zain al-Abidin watched the pace of the events which culminated in that terrible massacre. Imam Husayn (ع), who was leading a peaceful life in Medina, arranged the marriage of his son to Fatima daughter of Imam Hassan (ع), thus ensuring that the series of Imamate would continue even in the face of coming events.

Upon his departure from Medina to Mecca, then from Mecca to Karbala", Imam Husayn (ع) took his son Ali Zain al-Abidin, who was then twenty-two years old, with him. It cannot be ascertained whether Zain al-Abidin fell ill during the journey or after reaching Karbala. On the tenth of Muharram, 61 A.H./October 10, 680 A.D., he was too ill to move. As access to the Euphrates was blocked for three days and water was extremely scarce, the illness of Zain al-Abidin intensified. For the most part of that day, he lay unconscious and could not participate in the battle which was carried on by all the male members of his family.

So when Imam Husayn (ع) bade his family farewell and went to the battlefield, he could not talk with his son Zain al-Abidin. Providence had perhaps destined Zain al-Abidin to be tested in another way when he was to lead his distressed family as prisoners.

Immediately after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (ع), the ruthless enemies turned to his tents to burn and plunder, as the reader has already come to know. The overwhelming grief, the flames of burning tents, the tumult among the widowed ladies and orphans must have taken its toll on the sensitive Sajjad. Neither tongue nor pen could have described the psychological impact. But the son of Husayn (ع) maintained his composure and spiritual serenity. In spite of illness and crushing distress, he kept the grace of a true believer. Having said the night prayers on that fateful eve, he lay in prostration with his forehead on the ground and his tongue repeating these phrases all night long till dawn:

*There is no deity but Allah in all certainty;
There is no god but Allah in truth and faith;
I bear witness to this in submission and humility.*

Next day, Omer ibn Sa'd assembled all his slain soldiers, performed the funeral prayers for them and arranged for their burial, leaving the corpse of Imam Husayn (ع), Prophet Muhammad's grandson, and those of his faithful adherents uncovered, unshrouded, and unburied, simply lying on the ground. It was a most painful sight for Zain al-Abidin to pass through the site of the onslaught accompanied by the ladies, all being captives. He was shocked to realize that he could not bury his kith and kin due to his captivity.

Not less heart-rending might have been the event when this pillaged caravan was brought to the court of Ibn Ziyad, governor of Kufa. As-Sajjad might have remembered that it was the same town where once his grandfather Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) ruled as caliph and the ladies of the household were the royalty. Ibn Ziyad now rejoiced over his victory as the Prophet's family was brought as captives.

From Kufa these people were sent to Damascus. When their caravan entered the capital, it noticed how the bazaars were festively decorated and people were embracing each other, congratulating each other. The agony of humiliation suffered by Imam Husayn's helpless folk was immeasurable, yet Zain al-Abidin still stood and carried out Imam Husayn's mission of guiding the nation.

Having been released from confinement in Damascus, Zain al-Abidin went with his family to Medina to lead a quiet life, but that city was now in revolt against Yazid's cruel regime. Political parties pressured Zain al-Abidin to join them, but he knew their unreliability; therefore, he declined to do so. So, when Yazid's army invaded Medina, the invaders did not harass Zain al-Abidin's family.

Yet he was greatly shocked to see how for three days the invading host, led by Muslim ibn Uqbah, tied their horses at the Prophet's mosque, turning the sacred place into a filthy stable filled with horses' refuse, killing hundreds of innocent people and raping chaste women and children. It was too intolerable for the Imam who had to practice a great deal of control of his feelings. When different revolutionary parties rose to avenge Husayn's innocent blood, he wisely kept aloof from them. He deemed their uprisings as untimely, and he kept himself occupied in worship and preaching through excellent supplications, setting an example of forbearance and endurance.

Undoubtedly, Sulayman ibn Surad al-Khuzai or al-Mukhtar ibn 'Ubaidah at-Thaqafi avenged Imam Husayn's precious blood. Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) had compassion for them; he prayed for al-Mukhtar's success and used to often inquire about those who were captured and executed. Certainly al-Mukhtar relieved the Imam's wounded heart by punishing the culprits. But the Imam was so cautious that his outward appearance gave the impression that he was indifferent, so much so that the cruel government could not suspect him of any subversion.

His whole lifespan was a time of trouble for the Prophet's family and for their supporters. A few years

after Yazid's death, the ruthless Umayyad government put to death a large number of supporters of the Prophet's family at the hands of al-Hajjaj ibn Yousuf at-Thaqafi. It kept a constant surveillance over their activities and communications through its undercover agents. Under such circumstances, it was impossible for Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) to propagate the Prophet's teachings or guide the public in the open, so he lived Islam and made his life an example for others to emulate.

After the tragedy of Karbala", the Imam lived 34 years under very odd circumstances. During that entire period of time, patience and fortitude were his main characteristics. Staying away from worldly pursuits, he kept himself busy by either worshipping his Lord or narrating the heart-rending events of Karbala", thus keeping its memories alive. He wept whenever he remembered his father and whenever he saw food or water, reflecting upon the thirst and hunger of his father, Imam Husayn (ع).

In spite of the quiet life Imam as-Sajjad (ع) was leading, the Umayyad government considered him a potential threat to the regime. Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan ordered the governor of Medina to arrest him and take him into custody to Damascus. There, he remained confined for three days, but the Almighty Allah and the spiritual influence of Imam as-Sajjad (ع) made Abd al-Malik ashamed of his cruel behaviour, so he ordered him to be released and sent back home.

It was characteristic of the Prophet's family, particularly the twelve Imams (ع), to personify the excellence of the human perfections. Imam as-Sajjad (ع) was a true copy of his ancestors. In both Karbala" and Kufa, he demonstrated extreme patience and courage.

In Medina, he proved to be most forbearing and forgiving. Once, an insolent person spoke to Imam as-Sajjad (ع) in an abusive and taunting tone. The serene, high-spirited Imam replied saying, "May Allah forgive me if you have told the truth or forgive you if you are wrong." The man was impressed by his noble conduct and lowered his head in shame as he said, "In reality, what I said was wrong."

When another person tried to slander him, the Imam (ع) ignored him. The impudent fellow raised his voice saying, "It is you whom I meant." Imam as-Sajjad (ع), with an air of loftiness, replied, "And it is you whom I ignored." The Imam's reply echoed the Qur'anic verse in which the Almighty asked the Prophet (ص) to

"Hold to forgiveness; command what is right, but turn away from the ignorant" (Qur'an, 7: 199).

Hisham ibn Isma'eel behaved insolently towards Imam as-Sajjad (ع). Omer ibn Abd al-'Aziz, the only righteous Umayyad caliph, came to know about it and wrote Imam as-Sajjad (ع) saying that he had all intention to punish the rogue, but Imam as-Sajjad (ع) nobly replied, "I do not like that the man be harmed on my account."

Service of the nation and generosity to it were his outstanding traits. In the darkness of dreary nights, he used to carry flour and loaves of bread to the needy. Many of them did not know who the benefactor was because he always hid his face. It was only when Imam as-Sajjad (ع) died that those needy people

came to know who he was.

In addition to all these virtues, even opponents acknowledged his knowledge and admitted that none could match him in jurisprudence and religious sciences. Yet he told people that one should not boast about the nobility of his ancestors. Whenever he went to another town, he avoided revealing his name or illustrious lineage. When asked about the reason, he humbly said, "It is not fair for me to trace my lineage to the Holy Prophet (ص) since I do not have his virtues."

His ocean of knowledge was sought by the most distinguished scholars and theologians of the time, and many rose to a lofty status after obtaining such knowledge from him. They came to him from all parts of Arabia, the Middle and Far Easts, and from Africa. The list of individuals who benefitted from his knowledge and thus became scholars in their circles includes, according to Bihar al-Anwar of 'allama Majlisi (a photo of whom is below): Abu Hamzah at-Thumali, Thabit ibn Dinar, al-Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr (grandson of first caliph Abu Bakr), Ali ibn Rafi, al-Dhahhak ibn Muzahim al-Khurasani, Hamid ibn Musa al-Kufi, Abul-Fadl as-Sudair ibn Hakim as-Sairafi, Abdullah al-Barqi, the poet al-Farazdaq⁴, Furat ibn Ahnaf, Ayyub ibn al-Hassan, Abu Muhammad al-Qarshi as-Saddi, Tawoos ibn Kaisan al-Hamadani, Aban ibn Taghlib ibn Rabah, Qays ibn Rummana, Abu Khalid Wardan al-Kabuli (of Kabul, Afghanistan), Sa'd ibn al-Musayyab al-Makhzami, Omer ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn and his brother Abdullah, Jabir ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr (another grandson of the first caliph), and many, many others. The most distinguished of his followers are these great persons: Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari, Amir ibn Wa'ila al-Kinani, Sa'd ibn al-Musayyab ibn Hazan, and Sa'd ibn Jihan al-Kinani. Among the tabieen, the most distinguished were: Sa'd ibn Jubayr, Muhammad ibn Jubayr ibn Mutim, al-Qasim ibn 'Awf, Isma'eel ibn Abdullah ibn Ja'far, Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya and his brother al-Hassan, Habib ibn Abu Thabit, Abu Yahya al-Asadi, Abu Hazim al-Araj, Salamah ibn Dinar al-Madani, and many, many others. The most famous of those who narrated hadith from him were: az-Zuhri, Sufyan ibn Uyainah, Nafi, al-Awzai, Muqatil, Muhammd ibn Ishaq, among others. Authors who quoted the traditions transmitted through him were: at-Tabari, Ibn al-Bay, Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal, Ibn Batta, Abu Dawud, the authors of *Hilyat al-Awliya'*, *Asbab an-Nuzul*, *At-Tarhib wat-Tarhib*, *Al-Fa'iq*, *Al-Mustafa*, and others. These were certainly not his contemporaries, yet they verified and recorded the traditions which he had narrated.

As regarding the great poet al-Farazdaq, to whom reference is made above, we would like to quote his masterpiece poem for the enjoyment of the Arabic-speaking readers. The poem praises Imam Zain al-Abidin in the most beautiful way, actually too beautiful to render into English or any other language:

[رائعة الفرزدق .. في مدح الإمام زين العابدين بن الحسين بن علي]

هذه قصيده للفرزدق يمدح بها الإمام زين العابدين بن الحسين بن علي رحمه الله وهي من أجمل ما قال الفرزدق..... وسبب القصيده هو أن هشام بن عبد الملك حج، فحاول أن يلمس الحجر الأسود فلم يستطع من شدة

الازدحام فوقف جانباً، وإذا بالامام مقبلاً يريد لمس الحجر فانفرج له الناس ووقفوا جانباً تعظيماً له حتى لمس الحجر وقبله ومضى فعاد الناس الى ما كانوا عليه. فانزعج هشام وقال: من هذا؟ وصادف أن كان الفرزدق الشاعر واقفاً فأجابه هذا علي بن الحسين بن علي ثم أنشد فيه قصيدته المشهورة التي يقول فيها:

يا سائلي أين حلّ الجود و الكرم؟ عندي بيان إذا طلا به قدموا

هذا الذي تعرف البطحاء وطئته والبيت يعرفه والحلّ والحرمُ

هذا ابن خير عباد الله كُلُّهُمْ هذا التقي النقي الطاهر العلمُ

هذا الذي أحمد المختار والده صلى عليه إلهي ما جرى القلم

لو يعلم الركن من قد جاء يلثمه لخرّ يلثم منه ما وطئ القدم

هذا علي رسول الله والده أمست بنور هداة تهتدي الأمم

هذا الذي عمه الطيار جعفر و ال مقتول حمزة ليث حبه قسم

هذا ابن فاطمة ان كنت جاهله بجده انبياء الله قد ختموا

الله فضله قدما و شرفه جرى بذاك له في لوحه القلم

من جده دان فضل الأنبياء له و فضل أمته دانت لها الأمم

وليس قولك من هذا؟ بضائره العرب تعرف من انكرت والعجمُ

كلتا يديه غياث عمّ نفعهما يستوكفان و لا يعرفهما عَدَمُ

سهل الخليفة لاتخشى بواדרه يزينه اثنان: حسنُ الخلقِ والشيمُ

لا يخلف الوعد ميمونا نقيبته رحب الفناء أريب حين يعترم

حمّال ائقال اقوامٍ اذا امتدحوا حلو الشمائل تحلو عنده نعمُ

إن قال قال بما يهوي جميعهم و إن تكلم يوما زانه الكلم

ما قال لاقطُ الا في تشهده لولا التشهد كانت لاءه نعمُ

عمّ البرية بالاحسان فانقشعت عنها الغياهب والاملاق والعدمُ

اذا رآته قريش قال قائلها الى مكارم هذا ينتهي الكرمُ

يُغضّي حياءً ويغضّي من مهابته فلا يكلم الا حين يبتسمُ

بكفّه خيزرانُ ريحها عبق من كف اروع في عرينه شممُ

يكاد يمسكه عرفان راحته ركن الحطيم اذا ما جاء يستلمُ

الله شرفه قدماً و عظّمه جرى بذاك له في لوحة القلمُ

أيُّ الخلائق ليست في رقابهم لأوليّه هذا اوله نعمُ

من يشكر الله يشكر أوليّه ذا فالدين من بيت هذا ناله الاممُ

ينمي الى ذروة الدين التي قصرت عنها الاكف و عن احراكها القدمُ

من جده دان فضل الانبياء له وفضل امته دانت له الامم

مشتقة من رسول الله نبعته طابت مغارسه والخيم والشيم

ينشق نور الدجى عن نور غرته كالشمس تنجاب عن اشراقها الظلم

من معشر حبهم دين وبغضهم كفر وقربهم منجى ومعتصم

يستدفع السوء و البلوى بحبهم و يستزاد به الإحسان و النعم

مقدم بعد ذكر الله ذكرهم في كل بدء و مختوم به الكلم

إن عدّ اهل التقى كانوا ائمتهم او قيل من خير اهل الارض؟ قيل هم

لا يستطيع جواد بعد جودهم و لا يدانيهم قوم و إن كرموا

هم الغيوث اذا ما ازمة ازمت والاسد اسد الشرى والبأس محتدم

أي القبائل ليست في رقابهم لأولية هذا أوله نعم

من يعرف الله يعرف أولية ذا فالدين من بيت هذا ناله الأمم

بيوتهم في قريش يستضاء بها في النائبات و عند الحكم إن حكموا

فجده من قريش في أرومتها محمد و علي بعده علم

بدر له شاهد و الشعب من أحد و الخندقان و يوم الفتح قد علموا

و خبير و حنين يشهدا له و في قريضة يوم صيلم قتم

مواطن قد علت في كل نائبة على الصحابة لم أكتم كما كتموا

لاينقص العسر بسطاً من اكفهم سيان ذلك إن اثروا وإن عدموا

يستدفع الشرُّ والبلوى بحبهم ويستربُّ به والاحسان والنعمُ

His chief attribute which earned him the titles of "Zain al-Abidin" and "Sayyid as-Sajidan" was his sincere worship of the Almighty. He was an eyewitness to the tragedy of Karbala”, and the scenes of his near and dear ones being slaughtered were always fresh in his memory. Such depressing events naturally make any ordinary person indifferent to all other normal activities of everyday life, but they could not make Imam as-Sajjad (ع) relax his fear of Allah.

His complexion faded and his whole frame shook whenever the water for ablution was presented to him, or whenever he stood to say his prayers. When asked about the reason, he explained, "Can you at all imagine in Whose presence I am going to stand?! It is in the presence of the Lord of lords."

While putting on his pilgrimage garb, intending to utter "Labbayka Allahomma Labbayk!" (I am answering Thy Call, O Lord!), colour disappeared from his face. His whole frame shook, so much so that those who saw him inquired what was wrong with him.

Imam as-Sajjad (ع) said, "I tried to say *Labbayk!*' but I feared lest the Lord of the House calls out: No admittance for you." Tears flooded his eyes so excessively that he ultimately fainted. Whenever everyone else prostrated before the pomp of haughty Umayyad monarchy, it was Imam as-Sajjad (ع) who demonstrated how the King of kings should be worshipped.

His supplications were later compiled and named As-Sahifa as-Sajjadiyya, the book of as-Sajjad, which is dubbed "the Psalms of Muhammad's family." The reader who wishes to read some of its contents are referred to pp. 462 – 469 of my book titled Allah: The Concept of Allah in Islam (published by Ansariyan Publications). I feel honoured and humbled by the Almighty enabling me to translate such precious text. It is only He Who enables His servants to do whatever good they do, whatever useful knowledge they acquire and disseminate; He, and only He, is the source of all goodness.

The reign of the antagonistic Umayyad rulers never permitted Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) to deliver discourses and addresses as his grandfather Imam Ali (ع) did, nor to illustrate the creed as he had done. Later, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع), son and grandson of Imam as-Sajjad respectively, had the opportunity to fathom the depths of religious problems at study circles attended by

inquisitive students. But, alas, such a favourable atmosphere was not available to Imam as-Sajjad (ع).

He, therefore, adopted quite a different method which no worldly power could obstruct. He suspended all worldly contacts and took to hymns and prayers. The words of those prayers are a treasure-houses of theological mysteries and reflective of the relationship between the Creator and His creation. A collection of these hymns and prayers, known as As-Sahifa al-Kamila, or As-Sahifa as-Sajjadiyya, has survived despite all the odds. In the pages of this collection, we can find what we cannot perhaps attain even from reading lengthy addresses and discourses presented in a similarly appealing manner, if such can be found at all.

The calm and peaceful life of the Imam could not be tolerated by the cruel Umayyad regime. The Syrian monarch al-Walid ibn Abdul-Malik had him poisoned, and the Imam died inside the Medina jail on the 25th of Muharram, 95 A.H. (October 20, 713 A.D.). Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) conducted the burial ceremony, laying him to rest in the graveyard of Jannat al-Baqa beside his uncle, Imam Hassan (ع). May the Almighty cut off the hands of the tyrants and those who support them wherever and whoever they may be...

2) Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (as)

He was named after his great grandfather Prophet Muhammad, peace be with him and his progeny, and he was called "al-Baqir" which means "the splitter of knowledge". His father is Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) and his mother is Fatima daughter of Imam Hassan (ع), the Prophet's grandson. His lineage, therefore, reaches the Prophet of Islam (ع) on both parents' sides. Imam Husayn (ع), the younger grandson of the Prophet, is his grandfather. He has the unique attribute of having inherited the qualities of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) and Fatima daughter of the Prophet Muhammad (ص).

The Imam was born on Rajab 1, 57 A.H./May 10, 677 A.D., seven years after the martyrdom of Imam Hassan (ع), and he spent more than three years in the company of his grandfather Imam Husayn (ع). He was an eyewitness to the tragedy of Taff, and he was contemporary to his father Imam as-Sajjad (ع) during the entire period of his Imamate. The Karbala' tragedy was a troublesome and tumultuous period of time for the Prophet's offspring and their followers, supporters of Ahl al-Bayt (ع). Imam Ali's friends were always hunted, arrested, then hanged.

According to Al-Irshad of al-Mufid, Al-Fusul al-Muhimma of Ibn as-Sabbagh al-Maliki, Vol. 3 of al-Ya'qubi's Tarikh (history), and Tathkirat al-Khawass of Ibn al-Jawzi, the great sahabi Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari narrates saying, "The Messenger of Allah, peace be with him and his progeny, said to me: You shall live long enough to meet one of the descendants of Husayn who shall be named Muhammad and who shall split the core of knowledge; so, convey my Salam to him'."

According to Ikmal ad-Din wa Itmam an-Ni'ma, and on p. 252 of Shaikh as-Saduq's work, Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari asked the Messenger of Allah (ص) saying, "O Messenger of Allah, who are the

Imams from the descendats of Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع)?" He (ع) answered: "Al-Hassan, al-Husayn, masters of the youths of Paradise, then the master of the forbearing of his time, Ali ibn al-Husayn, then al-Baqir Muhammad ibn Ali, and, O Jabir! You shall live to see him! So when you do, convey my Salam to him."

Vol. 42, p. 25 of *Bihar al-Anwar*, and also both *I'lam al-Wara bi A'lam al-Huda* and *Kashf al-Ghumma fi Marifat al-A'imma*, when Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) was on his death-bed, his will to his oldest son al-Hassan was: "O son! The Messenger of Allah (ص) ordered me to give you my books and weapons just as he had ordered me to take his books and weapons and to tell you to pass them over to your brother Husayn before you die." Then he turned to Imam Husayn (ع) and said, "... and the Messenger of Allah (ص) ordered that you (Imam Husayn) should pass them on to your son Muhammad ibn Ali and to convey to him Salam from the Messenger of Allah and from me."

For three years, Imam al-Baqir (ع) enjoyed the cherished love of his grandfather Imam Husayn (ع), and when he had to leave Medina, al-Baqir, too, was one of the family members who made the journey across the desert. Imam Husayn (ع) left for Kufa and his journey terminated at Karbala'. Since the 7th of Muharram, when the Prophet's family was denied access to the water of the Euphrates, Imam al-Baqir (ع) suffered from the pangs of thirst till the tragedy was over. Providence, however, intended to preserve the Imamate by safeguarding his life, whereas even a baby like Imam Ali al-Asghar (ع) had already been killed by an enemy arrow.

Like his father Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع), Imam al-Baqir (ع) could not physically participate in the battle. The 10th of Muharram, 61 A.H./ October 10, 680 A.D. brought its hideous events with Imam Husayn (ع) gathering the corpses of his slain warriors all day long, the women wailing, the children crying because of being extremely thirsty, startled and bewildered, then came the last farewell bidden by Imam Husayn (ع), the murder of his baby Ali al-Asghar, the return of Imam Husayn's horse to his master's tent without his master...

Young al-Baqir (ع) witnessed all these events. Al-Baqir witnessed the tents being burnt, the children reeling in panic, the heartless enemy plundering, and the ladies of the Prophet's family being deprived even of their sheets and scarves. Who can possibly imagine how young Imam al-Baqir (ع) felt, or what a permanent impression such scenes had left on his mind?

On the next day, Imam al-Baqir (ع) witnessed the ladies of the Prophet's family being shackled with chains, hand-cuffed, then transported as captives by the enemy the entire distance from Karbala' to Kufa, then to Damascus. Having been released, he witnessed their journey back to Medina, again passing by Karbala'. The profoundly sad impressions could never have been erased from the memory of young Imam al-Baqir (ع).

After Karbala', Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) led a very calm life, staying aloof from the pursuits of this materialistic world. Secluded from the society, he spent his time either weeping as he reminisced on the agonies of his father Imam Husayn (ع), or worshipping the Almighty, while the heart of his son Imam al-

Baqir (ع) was being squeezed painfully as he watched helplessly. In this sad environment, Imam al-Baqir (ع) grew up studying the manners of his saintly father and availing himself from his knowledge and noble conduct.

Imam al-Baqir (ع) was in the full bloom of youth, ascending the heights of physical and spiritual perfection, when his revered father died. On his death-bed, Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) handed over to Imam al-Baqir (ع) a box containing books of religious sciences exclusively known to this illustrious Ahl al-Bayt (ع). Calling together all his offspring, he resigned them to the care of Imam al-Baqir (ع), now named the fifth in the successive series of the successors of the holy Prophet. He was then 38 years old.

The Umayyad monarchy was heading towards its decline and decay. The cruelties inflicted on the Hashemites, especially the massacre at Karbala", had produced shock waves throughout the Muslim world. Yazid witnessed the aftermath of Karbala" and may have regretted his heinous sins. After a brief rule, he died in 64 A.H., and his son Mu'awiyah II succeeded him briefly then abdicated.

The later Umayyad rulers, therefore, were fully aware of the consequences of the atrocities of their predecessors. The bloody battles waged by the Tawwaban movement, the penitents, led by Sulayman ibn Surd al-Khuza'i and later by al-Mukhtar, led to a powerful uprising against the Umayyads.

Everyone now demanded to avenge the holy blood of Imam Husayn (ع) and those who defended the Prophet's family. That movement ruffled the peace of the ruling despots and shook the foundations of their government. The good result was that Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) had the opportunity to free himself from the clutches of the tyrannical government. He had at that time better chances to peacefully guide the Muslim nation to the Right Path.

The Imams, the Prophet's leading offspring, had rivers of knowledge in their bosoms which were blocked by the oppressing government and thus their waters could not moisten the lips of the thirsty. In the days of Imam al-Baqir (ع), when the grip of the oppressive government loosened a little bit, the confined river of knowledge gushed forth, irrigating the fields of faith-seeking hearts. Having displayed his great skill in solving tough religious problems, he was called al-Baqir (discloser or splitter of hidden knowledge).

The number of those who benefitted from him and learned the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) reached thousands of seekers of knowledge. Many others, belonging to different schools of thought such as Imam Zuhri, Imam Awzai, Attar ibn Jarih, or Hafiz ibn Ghiyath, the judge, who all are considered as outstanding traditionists of the Sunni sects, came to seek knowledge from him and are counted among his students.

Volume 3 of Manaqib al Abi Talib states that Abdullah son of second caliph Omer ibn al-Khattab was asked once for the solution of a complex theological problem, and he could not provide one. "Go to that young boy," Omer said to the person who raised the question, pointing to Imam al-Baqir (ع), "Ask him and tell me what his answer will be."

The inquirer approached Imam al-Baqir (ع), obtained the answer, and went back to the son of Omer ibn al-Khattab to tell him what treasures of knowledge he had just acquired, and Abd-Allah commented: "They are a family immersed in knowledge."

Al-Irshad by al-Mufid, in a chapter on the Imamate of al-Baqir (ع), and in *Hilyat al-Awliya'* and *Tathkirat al-Khawass* of Ibn al-Jawzi, the grandson, Abdullah ibn Ata' al-Makki says, "I never saw scholars shrink as I saw them in the presence of Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Husayn. And I saw al-Hakam ibn 'Uyainah, despite his greatness, looking like a young boy before his teacher."

One of the testimonies to the excellence of his political thought is his advice to the renowned Umayyad caliph Omer ibn Abdul-Aziz in which he said, "I advise you to regard young Muslims as your sons, the adults as your brothers, and the elderly as your parents; therefore, be kind to your sons, stay in touch with your brothers, and be generous to your parents."

One of his students, Muhammad ibn Muslim, is quoted in Vol. 46, as saying, "Every time I faced a complex (theological) problem, I had to seek its solution from Abu [the father of] Ja'far, till I asked him about thirty thousand questions." One of his companions, Jabir ibn Yazid al-Jufi, may Allah be pleased with him, said once, as quoted in the same references which also quotes Al-Ikhtisas, saying, "Abu Ja'far narrated to me as many as seventy thousand traditions."

Advising Jabir ibn Yazid al-Jufi, he said, "I admonish you regarding five things: If you are wronged, do not commit wrongdoing to others; if you are betrayed, do not betray anyone; if you are called a liar, do not be furious; if you are praised, do not be jubilant; if you are criticized, do not fret and think of what is said in criticism: if you find in yourself what is criticized about you, then your falling down in the eyes of Allah, when you are furious about the truth, is a much greater calamity than your falling down in the eyes of people. And if you are the opposite of what is said (in criticism) about you, then it is a merit you acquired without having to tire yourself in obtaining it."

The dissemination of religious and scientific knowledge of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) was achieved by Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع). Out of the benefits gained from such a high-ranking mentor, the students wrote several books on various branches of knowledge. Here is a brief description of some of his disciples and their works which reflects the extent of Islamic learning imparted by the Imam:

1. Aban ibn Taghlib. He was the famous lexicographer and reciter of the Holy Qur'an who wrote the work *Ghara'ib al-Qur'an* غرائب القرآن, the first book explaining the intricate diction of the Holy Qur'an. He died in 141 A.H./758 A.D.
2. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn al-Hassan ibn Abi Sarh ar-Rawasi, the famous scholar of recitation, syntax and exegesis. *Kitab al-Faisal* and *Maani al-Qur'an* are two among five books which he authored. He died in 101 A.H./720 A.D.
3. Abdullah ibn Maimun, Abul-Aswad al-Du'Ali. A biography of the Holy Prophet and another book

expounding on Paradise and Hell are among his works. He died in 105 A.H./723 A.D.

4. Atiyyah ibn Sa'd al-'Awfi. He wrote an exegesis of the Holy Qur'an in five volumes; he died in 111 A.H./729 A.D.

5. Isma'eel ibn Abd ar-Rahman as-Saddi al-Kabir (as-Saddi senior), the well-known author of Tafsir. He is frequently referred to by all Muslim writers of tafsir books as as-Saddi. He died in 127 A.H./745 A.D.

6. Jabir ibn Yazid al-Jufi. He committed to memory 50,000 (or 70,000 according to some biographers) traditions which he had heard from Imam al-Baqir (ع). He is quoted in Muslim's Sahih. He wrote several volumes on tradition, tafsir and jurisprudence. He died in 128 A.H./746 A.D.

7. Ammar ibn Mu'awiyah al-Wahni. A book on jurisprudence is his contribution. He died in 133 A.H./752 A.D.

8. Salim ibn Abi Hafsah (Abu Yousuf) al-Kufi. He is the writer of a book on jurisprudence. He died in 137 A.H./754 A.D.

9. Abdul-Mu'min ibn Qasim (Abu Abdullah) al-Ansari. He is the writer of a book on jurisprudence. He died in 147 A.H./764 A.D.

10. Abu Hamzah at-Thumali. He wrote a book on tafsir (exegesis) of the Holy Qur'an. Kitab an-Nawadir and Kitab az-Zuhd are among his works. He died in 150 A.H./767 A.D.

11. Zararah ibn Ayun, a high-ranking Shi'a scholar who wrote several books on tradition, jurisprudence and kalam. He died in 150 A.H./767 A.D.

12. Muhammad ibn Muslim. He was a great scholar who recorded 30,000 traditions which he learned from Imam al-Baqir (ع). He wrote many books, including the "Four hundred problems of halal and haram." He died in 150 A.H./767 A.D.

13. Yahya ibn Qasim (Abu Basar) al-Asadi. He was a revered scholar who wrote Kitab Manasik al-Hajj and Kitab Yawmun wa Lailah. He died in 150 A.H./767 A.D.

14. Ishaq al-Qummi. He has a book on jurisprudence.

15. Isma'eel ibn Jabir al-Khashami al-Kufi. He wrote many volumes on hadith (tradition) and one on jurisprudence.

16. Isma'eel ibn Abdul-Khaliq. He was a high ranking jurist and had a book to his credit.

17. Bard al-Asqaf al-Azdi. He wrote on jurisprudence.

18. Al-Harith ibn al-Mughirah. He authored a book on the problems of jurisprudence.

19. Huthaifah ibn Mansur al-Khuza'i. He had a book on jurisprudence.

20. Hassan ibn Sirri al-Katib. He wrote one book.

21. Husayn ibn Saur ibn Abi Fakhita, author of *Kitab an-Nawadir*.

22. Husayn ibn Muhammad 'Abidi al-Kufi; he is author of one book.

23. Husayn ibn Mus'ab al-Bajali. He has a book to his credit.

24. Hammad ibn Abi Talha; he wrote one book.

25. Hamzah ibn Hamran ibn Ayun. He was nephew of Zurarah and author of one book.

These are quite a few scholars, traditionists and jurists who learned from the Ahl al-Bayt (ع), mostly from Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع), and safeguarded such knowledge by recording it in their books. Later, in the days of the Imam's son, namely Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, hundreds of volumes were written — the sources from which such valuable collections of hadith as *Al-Kafi*, *Man la Yahdharuhu Al-Faqih*, *Tahdhib al-Khasa'il*, *Al-Istibsar*, etc. were compiled. These books now form the fundamentals of Shi'a learnings. In addition to these, you may read his biography and the ahadith which he narrated in at-Tabari's *Tarikh*, in al-Balathiri, as-Salami, al-Khattab, Abu Dawud's *Sunan*, al-Isfahani, az-Zamakhshari, and in others.

His moral excellences were admired even by his foes. A Syrian lived in Medina and used to come to Imam al-Baqir (ع) frequently declaring that he was opposed to the Household. Yet, despite his prejudice, he admitted that, "The high morality and eloquence of Imam al-Baqir (ع) are too attractive to resist."

The author of *Tuhaf al-Uqul* quotes Imam as-Sadiq (ع) saying, "I entered the house of my father once and found him doling out eight thousand dinars as sadaqa to the poor, then he freed eleven slaves."

In a chapter on the merits of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) in Vol. 3 of *Manaqib Ali Abi Talib*, and in Vol. 46 of al-Majlisi's *Bihar al-Anwar*, Sulayman ibn Qaram is quoted as saying, "Abu Ja'far Muhammad [ibn al-Hanafiyya], son of Imam Ali (ع), used to give us as much as five or six hundred or even a thousand dirhams, and he never tired of visiting his brethren."

Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) cooperated with his contemporary caliphs and offered sound counsel concerning the affairs of the Muslims. So did all the Imams who succeeded him, each following his example. None of them hesitated to offer advice to their contemporary rulers, and Imam al-Baqir (ع) was no exception. The Umayyad government had till then no currency of its own. The Byzantine currency of the eastern section of the then Roman Holy Empire was the valid tender in Damascus as well.

But during the reign of al-Walid ibn Abdul-Malik, there rose a rift between him and the Byzantine ruler

when the latter decided to stamp a new currency with a phrase which al-Walid considered as derogatory to the Holy Prophet (ﷺ). This created suspense among the Muslims. Al-Walid convened a committee in which prominent Muslim scholars participated.

Imam al-Baqir (ع) expressed his opinion that the Muslim government ought to mint its own currency on one side of which it should stamp the statement "La Ilaha Illa Allah" and on the other the statement "Muhammadun Rasul-Allah," (There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah). The opinion was unanimously approved and new Islamic coins were minted.

It was only during the caliphate of Omer ibn Abdul-Aziz, the only pious Umayyad caliph, that the Prophet's progeny enjoyed a brief period of peace which lasted for only two years and five months, the duration of Omer's government.

He lifted from them a great deal of atrocities and prohibited the cursing of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) on the pulpits on Friday, substituting it with this verse of the Holy Qur'an: "Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition" Qur'an, 16:90 (an-Nahl).

When the Imam met caliph Omer ibn Abdul-Aziz, he found him weeping for the injustice inflicted by his predecessors upon their subjects. The Imam admonished him with pieces of wisdom till the caliph sobbed, knelt down and begged the Imam for more. Then the Imam told Omer what wrongdoing he came to ask him to rectify, and it was none other than the estate of Fadak which the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had left as inheritance to his daughter Fatima (ع) and her descendants. According to Vol. 4 of *Bihar al-Anwar*, Omer wrote: "*In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. This is what Omer ibn Abdul-Aziz had given back to Muhammad ibn Ali to rectify the wrongdoing: Fadak.*"

Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik succeeded Omer ibn Abdul-Aziz as the ruler, and he was a stone-hearted, immoral, miser and racist. His prejudice against non-Arab Muslims caused him to double the taxes non-Arabs had to pay, and his reign was a replay of the bloody days of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah and those of the blood-thirsty al-Hajjaj ibn Yousuf at-Thaqafi⁵.

It was then that the revolution of Zaid ibn Ali broke out as a continuation of the revolution of Imam Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع), but Hisham was swift in crushing it. Dr. Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, in his book *Tarikh al-Islam* ("History of Islam"), quotes contemporary historians testifying that Hisham ordered to crucify Zaid ibn Ali and then burn his corpse and throw the ashes in the Euphrates.

Although Imam al-Baqir (ع) never expressed any interest nor participated in political activities except when the rulers invited him to, since his peaceful way of living was devoted to people's spiritual guidance, he was not tolerated by the government. Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik wrote his governor over Medina instructing him to send Imam al-Baqir (ع) together with his son [later Imam] Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) to Damascus, intending to insult them both. When they reached Damascus, he kept them waiting for three days.

On the fourth day, he called them to his presence. He sat on a throne surrounded by his nobility, fully armed. In the center of the courtyard, a target was set on which the elite were shooting arrows on bet. Islam prohibits betting or gambling or any way of making money without working hard to earn it. As soon as the Imam entered, Hisham bluntly asked him to shoot arrows with others. Imam al-Baqir (ع) asked to be excused, but Hisham insisted; he planned to ridicule the Imam.

Since the Imam led a secluded life, Hisham thought that he might not have had anything to do with martial arts. Compelled by Hisham, Imam al-Baqir (ع) took the bow. Handling it skillfully, he shot a few arrows continuously, all sitting straight in the very heart of the center. A shout of praise burst from the throats of the astonished elites standing right and left. Hisham, thus outwitted, began to discuss the problems of Imamate and the virtues of Ahl al-Bayt (ع). Now he clearly saw that the Imam's stay in Damascus might lead to popular respect for Ahl al-Bayt (ع), so he permitted the Imam to return home to Medina. Inwardly, his enmity of the Prophet's family had increased.

Hisham harassed not only the Prophet's family but also their followers, dignitaries and scholars. He issued an order to execute Jabir ibn Yazid al-Jufi, the most distinguished among the Imam's scholars, but the Imam foiled his attempt by advising Jabir to feign madness as the only way to escape execution.

The more the Umayyads learned about the Imam's prestige and popularity, the more intolerable his existence became. At last they resorted to the same soundless weapon, poison, which used to be applied by those cunning monarchs quite often to eliminate their opponents or suspects. A saddle was presented to the Imam to which poison was skillfully applied. When he mounted on it, poison affected his whole body. After spending a few days suffering the pain of his ailment, he expired on the seventh of Thul-Hijja, 114 A.H./January 28, 733 A.D. He was laid to rest underneath the same dome in Jannat al-Baqi where Imam Hassan (ع) and Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) already lay.

3) Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq (as)

His name is Ja'far, and he is known as as-Sadiq and Abu Abdullah, son of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) son of Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) son of Imam Husayn (ع). His mother was Umm Farwah daughter of Qasim son of Muhammad son of [first caliph] Abu Bakr who was one of the seven most prominent jurists of Medina. Thus, the sixth Imam has an impressive lineage.

The Imam came to this world on Rabi' al-Awwal 17, 83 A.H./April 20, 702 A.D., the same lunar date when his great grandfather, the Holy Prophet (ص), was born. At his birth, his father, Imam al-Baqir (ع), was 26, and his grandfather, Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع), was 44. The Prophet's family joyfully welcomed this auspicious addition.

Till the age of twelve, Ja'far was brought up under the guidance of his grandfather Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) whose main concern was to worship his Maker and reflect on the tragic events of Karbala". Twenty-two years had lapsed since then, yet the remembrance of that shocking tragedy was still quite fresh in

his memory.

So, as soon as Ja'far gained understanding, he was profoundly impressed by the continuous grief of his grandfather, so much so that he felt as if he himself was present during that tragedy. He also contemplated on the presence of his father, Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع), although only three years old, at that gruesome scene. Ja'far as-Sadiq considered it as his duty to convene the recitation gatherings (majalis) about that sorrowful event.

He was twelve years old when his grandfather Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) expired. From then on and till the age of 31, he spent his time under the supervision of his father Imam al-Baqir (ع). It was the time when the Umayyad politics were tottering and Muslims who were approaching Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) by the thousands seeking his knowledge, wisdom and guidance. Whether at Medina or in travels, Ja'far as-Sadiq was always with his father. When Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik summoned Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع), Ja'far as-Sadiq accompanied him, as stated above.

In 114 A.H./732 A.D., Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) died, and the responsibilities of Imamate devolved on the shoulders of now Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq. Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik was ruling in Damascus and political disturbances were rampant. The call for seeking revenge against Bani Umayyah was strong among the public, and several descendants of Imam Ali (ع) were preparing themselves in the hope of overthrowing their corrupt regime. Most prominent among them was Zaid bin Ali, the respected son of Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع). His religious zeal and piety were known throughout Arabia. He was a well versed hafiz of the Holy Qur'an and had taken the field against the tyranny of the Umayyads.

This was a precarious juncture for Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq. As regarding hatred of the Umayyads, he agreed with his uncle Zaid for whom he had a great deal of respect. His far-sighted judgment could clearly see that his rising against the well-organized royal forces was of no avail; he, therefore, did not join him for all practical reasons. But he was compassionate towards him and sympathetic to his cause, and he asked him to be judicious. As a great host of Iraqis had sworn their allegiance to him, Zaid was now quite optimistic. He valiantly fought the royal forces but was in the end killed.

The vengeful enemies were not satisfied with Zaid's death. They exhumed his dead body from the grave, severed his head, sent it as a trophy to Hisham and hanged the body at the gate of Kufa where it remained for several years. One year after Zaid's martyrdom, his son Yahya earned the same ancestral honour. Imam Ja'far was surely moved by these tragic events, but he was destined to carry out the duties of spreading the religious knowledge of Ahl al-Bayt (ع).

The last days of the Umayyads' reign of terror were ruffled by political disturbances. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq witnessed the rise and fall of many of their kings. After Hisham, al-Walid ibn Yazid ibn Abdul-Malik, then Yazid ibn al-Walid, then Ibrahim ibn al-Walid, then Marwan al-Himar [the donkey] ascended the throne. The capture and death of the latter terminated the monarchy of tyrannical Umayyads.

During the last phase of tottering Umayyad rule, the Hashemites were actively engaged in their anti-

Umayyad activities. The Abbasides took advantage of their efforts and secretly formed an association whose members had sworn to transfer the government from the Umayyads to the Hashemites who really deserved it. It is clear that to rule the Islamic world was not the job of every Hashemite. It was the right of those divinely appointed descendants of the Holy Prophet and Imam Ali (ع) whom Allah had chosen to lead humanity. But these high-thinking souls never wished to take undue advantage of the situation with the aid of cunning tactics.

In short, the Imams who descended from the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali (ع), never tried to acquire power through political trickery and opportunism. But the Abbasides, who also were Hashemites, no doubt took the opportunity by the forelock. Availing themselves of the silence shown by the Imams, and of the compassion the people had for the Hashemites, the 'Abbasides realized their chance to rise to power.

But when they established themselves on the throne, they became enemies of Imam Ali's posterity in the same degree or more than that which had been adopted by the heartless Umayyads. Details of this will be narrated in the biographies of later Imams.

The first to start the movement from among the Abbasides was Muhammad ibn Ali ibn 'Abdullah ibn al-Abbas who sent his agents throughout Persia to secretly obtain the oath of allegiance to the Hashemites' cause from the Persians. On Muhammad's death, his son Ibrahim succeeded him. Meanwhile, the martyrdom of Zaid and his son Yahya had fanned the flames of revolution against the Umayyads.

The Abbasides took advantage of it, increasing their influence in Iraq through Abu Salamah al-Khallal. Slowly but steadily, their power base increased. Through the sincere support of Abu Muslim al-Khurasani, all Western Persia and Khurasan came under their control and the Umayyad governor had to flee. The name of the Umayyad ruler was dropped from Friday sermons, having been replaced by that of Ibrahim ibn Muhammad.

The Umayyads till then were under the impression that the disturbances were merely local protests, but now the government spies reported that it was a full-fledged movement initiated by Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn Abbas who resided at Jabulqa. Soon Ibrahim was arrested, imprisoned and mercilessly killed. His family escaped the royal wrath with other Abbasides and sought refuge with Abu Salamah in Iraq. When the news reached Abu Muslim al-Khurasani, he sent an army to Iraq which defeated the Umayyad forces and annexed Iraq.

Abu Salamah al-Khallal, dubbed "Minister of the Prophet's Progeny," was especially compassionate towards Imam Ali's offspring. He wrote letters to the prominent heads from among them inviting them to accept and share the royal power. One of such letters was addressed to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq. In political struggles, such opportunities are considered golden, but the Imam declined the offer and remained devoted to his duty of disseminating knowledge.

Those who supported the Abbasides' cause, in addition to the followers of Abu Muslim al-Khurasani,

swore the oath of allegiance to Abul-Abbas as-Saffah. On Rabi' II 14, 132 A.H./November 30, 749 A.D., the latter was acknowledged as the ruler and caliph of the Muslim world. Establishing themselves in Iraq, the Abbasides advanced towards Damascus. Marwan assembled his forces and confronted them, but his army was defeated. He had to flee for his life but was later captured in Egypt and killed.

Thereafter, a reign of terror followed: The Umayyads were massacred publicly; the dead bodies of the monarchs of their dynasty were exhumed and treated in a most shocking manner; thus, the revenge upon the oppressors, the law of nature, was implemented through the Abbasides. In 136 A.H./753 A.D., as-Saffah, the first Abbaside caliph, died and was succeeded by his brother Abu Ja'far al-Mansur, commonly known as al-Dawaniqi.

The Abbasides raised the banner of standing and protecting the rights of Ahl al-Bayt (ع), thus succeeding to rally the public around them on this very pretext, and it was their war-cry as well. But when they came to power and destroyed the Umayyads, they naturally feared lest the world should be disappointed and disillusioned with them, or lest a movement should start demanding that the caliphate must be vested upon the descendants of Imam Ali (ع) and Fatima instead of the Abbasides.

Abu Salamah was inclined to the descendants, and he was a candidate to support such a movement; therefore, in spite of all the favours which he had done to the Abbasides, he was the first to fall victim to their ingratitude. He was put to death during the reign of as-Saffah. Persia was under the control of Abu Muslim al-Khurasani. Al-Mansur arranged to have him murdered most treacherously.

Al-Mansur was no longer apprehensive of the interference of any influential person in his government. He, therefore, turned all his tyranny against the Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet (ص) themselves. On mere suspicion, al-Mansur would begin to destroy the Sayyids. The prominent among them were subjected to atrocities. Muhammad son of Ibrahim, who was the most handsome among them and was, therefore, called the "silken", was walled alive⁶.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) was sadly affected by those events. When the descendants of Imam al-Hassan ibn Ali (ع) were all fettered, shackled and banished from Medina, he watched their plight with a saddened heart from the flat roof-top of his house. With flooded eyes he was heard saying, "Oh! Medina is no longer a sanctuary or a haven of peace..."

Then he expressed his sorrow for the descendants of the Ansar who stood idly by thus: "The early Medenites (Ansar) had invited the Holy Prophet to Medina under the oath that they would protect him and his descendants just as they would protect their own kith and kin. But today the descendants of those very Ansar act as silent onlookers, and none stands up to protect the Prophet's offspring." Having said these words, he returned to his house and fell ill, unable to move from bed for twenty days.

Among the afore-mentioned prisoners was the aged Abdullah Mahd son of Imam al-Hassan ibn Ali (ع) who had to suffer the hardships of a prolonged imprisonment. His son Muhammad (known as "Thul Nafs az-Zakiyya") rose against the oppressive government and fell fighting near Medina in 145 A.H./762 A.D.

The head of the young warrior was severed then sent to his aged father in prison, a shocking sight which the worn-out old man could not bear, falling dead shortly thereafter. Another son of Abdullah Mahd, namely Ibrahim, also fought against al-Mansur's army and fell fighting near Kufa.

In the same way, Abdullah son of Thul Nafs az-Zakiyya, Musa and Yahya, brothers of Thul Nafs az-Zakiyya, were all killed mercilessly. Many Sayyids were used alive as part of the building materials of walls as explained in a footnote above.

In spite of all these atrocities which have been described very briefly here, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) went on silently propagating the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (ع). As a result, even those who did not acknowledge him as the Imam nor knew his prestige and lineage, bowed before his knowledge and prided in being counted among his students.

Al-Mansur wanted to diminish the esteem in which Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) was held by the people. He tried to bring persons to compete with him who all proved incapable of arguing not with him but with his own students. These fellows admitted that their counterparts had acquired the religious learning from the Prophet's Progeny (ع).

The haughty ruler, therefore, ignored them but continued to undermine the popularity of the Imam. Failing in all his efforts, he decided to harass, arrest or murder him. In every town and city, hired agents were posted to monitor the activities of the Shi'as so that anyone suspected of supporting the Imam would be arrested. Al-Mu'alla son of Khunais was one of the many Shi'as who were thus arrested and murdered in cold blood.

The Imam himself was summoned from Medina to the royal palace five times, each time being in one way or another nothing but harassment. Al-Mansur, however, could never find sufficient grounds to order his imprisonment or execution.

On the other hand, the consequent stay of the Imam in Iraq only expanded the circle of those who wanted to learn the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt from him. Perceiving this, al-Mansur ordered him to be sent back to Medina. Even there, he was not spared persecution. Through saboteurs, his house was once set on fire but Providence put it out and nobody was harmed.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) was one of those Infallibles who were created by the Almighty to be role models of moral excellence. The particular virtues of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع), which were recorded by historians, included: hospitality, charity, the helping of the needy in secrecy, the fair treatment of the relatives, forgiveness, patience and fortitude.

Once a pilgrim visiting the Prophet's mosque in Medina fell asleep there. On waking up, he hurriedly searched his belongings and found out that his purse containing one thousand dinars was missing. Looking around, he saw Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) saying his prayers in a corner of the mosque. Bewildered and ignorant of the greatness of the Imam, he accused him of having picked his purse. The

Imam asked about its contents and was told that it contained one thousand dinars. The Imam asked the stranger to follow him to his house where he paid him the amount from his own money. When the stranger came back to the mosque satisfied, once more he checked his property and found his purse intact, wrapped in a bundle. Greatly ashamed of his conduct, he went back to the Imam's house, profusely apologized and asked him to take his money back. The Imam appeased him with these words: "We never take back what we once give away."

Another event of the Imam's trust in Allah, the Sustainer, deserves mention here. During the days of scarcity and famine, one naturally tries to hoard up as much provisions as might suffice his needs for a long time. Once, the Imam asked his household's manager, Trenchab, "The price of corn is rising day by day. How much corn is there in our warehouses?" Trenchab said that the Imam should have no reason to worry since there was a large quantity of it to sustain them over a long period of time.

The noble Imam then ordered him thus: "Sell out all the corn today and let us face the situation along with others." Then he directed him thus: "Pure wheat flour shall not be used in my kitchen. Let it be mixed with an equal quantity of oat flour. We must share the misfortune with the needy as long as it takes." The Imam (ع) used to respect the poor more than the rich and value their hard work. Trade was his occupation, yet he liked to personally do manual work in his orchards. One day, while wielding the spade and sweating profusely from top to toe, someone offered to do the work for him, but the Imam (ع) said, "It is no insult to bear the heat of the summer sun for the sake of my family."

To be kind to the slaves and bondmaids was the main characteristic of the Prophet's Progeny (ع). Sufyan at-Thawri has narrated a surprising event in this regard. He said, "Once I went to pay him a visit. I saw his complexion fading.

On my asking him the reason, the Imam explained: I had forbidden my folk from ascending the stairs to the roof-top. Just now, as I entered the house, I saw a nursing maid with my babe in her arms ascending the stairs. She was so frightened that she became nervous, and the baby fell down and died. I do not grieve on the death of the baby as much as I grieve on her fright." Then he prepared to arrange for the shrouding and burial of his dead baby.

The Imam's profound knowledge of religious and other sciences was reputed throughout the entire Islamic world, and even Western scholars have paid him tribute, admiring his knowledge and character. One famous Western reference discussing the Imam is the renown *Encyclopedia Britannica* where he is discussed on p. 498, Vol. 5, of its *Micropedia*. People came to him from distant regions to quench their thirst for his ocean of knowledge. The number of his students reached once four thousand. Among them were scholars of jurisprudence, tafsir (exegesis), *hadith*, etc. Theologies from other creeds also went there to debate with his students. When they went away vanquished and defeated, the Imam used to explain to his students their (the latter's) own weak points so that they might be more careful in the future.

Sometimes he himself debated with the opponents especially the atheists. Apart from religious sciences, he used to teach some students mathematics, chemistry, medicine, etc. Jabir ibn Hayyan⁷ of Tarsus, the famous pioneer of physics, chemistry and mathematics, was his disciple who wrote about four hundred treatises based on his mentor's instruction. The jurists who learned from him and authored several volumes of books on jurisprudence can be counted by the hundreds and their students by the thousands.

Such a great teacher and scholar can never be ambitious for power. But the government of his time regarded his popularity as a constant threat. It finally resorted to the use of their soundless weapon, poison, to put an end to this great man, just as other governments did to his ancestors and offspring. History always repeats itself; it is a wheel in an endless motion.

The governor of Medina was directed to offer him poisoned grapes the efficacy of which ended his life on Shawwal 15, 148 A.H./December 4, 765 A.D. when he was 65. His funeral was arranged by his son and successor, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع), who led the burial prayers. He was laid to rest in the same compound at Jannat al-Baqi where Imam al-Hassan (ع), Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع), and Imam al-Baqir (ع) are buried...

4) Imam Musa Al-Kadhim (as)

His name is Musa; "al-Kadhim" and "Abul-Hassan" are his titles. He is usually called Musa al-Kadhim. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) was his father whose lineage, by five generations, reaches the Holy Prophet (ص). His mother, Hamida Khatun, was a North African Berber. He was born on Safar 7, 128 A.H./November 8, 745 A.D.

The knowledge of his father, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع), saturated the Islamic world. Although two elder sons, Isma'eel and Abdullah, had already illuminated the house, the addition of the new-born brought unequalled happiness to the family, probably because Providence had decided to maintain the continuity of Imamate through him. Photo (above) shows Imam al-Kadhim's shrine in al-Kadhimiyya, Baghdad, Iraq.

For twenty years, he remained under the care of his father Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع). It was due to the virtues, teachings and the dissemination of the knowledge of the Prophet (ص) through Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) that Shi'a Muslims are called "Ja'faris," taught by Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع).

The scholarly achievements of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) were so conspicuous that the world acknowledged Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) had, indeed, appointed him as his successor as commanded by the Almighty. It is proven by this act that Imamate does not, as a rule, go to the eldest son or be inherited.

It is the blessing bestowed by the Almighty upon the Infallible ones who are gifted with divine knowledge.

The principle is further established by the fact that such a great responsibility had once before passed from Imam Hassan (ع) to his brother Imam Husayn (ع) rather than to Hassan's descendants. The Imamate of Musa al-Kadhim (ع), therefore, illustrates that Imamate is based on personal perfection, not necessarily on descent.

In 148 A.H./765 A.D., upon the death of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع), the responsibilities of Imamate devolved on Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). This was during the reign of al-Mansur al-Dawaniqi, the tyrant who ordered the slaying of countless Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet of Islam (ص). The number of those imprisoned, oppressed, thrown into the dark cells of prisons or bricked up in the walls alive, was known only to Allah. Imam Ja'far himself had been subjected to harassment, tyranny and intrigues, the last of which was poison which ended his life.

On his death-bed, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) predicted that the life of his successor would also be ended in the same way. In order to avert this danger as much as he could, he nominated, in his will, five trustees to look after his family. Al-Mansur, the Abbaside ruler, was one of them. The other four were: Muhammad ibn Sulayman, the then governor of Medina, his son Abdullah al-Aftah, (later Imam) Musa al-Kadhim (ع), and their respected mother Hamida Khatun.

Imam Ja'far's prediction was correct. When the news of his death reached al-Mansur, the latter made a show of grief by thrice repeating these words: Inna lillahi wa inn ilayhi rajioon, "We are Allah's and to Him is our return." He also said, "Who can be Ja'far's equal now...?" But secretly he wrote to the governor of Medina saying, "If Ja'far, by way of a will, appointed any trustee, put him to death immediately." The governor replied: "He has appointed five trustees, the first of whom is your majesty." Having read this reply, al-Mansur remained silent, since the sanctity of a will cannot be violated. Then, pondering over the situation, he said, "In this case, these persons cannot be slain."

Accordingly, for the next ten years, al-Mansur did not try to harass Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) who carried out the duties of Imamate peacefully. Al-Mansur was, moreover, preoccupied with building the new capital, Baghdad, which he completed just one year before his death. He had, therefore, little time to think about harassing Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع).

Al-Mansur al-Dawaniqi died in 158 A.H./775 A.D. and was succeeded by his son al-Mahdi. In the beginning, al-Mahdi did nothing to humiliate or disrespect Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع), but later he fostered the old enmity against Imam Ali's descendants. In 164 A.H./781 A.D., having performed the *hajj*, he took the Imam with him from Mecca to Baghdad where he imprisoned him. For one year, the Imam suffered the hardship of imprisonment.

Then the ruler realized that he was mistreating a descendant of the Prophet (ص), so he released the pious Imam (ع). In 169 A.H./785 A.D., al-Mahdi died and was succeeded by his brother al-Hadi who ruled for only 13 months. On his death, Harun ar-Rashid ascended the throne. The latter's attitude towards Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) was very antagonistic, causing Imam al-Kadhim (ع) to die in prison.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) was one of the illustrious Imams whom the Almighty Allah had set as a paragon of moral excellence. Each member of this illustrious family personified the best of virtues and moral excellences. Each one of them was the embodiment of goodness. The Seventh Imam excelled in tolerance and forgiveness, so much so that he was titled al-Kadhim (ع), the suppressor of fury.

Never was he heard speaking roughly or looking sternly. Even in the most unpleasant situations, he wore a smile. This was in accordance with the saying of his ancestor Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) that a believer keeps his grief confined in his chest while wearing a smile on his face.

One government official of Medina was a persistent source of harassment to Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع), even using abusive language regarding Imam Ali (ع). But the Imam always directed his followers not to abuse him in return. When his malicious conduct became too rude to be tolerated, they sought permission to retaliate against him. The Imam appeased them, promising to settle the matter himself.

Pacifying his followers thus, he went to the fellow's farm and treated him with such noble benevolence that the man felt ashamed of his conduct and subsequently changed his attitude and altered his conduct. Explaining this policy to his followers, the Imam asked them: "Was my behaviour better than the methods you suggested?" They admitted that it was.

He thus carried out the instruction of his great ancestor Imam Ali (ع) which is recorded in Nahjul-Balagha: Subdue the enemy with kindness, since it is more effective than vanquishing him with force. Undoubtedly, this requires a correct judgment of the enemy's nature.

With some enemies, one may say, good conduct does not bear any fruit; it is then that force must be met with equal or better force, rest assured. Imam Ali (ع) has, therefore, warned not to use this policy with the vile and the mean lest they should be encouraged to do more mischief. Consider this piece of advice when you deal with the enemies of Islam.

To vanquish the foe with goodness certainly requires the foresight the Imam possessed. Strictness is permissible only when the enemy's continuous vile conduct justifies retaliation or the use of force. If not, these dignified souls preferred to deal with him gently, so as to have a valid pretext against the opponent and leave no ground for him to justify his aggression.

Such was the noble method usually employed by the Family of the Prophet (ص). Imam Ali (ع), even on his death-bed, behaved liberally with Ibn Muljim al-Muradi, his assassin who had dealt him a mortal blow only the day before. Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) showered his generosity on Muhammad ibn Isma'eel who carried out the orders of the Abbaside caliph to put an end to the Imam's life. It was Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) who aided him when he wanted to embark upon his journey with a grant of 400 dinars and 1,500 dirhams although he undertook this journey solely to poison the ears of the caliph against him.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) had to undergo a great deal of hardship. The academy of learning, which his

father Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) had established, could no longer be maintained. Other means to disseminate knowledge were beyond his reach. It was only through his noble personal behaviour that he was able to introduce the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (ص) and his Progeny (ع) to the public.

This, indeed, is the best way to propagate Islam. You can talk about Islam as much as you want, but when one sees you doing something un-Islamic, your words will be forgotten, your reputation will be ruined, and your hypocrisy will be exposed. Talk is cheap; action is the true yardstick to measure one's piety; actions speak louder than words.

The Imam (ع) used to observe silence at gatherings or seminars, and he never spoke unless spoken to or someone asked him a question or requested him to solve a scientific problem. Nor did he ever initiate a conversation. In spite of this, he was held in very high esteem by friends and foes alike. All acknowledged his knowledge and noble personality.

In view of his excessive worship at night, he was called "al-Abd as-Salih," i.e. the pious worshipper of Allah. No less famed was his generosity. He used to secretly help the beggars and the destitute who never got to know who their benefactor was till he had died. After the fajr (pre-dawn) prayers, he used to lower his forehead in prostration and remain in that position till the sun rose high in the heart of the sky. His recitation of the Holy Qur'an was attractive; he wept as he recited, and his audiences were deeply moved.

In 170 A.H./787 A.D., Harun ar-Rashid succeeded Abu Ja'far al-Mansur as the caliph. His ancestors' traditional cruelty towards the descendants of Imam Ali (ع) and Fatima (ع) was well in his view. The revolt of Yahya ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hassan broke out. Violating all agreements and covenants, as was always customary of the Umayyads and the Abbasides, Harun threw Yahya into the choking dark dungeons then had someone kill him. Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) was in no way connected with Yahya's uprising.

Rather, he had actually advised him against opposing the tyrannical government. But Yahya's action served to intensify the enmity which Harun harboured towards Imam Ali's descendants including, of course, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). To make matters even worse, the Prime Minister, Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki, poisoned Harun's ears by pointing out that Ja'far ibn al-Ash'ath (tutor of Harun's son, al-Amin, and a political rival of Yahya) was a follower of the Imam and that he planned to bring the Imam to power.

Although Yahya ibn Khalid intended just to entice Harun against Ja'far ibn al-Ash'ath, his plan proved to be fatal to Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). In the same year, Harun came to Mecca to perform the hajj, and so did Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). Here Harun watched with jealous eyes the sublime popularity which the Muslim multitudes demonstrated towards that sage. It was sufficient to flare up his rage. Muhammad ibn Isma'eel's hostility worsened the situation.

To understand these complications, let us ponder on the following facts: Isma'eel, Muhammad's father,

was the eldest son of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع), and he was expected to succeed his father as the Imam. But he died during the Imam's lifetime. The common notion was thus shattered. Yet some simpletons still held the view that Imam Ja'far's successor should be one of Isma'eel's offspring. Muhammad ibn Isma'eel and his followers, the Isma'eelis (or Isma'eelites, now a small off-shoot Shi'a sect), therefore, never acknowledged the Imamate of Musa al-Kadhim (ع). Since his followers were a small minority, he outwardly expressed his loyalty to the family.

To discuss all means to annihilate Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع), Harun consulted Yahya al-Barmaki whom he instructed to collect complete reports about the Imam through one of the descendants of Imam Ali (ع). Yahya, an avowed foe of the Prophet's Progeny, recommended Muhammad ibn Isma'eel as the person who would supply all the details correctly. Accordingly, he was summoned to Baghdad.

When Muhammad ibn Isma'eel received the caliph's letter, he considered it a passport to power, prestige, and prosperity. But he was penniless and unable to prepare for the journey. He was, therefore, obliged to approach the same generous saint who demonstrated benevolence to friends and foes alike. The Imam knew fully well the motives behind the journey. He nevertheless inquired about its purpose. Muhammad explained that he was having hard times, being deeply in debt, and that he thought that the journey might bring him prosperity.

The Imam said, "You need not go there; I promise to pay off all your debts and provide adequately for your sustenance." But Muhammad would not change his mind about going to Baghdad. Upon leaving, he paid the Imam a visit and requested a useful piece of advice. Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) remained silent. When he repeated his request, the Imam said, "Please see that you do not become a party in slaying me, and please do not be the cause of making my children orphans." Muhammad tried to turn from the point and asked for some appropriate advice. But the Imam refused to say anything more. When he got up to depart, the noble Imam gave him 450 gold dinars and 1,500 silver dirhams for the journey.

The result was exactly what the Imam had foreseen. Muhammad ibn Isma'eel reached Baghdad and stayed at the house of Prime Minister Yahya who introduced him to caliph Harun. The latter surrounded him with honours and inquired about the pace of events in Medina. Muhammad stated the circumstances most incorrectly, adding, "I never saw nor heard that a country is ruled by two kings." Asked to explain, he asserted: "As you are ruling here in Baghdad, Imam Musa al-Kadhim rules there in Medina. From every town, revenues are delivered to him, and he claims to be your own equal in power."

These were the words Yahya al-Barmaki had instructed Muhammad to say to Harun who felt provoked and challenged. He sent Muhammad back after granting him ten thousand dinars. But Allah wished that Muhammad should not avail of this sizeable wealth. On that very night, he suffered from throat pain, and when the day dawned, the darkness of death closed on him. Harun heard the news and ordered to retrieve the cash! Muhammad's statement was not erased from Harun's memory and he was resolved to put an end to the Imam's life.

In 179 A.H./795 A.D., Harun went to Mecca and Medina. He stayed in the latter city for a day or two after which he sent his men to arrest Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). The Imam was not at home when the caliph's men came, so they went to the Prophet's tomb where he used to say his prayers. Having total disregard for the sanctity of the Prophet's grave, they arrested his descendant there and brought him before Harun.

It was on the 20th of Shawwal of 179 A.H./795 A.D. that the Prophet's pious son was being fettered and taken prisoner while not even one Medenite dared to raise a finger against the tyrant. This lethargy of the unfeeling Muslims had also been witnessed on several occasions before that incident. As a matter of fact, these Medenites have been politically lethargic ever since, especially after the Wahhabis took control, by force, of the politics of their country...

Being apprehensive of any attempt which might be made to rescue the Imam, Harun ordered two camel-domes to be prepared in one of which he seated the Imam and sent him to Basra escorted by a sizeable military detachment. The other empty dome was sent to Baghdad with an equal number of soldiers in order to confuse any prospective rescuers and distract the attention of the people by keeping the place of imprisonment unknown. Was it not a shocking event that the Imam's family could not even see the Imam or bid him farewell?

They only received the news that he had been imprisoned by the government. They were distressed to hear it and the Imam, too, was equally grieved for being separated from his loved ones without being able to bid them farewell.

Nobody knows what a zigzag route was followed; the journey to Basra took 47 days. There, the Imam remained in confinement for one year. The city's governor was as-Sayid Ja'far, a cousin of Harun. In the beginning, he carried out Harun's orders. But he often wondered about the reasons for the imprisonment of the pious descendant of Prophet Muhammad (ص). He, therefore, became curious about the Imam's life, character and personality. The more he studied them and noticed his forbearance, the more he was impressed by his noble conduct. He conveyed his views to Harun in good faith, but the latter only became suspicious of the intentions of his own cousin.

He, therefore, ordered the Imam to be transferred to Baghdad where he put him under the custody of Fadl ibn ar-Rabi'. Having come to know that Fadl was sympathetic to the followers (Shi'a) of the Prophet's Progeny (ع), he put the Imam under the custody of Yahya al-Barmaki, the notorious enemy of Ahl al-Bayt (ع). It seems that the Imam's sacred personality impressed everybody, so the tyrant thought it necessary to change his jailers.

The Imam was finally imprisoned in a dungeon under the charge of as-Sindi ibn Shahik, the ruthless and stone-hearted Chief of Police of Harun ar-Rashid. The Imam died on the 25th of Rajab 183 A.H./September 2, 799 A.D. at the age of 55. No respect was awarded to him at the time of his burial either. Rather, the corpse was carried to the grave-yard by men who were announcing his death in

degrading tones.

By this time, the people felt depressed about the fate of the elevated Imam and sadly accompanied the coffin with a sincere display of grief and respect. They buried him in a northern suburb of Baghdad now bearing his name: al-Kadhimiyya, the city of Imam al-Kadhim (ع), where his magnificent mausoleum now houses a reputed school of theology coveted by scholars and seekers of knowledge.

5) Imam 'Ali Ar-Rida' (as)

He is Imam Abul-Hassan II, Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida, the eighth in the series of the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt (ع) of the Prophet. His birthplace is Medina, and his resting place is Tus (Iran). He was born in Medina on Friday, or Thursday, Thul-Hijja 11, or Thul-Qi'da, or Rabaul-Awwal, of the Hijri year 148 or the year 153. He died on Friday, or Monday, near the end of the month of Safar, or the 17th of Safar, or Ramadan 21, or Jumada I 18, or Thul-Qi'da 23, or the end of Thul-Qi'da, of the year 202 or 203 or 206.

In his *'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida*, as-Saduq states: "What is accurate is that he died on the 13th of Ramadan, on a Friday, in the year 203." There is a great deal of dispute regarding the name of his mother. Some say she was called al-Khayzaran; others say she was Arwi and her nickname was "the blonde of Nubia," while others say she was Najma and her nickname was "Ummul-Baneen."

Others say she was called Sakan the Nubian; still others say she was called Takattum. Disputes exist also regarding the number of his offspring and their names. Some scholars say that they were five sons and one daughter, and that they were: Muhammad al-Qani', al-Hassan, Ja'far, Ibrahim, al-Husayn, and 'Aisha.

Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, in his book titled *Tathkiratul-Khawass*, says that the sons were only four, dropping the name of Husayn from the list. Al-Mufid inclines to believe that the Imam did not have any son other than Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (ع), and Ibn Shahr Ashub emphatically states so, and so does al-Tibrisi in his *A'lam al-Wara*. Author of *Al-Udad al-Qawiyya* states that the Imam (ع) had two sons: Muhammad and Musa, and that he did not have other descendants.

In his claim, he is supported by *Qurb al-Isnad* where the author says that al-Bazanti asked ar-Rida, "For years I have been asking you who your successor is and you keep telling me that it is your son even when you had no son at all, but since Allah has now blessed you with two sons, which one of them is he?" *'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida* indicates that he had a daughter named Fatima. His life was characterized by melancholy from its beginning till its painful end. At the onset of his life, he witnessed the trials and tribulations which filled the life of his father Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (ع).

The Abbaside caliph al-Mahdi III ordered the Imam (ع) to go to Baghdad so that the caliph would secure from him promises and pledges that he would not oppose his authority nor mobilize a revolution against him, and the Imam (ع) did not go back home till al-Mahdi went back to his Lord with his shoulders bent

by the load of the regime's sins and immoral actions. He was succeeded by the Abbaside caliph al-Hadi who tried to put an end to the life of the Imam, but he did not live long enough, so ar-Rashid acceded to the throne, thus the parching flames of the tragedy started incinerating the existence of the Alawis (Alawides) headed by Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (ع), and the dungeons of Baghdad, Basra, Wasit and other cities could not limit the regime's passion for seeking revenge against its opponents.

Instructions issued by the government required the builders to fill the hollow building cylinders and columns with the still alive bodies of the elite from among Alawi youths as well as non-Alawi sympathizers. This ugly method of eliminating the government's opponents was not something invented by ar-Rashid ; it was a continuation of a custom started by al-Mansur who sought revenge against some Alawi youths as history tells us.[8](#)

The Abbaside caliph al-Ma'mun decided to use the Imam (ع) as a bargaining chip between him and the Abbasides in Baghdad on one hand, and between him and the Alawis on the other, and also between him and the Shi'as of Khurasan as well. The ploy of relinquishing the throne was foiled when the Imam (ع) refused to accede to it.

It is worth mentioning here that when Imam ar-Rida (ع) refused to accept the caliphate from the abdicating caliph, al-Ma'mun, or to take charge of the post of heir apparent to the throne, he had no reason except his own awareness of the real depth of the goal al-Ma'mun anticipated to achieve by his plan, and that the desire to abdicate was not to be taken seriously.

Imam ar-Rida (ع) inherited the knowledge of his grandfather the Messenger of Allah (ع). History narrates a great deal about his scholarly stances and intellectual discourses. Imam Musa a-Kadhim (ع) is reported to have often said to his sons, "Ali ibn Musa, your brother, is the learned scholar of the Descendants of Muhammad (ص); therefore, you may ask him about your religion, and memorize what he tells you for I have heard my father Ja'far ibn Muhammad more than once saying, The learned scholar of the family of Muhammad is in your loins. How I wish I had met him, for he is named after the Commander of the Faithful Ali (ع)."

Ibrahim ibn al-Abbas as-Sali is reported as having said, "I never saw ar-Rida (ع) unable to provide the answer to any question he received, nor have I ever seen any contemporary of his more learned than he was. Al-Ma'mun used to put him to test by asking him about almost everything, and he always provided him with the answer, and his answer and parable was always derived from the Holy Qur'an."

Raja' ibn Abul-Dhahhak, who was commissioned by al-Ma'mun to escort ar-Rida (ع) to his court, said once, "By Allah! I never saw anyone more pious than him nor more often praising Allah at all times, nor more fearful of Allah, the Exalted. People approached him whenever they knew he was present in their area, asking him questions regarding their faith and its aspects, and he would answer them and narrate a great deal of hadith from his father who quoted each of his forefathers till Ali (ع) who quoted the Messenger of Allah (ع). When I arrived at al-Ma'mun's court, the latter asked me about his behaviour

during the trip and I told him what I observed about him during the night and the day, while riding or halting; so, he said, Yes, O son of al-Dahhak! This is the best man on the face of earth, the most learned, and the most pious.”⁹

Al-Hakim is quoted in Tarikh Nishapur as saying that the Imam (ع) used to issue religious verdicts when he was a little more than twenty years old. In Ibn Majah’s Sunan, in the chapter on “Summary of Cultivating Perfection,” he is described as “the master of Banu Hashim, and al-Ma’mun used to hold him in high esteem and surround him with utmost respect; he even made him his successor and secured the oath of allegiance for him.”

Al-Ma’mun said the following statement once in response to Banu Hashim: “As regarding your reaction to the selection by al-Ma’mun of Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع) as his successor, be reminded that al-Ma’mun did not make such a selection except upon being fully aware of its implications, knowing that there is none on the face of earth more distinguished, more virtuous, more pious, more ascetic, more acceptable to the elite as well as to the commoners, or more God-fearing, than he (ar-Rida) is.”¹⁰

Abul-Salt al-Harawi is quoted as saying, “I never saw anyone more knowledgeable than Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (ع). Every scholar who met him admitted the same. Al-Ma’mun gathered once a large number of theologians, jurists and orators and he (ar-Rida [ع]) surpassed each and every one of them in his own respective branch of knowledge, so much so that the loser admitted his loss and the superiority of the winner over him.”¹¹

He is also quoted as saying, “I have heard Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (ع) saying, I used to take my place at the theological center and the number of the learned scholars in Medina was quite large, yet when a question over-taxed the mind of one of those scholars, he and the rest would point at me, and they would send me their queries, and I would answer them all.”¹²

After an intellectual discourse with al-Ma’mun, ‘Ali ibn al-Jahm said, “Al-Ma’mun stood up to perform the prayers and took Muhammad ibn Ja’far, who was present there, by the hand, and I followed both of them. He asked him: What do you think of your nephew?’ He answered, A learned scholar although we never saw him being tutored by any learned mentor.’

Al-Ma’mun said, This nephew of yours is a member of the family of the Prophet (ص) about whom the Prophet (ص) said, The virtuous among my descendants and the elite among my progeny are the most thoughtful when young, the most learned when adult; therefore, do not teach them for they are more learned than you are, nor will they ever take you out of guidance, nor lead you into misguidance.”¹³

Good manners constitute a significant part of one’s personality. The Imam was characterized by a most noble personality which won him the love of the commoners as well as the elite. Ibrahim ibn al-Abbas as-Sali is quoted as saying, “I never saw Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع) angering anyone by something he said, nor did I ever see him interrupting anyone, nor refusing to do someone a favour he was able to do, nor did he ever stretch his legs before an audience, nor leaned upon something while his companion did

not, nor did he ever call any of his servants or attendants a bad name, nor did I ever see him spit or burst into laughter; rather, his laughter was just a smile. When he was ready to eat, he seated with him all his attendants, including the doorman and the groom.” He added saying, “Do not, therefore, believe anyone who claims that he saw someone else enjoying such accomplishments.”¹⁴

A guest once kept entertaining him part of the night when the lamp started fading and the guest stretched his hand to fix it, but Abul-Hassan (ع) swiftly checked him and fixed it himself, saying, “We are folks who do not let their guests serve them.”¹⁵

The author of *Al-Manaqib* states that ar-Rida (ع) once went to the public bath-house and someone asked him to give him a massage, so he kept giving the man a massage till someone recognized him and told that person who that dignitary was. The man felt extremely embarrassed; he apologized to the Imam (ع) and gave him a massage.¹⁶ Muhammad ibn al-Fadl narrates the following anecdote regarding the Imam’s simple personality. He says:

Ar-Rida (ع), on the occasion of Eidul-Fitr, said to one of his attendants, “May Allah accept your good deeds and ours,” then he stood up and left. On the occasion of Eidul-Adha, he said to the same man, “May Allah accept our good deeds and yours.” I asked him, “O son of the Messenger of Allah! You said something to this man on the occasion of Eidul-Fitr and something else on the occasion of Eidul-Adha; why?” He answered: “I pleaded to Allah to accept his good deeds and ours because his action was similar to mine and I combined it with mine in my plea, whereas I pleaded to Allah to accept our good deeds and his because we are capable of offering the ceremonial sacrifice while he is not; so, our action is different from his.”¹⁷

Imam ar-Rida (ع) defines for us the Islamic theory as the rules which govern the actual dealings of man with his brother man. From this can we be inspired that Islam abolishes the then class distinctions among individuals and groups in the areas of public rights and the safeguarding of man’s dignity, and that the difference which we must recognize regarding these areas is the one between a person who obeys Allah and another who does not.

A man once said to the Imam: “By Allah! There is nobody on the face of earth who is more honourable than your forefathers.” The Imam responded by saying, “Their piety secured their honour, and their obedience of Allah made them fortunate.”¹⁸ Another man said to him: “By Allah! You are the best of all people!” He said to him: “Do not swear that like. Better than me is one who is more obedient to Allah and more pious. By Allah! The following verse was never abrogated: And We have made you nations and tribes so that you may know each other; verily the best of you in Allah’s sight is the most pious.”¹⁹

Abul-Salt once asked him: “O son of the Messenger of Allah! What do you say about something because of which people have been criticizing you?” He asked: “What is it?” He said, “They claim that you call people your slaves.” He said, “Allah! Creator of the heavens and the earth, You know what is hidden and what is manifest! I invoke Thee to testify that I have never said so, nor did I ever hear that

any of my forefathers had said so! Allah! You know the many injustices this nation has committed against us, and this is just one of them..." Then he came to Abul-Salt and said, "O Abdul-Salam! If all people, as some claim, are our slaves, who did we buy them from?" Abul-Salt answered: "You are right, O son of the Messenger of Allah..."

Then the Imam said, "O Abdul-Salam! Do you deny the right which Allah has allotted for us to be charged with the authority as others deny?" He said, "God forbid! I do acknowledge such right."²⁰ Abdullah ibn as-Salt quotes a man from Balkh saying, "I accompanied ar-Rida (ع) during his trip to Khurasan. One day he ordered preparations for his meal to which he invited all his attendants, blacks and non-blacks, so I said to him, May my life be sacrificed for yours! Maybe these should have a separate eating arrangement.' He said, Allah Almighty is One; the father (Adam) and the mother (Eve) are the same, and people are rewarded according to their deeds."²¹

Ibrahim ibn al-Abbas as-Sali is quoted as saying, "I heard 'Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida saying, I swear by emancipation--and whenever I swore by it, I would emancipate one of my slaves till I emancipated each and every one of them--that I do not see myself as better than that (and he pointed to a black slave of his who remained in his service) on account of my kinship to the Messenger of Allah (ع) except if I do a good deed which would render me better."²²

Yasir, one of his servants, said once: "Abul-Hassan said to us once: If I leave the table before you do, while you are still eating, do not leave on my account till you are through.' It may happen that he calls upon some of us to his service and he is told that they are eating, whereupon he says: Leave them to finish their meal first.'" Nadir, another servant, says, "Abul-Hassan did not require us to do anything for him except if we had finished eating our meal."²³

There is no doubt that, generally speaking, the Imams (ع) were more distant than anyone else from the alluring wares of this vanishing world, and most distant from its ornamentations and allurements. But the concept of asceticism according to them was not limited to wearing modest coarse clothes or eating very simple food.

Rather, its limits extended beyond that, for the ascetic person is the one who does not allow the pleasures of this world to take control over him without being able to take control of them, one who does not see this world as the ultimate goal he seeks; rather, when it comes towards him, the believer is entitled to enjoy its good things, and when it forsakes him, he contends himself that Allah's rewards are more lasting.

Al-Ḥabī is quoted in *Nathr al-Durar* نثر الدرر as saying, "A group of Sufis visited ar-Rida (ع) when he was in Khurasan, and they said to him, 'The commander of the faithful looked into the authority Allah Almighty entrusted to him, and he found you, members of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (ع), to be the most deserving of all people to be the leaders. Then he discerned you, members of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (ع), and he found yourself the most worthy of leading the people, so he decided to entrust such leadership to

you. The nation is in need of one who wears coarse clothes, eats the most simple food, rides the donkey and visits the sick.'

Ar-Rida (ع) was first leaning on his side, so he sat straight then said, 'Joseph (Yousuf) was a Prophet who used to wear silk mantles brocaded with gold. He sat on the thrones of the Pharaohs and ruled. An Imam is required to be just and fair; when he says something, he says the truth, and when he passes a judgement, he judges equitably, and when he promises something, he fulfills his promise. Allah did not forbid (an Imam) from wearing a particular type of clothes or eating a particular type of food.'

Then he recited the Qur'anic verse:

'Say: Who has forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah which He has produced for His servants, and the good things, clean and pure (which He has provided) for sustenance?'[24](#)

Imam al-Jawad (ع) was asked once about his view regarding musk. He answered: "My father ordered musk to be made for him in a ben tree in the amount of seven hundred dirhams. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl wrote him saying that people criticized him for that.

He worte back: O Fadl! Have you not come to know that Joseph (Yousuf), who was a Prophet, used to wear silk clothes brocaded with gold, and that he used to sit on gilded thrones, and that all of that did not decrease any of his wisdom?' Then he ordered a galia moschata (perfume of musk and ambergris) to be made for him in the amount of four thousand dirhams."[25](#)

Ibn Abbad tells us the following about Imam ar-Rida's ascetic conduct: "Ar-Rida used to sit on a leaf mat during the summer and on a straw sack during the winter; he used to put on coarse clothes, but when he went out to meet the public, he put on his very best."[26](#)

So, when he is by himself, away from public life, his soul finds harmony with denying what is fake, that is, the decorations and allurements of this life. But when he goes out to meet people, he puts on his best for them following their own nature of holding the appearances of this world as significant, enjoying its good things. This realistically ascetic conduct of the Imam provides us with a glorious example of the truth regarding the Ahl al-Bayt (ع) and their pure view of life which is free from any disturbing fake or pretense.

The Imam (ع) tries to cause others to adorn themselves with the same trait of clemency and tolerance upon being wronged as an element of good relationship among them, justifying this by saying that it increases the dignity of man, for clemency and tolerance, when the ability to deal equal blows and effect equal retribution express the power of anger in man and his control over his rash temper upon being challenged, this causes others to respect and venerate such a person especially when that person shoulders the responsibilities of authority. Al-Ḥafi says:

A man sentenced to be beheaded was brought to al-Ma'mun while ar-Rida (ع) was among his train. Al-

Ma'mun asked him: Father of al-Hassan! What is your view?' He said, All I can say is that Allah only increases the dignity of those whose good will causes them to forgive.' He, therefore, forgave the man.[27](#)

In a dialogue with al-Bazanti, the Imam said, "Anyone who receives a boon is in danger: He has to carry out Allah's commandments in its regard. By Allah! Whenever Allah blesses me with something, I continue to be in extreme apprehension till (and here he made a motion with his hand) I take out some of it and spend it in the way Allah has ordained in its regard." Al-Bazanti asked him: "May my life be sacrificed for yours! You, in your status of high esteem, fear that much?" He answered: "Yes, indeed! And I praise my Creator for the blessings He bestowed upon me."[28](#)

When in Khurasan, he once distributed his entire wealth to the poor on the day of Arafat, so al-Fadl ibn Sahl said to him: "Now you are bankrupt!" he said, "On the contrary! I am now wealthier than ever. Do not consider trading my wealth for Allah's rewards and pleasure as bankruptcy."[29](#) He did not give others in order to buy their affection or friendship; rather, he considered giving with generosity as a good trait whereby man gets nearer to his Maker by including His servants in the wealth with which He blessed him. This is the difference between his method of giving and that of others. Ya'qub ibn Ishaq an-Nawbakhti is quoted as saying,

A man passed by Abul-Hassan and begged him to give him according to the extent of his kindness. He said, "I cannot afford that." So he said, "Then give me according to mine," whereupon he ordered his servant to give the man two hundred dinars. [30](#)

The reason why the Imam abstained from giving the man according to the extent of his own kindness, as the man asked him the first time, is probably due to the fact that he simply did not have as much money as he liked to give. As regarding his own affection towards the poor and the indigent, and his way of looking after them, Mu'ammarr ibn Khallad narrates this anecdote:

Whenever Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع) was about to eat his meal, he would bring a large platter and select the choicest food on the table and put on it, then he would order it to be given away to the poor. After that he would recite the following verse: "But he hath made no haste on the path that is steep."[31](#) After that he would say, "Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, knows that not everyone has the ability to free a slave; nevertheless, He found means for them to achieve Paradise (by feeding others)."[32](#)

Thus does the Imam sense the weight of deprivation under which the poor moan and groan; therefore, he shares his best food with them in response to the call of humanity and kindness and in harmony with the spirit of the message with which Allah entrusted him. Al-Bazanti tells the story of a letter Imam ar-Rida (ع) once wrote to his son (later Imam) Abu Ja'far (ع) which personifies the generosity and spirit of giving deeply rooted in the hearts of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (ع); he says:

"I read the letter of Abul-Hassan Imam ar-Rida (ع) to Abu Ja'far which said, O Abu Ja'far! I have heard that when you ride, the servants take you out of the city through its small gate. This is due to their being miser so that nobody would ask you for something. I plead to you by the right I have upon you that every

time you enter into or get out of the city, you should do so through its large gate, and when you ride, take gold and silver with you, and every time you are asked, you should give. If any of your uncles asks you for something, you should give him no less than fifty dinars, and you yourself may determine the maximum amount you would like to give; and if any of your aunts asks you for something, do not give her less than twenty-five dinars, and it is up to you to determine the maximum amount. I only desire that Allah raises your status; therefore, keep giving away and do not fear that the Lord of the Throne will ever throw you into poverty.”[33](#)

Yasir, one of the Imam’s servants, narrates saying that the Imam’s attendants were eating some fruit one day and they were throwing away a good portion of it uneaten. Abul-Hassan (ع) said to them: “Praise be to Allah! If you have eaten to your fill, there are many who have not; so, you should feed them of it instead.”[34](#)

Sulaiman ibn Ja’far al-Jufi is quoted as saying, “I was in the company of ar-Rida (ع) trying to take care of some personal business of my own when I wanted to go home. He said to me, Come with me and spend the night over my house.’ So I went with him and he entered his house shortly before sunset. He noticed that his attendants were working with clay, probably mending stables, and there was a black man among them. He asked them, What is this man doing with you?’ They said, He is helping us, and we will pay him something.’ He asked, Did you come to an agreement with him regarding his wages?’ They said, No. He will accept whatever we pay him.’ He, thereupon, started whipping them and showing signs of extreme anger. I said to him, May my life be sacrificed for yours! Why are you so angry?’ He said, I have forbidden them so many times from doing something like that and ordered them not to employ anyone before coming to an agreement with him regarding his wages. You know that nobody would work for you without an agreed upon wage. If you do not, and then you pay him three times as much as you first intended to pay him, he would still think that you underpaid him. But if you agree on the wage, he will praise you for fulfilling your promise and for paying him according to your agreement, and then if you give him a little bit more, he would recognize it and notice that you increased his pay.”[35](#)

Al-Bazanti is quoted as saying,

Ar-Rida (ع) had one of his donkeys sent to convey me to his residence, so I came to the town and stayed with a dignitary for a part of the night, and we both had our supper together, then he ordered my bed to be prepared. A Tiberian pillow, a Caesarian sheet, and a Merv blanket were brought to me. Having eaten my supper, he asked me, “Would you like to retire?” I said, “Yes, may my life be sacrificed for yours.” So he put the sheet and the blanket over me and said, “May Allah make you sleep in good health,” and we were on the rooftop. When he went down, I told myself that I had achieved a status with that man nobody else had attained before. It was then when I heard someone calling my name, but I did not recognize the voice till one of his (ar-Rida’s) servants came to me. He said, “Come meet my master;” so I went down and he came towards me, asked me for my hand to shake and he shook it with a squeeze, saying, “The Commander of the Faithful, Allah’s peace be with him, came once to visit

Sa'sa'ah ibn Sawhan, and when it was time to leave, he advised Sa'sa'ah not to boast about his visit to him but to look after himself instead for he seemed to be about to depart from this world and that worldly hopes do not do a dying man any good, and he greeted him a great deal as he bid him good-bye.”³⁶

We can clearly be acquainted with the negative stance of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) towards their rulers by examining what al-Hassan ibn al-Husayn al-Anbari tells us about Imam Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع). Says he, “I continued writing him for fourteen years asking his permission that I accept a job in the service of the sultan. At the conclusion of the last letter which I wrote him, I stated the fact that I was fearing for my life because the sultan was accusing me of being a Rafidi and that he did not doubt that the reason why I declined from working for him was due to my being a Rafidi. So Abul-Hassan wrote me saying, I have comprehended the contents of your letters and what you stated regarding your life being in jeopardy. If you know that should you accept the job, you would behave according to the commands of the Messenger of Allah (ع) and your assistants and clerks would be followers of your faith, and if you use the gain you receive to help needy believers till you become their equal, then one deed will offset another; otherwise, do not.”³⁷.

The author of *Al-Ghaiba الغيبة* quotes al-Hassan ibn al-Hassan (al-Hassan II) saying, “I said to Abul-Hassan Musa (ع) once, Can I ask you a question?’ He answered, You must rather ask your own Imam.’ I inquired, What do you mean? I do not know of any Imam other than your own self.’ He said, He is my son ‘Ali to whom I gave my title (of Imam).’ I said, Master! Please help me save myself from Hellfire! Abu Abdullah (ع) had said that you yourself are the Qa'im, the caretaker of this issue.’ He said, Was I not?’

Then he added, O Hassan! No Imam preaches to a nation except when he is their Qa'im; so, when he leaves them (i.e. dies), his successor will be the Qa'im and the Hujja (Proof) till he too leaves. We (the Imams) are all Qa'ims; therefore, from now on, redirect all your dealings to my son ‘Ali, for by Allah do I swear twice that I did not do that on my own accord but Allah did out of His love for him.”³⁸

The Imam did his best to emphasize the error of that concept and how it collided with the reality by continuously stating that the Imamate after his demise would be the responsibility of his son ‘Ali, and he even made a number of his followers and family testify to it. For example, Haider ibn Ayyub says, “We were in Medina at Quba, where we used to meet Muhammad ibn Zaid ibn Ali. He (the latter) came to us one day much later than anticipated, so we asked him what caused him to be so late.

He said, Abu Ibrahim (Imam ar-Rida [ع]) invited seventeen of our men, all descendants of Ali and Fatima, Allah's blessings be upon both of them, and he required us to bear witness to his will and testimony that his son Ali would be his successor and representative during the remainder of his own life and after his demise.’

Then Muhammad ibn Zaid said, By Allah, O Haider! He has today tied the knot of Imamate for him, and the Shi'as will accept him as the Imam after his father's demise.”³⁹ Abdullah ibn al-Harith said, “Abu Ibrahim called us to his presence and we responded. He said, Do you know why I have gathered you all

here?’ We answered in the negative. He said, Bear witness that this Ali, my son, is my regent, the executor of my will, and my successor after me; whoever entrusted me with anything, let him take it back from him, and whoever insisted on seeking audience with me, let him obtain his written approval first.”[40](#)

Abdul-Rahman ibn al-Hajjaj is quoted as saying that Abul-Hassan Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) had nominated his son Ali for the Imamate and wrote a statement to this effect in the presence of sixty witnesses from among the most distinguished dignitaries of Medina.[41](#)

There are many narratives narrated by some advocates and inventors of Waqfism which clearly prove to us their false claims. For example, Ziyad ibn Marwan al-Qandi narrates the following:

Once I visited Abu Ibrahim, and his son Ali was with him. He said to me, “O Ziyad! His statements (referring to his son) are as good as mine, his speech is like my speech, and his instructions are as binding as mine.”[42](#)

Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Maithami, a Waqfi, says, “Muhammad ibn Isma'eel ibn al-Fadl al-Hashimi told me the following: I visited Abul-Hassan Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) when he was suffering from an acute illness. I asked him: If the matter regarding which I pray Allah that it would not happen (Imam's death) comes to pass, who shall we follow?’ He said, My son Ali; his writing is as though I wrote it, and he is my regent and successor after me.”[43](#)

Ghannam ibn al-Qasim is quoted as saying, “Mansur ibn Yunus Barzaj told me that he had visited Abul-Hassan, that is, Musa ibn Ja'far (ع), and he said to him, Have you come to know what new undertaking I have undertaken today?’

He answered in the negative, so the Imam said, I have appointed my son Ali as my regent and successor after me; so, entered the room and congratulate him and tell him that I ordered you to do so.’ He, therefore, entered Ali's room and congratulated him and informed him that his father had ordered him to do so, but al-Mansur reneged after that, and he even confiscated the funds (of Muslims) entrusted to him.”[44](#)

There is another stance for the Imam which is not without an exciting moment involving one of the main advocates of Waqfism. His stance was like a clear warning to those who created the controversy of this “sect” and promoted it; al-Bata'ini states the following:

I said to Abul-Hassan, “Your father had informed us of his successor, and we wish you could inform us of yours.” So he took my hand and shook it, then he recited the verse: “Allah will not mislead people after He had guided them, in order that He may make clear to them what to fear (and avoid).”[45](#)

The recitation of that verse came almost like a prophecy about the future of what that person and his friends would do and how they would fall into the slippery paths of misguidance; therefore, he shook his hand and recited a verse which predicted that those folks' deviation would take place after proof had

been made manifest against them. The Imam, as a matter of fact, referred clearly to the Waqfi movement after him and even recited the epitaph of the faith of those who advocated Waqfism in a narrative transmitted by Muhammad ibn Sinan who says,

I visited Abul-Hassan one year before he was transported to Iraq, and his son was with him. He called upon me to be attentive, and I responded. Then he said, "There will be a movement this year..., but do not let it bother you." Then he lowered his head contemplating, picking the ground. Then he raised his head and recited this verse: "Allah leads the oppressors astray and does whatever He pleases."⁴⁶ I said, "And what is that, may my life be sacrificed for yours?" He said, "Anyone who denies the right of this son of mine and refuses to recognize his Imamate after me will be equal to one who denied the right of Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) and did not recognize his Imamate after Muhammad (ص)." So I understood that he was implying that his death was near, and that he was appointing his son as his successor.⁴⁷

The Imam (ع) was briefly contemporary to ar-Rashid's regime during which he suffered the tragedy of the assassination of his father Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) and other Alawides. After the murder of his father, he was not safe from the schemes of some of those who flattered the rulers, followed their course, and pretended to show their loyalty by instigating enmity against the regime's opponents, encouraging their elimination, thinking that that would increase the rulers' liking for them and nearness to them, that it would strengthen their position, grant them unique distinctions, and raise them to the highest pinnacles.

Ja'far ibn Yahya says, "I heard as a ibn Ja'far say to Harun (ar-Rashid) upon leaving ar-Riqqa for Mecca, Remember your oath by the dignity of the descendants of Abu Talib that: should anyone after Musa (al-Kadhim [ع]) claim to be the Imam, you would strike his head with the sword. This Ali, his son, claims so, and people are addressing him in the same way they used to address his father.' He looked at him angrily and said, Why? Do you expect me to eliminate each and every one of them?" Musa ibn Mahran says that when he heard Ja'far ibn Yahya say so, he went to him (i.e. to Imam ar-Rida) and told him what he had heard. Ar-Rida (ع) responded by saying, "What do I have to do with them? By Allah, they cannot hurt me in the least."

Such instigation was not confined within a reasonable limit but went beyond it to where instigation might cause ar-Rashid to pay serious attention, for the Barmakis were most antagonistic towards the Descendants of the Prophet (ص) and the most cruel among them in their grudge, so much so that it is reported that Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki was the one who ordered Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) to be murdered⁴⁸ when the Abbaside caliphate was under their mercy.⁴⁹

Imam ar-Rida (ع) rendered Allah's retribution against the Barmakis to their persecution and oppression the worst of which was suffered by Imam al-Kadhim (⁵⁰ع). Suffices for proof is the fact that Yahya ibn Khalid was the one who plotted the ugly plot against Imam al-Kadhim (ع) after causing Harun ar-Rashid to be angry with him, instigating ar-Rashid against the Imam (ع) and using some simpleton weaklings among the Alawides to achieve his goal.⁵¹

Finally, ar-Rashid is surrounded by a large number of courtiers instigating him to kill Imam ar-Rida (ع), and they succeeded in stirring his feelings against the Imam (ع). Abul-Salt al-Harawi narrates saying that one day he was sitting with the Imam (ع) at his house when a messenger from Harun ar-Rashid came in and ordered the Imam (ع) to present himself before the caliph. The Imam (ع) said, "O Abul-Salt! He does not call upon me at such time of the night except for trouble. By Allah! He cannot do anything which I hate to me because of what I had come to know of certain statements said by my grandfather the Messenger of Allah (ع)." Abul-Salt continues his narrative to say that he accompanied the Imam (ع) as he entered Harun ar-Rashid's court.

When the latter looked at him, ar-Rida (ع) recited a certain supplication by the Prophet (ص). When the Imam (ع) stood before ar-Rashid, the latter looked carefully at him and then said, "O Abul-Hassan! We have ordered a hundred thousand dirhams for you; write down of all your family's needs." When the Imam (ع) left the court, the caliph kept looking at him as he was leaving and said behind his back: "I wished something, and Allah wished otherwise, and what Allah wished was good."

Thus did Allah save the life of the Imam (ع) who sought refuge with Him, seeking His assistance through the sincere words which he had come to know that his grandfather the Messenger of Allah (ع) had articulated. Ar-Rashid, on the other hand, went back to himself satisfied after destiny had opposed his vicious intention just to realize that what Allah had done was, indeed, better than what he himself had intended to do.

Safwan ibn Yahya is quoted as saying, "When Abul-Hassan Musa (ع) passed away and ar-Rida (ع) started preaching his mission, we were worried about his life (ar-Rida's) and we said to him, You have declared something of great magnanimity, and we worry about your safety because of this tyrant.' He said, Let him try his best, for he shall not have the means to hurt me."[52](#)

Muhammad ibn Sinan said, "During Harun's reign, I said to Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع), You have made yourself well-known because of this matter and followed in the footsteps of your father while Haroun's sword is dripping with blood.' He said, What made me bold in this regard is that the Messenger of Allah (ع) had said, If Abu Jahl harms even one hair on my head, then bear witness that I am not a Prophet at all,' and I tell you that if Harun took one hair away from my head, then bear witness that I am not an Imam at all."[53](#)

Some Waqfis tried to warn him against declaring himself as the Imam (ع) and openly acting as such, and he told them that such a matter did not require a warning, and that the fear that Harun might hurt him was groundless.

Those individuals had only one objective in mind: to discourage ar-Rida (ع) from making his Imamate public so that they might be able to promote their "sect" which claimed that the Qa'im was Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) and that he was still alive as we mentioned above. Let us review the dialogue between the Imam (ع) and some of those Waqfis. Abu Masrooq has stated the following:

"A group of Waqfis entered the house of the Imam (ع) once and among them were men like Abu Hamzah al-Bata'ini, Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Ammar, al-Husayn ibn Umran, and al-Husayn ibn Abu Sa'd al-Makari. Ali ibn Abu Hamzah said to him, "May my life be sacrificed for you! Tell us how your father is doing." He said, "He, peace be with him, passed away." He said, "Who did he recommend to succeed him?" He answered, "Myself." He said, "You are claiming something which none among your forefathers claimed, starting from Ali ibn Abu Talib downwards." He said, "It was said by the best of my forefathers and the most distinguished among them: the Messenger of Allah (ع)."

He asked, "Do not you fear for your safety?" He said, "Had I worried about my safety, I would have been in a position to do something to protect myself. The Messenger of Allah (ع) was approached once by Abu Lahab who threatened him; the Messenger of Allah (ع) said to him: If I am scratched by you even slightly, then I am, indeed, a liar.' That was the first time the Messenger of Allah (ع) instigated someone, and this is the first time I do likewise and tell you that if I am scratched by Harun even slightly, then I am, indeed, a liar."

Husayn ibn Mahran said to him, "If this comes to pass, then we will have achieved our objective." He said, "What do you exactly want? Should I go to Harun and tell him that I am the Imam (ع) and that he is nobody? This is not how the Messenger of Allah behaved at the onset of his mission; rather, he said so to his family and followers and those whom he trusted from among the public. You believe that Imamate belongs to my father, claiming that what stops me from admitting that my father is alive is my own fear. I do not fear you when I say to you that I am the Imam; so, how can I fear you if my father is, indeed, alive?"[54](#)

The Imam's expectation proved to be true; Ar-Rashid breathed his last without hurting the Imam (ع) in the least.

As regarding the Imam's life during al-Amin's reign, we cannot recount any incident regarding the government's stance towards Imam ar-Rida (ع), and this may be attributed to the confusing environment in which the Abbaside caliphate found itself due to internal dissents which led in the end to a serious split among the members of the ruling dynasty.

Such split which was caused by al-Amin who deposed his brother al-Ma'mun from the post of heir to the throne and the nomination of his son, Musa, in his place after listening to the advice of al-Fadl ibn ar-Rabi" who had a personal vendetta against al-Ma'mun and who feared him for his post should he become the caliph instead, since he had already opposed him openly.[55](#)

There is disagreement regarding caliph al-Amin's school of thought. Some think that he was Shi'a, while others think that he only pretended to be so out of his concern for Imam ar-Rida's feelings and for those of other Alawides while in reality he was otherwise. But his discourses, debates, and his serious method whereby he challenged what was regarded as accepted facts by those who opposed his views dispel any doubts regarding his acceptance of Shi'aism.

Moreover, there are certain noteworthy measures which he undertook supporting this view such as his belief that the Holy Qur'an was the Word of Allah created by Him, and his insistence that scholars and

faqih should indicate and promote this view, so much so that he stirred quite a reaction among contemporary Islamic circles to the extent that it was referred to as “the Holy Qur’an’s ordeal.”

His father, ar-Rashid, differed from him in this regard. When he heard that Bishr al-Marisi endorsed the concept that the Holy Qur’an was created by Allah, he said, “If I ever lay my hand on him, I shall strike his neck with the sword.”⁵⁶ Also, he believed in the temporary marriage of mut’a, and he refuted the views of the second caliph in this regard with arguments which have already been recorded by leading historians.

Add to all this his preference of Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) over all other companions of the Prophet (ص) and his view that Ali was more worthy of succeeding the Messenger of Allah (ص) as the caliph. Yet another supporting argument is his serious attempt to make the cursing of Mu’awiyah a tradition and enforce it on his subjects; he announced to people once the following:

There shall be no pardon for anyone guilty of praising Mu’awiyah, and the best of creation after the Prophet (ص) is Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع).⁵⁷

That was in response to Mu’awiyah who made the cursing of Ali a tradition which continued throughout the reign of all Umayyad rulers till the days of caliph Omer ibn Abdul-Aziz who put an end to it in order to safeguard the government of the Umayyads against the disgust people felt towards such ignominious tradition. He sympathized with the Alawides, and returned Fedak to them.

Al-Ma'mun, in fact, sincerely felt guilty about the crimes committed by his predecessors against the Alawides as a letter he wrote to some Hashemites testified as stated above wherein he said, “The Umayyads killed anyone (among the Alawides) who unsheathed a sword, while we, the Abbasides, have been killing them en masse; so, ask the great souls of the Hashemites what sin they committed, and ask those who were buried in Baghdad and Kufa alive...”⁵⁸

Al-Ma'mun’s inclination towards Shaism is the result of many factors of a permanent impact upon his way of thinking, starting with his childhood when a Shi’a educator planted deeply in his soul the allegiance to Ali and the family of Ali (ع), and ending with his residence in parts of Khurasan where mostly Shi’as lived. Al-Ma'mun himself narrated an anecdote with a moral which taught him to sympathize with Shi’as. It involved an encounter with his father ar-Rashid who was very well known for his cruelty, tyranny, arrogance and hatred of the Alawides, especially Imam Musa ibn Ja’far (ع) whom he poisoned. Al-Ma'mun states that when Imam Musa ibn Ja’far (ع) met ar-Rashid at Medina, ar-Rashid showed a great deal of humbleness before him and a great deal of respect to a degree which attracted his own attention; so, he continues to say, “When there was nobody else present, I said, O commander of the faithful! Who is this man whom you have held with such high esteem, respected a great deal, stood up to receive, and even seated in the most prominent place while seating yourself in front of him, and you even ordered us to hold the rein of his horse?!” He said, This is the Imam of the people, the Proof of Allah’s Mercy to His creation (Hujjatullah) and His caliph among His servants.’

I asked, O commander of the faithful! Are not all these attributes yours and fulfilled in your person?' He replied, I am the Imam of the masses by force and through oppression, while Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) is the Imam in truth. By Allah, son, he is more worthy of being the successor of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as the caliph than I am and anyone else among the people! By Allah! If you yourself attempt to take such caliphate from me, I shall take it away from you even if that means gouging your eyes, for power is blind!'”[59](#)

Harun ar-Rashid was still not satisfied till he divided the domains of the state into three sections, granting al-Amin authority over Iraq and Syria up to the end of his western possessions; to al-Ma'mun he gave the territories from Hamadan up to the eastern borders of his domains; to al-Qasim he gave the peninsula, the sea ports, and the metropolises after having secured the oath of allegiance for him after his brother al-Ma'mun and giving him the option to keep or depose al-Ma'mun.[60](#)

Thus, ar-Rashid thought, the ghost of dissension would be averted, and the government after his death would be secured for all his sons since he gave each one of them a portion thereof whereby he would maintain a force strong enough to deter the aggression of the other.

People predicted ominous consequences because of what ar-Rashid had done. Some of them said that he sowed the seeds of evil and war among his sons.[61](#) Some wise men said that he caused them to fall into an inner conflict the perils of which victimized the subjects.[62](#) The conflict among the two brothers was worsened by the instigation of some top rank politicians in each party.

On one hand, we find al-Fadl ibn ar-Rabi", who caused the army to renege on its sworn promise of support for al-Ma'mun in Khurasan as soon as ar-Rashid died, marched to Baghdad in order to strengthen al-Amin's position, trying to aggravate the tension between al-Amin and his brother al-Ma'mun, instigating the first to nullify the allegiance to al-Ma'mun and change it to his son Musa, depending in so doing on various means of instigation which in the end pushed al-Amin to attack his brother.

Al-Fadl, by doing so, was trying to get rid of al-Ma'mun as the regent for fear that should he come to rule, he would certainly seek revenge against him due to his going back on his promise to support al-Ma'mun whom he slighted and the oath of allegiance to whom he violated.[63](#)

Al-Irshad narrates that al-Ma'mun discussed the subject of regency with ar-Rida (ع), saying, "I have decided that you should be my successor." The Imam said, "Exempt me from that, O commander of the faithful, for I have neither the ability nor the strength for that." He said, "I have decided that you should be my successor."

The Imam said, "Exempt me from that, O commander of the faithful." Al-Ma'mun responded with a statement which was more of a threat than anything else; he said to him: "Omer ibn al-Khattab entrusted six persons to consult regarding the caliphate; one of them was your grandfather, Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع), and he preconditioned that anyone who went against their decision should be executed;

therefore, you will have to accept what I have decreed for you, for I see no way that I can ever change my mind.”[64](#)

The Imam (ع), therefore, had to agree.[65](#) It is also narrated that a lengthy discussion went on between both men in which al-Ma'mun offered the Imam to be the caliph and the Imam refused to accept, then he offered him the regency and he again refused, so al-Ma'mun said to him, “You always say what I hate to hear, and you think that you are safe from my might; therefore, I swear by Allah that you should either accept the regency willingly or I shall force you to do so; therefore, accept out of your own will; otherwise, I shall certainly strike your neck with the sword.”[66](#)

What proves the fact that al-Ma'mun was not serious in his offer to the Imam to be the regent is a narration stating that al-Fadl an-Nawbakhti, who was an astronomer believed to be a Shi'a, wanted to test al-Ma'mun's intentions, so he wrote him saying, “The order of the stars indicates that naming ar-Rida (ع) as the regent at this time cannot be done; otherwise, the person named will suffer a catastrophe.

Therefore, if al-Ma'mun's intentions agree with what he proclaims in public, he ought to postpone this matter till a more opportune time.” To this, al-Ma'mun warned him against discouraging Thul-Riyasatayn from contracting that agreement at that time, and that if he did not, he would know that the postponement was instigated by an-Nawbakhti.

He also ordered him to return his own letter back to him so that nobody else would come to find out about it. He then came to know that al-Fadl was aware of the fact that time was not ripe for contracting the regency because he himself had knowledge of the science of the stars; therefore, an-Nawbakhti feared that the change of mind of al-Fadl ibn Sahl was because of him personally, and he would thus be killed by al-Ma'mun, so he rode to him and convinced him through his own knowledge of astronomy that time was indeed ripe for it, contrary to the reality, because he was more knowledgeable than him in astrology, and he kept confusing him till he finally convinced him.[67](#)

Having failed to convince the Imam that he would abdicate the throne for him, al-Ma'mun requested him to accept to be the regent and to name him the succeeding caliph after him, but the Imam again insisted on refusing, so much so that al-Ma'mun had to seek the assistance of some of his best aides despite the fact that they themselves were not convinced that it was such a good idea, thinking that al-Ma'mun was serious. In his book titled Kitab Al-Irshad, Shaikh al-Mufid states the following:

"A group of historians and court biographers who were contemporary to the [Abbaside] caliphs say that when al-Ma'mun wanted to name Ali ibn Musa (ع) as his successor, and having thought seriously about the matter, he ordered al-Fadl ibn Sahl to come to him and he informed him of his intention, ordering him to seek the assistance of his brother al-Hassan ibn Sahl[68](#) in this regard, and he did just that. So they met with him, and al-Hassan kept pointing out the magnanimity of the consequences of his suggestion, acquainting him with the outcomes resulting from taking his family out of it and affecting his

own life.

Al-Ma'mun, thereupon, said to him: "I pledged to Allah that if I lay my hand on the person who deposed me, I would hand the caliphate over to the best person among the progeny of Abu Talib, and I do not know anyone better than this man on the face of earth." So, when both al-Fadl and al-Hassan saw his determination to carry out this matter, they stopped opposing him and he sent them to ar-Rida (ع). They offered him the position, but he refused to accept it, and they continued pressing him till he finally agreed, so they went back to al-Ma'mun and told him about his approval whereupon he was very pleased."[69](#)

Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani stated something similar to the above with this variation: "He dispatched them to Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (ع) and they offered it to him, and they continued pressing him while he was refusing till one of them said to him, If you agree, let it be so, but if you do not, we shall surely harm you,' and he threatened to kill him. Then one of them said, By Allah he ordered me to strike your neck with my sword if you go against his wish.'" [70](#)

Imam ar-Rida (ع) knew beforehand about al-Ma'mun's intentions through his knowledgeable foresight of the circumstances which led al-Ma'mun to vest the regency upon him, and he was contented that he would not actually accede to the throne in the future. Al-Madaini quotes one of his sources saying, "When ar-Rida (ع) was seated during the regency celebration, with the orators and poets surrounding him and the flags fanning him, one individual who was present there and then said, I was close to him that day, and he looked at me and noticed my optimistic smile regarding the event, so he beckoned for me to come close. When I did, he said the following to me while nobody except me could hear him: Do not let this excite you, and do not be overly optimistic, for it will never materialize." [71](#)

Al-Ma'mun was not satisfied with all of that; he went ahead and subjected the Imam (ع) to a strict surveillance whereby he was closely watching all his movements, and he indirectly restricted his contacts with others; ar-Rayyan ibn as-Salt narrates the following:

"Hisham ibn Ibrahim ar-Rashid i was the closest person to ar-Rida (ع) before he was taken to the caliph's palace, and he was a courteous and brilliant scholar. Ar-Rida's contacts used to be transacted through him and under his supervision, and he used to collect all monies on his behalf before he, Abul-Hassan, was taken away. When he was taken away to the palace, Hisham ibn Ibrahim contacted Thul-Riyasatayn and he tried his best to win his favour and started informing him and al-Ma'mun about ar-Rida's movements, thus he won their confidence and did not conceal anything regarding the Imam (ع) from them.

Al-Ma'mun, therefore, appointed him as the Imam's chamberlain, and nobody could have audience with the Imam (ع) except those whom he liked, and he enforced a tight surveillance on the Imam (ع), so much so that none of his supporters could reach him without Hisham's approval, and he used to inform al-Ma'mun and Thul-Riyasatayn of anything and everything ar-Rida (ع) said at home." [72](#)

What prompted al-Ma'mun to take such a harsh measure was his great apprehension that the Alawides, who predominated Khurasan, encouraged and directed by the Imam (ع), might move to topple his government.

Having evaluated the general status of the political policies of his government, which were surrounded by tumultuous events starting with Baghdad going back against its promise of support to him and passing by the Shi'a Alawide throngs surrounding his base of government in Khurasan and ending with the Alawide rebellions in Iraq, Hijaz and Yemen, al-Ma'mun thought of curing this weak point by a brilliantly acceptable political move which would be something to divert the attention of the Alawides and the Shi'a residents of Khurasan and, at the same time, constituting a terrible threat to the Abbaside masses in Baghdad.

All such measures, he hoped, would strengthen his influence and help him control all parties involved. This could not be accomplished without naming Imam Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (ع) as the successor to the throne. And so it happened; the caliph sent letters to the Imam (ع) ordering him to go to Merv. The Imam (ع) refused, and a great deal of correspondence ensued between both men till al-Ma'mun finally convinced him to go there, sending a special force to escort him which included al-Dhahhak, or, according to al-Mufid and Abul Faraj al-Isfahani, al-Jalladi. History books do not say much about that trip except small bits and pieces which do not provide us with a clear vision of its nature and mission.

Al-Ma'mun had already ordered his messenger to take a group of dignitaries who were descendants of Abu Talib to the Basra highway, then to al-Ahwaz and Persia, keeping in mind that the alternate route, which was Kufa-al-Jabal-Kerman Shah-Qum, was mostly inhabited by Shi'as and it has their strongholds, and they might be carried away by their enthusiasm upon finding out that the Imam (ع) was among them and might decide to keep him there and thus involve the government in dangerous consequences which might cause its weakening and collapse.

When he entered Nishapur⁷³, he stayed at a neighbourhood called al-Qazwani where there were crowds of pigeons, the pigeons which they call today ar-Rida (ع) pigeons, and there was a spring there the water of which had receded, so he hired workers who repaired it till its water became plentiful. He had a pool built on its outside where stairs were also built according to his instructions leading to the low level of the spring water, so the Imam (ع) went down, made his ablution, came out and said his prayers on the outside.

The Imam (ع) continued his trip till he finally reached Merv where al-Ma'mun had prepared a comfortable place for him, surrounding him with respect and. It was then that al-Ma'mun started to execute the plan which he had plotted for the regency.

Having been convinced to accept, the Imam (ع) said to al-Ma'mun: "I also agree not to name anyone in a post nor remove anyone from a post, that I do not cancel any decree or custom, and to remain as an advisor." The caliph agreed.⁷⁴

In another encounter, al-Ma'mun tried to press the Imam (ع) into participating in the state affairs. Mu'ammār ibn Khallād said that Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع) had said to him, "Al-Ma'mun said to me, O father of al-Hassan! You may suggest the names of some individuals whom you trust to be governors of the areas where corruption is manifest,' and I said to him, If you honour your part of the agreement, I shall certainly honour mine. I agreed to what I agreed on the condition that I do not issue orders nor overrule others, nor depose anyone nor appoint anyone, nor do I go anywhere except wherever Allah sends me. By Allah! Caliphate is something which I never desired, and I used to live in Medina where I would go traverse its alleys on the back of my animal, and when its residents or others asked me to do them a favour, I would do them a favour, and thus they become like my own uncles. My letters still carry weight in various lands, and you have not increased me in the least in whatever blessing Allah has bestowed upon me.' So he said, I shall honour it." ⁷⁵

One of the manifestations of the inaugural regency ceremony was the Eid prayers which al-Ma'mun insisted that the Imam (ع) should conduct in person because he himself had caught a very bad cold, or he may have had another excuse. Al-Irshād quotes Ali ibn Ibrahim who, in turn, quotes Yasir the servant and ar-Rayyān ibn as-Salt saying that when the Eid approached, and ar-Rida (ع) had already been named as the caliph's successor, al-Ma'mun invited him to ride to the place where the occasion was to be celebrated and to lead the congregational prayers and deliver the sermon. Ar-Rida (ع) sent him word saying, "You know what terms exist between both of us; so, please exempt me from conducting the prayers to people." Al-Ma'mun answered saying, "My intention is that people's hearts must rest at peace regarding you and they should come to know your excellences."

Messengers kept going between both men carrying messages, and when al-Ma'mun insisted on his suggestion, he sent him a message saying, "If you exempt me, I would appreciate it, and if you do not, I shall come out just as the Messenger of Allah (ص) and the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) did," whereupon al-Ma'mun said, "Come out however you please."

He ordered the commanders of the army and the chamberlains as well as the public at large to go early to ar-Rida's house. People waited in the alleys and on rooftops to see Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع), and women and children waited for him, too. The army commanders and their attending troops stood guard at his door mounted on their horses till the sun started rising.

Abul-Hassan washed, put on his outdoor clothes. He wore a cotton turban, leaving a tassel of it drape down on his chest and between his shoulders. He rubbed his hands with some perfume, took a cane and told his servants to do likewise. So they all came out, and he was barefoot. He raised his trousers up to half the leg, and his clothes were hanging loosely on him. He walked for a short while, raised his head above and made the takbar and his servants did likewise. Then he walked till he reached his doorstep.

When the leaders and their troops saw him looking like that, they all swiftly alighted, so much so that lucky was whoever happened to have a knife to cut the leather stirrups so that he could jump faster than

the rest, take his sandals off and remain barefoot just as the Imam (ع) had done. Ar-Rida (ع) made takbar again, and everyone else did likewise; it seemed as if the sky and the walls echoed with him, and Merv was shaken with the noise of weeping and hassle when its residents saw Abul-Hassan and heard him say *Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!...*

Al-Ma'mun came to know about all of that. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl Thul-Riyasatayn said to him, "O Commander of the faithful! If ar-Rida (ع) reaches the mosque in such a condition, people will be fascinated by him and we all will have to fear for our lives; so, send him a messenger and tell him to return."

Al-Ma'mun sent him a message saying, "We have over-burdened you and wore you out, and we do not wish that you should suffer any hardship on our account; so, go back home, and let people say their prayers behind whoever they have been praying." Abul-Hassan, therefore, asked for his sandals back, put them on and went back. People on that day differed regarding their prayers, and he did not congregate with them.

Al-Ma'mun's reign was plagued with dissensions and discords both at home and abroad, and part of the problem was the influence the caliph had awarded to his prime minister al-Fadl ibn Sahl. The latter did many things on his own, letting the caliph know what he wanted him to know. Many dignitaries, including top ranking government officials and commanders of the army, were not happy about such an influence.

They were sincere in their intentions to save the deteriorating situation by requesting Imam ar-Rida (ع) to disclose the reality of the status quo to al-Ma'mun, since he was the only one who could not be harmed by al-Fadl nor could anyone instigate al-Ma'mun against him. Ibn Khaldun writes the following:

"As discords took place in Iraq because of al-Hassan ibn Sahl (brother of al-Fadl), and due to people's resentment of his and his brother's excessive influence over al-Ma'mun, then [their outrage at] the nomination of Ali ibn Musa ar-Rida (ع) and the possibility of the caliphate slipping away from the Abbasides' hands, al-Fadl ibn Sahl was meanwhile concealing all of that from al-Ma'mun.

He was going to extremes in such concealment for fear al-Ma'mun might change his heart about him and about his brother. When Harthamah came, he knew that he was going to tell al-Ma'mun about all of that, and that al-Ma'mun trusted the advice of Harthamah; so, he perfected his instigation against him with al-Ma'mun till he made him change his mind about the man and kill him, and he did not even listen to what he wanted to say; therefore, the displeasure of the Shi'as there, as well as that of the residents of Baghdad, intensified against him, and dissensions became widespread.

The commanders of al-Ma'mun's army started talking about it, but they could not inform him of it, so they approached Ali ar-Rida (ع) and asked him to convey the matter to al-Ma'mun. And so it was. He informed him of the rioting and killing in Iraq and that people criticized him for the favourite status which he had granted both al-Fadl and al-Hassan, and for his (ar-Rida's) nomination.

Al-Ma'mun asked him, "Who else besides you knows all of that?" He said, "Yahya ibn Maad, Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran and other prominent army leaders." So he called them to him, and they did not reveal anything except after he had offered them sworn guarantees of their own security, so they told him exactly what ar-Rida (ع) had already told him."[76](#)

At-Tabari provides us with a clear and more precise picture of Imam ar-Rida's situation; he writes the following in his famous history book:

"It was rumoured that Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad [ar-Rida], the Alawide, told al-Ma'mun about the dissension and inter-killing among people, that since the assassination of his brother, al-Fadl was concealing the news from him, that his own family and the public criticized him for certain reasons and said he was a bewildered madman, and that since they saw that he was doing all of that, they swore the oath of allegiance to his uncle Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi as the caliph.

Al-Ma'mun said, "They did not swear the oath of allegiance to him; rather, they accepted him as a governor ruling them in the way al-Fadl had instructed him." He informed him that al-Fadl had indeed lied to him and that he cheated him as well, adding, "The war between Ibrahim and al-Hassan ibn Sahl is raging; people criticize him for the status which you gave him (al-Fadl) and his brother, and they criticize your nomination of myself as your successor."

He asked him, "Who else in my army is aware of that?" He said, "Yahya ibn Mad, Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran, and a number of prominent military commanders." So he called them to his court, and they were Yahya ibn Mad, Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran and Musa and Ali ibn Abu Sa'd, who was son of al-Fadl's sister, and also Khalaf the Egyptian. He asked them about what he had heard, but they refused to tell him anything unless he guaranteed their safety against the threat of revenge by al-Fadl ibn Sahl.

He guaranteed that for them, and he wrote each one of them a statement in his own handwriting to that effect. Then they told him about the discords among his subjects, about the deliberate misinformation he heard from al-Fadl regarding Harthamah, and that Tahir ibn al-Husayn had done an excellent job serving him and opened many lands to his government and strengthened his caliphate.

When he accomplished all of that, he was "rewarded" by banishment to Riqqa where he was not permitted to receive funds from anyone, till his authority was undermined and his troops mutinied, that had his caliphate been in Baghdad, he would have had a better control and nobody would have dared to mislead him as al-Hassan ibn Sahl had. The land from one end to the other was shaking under his feet. Tahir ibn al-Husayn had been forgotten that year, since the murder of Muhammad in Riqqa, without being utilized in these wars while someone who was a lot less qualified was in charge...[77](#)

The picture now was turned upside down in the eyes of al-Ma'mun, but he did not try to change the way how he was dealing with al-Fadl because the latter was in charge of the government base in both Khurasan and Baghdad.

In Khurasan, the psychological war, which he waged by deposing Tahir ibn al-Husayn and by having Harthamah murdered, nurtured the desire among the commanders of the army for mutiny, pushing them to yield to his wishes and expectations after having felt that al-Ma'mun represented no more than a magic wand in al-Fadl's hands. As regarding Baghdad, it was in the grip of his brother al-Hassan ibn Sahl who was considered as al-Fadl's right hand and the big stick whereby he threatened al-Ma'mun.

As regarding those men who exposed to al-Ma'mun the reality of al-Fadl's conduct and the dangers it implied, they were terrified when al-Fadl tore down the assurances which had been written by al-Ma'mun guaranteeing their safety against his wrath and revenge upon coming to know about their instigation and their support of what Imam ar-Rida (ع) had said about him. At-Tabari says,

"When that became certain to al-Ma'mun, he ordered preparations to march to Baghdad, and when al-Fadl ibn Sahl came to know about those preparations, he came to know only about some of them, so he interrogated those men, whipping and jailing some of them and pulling the hair out of the beards of others. Ali ibn Musa [ar-Rida] came to his court and told him what had happened to those men and reminded him of his assurances to them. He [al-Ma'mun] answered him by saying that he was only tolerating."[78](#)

Al-Ma'mun was now convinced that he had no choice except to get rid of al-Fadl ibn Sahl whose job in modern times is equivalent to prime minister. It is also interesting that chance should play a major role in the execution of al-Ma'mun's plan to eliminate al-Fadl, and it may even have been arranged by al-Ma'mun himself.

While on his way to Baghdad, al-Fadl, who was in the company of al-Ma'mun, received a letter from his brother al-Hassan ibn Sahl in which he said, "I have looked in the changing of this year according to the calculations of the movements of the stars and I found out that you will in such and such month, on a Wednesday, taste the pain of red-hot iron and of the burning fire, and I am of the view that you should today go in the company of ar-Rida (ع) and the commander of the faithful to the bath-house to take a bath and then pour blood over your body so that the ill luck of this omen may leave you." Al-Fadl, therefore, sent a letter to al-Ma'mun asking him to go with him to the bath-house, and to request Abul-Hassan (ع) to join them too.

Al-Ma'mun wrote a letter in that same meaning to ar-Rida (ع) who wrote him back saying that he would not enter the bath-house the next day, nor would he recommend that the commander of the faithful should enter it either, nor even al-Fadl. But al-Ma'mun repeated his request twice, and Abul-Hassan wrote him again saying, "I shall not enter the bath-house tomorrow for I saw in a vision the Messenger of Allah (ص) last night telling me not to enter the bath-house tomorrow; therefore, I do not advise the commander of the faithful nor al-Fadl to enter the bath-house tomorrow,"

Whereupon al-Ma'mun wrote him saying, "You have, master, said the truth, and so has the Messenger of Allah (ص); I shall not enter the bath-house tomorrow, and al-Fadl knows best what he should do..."[79](#)

Al-Fadl entered the bath-house just to be received by the swords of the assassins as the letter he had received from his brother al-Hassan ibn Sahl had “predicted,” or was it really a prediction?!

We do not think it is unlikely that the letter prepared by al-Ma'mun imitated the writing style of the al-Fadl's brother, al-Hassan, in order to avoid being accused of murdering his prime minister. It is also possible that al-Ma'mun wished to get rid of both al-Fadl and Imam ar-Rida (ع) by that method of assassination, but the Imam (ع) was alert in the face of al-Ma'mun's cunning and scheming, so he resisted the insistence of al-Ma'mun to enter the bath-house with him and with al-Fadl by tact and caution.

The last paragraph of the anecdote tells us clearly that the letter was a plot by al-Ma'mun to kill both al-Fadl and the Imam (ع); otherwise, why did al-Ma'mun abstain from warning al-Fadl against entering the bath-house although the Imam (ع) had asked him to do just that?

What provides evidence is the fact that those who killed al-Fadl were among the closest courtiers and train members of al-Ma'mun and, according to one account, they later on faced al-Ma'mun with their accusation that he was the one who asked them to do it. At-Tabari writes the following:

When he [Ma'mun] reached Sarkhas, some men assaulted al-Fadl ibn Sahl at the bath-house and struck him with their swords till he was dead, and that was on a Friday two nights before the end of Shaban in the year 202 A.H./817 A.D. They were arrested, and it became clear that those who assassinated al-Fadl were among al-Ma'mun's closest courtiers. They were four in number: Ghalib al-Mas'udi, the black man, Qistantine (Constantine), Faraj al-Daylami, and Muwaffaq of Sicily; they killed him and he was sixty years old and they ran away. Al-Ma'mun posted a reward of ten thousand dinars for anyone who would bring them to him, and they were brought to him by al-Abbas ibn Haitham ibn Bazar-Jamhar al-Daynari, and they said to al-Ma'mun, “But you ordered us to kill him!” He ordered them to be killed. It is also said that when those who killed al-Fadl were arrested, al-Ma'mun interrogated them, and some of them said that Ali ibn Abu Sa'd the son of al-Fadl's sister had dispatched them, while others among them denied that, and he ordered their execution. After that he ordered Abdul-Aiz ibn Imran, Ali, Musa, and Khalaf, to be brought to him, and he interrogated them. They denied having any knowledge of the matter, but he did not believe them and ordered their execution too, sending their heads to al-Hassan ibn Sahl in Wasit as a trophy and informing him about his own pain because of the tragedy of the murder of al-Fadl and that he appointed him in his place.[80](#)

Thus did al-Ma'mun get rid of the strongest power base within his government which threatened his authority and his fate, leaving only one obstacle in his way to guarantee to uproot the rebellion in Baghdad by dealing with its root causes which included the presence of Imam ar-Rida (ع) who, according to the Abbasides, was a difficult knot they could not be loyal to al-Ma'mun except if he untied it, for its presence meant the end of the Abbaside rule and the beginning of the Alawide.

It was not politically feasible for al-Ma'mun to reach Baghdad accompanied by Imam ar-Rida (ع), for that

would stir the winds of dissension against him which he might not be strong enough to withstand. We are convinced that al-Ma'mun was the one who plotted to end the life of the Imam (ع) by giving him poisoned grapes. Al-Ma'mun's letter to the Abbasides and the residents of Baghdad, which he wrote after the demise of Imam ar-Rida (ع), lends credence to such a conviction. "He wrote the Abbasides and their supporters as well as the people of Baghdad informing them of the death of Ali ibn Musa and that they had resented his nominating him as his successor, asking them now to go back to their loyalty to him."⁸¹

This may be understood as a clear admission that the death of the Imam (ع) was not natural during those circumstances, and the text Ibn Khaldun provides in expressing the contents of this letter provides even clearer clues to accusing al-Ma'mun of murdering him; he says the following in his *Tarikh*:

"... And al-Ma'mun sent messages to al-Hassan ibn Sahl, to the people of Baghdad, and to his supporters apologizing for naming him his heir to the throne and inviting them to go back to his loyalty."⁸²

As-Saduq narrates saying, "While ar-Rida (ع) was breathing his last, al-Ma'mun said to him, "By Allah! I do not know which of the two calamities is greater: losing you and parting from you, or people's accusation that I assassinated you..."⁸³

In another narrative by Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani, al-Ma'mun said to him, "It is very hard for me to live to see you die, and there was some hope hinging upon your stay, yet even harder for me is people saying that I have poisoned you, and Allah knows that I am innocent of that."⁸⁴

This situation discloses the fact that the accusation of his own murder of the Imam (ع) was the subject of argument, maybe even of conviction, even then, for al-Ma'mun asserts people's accusation of him and he tries to extract an admission from the Imam (ع) clearing him of it, as Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani mentions in his book *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*.

Accounts regarding the method al-Ma'mun employed to kill Imam ar-Rida (ع) are abundant. Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani and Shaikh al-Mufid say that he killed him by poisoned pomegranate juice and poisoned grape juice. In his book *Al-Irshad*, al-Mufid quotes Abdullah ibn Bashir saying, Al-Ma'mun ordered me to let my nails grow as long as they could without letting anyone notice that; so I did, then he ordered to see me and he gave me something which looked like tamarind and said, Squeeze this with both your hands,' and I did.

Then he stood up, left me and went to see ar-Rida (ع) to whom he said, How are you?' He answered, I hope I am alright.' He said, I, too, by the Grace of Allah, am alright; did any well-wisher visit you today?' He answered in the negative, so al-Ma'mun became angry and called upon his servants to come, then he ordered one of them to immediately take the pomegranate juice to him, adding, ... for he cannot do without it.' Then he called me to him and said, Squeeze it with your own hands,' and so I did. Then al-Ma'mun handed the juice to ar-Rida (ع) in person, and that was the reason for his death for he stayed only two days before he (ع) died."

Abul-Salt al-Harawi is quoted as saying, "I entered ar-Rida's house after al-Ma'mun had already left; he said to me, O Abul-Salt! They have done it...!" and he kept unifying and praising Allah." Muhammad ibn al-Jahm is quoted as saying, "Ar-Rida (ع) used to love grapes. Some grapes were said to be prepared for him; they were pierced with needles at their very tips and were kept like that for several days. Then the needles were taken out, and they were brought to him and he ate some of them and fell into the sickness to which we have referred. The grapes killed him, and it was said that that was one of the most effective methods of poisoning."⁸⁵ Al-Ma'mun was, indeed, the one who killed Imam ar-Rida (ع), there is no doubt about it.

His death occurred at Toos in a village called Sanabad, of the Nooqan area, and he was buried at the house of Hameed ibn Tahtaba under the dome where Harun ar-Rashid had been buried, and he was buried beside him facing the *qibla*.⁸⁶

When ar-Rida (ع) died, al-Ma'mun did not disclose when it happened, leaving him dead for one day and one night, then he called for Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad and a group of descendants of Abu Talib.

When they were present, he showed him [Imam] to them; his corpse looked alright; then he started weeping and addressed the corpse saying, "O Brother! It is indeed very hard for me to see you in such a condition, and I was hoping to go before you, but Allah insisted on carrying out His decree," and he showed a great deal of agony and grief and went out carrying the coffin with others till he reached the place where it is now buried...⁸⁷

... So al-Ma'mun was present there before the grave was dug, and he ordered his [Imam's] grave to be dug beside that of his father, then he approached us and said, "the person inside this coffin told me that when his grave is dug, water and fish will appear underneath; so, dig..." They dug. When they finished digging, a spring of water appeared, and fish appeared in it, then the water dissipated, and ar-Rida (ع) was then buried.⁸⁸

In Yemen, in the aftermath of the Imam's assassination, Ibrahim ibn Musa ibn Ja'far rebelled and took control of the government after banishing al-Ma'mun's governor. In Mecca, al-Husayn ibn al-Hassan al-Aftas revolted, and Muhammad ibn Ja'far was named caliph. In Basra, Zaid ibn Musa ibn Ja'far rebelled. He was nicknamed "Zaid of the fire" due to the number of the homes of the Abbasides and of their followers which he had burnt. Whenever he came across a man draped in black, he would burn his home. Ali ibn Sa'd marched to him.

Zaid requested him to guarantee his safety if he gave up, and Ali agreed. But he nevertheless arrested him⁸⁹ and sent him to al-Hassan ibn Sahl who ordered to have him executed while al-Hajjaj ibn Khaythamah was present, so he said, "Prince! Do not rush, for I have a piece of advice for you." He stopped the executioner and came close to him. He said, "Prince! Did you receive instructions from the commander of the faithful to do what you are about to?" He answered in the negative, so he asked

again, "Then why are you executing the cousin of the commander of the faithful without his knowledge or consultation?" Then he narrated for him the story of Abu Abdullah al-Aftas whom ar-Rashid jailed under the watchful eyes of Ja'far ibn Yahya. Ja'far killed him without his knowledge and sent his head on a platter to him together with other Nawraz⁹⁰ presents.

When ar-Rashid ordered Masrar to kill Ja'far, he said to him, "If Ja'far asked you about his crime for which you are killing him, tell him that you are killing him for his own killing of my cousin Ibn al-Aftas whom he killed without my knowledge." Then al-Hajjaj ibn Khaythamah said to al-Hassan ibn Sahl, "O Prince! Do you feel secure should anything happen between you and the commander of the faithful if you kill this man and use it as an excuse just as ar-Rashid had done against Ja'far ibn Yahya?" Al-Hassan said to al-Hajjaj, "May Allah reward you!" Then he ordered Zaid to be returned to his prison where he was kept till he was transported to al-Ma'mun. Once he was there, al-Ma'mun sent him to his brother ar-Rida (ع) who set him free.⁹¹ One of the interesting anecdotes narrated about him is the following:

"When he was brought to al-Ma'mun, the latter said to him, "O Zaid! You led the uprising in Basra, and instead of starting with the homes of our common enemies: the Umayyads, Banu Thaqaf, Uday, Bahila and al Ziyad, you targeted the homes of your own cousins." Zaid, who had a humorous temper, said, "I, indeed, erred from each direction, O commander of the faithful! If I go back, I will start with our enemies!" Al-Ma'mun laughed and sent him to his brother ar-Rida (ع) saying, "I have pardoned him just to please you." When he was brought to the Imam (ع), he was reprimanded then released."⁹²

What we try to get acquainted with by examining the Imam's stand towards his brother "Zaid of the fire" was the reality regarding the Imam's viewpoint of the revolutionary method employed by the Alawides in their revolutions against the Abbasides. We find the Imam (ع) taking a strictly negative stand towards his brother Zaid. Yet he did not rebuke him and blame him simply because he had revolted against the government, but rather because he had committed several unlawful acts according to Islamic Shari'a such as looting, confiscating, burning, in which acts he did not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty.

Other than that, the sincere Alawide revolutions which aimed at standing in the face of injustice and oppression used to enjoy the support of the Imams who considered them the only way to disclose to the nation how corrupt the government was, and to make them aware of its infringements and transgressions.

Al-Ma'mun's tolerance towards those who rebelled against him was not in contradiction with his general conduct. On one hand, he wanted to compete with the Alawides in winning the public opinion to his side. On the other hand, he was trying to stay away from getting involved in shedding their blood and seeking revenge against them which did not agree with his inclination, though in theory, towards the Alawides.

The Imam (ع) had sided with the Alawide revolution of Ibn Tabataba under the command of Abul-

Saraya; this is a fact. Muhammad ibn al-Athram, Medina's chief of the police force of Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Alawi during the days of Abul-Saraya, is quoted as saying, "His near in kin and some people from Quraish gathered around him and swore the oath of allegiance to him saying, If you send word to Abul-Hassan (ع), he will surely support us, and we will be thus united.'

Sulayman said to me, Go to him and convey my greetings to him and tell him that his kinfolk have gathered and desired that he should join them; so, if you wish, please do so.' So I met him at al-Hamra and I conveyed the message to him. He said, "Convey my greeting to him and tell him that I will join him after twenty days." I conveyed to him the message with which I was sent. On the 18th day, Warqa, al-Jalladi's commander, marched towards us, whereupon I ran in the direction of the two Surs. When I heard someone calling me 'O Abu Athram!', I turned back, and it was Abul-Hassan (ع) asking me: 'Did the twenty days pass already?!"[93](#)

Such cautious stand of the Imam (ع) was not due to evading his participation in the revolutionary movement but was the result of a realistic calculation of the development of events in the sphere of the movement of revolutions along the Abbaside rule and before them the Umayyad. For this reason, we cannot conclude that the Imam's lack of participation in a rebellion meant that he was not convinced of the principle of its necessity.

Now let us turn to the intellectual contributions of this great sage to Islam in particular and to humanity in general. Nobody can do justice to all the rich aspects of the intellectual life of Imam ar-Rida (ع), but let us glance at his intellectual output in various fields of knowledge and scholarship.

Some historians doubted the scholarship of the Imams, let alone their scholarly superiority, basing their doubts on the claim that had they been truly scholars, their books would have been made available to the public as is the case with all other scholars.

Anyone who considers the revolution of Imam Husayn (ع) against Yazid as a mistake committed by the Imam (ع) and a gross miscalculation can be expected to make a statement like this which we cannot attribute to ignorance or to lack of the ability to know, but it is nothing other than the dark cloud of sectarian prejudice forming a curtain between a prejudiced person and his seeing events, issues, and reflections as they really are. This is true about Muslims and non-Muslims.

A "fair-minded" historian is asked to tell us about the books authored by the sahaba and their works from whom he derived the principles and precepts of the creed of the Prophet (ص), or even the works of the tabieen whom he regards as the second class that is knowledgeable of the issues of the sharaa, custodians of its structure. What books did the "righteous caliphs" write?! Can you call the title of any of them besides Nahjul-Balagha or Mushaf Fatima?! Let us stop here for a minute; surely many readers have heard and probably read Nahjul-Balagha, but not many of them are familiar with Fatima's mushaf; so, let us shed some light on it here.

Linguistically, the word "mushaf" means: a collection of suhuf, plural of sahafa, a page or a tablet. The

word “qur’an” means: a reading material, a written text. Both words are used at the present time to denote the Book of Allah, the Holy Qur’an, but that was not the case during the dawn of Islam.

Mushaf Fatima, or Fatima’s mushaf, is not a copy of the Holy Qur’an as one may be tempted to believe. One of the scholars who sheds light on it is Thiqatul-Islam Muhammad ibn Ya’qub al-Kulayni. He does so on page 295 and following pages of Vol. 1 of his famous classic work titled *Usul al-Kafi*. The edition consulted for this book was published by Dar at-Ta’aruf (Beirut, Lebanon) in 1411 A.H./1990 A.D.

Al-Kulayni quotes a dialogue between Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (ع) and his great companion, Abu Busayr, wherein the Imam (ع) details the most precious relics Ahl al-Bayt (ع) have, and the list includes, among others, Fatima’s mushaf. The Imam (ع) described this *mushaf* as follows: “It is a *mushaf* three times the size of the Qur’an, yet it does not contain even one Qur’anic verse.” The Imam (ع) continued to describe the extent of its contents to Abu Busayr.

It contains, among others, a chronology of Islamic events, numerous traditions of the Prophet (ص), numerous *qudsi* traditions and many narratives related by arch-angel Gabriel to the Prophet (ص). Refer to this text for a description of “al-jami’a”, a 70-yard long book written on ox skin by the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع).

The legacy our Imams, members of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) in various fields of knowledge is narrated about them by those with whom they associated, their admirers and sincere followers, and it is sufficient to acquaint us with the extent of their knowledge and superiority over all others barring none. Is it really possible that Ibn Khaldun did not review such legacy of ahadith which reached us through them and recorded by scholars and thinkers and upon which the structure of their school of thought, in which a large section of the nation believes, stood? We doubt it; nay, we are sure about the unrealistic nature of such an odd question especially since Ibn Khaldun is one of the most knowledgeable, highly intellectual, and mature writers. A writer of such caliber is not expected to be so ignorant. Ignorant he was not, prejudiced he surely was, and so are millions others...

The Imams were tested during various periods of their lives by pressing crises due to the trespassing of oppressive rulers on their civil liberties. They pursued their followers and sincere adherents, straitening on them in various aspects of their everyday life, so much so that the word rafidi came to represent in the eyes of the rulers the final indictment of anyone proven to be “guilty” of its context, a believer in its background.

Because of that, the chance was lost for many of those who sought knowledge to derive from that leading fountainhead, and the chance to find the scholarly solutions for the intellectual problems because of which they were disturbing their minds. Despite all these pressures and violent trespassing, mankind is not intellectually deprived of a great deal of intellectual masterpieces which the Imams (ع) dictated to their students and disciples in various aspects of scholarship.

Some of those students used to bribe the jailers so that they might agree to carry written questions to

the jailed Imam (ع) and bring them back his answers. They only desired to benefit from the presence of the Imam (ع), and they aspired to be faithful to the trust of scholarship. They, moreover, wanted to protect the faith from the abyss of doubt and suspicion.

The biography of the jailed Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) bears witness to these facts according to the testimony of those who quoted him. Historians and biographers of Imam ar-Rida (ع) do, in fact, mention some books authored by the Imam (ع) besides his narration of hadith. They record what he dictated to those who asked him various questions and whatever he confided to his close companions who used to frequently question him about various types of knowledge which they could not fully comprehend and digest.

Among such books is *Al-Fiqh ar-Radawi* which **الفقه الرضوي** was for some time the object of debate among scholars. There are among the latter those who considered it to be authored by the Imam (ع), relied on it, and built their arguments on its premises. Among such scholars were: al-Majlisi (both al-Majlisi senior, the father, and his son, the renown author of *Bihar al-Anwar*, Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum, Shaikh an-Nawari, and others. The story of how this book surfaced is interesting.

A group of the residents of Qum brought a copy with them to Mecca where the ruler-judge (qadi-emir) Sayyid Husayn al-Isfahani saw it and testified to its being authored by ar-Rida (ع) and made a copy of it for himself which he brought to Isfahan. There, he showed it to al-Majlisi (senior) who was, likewise, sure it was authored by the Imam (ع) and so was his son the second al-Majlisi (junior). The latter quoted the ahadith it contained in his voluminous book *Bihar al-Anwar*, making the book one of his references, and this is how its fame spread.

In his Introduction to *Bihar al-Anwar*, al-Majlisi writes, "I was told about the book *Fiqh ar-Rida* by the virtuous traditionist the ruler-judge Husayn, may Allah be Gracious to his soul, after returning to Isfahan. He said to me, It happened that during the time when I was neighbouring the House of Allah, a group of the residents of Qum visited me while performing their *hajj* and they had with them an old book the date of its writing agreed with the date during which ar-Rida (ع) was alive." Al-Majlisi continues to say, "I heard my father saying that it was written in the handwriting of ar-Rida (ع), and a large number of dignitaries testified to the same."

Among the Imam's scientific books is what is known as *Ar-Risala at-Thahabiyya fil Tibb* (the golden medical dissertation) for which sources are counted reaching sometimes to Muhammad ibn Jumhar, and sometimes to al-Hassan ibn Muhammad an-Nawfali who was accepted as trustworthy by an-Najjashi who described him as "highly esteemed and trustworthy; he narrated one text about ar-Rida (ع)," which could be "the golden medical dissertation."

It is possible that the dissertation's fame among scholars, and their consensus in various centuries that the Imam (ع) was its author, and that nobody doubted such an authorship, are enough proofs leading the researcher to comfortably conclude that it was, indeed, from the intellectual output of Imam ar-Rida (ع)

himself. But what is this dissertation all about, anyway?

This dissertation is one of the most precious pieces of Islamic legacy dealing with the science of medicine. It is a summary of a number of medical sciences such as anatomy, biology, physiology, pathology and preventive medicine. Its contents are also relevant to the sciences of nutrition and chemistry, in addition to other medicine-related branches of science. The Imam (ع) sent this dissertation to the caliph al-Ma'mun around the year 201 A.H./816 A.D., that is to say, when medicine was a primitive science and its research was not conducted scientifically but based on practice alone rather than on scientific discoveries.

The science of bacteriology was not yet discovered, nor was there any significant knowledge of nutritional supplements such as vitamins, nor were there other significant medical discoveries for fighting microbes such as penicillin, streptomycin, oromycin, etc. On the surface, the dissertation seemed to be very simple in order to be in line with the mentality of that time, but it is quite deep and complicated in its implications and it is worthy of a serious scientific study and lengthy researches to unveil its secrets and uncover its treasures. It should be compared with modern scientific facts.[94](#)

Al-Ma'mun was very pleased to receive that dissertation and he expressed how much he cherished it by ordering to have it written down in gold and to be deposited at his “depository of wisdom,” hence its name, “the golden dissertation.”

In praising it, al-Ma'mun said, “I have reviewed the dissertation of my learned cousin, the loved and virtuous one, the logical physician, which deals with the betterment of the body, the conduct of bathing, the balance of nutrition, and I found it very well organized and one of the best blessings. I carefully studied it, reviewed and contemplated upon it, till its wisdom manifested itself to me, and its benefits became obvious, and it found its place to my heart, so I learned it by heart and I understood it by my mind, for I found it to be a most precious item to post, a great treasure, and a most useful thing, so I ordered it to be written in gold due to its being precious, and I deposited it at the depository of wisdom after I had it copied down by the descendants of Hashim, the youths of the nation. Bodies become healthy by balanced diets, and life becomes possible by overcoming disease, and through life wisdom is achieved, and through wisdom Paradise is won. It is worthy of being safeguarded and treasured... It is so because it came out of the house of those who derive their knowledge from the knowledge of the Chosen One (ع), the missive of the prophets, the arguments of successors to the prophets, the manners of scholars, the cure to the hearts and the sick from among the people of ignorance and blindness..., may Allah be pleased with them, bless and be merciful to them, the first of them and the last, the young and the old. I showed it to the elite from among my closest train who are known for their wisdom and knowledge of medicine, and who are authors of books, those who are counted among the people of knowledge and described with wisdom. Each one of them lauded it and thought highly of it, elevated it with esteem and evaluated it in order to be fair to its author, submitting to him, believing in the wisdom he included therein.”[95](#)

Al-Ma'mun had a very inquisitive mind and a thirst for knowledge; he was always eager to obtain more and more knowledge. During one of his scientific debates, a group of physicians and philosophers in Nishapur, including Yuhanna (John) ibn Masawayh, the physician, Jibraeel (Gabriel) ibn Bakhtishoo⁹⁶, the physician, Salih ibn Salhamah, the Indian philosopher, in addition to others, had gathered. Discussion turned to medicine and how through it can the bodies be improved.

Al-Ma'mun and his attendants were involved in a very lengthy discussion of the subject. They were debating how Allah created the human body and the contradictory things in it, the four elements, the harms and the benefits of various types of food. All this went on as the Imam (ع) kept silent and did not take part in any of it. Al-Ma'mun, therefore, said to him, "What do you have to say, O father of al-Hassan, about today's subject of discussion?"

Abul-Hassan (ع) said, "I have of it the knowledge of what I have personally tested and came to know about its accuracy by experience and by the passage of time in addition to what I was told by my ancestors of what nobody can afford to be ignorant of, nor excused for leaving out. I shall compile it with an equal portion of what everyone should know." Al-Ma'mun, following that, had to go in a hurry to Balkh, now a province in northern Afghanistan the capital of which is Mazar Sharif⁹⁷, and Abul-Hassan (ع) did not accompany him; therefore, al-Ma'mun sent him from there a letter asking him to fulfill his promise and to make that compilation. Ar-Rida (ع) wrote him saying,

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful; My reliance is upon Allah. I have received the letter of the commander of the faithful ordering me to acquaint him with what is needed of matters which I have tested and heard, about foods and drinks, medicines, venesection, blood letting, bathing, poisons, what should be avoided, and other things which manage the health of the body, and I explained what is needed to be done regarding one's own body, and Allah is the One Who grants success.

After that he initiated his dissertation. A good number of scholars attempted to write commentaries on the dissertation; here is a partial listing of some of them so that the discreet reader may refer to them if he so wishes:

1. *Tarjamat al-Alawi lil Tibb ar-Radawi* ترجمة العلوي للطب الرضوي of Sayyid Diaud-Dan Abul-Rida Fadlallah ibn Ali ar-Rawandi (d. 548 A.H./1153 A.D.).
2. *Tarjamat at-Thahabiyya* الترجمة الذهبية by mawla FaydAllah 'Usarah at-Tasatturi, an authority on medicine and astrology during the regime of Fath-Ali Khan. This book was written in secrecy in about 107 A.H./725 A.D. A handwritten copy of the manuscript dated 1133 A.H./1721 A.D. is available at the Mishkat Library of Tehran's University.
3. *Tarjamat at-Thahabiyya* الترجمة الذهبية by Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi. It is available at the private library of the late Sayyid Hassan as-Sadr in Kadhimiyya (north Baghdad, Iraq).
4. *'Afiyat al-Bariyya fi Sharh at-Thahabiyya* عافية البرية في شرح الترجمة الذهبية by Mirza Muhammad Hadi son of

Mirza Muhammad Salih ash-Sharazi. It was authored during the reign of Sultan Husayn as-Safawi (the Safavid). It is in handwritten manuscript form and is available at the Sayyid Husayn al-Hamadani Library, Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

5. *Sharh Tibb ar-Rida شرح طب الرضا* by mawla Muhammad Sharif al-Khatunabadi. He authored it around 1120 A.H./1709 A.D.

6. *Tarjamat at-Thahabiyya ترجمة الذهبية* by Sayyid Shamsud-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Bada ar-Radawi al-Mashhadi. Its writing was finished in 1155 A.H./1743 A.D. and is available at the Shaikh Muhammad Ali Akbar an-Nahawandi Library in Khurasan (Iran).

7. *Sharh Tibb ar-Rida شرح طب الرضا* by Sayyid Abdullah ash-Shubber who died in 1242 A.H./1827 A.D. Shaikh an-Nawari indicated in some of his writings that he had seen that copy himself.

8. *Sharh Tibb ar-Rida شرح طب الرضا* by mawla Muhammad ibn al-Hajj Muhammad Hassan al-Mashhadi who taught at Mashhad and died in 1257 A.H./1842 A.D.

9. *Sharh Tibb ar-Rida شرح طب الرضا* by mawla Nawraz Ali al-Bastami.

10. *Al-Mahmoodiyya المحمودية* by al-Hajj Kadhim al-Musawi az-Zanjani who died in 1292 A.H./1876 A.D. It is in manuscript form and is available with the author's grandsons.

There are others besides these scholars who explained and commented on it, revealing what is hidden of its secrets and obscure treasures. Probably the latest person to explain it and to conduct a comparative study between its theory and the latest modern scientific discoveries is Dr. Abdul-Sahib Zaini who did so in the "Multaqā al-Asrayn" periodical series.

Among other works, credit for which goes to this great Imam (ع), is *Sahafat ar-Rida* which deals with fiqh. The author of *Mustadrak al-Wasa'il* described it as "among the well-known books which is relied upon and which no other book, before it or after it, is more esteemed or reliable."

Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, in his encyclopaedic work titled *A'yan ash-Shi'a*⁹⁸, mentions an isnad (ascription) related to it alone from Shaikh Abdul-Wasi' al-Yemani az-Zaydi for the copy brought by the said Shaikh from Yemen and published in Damascus, Syria. Also, some of its copies contain its ascription to Abu Ali at-Tibrisi.

Al-Mustadrak states the following: "The esteemed Mirza Abd-Allah Afandi, in his *Riyad al-Ulema*', has compiled all its sources and said, Among them is a copy of this *Saheefa* which I saw at the town of Ardabil (chief town of the Azerbaijan district, Iran), and its sanad was..., then he goes on to indicate its *sanad*. Among other works attributed to the Imam (ع) is the book titled *Mahd al-Islam wa Shara'i ad-Dan* which is referred to by as-Saduq in his *Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida* through al-Fadl ibn Shathan, but he did not indicate that it was written in response to al-Ma'mun's request.⁹⁹

Ajwibat Musa'il Ibn Sinan ("Answers to Ibn Sinan's Queries") can be described as one of the works of the Imam (ع). It contains his answers to questions put forth to him by Ibn Sinan. But this cannot be described as a book authored by the Imam (ع); otherwise, the collection of his answers to the questions of many others, which deal with various fields of knowledge and scholarship, must be also described as such. *Ilal Ibn Shathan*: This book contains the Imam's answers to questions relevant to ailments put forth to him by Ibn Shathan.

On various occasions, al-Ma'mun tried to force Imam ar-Rida (ع) into the arena of complex debates with various groups and creeds. He used to conduct scientific and intellectual sessions to which he invited great thinkers, leading scientists, the atheists of the century, and debaters whose scientific caliber was feared, and before the stubbornness of whose complex arguments the evidence was muted, and due to the fierceness of whose doubt the proof was weakened. In all such debates, the Imam would come out victorious over his opponents due to the tremendous power of knowledge with which the Almighty endowed him, for such are the miracles of the Infallible Imams.

None of them ever had to force himself into the sophistry of arguments to which some might have resorted in order to smash his opponent's argument and weaken his ability to provide evidence. Rather, he depended in his debates on honest arguments in order to prove right to be right and on his miraculous ability of conviction and calm stylistic method.

An-Nawfali tried to warn the Imam against attempting to deal with the debates of such people when the Imam asked him why al-Ma'mun had invited him to debate them, for al-Ma'mun had asked the Catholic archbishop, the High Rabbi, the leading Sabians, the Hindu high priest, followers of Zoroaster, Nestus the Roman medical scientist, and a group of orators of his time, to engage in scientific debates with Imam ar-Rida (ع).

He dispatched Yasir, the servant, to tell the Imam about the time when the debate would start, requesting him to attend. When Yasir went out and an-Nawfali was alone with the Imam, the Imam (ع) turned to him and asked him in the form of a dialogue, "O Nawfali! You are an Iraqi, and the heart of an Iraqi is not severe; so, what can you gain from causing your cousin to require us to meet with disbelievers and rhetoricians?" An-Nawfali answered, "May my life be sacrificed for yours! He wants to put you to test, and he loves to know how much knowledge you have. He has, indeed, built his assumption on a shaky foundation, and doomed, by Allah, is what he has built."

He asked him, "And what has he built?" He answered him saying, "Scholars of kalam and innovators are the antithesis of the scholars. A scholar does not deny the undeniable, whereas rhetoricians and polytheists are people who deny and try to prove what is not true. If you argue with them and tell them that Allah is One, they would say, 'Prove His Oneness,' and if you say that Muhammad (ص) is the Messenger of Allah, they would say, 'Confirm his Message,' then they would press their lies on a person while he tries to disprove their lies, and they would continue to prove that he is mistaken till he abandons his argument; so, beware of them, may my life be sacrificed for you."

The Imam (ع) smiled and asked him, “O Nawfali! Do you fear that they will disprove my argument?” He answered, “No, by Allah! I have never worried about you, and I hope Allah will enable you to have the upper hand over them.” The Imam asked him again, “O Nawfali! Would you like to know when al-Ma'mun will feel remorseful?” He answered, “Yes.”

He said, “When he hears me argue with the people of the Torah quoting their own Torah, with the people of the Gospel (Bible) quoting their own Gospel, with the people of the Psalms quoting their own Psalms, with Zoroastrians arguing in their Persian language, with the Romans in their own Latin, and with rhetoricians using their very rhetoric. So, if I closed all the avenues of argument in the face of each arguing party and disproved his claim, making him renounce his statement from its onset and referring to my own statement, then al-Ma'mun will realize that he will not achieve what he aspires. It is then that he will feel regretful; We are Allah's, and Unto Him is our return.”

Thus does the Imam show that he was not concerned about such persons whom al-Ma'mun wished to gather together against him trying to embarrass him with their falsification and arguments which he hoped might close for the Imam (ع) all the avenues of argument.

Whenever a session started and the Imam (ع) was invited to join it, discussion started and the Imam (ع) debated with the Catholics, making the Bible his reference to prove his own defense of the Unity of Allah (versus their Trinity) and disprove the so-called godhead of Christ (ع).

Then he would follow up with a magnificent discussion proving that the Bible in circulation today is not the same which Allah had revealed to Christ (ع) and that it is authored by some of the disciples of Jesus (ع) who are the authors of the four gospels, not Jesus (ع), depending in his argument on the fact that the details presented by each one of them stand in flagrant contradiction with those of the other. To the right of this text is cover page of the author's book *Mary and Jesus in Islam*, a thorough research that proves, from “Christian” references, that Jesus (ع) was not the one who was crucified but that Judas Iscariot was, that he was not born on December 25, that the concept of Trinity crept into Christianity in the 3rd century..., in addition to evidences that Christianity has borrowed so much from ancient Babylonian, Greek, Roman Persian and Indian mythologies.

Let us digress here for a minute to tackle the issue of Christianity in brief, particularly that of Catholicism, then we will bring the reader a debate between Imam ar-Rida (ع) and a Catholic archbishop.

The reader already knows that the only Bible accepted by Muslims is the one compiled by Saint Barnabas, a gospel which was not canonized at the famous Nicæa, N.W. Asia Minor, conference of 325 A.D. called for by Emperor Constantine who aspired to put an end to the sectarian differences among the Christians of his time. The next few paragraphs are excerpted from my book *Mary and Jesus in Islam*:

According to the Gospel of Matthew, and to be exact Ch. 10, verse 4, the list of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ is as follows: Simon (or Peter), Andrew (Peter's brother), James (son of Zebedee), John

(James' brother), Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew (the tax collector), James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, another Simon who is said to be "a member of The Zealots,' a subversive political party," and Judas Iscariot. Why is the name of Saint Barnabas not among them, and how did he come to write his own Gospel, the only one accepted by Muslims as the true Bible?

With all their prejudices, speculations, sectarian motivations, it is unwise to accept what today's or yesterday's Christians tell us about Saint Barnabas and his Bible, or about the other disciples. The Encyclopedia Britannica III, for example, describes those who believed that Christ was human and not divine as heretics, and so do many Christian writers and theologians. An independent research, therefore, will yield better results, that's for sure.

One such research has been undertaken by M.A. Yusseff who published his findings in a very interesting book titled The Dead Sea Scrolls, the Gospel of Barnabas, and the New Testament which was published in 1405 A.H./1985 A.D. by the American Trust Publications of Indianapolis, Indiana, U.S.A. [100](#) Saint Barnabas was originally called Joseph the Levite, or Joses the Levite, and is better known as Matthai, or Matthias.

In the Christian document known as Recognitions, Matthias is identified as another name for Apostle Barnabas, which is correct. In another document known as Homilies, Barnabas is said to be a personal Apostle of Jesus, "a strict servant of the Law," and, hence, one of the original twelve Disciples (or Apostles) of Jesus Christ.

The Jews, too, list his name among not twelve but five apostles, the remaining four being: Naki, Nester (perhaps Nestor after whom Nestorian Christians are named), Buni, and Todah. But we find the name "Lebbacus" among these disciples in Matthew 10:13, that of "Judas son of James" in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13, both contradicting other Biblical accounts; so, which one is correct and which one is not?!

Saint Barnabas was born in Cyprus in the first century A.D. Other references to him are recorded in the Bible in Acts 11:19 and 15:41. He is said as having joined the Jerusalem church "after the alleged crucifixion of Jesus [101](#)," which is not true, sold his property, and gave the proceeds as a donation to his community. He founded the church in Antioch (Turkish Antakya; see footnote above about the history of this city), where he preached.

Inviting Paul of Tarsus (Turkey) to be his assistant, he undertook missionary activity and then went to Jerusalem. Shortly after 48 A.D., a conflict separated both men, and Barnabas sailed home to Cyprus. Where did he write his Gospel and when? Nobody seems to know. How did he die? Nobody seems to know, yet he is called a martyr... We are also told that he knew St. Mark. In 488 A.D., his grave was discovered near the Monastery of St. Barnabas in the Cypriot city of Salamis. A copy of his Gospel was found buried with him [102](#). The accurate list of the twelve disciples of Jesus exists in the Gospel of St. Barnabas himself who records the following:

Jesus, having returned to the region of Jerusalem, was found again of the people with exceedingly great

joy, and they implored him to abide with them, for his words were not as those of the scribes, but were with power; for they touched the heart.

Jesus, seeing that great was the multitude of them that returned to their heart for to walk in the law of God, went up into the mountain, and abode all night in prayer. When the day came he descended from the mountain and chose twelve whom he called apostles, among whom is Judas, who was slain upon the cross¹⁰³.

Their names are: Andrew and Peter his brother, fishermen; Barnabas, who wrote this, with Matthew the publican, who sat at the receipt of custom; John and James, son of Zebedee; Thaddaeus and Judas¹⁰⁴; Bartholomew and Philip; James, and Judas Iscariot the traitor. To these he always revealed the divine secrets. He made Judas Iscariot his dispenser of that which was given in alms, but he took the tenth part of everything. (The Gospel of Barnabas 14)

The Gospel of St. Barnabas is the one that contains the true teachings of Jesus Christ; it will be discussed later how it refers to Prophet Muammed as the "Paraclete," a Greek word meaning "Messenger" and "Comforter," in Arabic al-Amin... Even if you set aside the Gospel of St. Barnabas, a good Greek translation of the original of John 14: 16 will be: "And I will Pray the Patera, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you forever." The Greek word Patera is erroneously translated into "the Father," a reference to the Almighty, in a "modern" version of the Bible which gives the following text for John 14: 16–17: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever ___ the Spirit of Truth."¹⁰⁵ No man of righteousness has earned the title of "the Spirit of Truth" (in Arabic al-adiq) more than Prophet Muammed.

A good scholar of Greek will do better than that; he will translate Patera into "Nourisher" or "Sustainer," and Paraclete into "Comforter," al-Amin in Arabic, a title given to Prophet Muammed even before he had started his mission. The translation of what John has in 14: 16–17 should instead run as follows:

"And I will request the Nourisher (God) to send you another Messenger, so that he may be (your) guide always, the inspired, the Truthful, whom the world at large will not welcome because it will not comprehend or appreciate him, but you (believers) will recognize him. He will dwell with you and (his message) will find a place in your hearts."

A testimony to the truth of the statement saying "... and (his message) will find a place in your hearts" is that most converts to Islam used to follow one sect of Christianity or another. Upon acceptance of Islam, such converts do not abandon Christ; they simply rediscover him and get to know the real Christ whose message has been and is still being distorted. The best Christians in the world are the Muslims. Muslims wholeheartedly honour Jesus Christ and his true and pristine message presented by Prophet Muammed; read the following verses of the Holy Qur'an and see for yourself how such message is described:

Allah said: O Jesus! I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above

those who disbelieve till the Day of Resurrection... (3:55)

Carefully examine the above verse especially this portion: "... and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve till the Day of Resurrection" and see how the Almighty raises the status of those who follow Jesus above those who disbelieve in him till the Day of Judgment. Those who believe in Jesus Christ and who follow his pristine message are none other than the Muslims, whereas the rest may be divided into two groups:

- 1) those who have distorted the message of Jesus Christ and lied about it one generation after another and are still doing so, and
- 2) the Jews who disbelieved in him and in his message and disbelieved in his virgin birth. Although the Jews now are the masters of the world, thanks to the West in general and to the U.S. in particular, but such power they will not keep forever. They will eventually weaken because the promise of the Almighty is true and irreversible; they will be exposed for what they really are: the anti-Christ, the Dajjal, the disseminator of falsehood through their absolute control over the news and information media.

The Imam (ع) asked the Catholic, "O Christian! Are you familiar with a statement in the Bible wherein Jesus says: 'I am going to my Lord and your Lord, and the Paraclete is coming who shall testify to my truth just as I testified for him, and he shall explain everything to you, and he shall be the one to expose all the sins of nations, and he shall be the one to smash the pillar of apostasy'? [106](#) The Catholic said, 'We admit all what you have just quoted of the Bible.'" The Imam asked him, "Do you testify that such a statement is actually fixed in the Bible?" "Yes," said the Catholic. Imam ar-Rida said, "O Catholic! Could you tell me about the first Bible, how you lost it then found it, and who put your existing Bible together?" The Catholic said, "We did not lose the Bible except for one single day then we found it fresh; John and Matthew brought it back to us." Imam ar-Rida (ع) said, "How little your knowledge of the Bible and its scholars is! If such is your claim, then why do you dispute with one another about the Bible? Rather, controversy has always revolved around the Bible which is in your hands today. Had it been the same as the first one was, you would not have thus disputed (with one another) about it, but I shall inform you of such controversy myself."

The Imam went on to state the following:

"Be informed that when the first Bible was lost, the Christians gathered around their scholars and said to them: 'Jesus son of Mary has been killed, and we do not know where the Bible is. You are the scholars; so, what do you have with you?' Luke and Mark said to them, 'We have learned the Bible by heart; so, do not grieve in its regard, and do not forsake the churches, for we shall recite to you one Gospel after another on each Sunday till we put it all together.'"

Luke, Mark, John and Matthew sat together, and they put this Bible of yours for you after you had lost the first (original) one. These four men were students of the early disciples; are you aware of that?!" The Catholic answered, "This I did not know and now I do. It is also now clear to me how much you know

about the Bible, and I have heard from you things with which I was familiar and to which my heart testifies to be the truth. I have, therefore, gained a better understanding.”

Imam ar-Rida then said to him, “How do you, then, find the testimony of these men?” “Accurate,” said the Catholic, “since they are the scholars of the Bible, and everything to which they testified is the truth.”

Imam ar-Rida then turned to al-Mamoon and his company and said, “Bear witness to what he has just said.” They said, “We testify.”

Then the Imam turned to the Catholic and said, “I challenge you to swear by the son and his mother whether you know if Matthew had said, ‘The Messiah is David son of Abraham son of Isaac son of Jacob son of Yehuda son of Khadrūn’, and that Mark said about the lineage of Jesus son of Mary that he was ‘The word of God which He placed in the human body, so it became human’, and that Luke said, ‘Jesus son of Mary and his mother were humans of flesh and blood, so the Holy Spirit entered into them’. Then you testify that Jesus had himself said the following about his creation: ‘I tell you the truth: None ascends the heavens except that he descends therefrom except the man who rides the camel, the seal of the prophets, for he shall ascend to the heavens then shall he descend;’ so, what do you say about that?” The Catholic said, “This is the speech of Jesus, and we do not deny it.”

Imam ar-Rida (ع) said, “If so, what do you say about the testimony of Luke, Mark, and Matthew with regard to Jesus and what they had attributed to him?” The Catholic said, “They lied about Jesus...”

Imam ar-Rida (ع) turned to the audience and said, “O people! Has he not (a moment ago) testified to their truthfulness, saying that they were the scholars of the Bible and what they said is the truth?!” The Catholic said to the Imam (ع), “O scholar of the Muslims! I would like you to excuse me from discussing these men.”

After a while the Imam (ع) turned to that Catholic, who was an arch-bishop, and said, “In the Bible, it is written: ‘The son of the virtuous woman is departing, and the Paraclete is coming after him, and he shall lighten the burdens and explain everything to you, and he shall testify for me as I have testified to you. I have brought you the parables, and he shall bring you the interpretation.’ Do you believe that such a text exists in the Bible?” The Catholic answered in the affirmative. [107](#)

The Holy Qur’an, moreover, tells us in Surat as-Saff (Ch. 61) that “Jesus son of Mary said: ‘O Children of Israel! I am the prophet of Allah to you testifying to that which is before me of the Torah and giving the glad tidings of a Prophet who will come after me; his name is Amed; but when he came to them with clear arguments, they said: This is clear magic’ (Qur’an, 61:6). Compare this Qur’anic verse with the following text in the Gospel of St. Barnabas:

Thereupon said the disciples, “O master, it is thus written in the book of Moses, that in Isaac was the promise made.”

Jesus answered with a groan, “It is so written, but Moses wrote it not, nor Joshua, but rather our rabbins (rabbis), who fear not God. Verily, I say to you that if you consider the words of the angel Gabriel, you shall discover the malice of our scribes and doctors. For the angel said: Abraham, all the world shall know how God loves you, but how shall the world know the love that you bear to God? Assuredly it is necessary that you do something for the love of God.’ Abraham answered, ‘Behold the servant of God ready to do all that which God shall will.’

“Then spoke God, saying to Abraham, ‘Take your son, your firstborn Ishmael, and come up the mountain to sacrifice him.’ How is Isaac firstborn, if when Isaac was born Ishmael was seven years old?!”

Then answered Jesus, “Verily I say to you that Satan ever seeks to annul the laws of God. Therefore he with his followers, hypocrites and evildoers, the former with false doctrine, the latter with lewd living, today have contaminated almost all things, so that scarcely is the truth found. Woe to the hypocrites, for the praises of this world shall turn for them into insults and torments in hell.

“I, therefore, say to you that the messenger of God is a splendor that shall give gladness to nearly all that God has made, for he is adorned with the spirit of understanding and of counsel, the spirit of wisdom and might, the spirit of fear and love (of God), the spirit of prudence and temperance. He is adorned with the spirit of charity and mercy, the spirit of justice and piety, the spirit of gentleness and patience, which he has received from God three times more than He has given to all his creatures. O blessed time, when he shall come to the world. Believe me that I have seen him and have done him reverence, even as every prophet has seen him. Seeing that of his spirit God gives to them prophecy. And when I saw him my soul was filled with consolation, saying, O Muammed, God be with you, and may he make me worthy to untie your shoe latchet, for obtaining this I shall be a great prophet and holy one of God.” (The Gospel of Barnabas 44)

“... unworthy to untie your latchet” above brings to memory what St. Mark said in 1:7: “And this was his message: After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.” The speaker is undoubtedly Jesus and the one whose coming he is predicting is none other than Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). But people look at things and make them appear as they would like them to. Such is the truth which all other disciples, with the exception of Barnabas, had deliberately hidden.

The reader is encouraged to obtain a copy of the Gospel of Saint Barnabas [108](#) and compare it with other existing Bibles, be they those accepted by the Catholics or those endorsed by the Protestants, and judge for himself as to how much distortion the message of Christ has suffered and is still suffering...

The Catholic archbishop slipped into an obvious self-contradiction; for he on one hand sanctified the authors of the four gospels and held them above lying while, on the other hand, he admitted to the Imam that they did tell lies about Christ (ع).

Then the Imam (ع) debated with the High Rabbi, the most distinguished scholar of the Jews, to prove the

prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) from the previously revealed divine testaments, after which he follows with a very logical debate. Having argued with him that one of the requirements of a Prophet was to perform something all other creation are unable to perform, he asked him about the reason why they, the Jews, refrained from believing into the miracles of all prophets other than Moses (ع) son of Imran (Amram), and the High Rabbi answered him by saying, “We cannot admit the prophethood of any who professes prophethood except after bringing us knowledge similar to that brought by Moses.”

Ar-Rida (ع) said to him, “Then how come you admitted the prophethood of other prophets who preceded Moses (ع) who did not split the sea, nor did they cleave the stones so that twelve springs would gush forth from it, nor did they take their hands out shining white as Moses did, nor did they turn a cane into a snake?!” It was then that the High Rabbi overcame his stubbornness, submitted to the argument, and admitted that any supernatural act beyond human capacity was indeed a proof of prophethood.

The Imam (ع) then asked him about the reason why the Jews did not believe in the prophethood of Jesus (ع) despite the fact that he brought forth miracles beyond human capacity such as bringing the dead back to life, healing those who were born blind and the lepers, and about the reason why they did not believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (ﷺ) despite his bringing an extra-ordinary miracle, the Holy Qur’an, although he was neither a scholar nor a writer. The High Rabbi had no answer at all.

Then came the turn of the Zoroastrian high priest whom the Imam debated based on the priest’s belief in the prophethood of Zoroaster. The Zoroastrian told the Imam (ع) that Zoroaster brought them what no other man had ever brought them before. “We did not see him,” he continued, “but the tales of our ancestors informed us that he legalized for us what no other person before had made legal; so, we followed him.” The Imam (ع) asked him, “You believed in the tales which came to you about him, so you followed him, didn’t you?” “Yes,” he answered. The Imam (ع) said, “This is the case with all other nations. Tales came to them about what the prophets had accomplished, what Moses (ع), Jesus (ع), and Muhammad (ﷺ) had all brought them, so why did you not believe in any of these prophets, having believed in Zoroaster through the tales that came to you about him informing that he brought forth what others did not?” The Zoroastrian high priest had no more to say.

After that the Imam turned to the debate’s witnesses, having finished debating with the chief representatives of those creeds, asking anyone else to go ahead and put forth any question to him. Everyone abstained from doing so. It was then that Imran the Sabian, who was one of the most distinguished scholars of the science of kalam of his time, approached the Imam (ع) and asked him how he could prove the existence of the Creator. The discussion between them delved into the deepest depths of this complex question, while the Imam answered the man’s questions through clear scientific facts in a very simple way.

Among the questions Imran asked the Imam (ع) was: “Master! Was the Being known to Himself by His Own Self?” The Imam said, “Knowledge is acquired by something which would negate its antithesis (ignorance). So that the thing itself would be existing through what it is negated, without the existence of

anything which contradicts its existence, a need arises to negate that thing about itself by defining what is known about it. Do you understand, O Imran?" He said, "Yes, by Allah, master! Tell me, then, by what means did He come to know what He knew, by a pronoun or by something else?"

The Imam (ع) said, "If it had been by a pronoun, would He then find anyway not to establish for that pronoun a limit where knowledge ends?" Imran answered, "Yes, He will have to find such a way." The Imam asked him, "Then what is that pronoun?" Imran could not provide any answer. The Imam (ع) said, "Is it alright if I ask you about the pronoun and you define it by another pronoun? If you answer in the affirmative, then you would make both your claim and statement void. O Imran! Ought you not come to know that the One cannot be described by a pronoun and would not be described except by a verb, a deed, an action, and He cannot be expected to be parts and kinds like human beings?"

Imran asked him, "Master! The knowledge I have says that the being is changed in his essence by his action of creating..." The Imam (ع) said, "Does your statement, O Imran, mean that the being does not in any way change its essence except when it affects its own essence in a way which changes it? O Imran! Can you say that the fire changes its own nature, or that the heat burns itself, or have you seen anyone seeing his own vision?" Imran said, "No, I have not seen that; could you please tell me, master, is it the creation, or is it the nature of creation?"

The Imam (ع) said, "Yes, O Imran, He is above all of that; He is not in the creation, nor is the creation in Him; He is elevated above that, and bad indeed is your knowledge about Him, and there is no might except in Allah. Tell me about the mirror: are you in it or is it in you? If neither one of you is in the other, then how did you come to see your own reflection in it?" Imran said, "Through the light between myself and it."

The Imam (ع) said, "Can you see of that light more than what you can with your own eyes?" He answered, "Yes." The Imam (ع) said to him, "Then show it to us..." It was then that the man was too baffled to say a word. The Imam (ع) said, "I do not see the light except leading you and the mirror to come to know each other without being in either one of you. There are many such examples which the ignorant simply cannot observe, and Allah Has the greatest example."

Thus did the Imam face the challenge of Imran the Sabian's doubting method, smashing it and dispelling the ambiguity of the complex doubts which he could not understand till vision became clear to him. The Imam (ع) did not determine an evidence except after building it with simple, easy to understand, proofs derived from everyday life in order not to leave any room for the opponent to doubt after transforming a most complex theory into an easy and commonsense idea, all of that by employing a very beautiful and miraculously effective style.

In another session, al-Ma'mun invited the Imam (ع) to debate Sulayman al-Marazi, Khurasan's scientist in kalam, and the debate between them dealt with some significant topics which were being debated then by scholars of the science of kalam. The starting-point of the discussion was the issue of *bada'*.

The Imam (ع) explained its sound meaning, indicating that the Sublime and Dear God had innermost knowledge which nobody but He knew: that was the source of *bada'* and the knowledge whereby He taught His angels and Prophets.

To explain it in a way which would remove all confusion and ambiguity, we can say about *bada'* is that Allah makes it clear that His Divine Will is always linked to an advantage, a benefit, that necessitates it, brings about such Will, carries it out..., whereas what is apparent is that His Will is hinging on what is opposite thereto. Then He, after that, makes manifest His actual Will when the advantage is satisfied from all aspects, and the reasons for which it was not previously manifested are removed, and it appears to the creation as if Allah willed to abandon His first Will, hence it is in the view of creation, not in the reality of Will, *bada'*. This is the theory of *bada'* in its simple logical context which Imamis (Shi'as) uphold and which some people misunderstood and misinterpreted, giving it a wrong meaning which necessitated attributing ignorance (!!!) to the Almighty God, an excuse to wage an unfair campaign of defamation against Imami Shi'as by their opponents from among the followers of other sects.

First, the Imam (ع) has proven the accuracy of *bada'* in which Ahl al-Bayt (ع) believe by: First quoting the Holy Qur'an where Allah Almighty says,

فَقُولْ عَنْهُمْ مَا أَنْتَ بِمَلُومٍ

“So leave them alone, for you shall not be blamed for that” (Qur'an, 51:54),

meaning thereby that He intends to annihilate them. Then the Almighty, according to the *bada'* theory, says,

وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَ تَنْفَعُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

“So remind (them), for (such) reminding may avail the believers” (Qur'an, 51:55),

which indicates a shift from the first decision as observed from studying the context of both verses.

Second, he tries to prove it through traditions narrated from his forefathers citing the Messenger of Allah (ع) saying, “Allah sent his wahi to one of His prophets to inform him that he would die on a particular day, and when that prophet was told of it, he plead to Allah, the King, while on his bed, and kept saying, Lord! Postpone my demise till I see my son growing up to carry out my will’ till he fell from his bed, whereupon Allah sent his wahi again to the same prophet to inform him that He decided to postpone it.”

It is apparent that *bada'* in the meaning which we indicated requires no reason whatsoever to be alarmed, and it does not justify waging a campaign of defamation against those who believe in it by

those who do not.

The same discussion led to discussing the will's eternity and transience, and the Imam (ع) stood to disprove the theory which called for the eternity of the will, proving its being transient by revealing its self-contradiction, removing the confusion which may occupy anyone's mind in its regard.

Will, as the Imam (ع) says, is one of the actions of the Almighty. It is not one of His attributes; therefore, it is transient, not perpetual, since an action is a form of event, and the deed cannot be identical to the doer, so the will cannot be identical to the willing person. Will is not like hearing, or seeing, or knowing as al-Marazi tried to prove; it does not make sense, the Imam says, to say that

He "wanted" Himself. Does He want to be "something," or does He want to be alive, Seeing, Hearing, or Able?! If this is according to His Will, it would require the impossible which is the change occurring to the self, for the meaning then would be that He wanted Himself to be something which was not... Sublime is Allah greatly above all of this sophistry.

Thus did the debates between the Imam and al-Marazi take place frequently about the eternity of the will versus its transience with regard to relevant matters.

In his debates with the Imam (ع), al-Marazi kept arguing and coming back to the same point from which he had started his argument in an inflexible argumentative manner. While accepting that to desire something (to "will", to wish, to desire, to decide) is a verb, he goes back to deny that, claiming that it is an adjective, and he may admit something and say something else.

The Imam asked him, "O Abu Sulayman! Can you tell me if the will is a verb or not?" He said, "Yes, it is a verb." The Imam (ع) asked him, "Is it causative, since verbs are?" "It is not a verb," came the answer. The Imam (ع) asked him, "Is there anyone besides Him who, too, is eternal?" Sulayman answered, "Willing is doing."

The Imam (ع) said, "O Sulayman! This is the same (sophistry) because of which you criticized Dirar and his followers, saying that everything Allah Almighty has created in His heavens and earth, ocean or land, dog or pig, monkey, human, or an animal, is Allah's will, and that Allah's will gives life and takes life away, and it goes here or drinks from there, marries, enjoys food, commits immoral acts, disbelieves and commits shirk..."

Sulayman said, "It is like hearing, seeing, or knowing; that is, it is an adjective, an attribute." Having abstained from providing an answer to the Imam's question, Sulayman went back to the beginning of the argument regarding whether the will is an adjective, an attribute, or a verb, but the Imam nevertheless repeated his argument with him by following another route different from the one he took first. This indicates how commonsense the idea seems to him and demonstrates his ability to prove it however he willed.

The debate continued between them in the same calm manner in which the Imam (ع) coined his questions, which is the most magnificent method of debate. In his way of providing answers, the Imam never blocked the avenue before his opponent to continue the debate; rather, he left him completely free to debate in whatever manner he wished through his questions till he brought him to a dead-end where he could not proceed anymore just to go back to seek another route which the Imam himself wanted him to seek out of his own will, and after his own conviction.

But Sulayman kept fumbling about in his answers to the Imam's questions after the Imam had closed before him all avenues of argument, and al-Ma'mun was quick to notice his fumbling about which indicated Sulayman's loss, so he rebuked the latter and criticized him. It is reported that during the debate, when ar-Rida (ع) asked him to continue his questions, he said, "Will is one of His attributes."

The Imam said, "How many times have you said that it is one of His attributes?! Is it a new attribute, or has it always been so?" Sulayman said, "New."

The Imam (ع) said, "Allahu Akbar! You are telling me that His attribute is new! Had it been one of His attributes, an eternal one, then He willed and He created as long as His will and His creation are eternal...! This means it is an attribute of someone who did not know what he did! Allah is Elevated above this..."

Sulayman said, "Things are not a will, and He did not will anything." Here the Imam said, "You have hissed, O Sulayman! He did and He created as long as His will and His creation are eternal...?! This is the attribute of someone who does not know what he is doing! Elevated is Allah above all of that."

Turning to al-Ma'mun, Sulayman then said, "Master! I have already informed him that it is like hearing and seeing and knowing." Al-Ma'mun said, "Woe unto you, Sulayman! How you have erred and how often you have repeated yourself! Stop it and take another route, for you seem to be unable to provide any answer better than that."

The debate continued after that till Sulayman's tongue was tied, whereupon al-Ma'mun said, "O Sulayman! This is the most learned descendant of Hashim," and the session was terminated.

The Imam (ع) also conducted a very magnificent debate with Ali ibn al-Jahm dealing with the infallibility of prophets in which he explained in a very beautiful way. He underscored the fact that the superficial meaning of some verses may give the impression of self-contradiction. The Imam (ع) started his discussion with Ali ibn al-Jahm by criticizing him and those who interpreted the Book of Allah according to their own viewpoints, stating that he and those folks have to refer to those whom Allah endowed with the faculty of knowledge and understanding in order to learn the actual and accurate interpretation of such verses. This is according to the sacred verse which says,

"And none knows its interpretation except Allah and those deeply grounded in knowledge"
(Qur'an, 3:7).

Then the Imam (ع) started explaining the verses whose superficial meaning indicates the fallibility and possibility of sinning by prophets. He indicated that Adam's transgression took place while he was in Paradise, not on earth, and the infallibility in question is earthly, and that he did not commit any sinning act as long as he lived on earth which contradicted his infallibility as proven by the following sacred verse:

“Allah did indeed choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Imran above all people” (Qur'an,3:33).

As regarding the verse which states the following:

“And remember Thun-nan when he departed in wrath; he imagined that We had no power over him, but he cried through the depths of darkness, There is no God but You! Glory to You; I was indeed wrong”(Qur'an, Al-Anbiya':87),

what is meant by “he imagined that We had no power over him” is that he realized that Allah was not going to sustain him.” Had he thought that Allah was unable to overpower him, he would have then committed kufr (apostasy) and he would have also committed 'isyan, transgression.

As regarding the verse “And (with passionate lust) did she desire him, and he would have desired her” (Qur'an, Yousuf:24), the case regarding what the wife of al-'Aziz wanted, and what Yousuf (ع) desired to do, are two different things, for she wanted to commit a sin while he desired to kill her if she forced him; therefore, Allah saved him from the deed of killing her and its terrible consequences, and saved her from her own wishful desire to commit a sin.

As regarding prophet David (ع), his statement that the defendant had committed injustice by asking for the ewe, it was an error only within the framework of the case, and it took place before he had asked the defendant about his defense against the plaintiff's claim, and it is not a transgression, for Allah corrected his decision for him by bringing him the example of the two kings.

As regarding his marriage with the widow of Uryah, which was regarded by people at that time as a sin and criticized him for it, it was done for the sake of effecting a legislative interest whereby David wanted to shatter the then prevalent custom of a widow not getting married after the death of her husband.

It is similar to what happened to the Prophet with Zainab daughter of Jahsh, wife of Zaid ibn Harithah who had been adopted by the Prophet (ص). By marrying Zainab after granting her divorce from Zaid, the Prophet (ص) wanted to shatter the pre-Islamic custom whereby a man would not be permitted to marry the former wife of someone whom he had adopted, as is clear in the text of the Holy Qur'an. The Prophet (ص) was apprehensive of the criticism of the hypocrites of his action, so the Almighty addressed him by saying,

“Do not fear people; it is more fitting that you should fear Allah” (Qur'an, Al Ahzab:37),

since it was Allah Who ordered him to marry her as we understand from the verse,

“Then when Zaid had dissolved (his marriage) with her, with the necessary (formality), We joined her in marriage to you in order that (henceforth) there will be no difficulty to the believers in (the matter of) marrying the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have dissolved with the necessary (formality, their marriage) with them, and Allah’s command must be fulfilled” (Qur’an, Al Ahzab:37).

By providing such glorious knowledge of the exegesis of sacred Qur’anic verses, and by giving such honest interpretations which safeguard the integrity of the context, the Imam (ع) used to dispel the confusion of those who did not have a deep actual understanding of the Glorious Book of Allah.

In his book *Al-‘Iqd al-Farid*, Ibn Abd Rabbih al-Andalusi recorded a debate on the subject of Imamate between the Imam and caliph al-Ma'mun which seems to be stamped with artificiality, and we think it is possible that some fanatics from among those who deviated from the line of the Ahl al-Bayt (ع) had fabricated it, for he stated the following in his book:

Al-Ma'mun said to Ali ibn Musa (ع), “Why do you claim it (Imamate) for your own selves?” The Imam (ع) answered, “Due to Ali and Fatima (ع) being near in kin to the Messenger of Allah (ع).” Al-Ma'mun said, “If it is only a matter of kinship, then the Messenger of Allah (ع) had left behind him those who were closer in kinship to him than Ali or any of his relatives, and if you mean the kinship of Fatima (ع) to the Messenger of Allah (ص), then the matter (Imamate) after her should have belonged to al-Hassan and al-Husayn (ع) whose right was confiscated by Ali even while they were still alive, taking control of what was not his.” Ali ibn Musa (ar-Rida [ع]) could not provide an answer.

Let us record the following regarding this quotation:

The Imam did not claim his right to caliphate only on account of his kinship to the Prophet (ص), but rather on account of the clear statements made by the Prophet (ص) emphasizing that he was to be the caliph after him, in addition to the personal qualifications which adorned Imam Ali (ع) and which distinguished him above the rest of *sahaba*.

The concept of caliphate according to Ahl al-Bayt (ع) is that it is decreed according to a divine text, not dictated due to factors of kinship, politics, etc. Allah is the One Who chooses, and His choice is conveyed by His Prophet (ص), whoever He sees to be most fit to safeguard the Message and the interest of the nation. The claim of those who said that they deserved caliphate due to their kinship to the Prophet (ص) is similar to the claim of those who said that the muhajiran (immigrants) were more qualified than the ansar (supporters of Medina) due to the nearness of the first party to the Messenger of Allah (ص). The Imam, if this story is true at all, would not have been unable, as it suggests, to answer al-Ma'mun’s objection that there are among the Ahl al-Bayt (ع) those who had more priority than Ali (ع) or any of his relatives, an apparent reference to his grandfather al-Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib¹⁰⁹, to caliphate.

It was al-Abbas himself who approached the Imam requesting him to stretch his hand to him so that he would swear the oath of allegiance to him when he felt that the fate looked ominous and that the environment was threatening of a revolt. But the Imam refused to accept such an oath privately; rather, he preferred that such an oath be sworn to him in public and before eye witnesses after finishing the funeral rites for the Messenger of Allah (ص) whose corpse was still lying in state waiting to be bathed and buried¹¹⁰. If you suppose that al-Abbas had any right to the caliphate, he would then have relinquished it.

As regarding al-Hassan and al-Husayn, they were then very young; Hassan was 10 and Husayn was 9. Neither wilayat nor wisayat can be enforced on caliphate till they were old enough, for caliphate is a post which permits no wisayat at all; therefore, the issue of caliphate was confined to Ali (ع) alone.

The fact that al-Ma'mun's way of thinking regarding the issue of caliphate, and his views with which he confronted the faqihs in his debates, as the author of *Al-'Iqd al-Farid* **العقد الفريد** himself mentions, proving that caliphate was the legitimate right of only Ali rather than anyone else among the sahaba, this fact itself convinces us that this fabricated dialogue quoted above was written by some fanatic followers of other sects.

Imam ar-Rida (ع) did not write a book on exegesis, but he explained the meanings of the Qur'anic verses about which he was asked, and we will indicate here some such explanations in order to acquaint you with the magnificent method and innovative style of the Imam (ع) in this regard.

Al-Ma'mun asked him once to explain some Qur'anic verses out of his curiosity about the knowledge which Allah bestowed upon the Imam (ع). Among such verses was this one:

“He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was over the water, so that He might try you which of you is best in conduct” (Qur'an, Hud:7).

He said, “The Praised and Exalted Allah created the Throne, the water, and the angels before the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the angels used to know Allah through their own creation, through the Throne and the water. Then He made His Throne over the water in order to manifest His might to the angels so that they might know that He is capable of doing whatever He pleased. Then He raised the Throne through His might, moved it and made it above the seven heavens. Then He created the heavens and the earth in six periods of time. He was capable of creating them in a twinkle of the eye, but the Exalted One created them in six periods in order to show the angels what He was creating, one creation after another, so that they would know time, and so that they would again know that Allah was the absolute Originator of each and every thing. Allah did not create the Throne because He was and is independent of it and of everything He created; He cannot be described by anything in the cosmos simply because He has no physical body; Exalted is He above the characteristics of what He created a great deal of Exaltation.

“As regarding His saying, ...so that He might try you which of you is best in conduct,’ He has created

them in order to test them through the responsibility of obeying and worshipping Him, not out of His desire to test or to try them, since He already knows all things.”

Al-Ma'mun also asked him about the meaning of this verse:

“Had it been thy Lord’s Will, they would all have believed, (so would have) all those on earth! Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?! No soul can believe except by the Will of Allah” (Qur’an, Yunus:99–100).

Quoting his forefathers, ar-Rida (ع) said, “Muslims said to the Messenger of Allah (ص), We wish you forced those whom you have conquered, O Messenger of Allah, to accept Islam, so that our number would increase, and we would become stronger in the face of our enemies.’ The Messenger of Allah (ص) said, I am not going to meet Allah, the Almighty and the Exalted, having invented an innovation which He did not command me to do, nor am I the type of person who forces others to do anything at all.’ It was then that this verse was revealed: Had it been thy Lord’s Will, they would all have believed, (so would have) all those on earth,’ by means of forcing them, or when they find no other choice while in this world, just as will those who will believe only after witnessing Allah’s might and retribution in the life after death. If I do such a thing to them, they would not deserve any reward, but I wish they accept it out of their own choice rather than being forced to do so in order that they may deserve to be close to me and blessed through me, and they will thus remain in Paradise forever.’

“As regarding the meaning of No soul can believe except by the Will of Allah,’ it does not mean that it is prohibited from believing (without a prior consent from Allah); it simply means that Allah invites it to believe without forcing it to do so.”

The Imam (ع) said the following in his explanation of the verse which says,

“[Allah is He] Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy” (Qur’an, Al-Baqara:22):

“He made the earth suitable to the creation of your nature, agreeable to your bodies; He did not make it too hot to burn you, nor too cold to freeze you, nor too windy to cause you dizziness, nor too stinky to damage your heads, nor as liquid as water to cause you to drown, nor too solid to enable you to build houses and graves for your dead; rather, the Exalted and the Sublime One made it strong enough to be useful for you, for your bodies, and for your buildings, making it usable in your homes and graves and a great deal of other advantages as well; thus, He made the earth a couch for you.

“As for the heavens, He made them like a protective ceiling above your heads in which He let the sun and its moon and the stars orbit for your own good. He ... 'sent down water from the heavens, and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance,’ meaning thereby water which He caused to descend from a high altitude in order to reach the summits of your mountains and hills, valleys and plains. He caused it to descend as showers and as moisture which soil inhales, and He did not cause it to pour

down at once to ruin your lands, trees and other vegetation and fruits. And brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance' (Qur'an, Al-Baqara:22)

means whatever grows on earth for your sustenance, so Do not set up rivals unto Allah while you know (the truth),' that is, rivals' such as similitudes and such things like idols which have no comprehension, hearing, sight, nor are they able to do anything at all, while you know that they cannot create any of these great blessings with which He, your Lord, the Exalted, the Most High, has blessed you."

About the subject of the infallibility of Prophets, the Imam (ع) was asked to explain the meanings of some verses whose superficial meanings suggest that Prophets were not infallible at all, that they were liable to commit sins. At one of the meetings arranged by al-Ma'mun, the latter asked the Imam (ع): "O Son of the Messenger of Allah (ص)! Don't you claim that Prophets are infallible?"

The Imam (ع) answered in the affirmative.

Al-Ma'mun then asked him, "Then what is the meaning of this verse: Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and allow himself to be seduced'?"

The Imam answered this question by explaining that Allah had forbidden Adam and Eve from coming close to a particular tree without forbidding them from eating its fruit or the fruit of similar trees. They obeyed Allah by not coming near that tree, but Iblis (Eblis) confused them in this regard and suggested that they should eat not from that tree but from other similar trees, swearing to them by Allah that he was only providing them with advice. So they believed in his oath, and they ate the fruit of a similar tree, and that was before Adam was considered as a Prophet and before his descent to earth.

What he did was not a sin for which the penalty is Hellfire, but it was a minor disobedience which could be forgiven and could be committed by Prophets before wahi (revelation) reaches them. When Allah chose him and made him a Prophet, he became infallible and was not permitted to commit a sin, minor or major, telling him, "Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and allow himself to be seduced. But his Lord chose him (for His Grace); He turned to him, and gave him guidance."

Then he asked him about Ibrahim (Abraham) al-Khalil (ع), the Friend of Allah, and about the stage of doubt through which he passed as appears on the surface in the Holy Qur'an when he is mentioned, till truth became manifest to him and he believed therein. The Almighty says:

"When the night covered him, he saw a star. He said, This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, I do not love those that set.' When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said, This is my Lord.' But the moon set, so he said, Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.' When he saw the sun rising in splendour, he said, This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all).' But when the sun set, he said, O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of ascribing partners to Allah. For me, I have set my face firmly and truly towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I attribute partners to Allah'" (Qur'an, Al An'am:76-79).

About this issue, the Imam (ع) commented thus:

“Ibrahim (ع) never passed through a stage of doubt in Allah; rather, his story may be summarized thus: He lived in a society where three types of worship dominated: the worship of Venus, the worship of the moon, and the worship of the sun. The outward pretense of Ibrahim (ع) to follow these religions before declaring his belief in Allah was only to deny the validity of each one of them and to prove to others the fact that they were invalid, not due to his temporary belief in them. He simply wanted to prove to their fellows, through the method of argument which he employed in a spirit filled with belief in Him, that their type of creed and their norm of worship of Venus, the moon, and the sun, were not appropriate due to the variation which occurred to them and which is one of the attributes of the creatures, not of the Creator.”

Then the Imam (ع) added saying, “What Ibrahim al-Khalil (ع) did was actually according to the inspiration which he had received from Allah by the token of the verse that says, That was the reasoning about Us which We gave to Abraham (to employ) against his people’ (Qur’an, Al-An’am:83). What he did, therefore, was merely a method to win the argument against his people regarding the invalidity of their norms of worship and in their belief in gods other than Allah, which is a unique method among Qur’anic methods to invite others to believe.”

Al-Ma'mun then asked him about the meaning of the verse which says,

“... till the apostles give up hope (of their people) and (their people come to) think that they proved them to be liars, Our help will then come to them” (Qur’an, Yousuf: 110).

The reason for questioning is attributing despair to Allah’s Messengers after being promised help from Allah. Despair and despondency are forms of kufr (disbelief); the Almighty has said,

“Never give up hope of Allah’s mercy; truly none despairs of Allah’s mercy except those who have no faith” (Qur’an, Yousuf:87).

So, how can despair find its way to the heart of a messenger of Allah, or a prophet, knowing that, according to this verse, only kafirs can do so, and what is a greater sin than committing *kufr*?!

What is superficially obvious from the text of this verse is that the time when they despaired was after receiving the Message and inspiration. To this, the Imam (ع) answered by saying that the subject of despair in this verse is not Allah’s help promised to His messengers, but rather losing hope of their people ever believing in them and accepting their message; i.e. to believe in Him and renounce their previous disbelief and disobedience by their worship of gods other than Allah. The meaning of this verse, then, will be something like this: When the messengers lost hope that their people would ever believe in them, and when those people thought that they succeeded in proving those messengers liars, it is then that Our help came to them.

Thus is the outward ambiguity of the verse removed, and thus does the Imam (ع), through providing such glorious explanations to the sacred verses of the Holy Qur'an whose outward meaning is actually the opposite of that of the context, dispel the cloud of doubt which may come to one's mind regarding the infallibility of Prophets. They are not mere justifications or one's own personal opinions; rather, they are actual facts; to uphold to the contrary is not possible.

There are other verses the superficial meaning of which gives the impression that Allah has limbs just as humans do which He uses to achieve His purpose. An example is His statement addressing Iblis when the latter refused to prostrate to Adam as commanded by Allah: "What prohibited you from prostrating to what I have created with My own hands?" and also the verse saying, "When a leg will be uncovered and they are invited to prostrate..."

The Imam (ع) explains the meaning of Allah's hand to be His might. The meaning of the previous verse would be, "What prohibited you from prostrating to what I have created with My might and power?" Allah does not have eyes, legs, hands, or any such things as we may imagine which would put limits to Allah like those to man, and the revealed texts containing a reference to such things are given meanings which agree with conceiving Allah to be Exalted above having physical dimensions a great deal of exaltation.

The "leg" is interpreted by the Imam as a barrier of light which, when removed, will cause the believers to fall prostrating, while the legs of the hypocrites become too stiffened to prostrate.

Thus does Imam ar-Rida (ع) portray for us an accurate picture which is honest in interpreting the meanings embedded in the Glorious Book if we wish to honestly and wisely interpret its verses.

One more thing remains. There are narratives which contain some interpretations of Qur'anic verses attributed to Imam ar-Rida (ع) the authenticity of which is questioned simply because some of those who reported them are not free of the practice of distortion or fabrication.

What we feel comfortable with is: if such narrations do not contain anything which disagrees with the beliefs of followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (ع) regarding the interpretation of Qur'anic verses, it will be a testimony to their authenticity. Add to this the fact that we think it is quite unlikely that some narrators would deliberately tell lies about the Imam (ع) in cases where telling lies does not benefit the narrator a bit, particularly in the interpretations of the verses which we have quoted above. This is why we find scholars of exegesis rely on such narratives and their likes in explaining the Holy Qur'an. If they contradict one another, they accept the one which seems to have the most sound meaning, or to the ones which agree with the basic principles of the School of Thought.

In the case where the interpretation of certain verses becomes the basis of a legislative rule, or in the process of deriving one, then the authenticity of narration or interpretation has to be verified first as one provided by the Prophet (ص) or by members of his Ahl al-Bayt (ع), and attempts should be made to make sure that the integrity of their narrators is not questioned.

Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) justifies the existence of Qur'anic verses which can be interpreted in more than one way by saying, "The Almighty has done so in order to foil the attempt of wrong-doers from among those who would take control over the legacy of the knowledge of the Book left by the Messenger of Allah (ع), which he did not intend them to acquire, rendering them unable to explain the various possible meanings thereof."

It is as if Allah willed that the Prophet (ص) and those who would bear the Message after him would have a special distinction which is: the understanding of what others are not able to understand, so that people would resort to them when they are unable to understand certain verses of the Holy Qur'an which they need to understand for the betterment of their life and the comprehension of their creed.

The Imam's answers to theological questions were all in harmony with the environment of the occasion surrounding their legislation. Causes may be to achieve a social benefit, when the social aspect of legislation is more apparent than any other, or for a health-related, spiritual or psychological benefit. For example, when he explains the causes for the prohibition of adultery, the Imam (ع) says, "Adultery is prohibited due to the corruption it causes such as murders, loss of lineage, child desertion, chaos regarding inheritance, and other such aspects of corruption."

The Imam (ع) explains to us why usury (riba) is prohibited by saying, "The reason for prohibiting usury is because it eliminates favours, ruins funds, causes greed for profit, causes people to abandon their dealing with loans to each other or in paying with cash, or when they do each other favours, and due to all the bad consequences of corruption and oppression and the exhaustion of funds."

As regarding the prohibition of eating the meat of pigs, rabbits, dead animals, spleens, the Imam (ع) says, "As regarding pigs, their creation was distorted by Allah in order to provide a moral lesson to man, and in order to remind man to fear Allah, and as an evidence of Allah's might to distort what He creates at will, and because the food they eat is the filthiest of filth, in addition to many other reasons. As regarding the rabbits, they are like cats: Their claws are like those of cats and like wild animals. Their behaviour, therefore, is equally wild, in addition to their own inner dirtiness and due to their bleeding which is similar to the bleeding of women during their menstrual period because they are miscreants. As regarding dead animals, the prohibition of eating their meat is due to the damage such meat will cause to the body, and due to the fact that Allah has made lawful the meat of animals slaughtered in His name so that that would be a distinction between what is lawful and what is not. As regarding the spleen, it is prohibited because of the bad blood it contains, and the cause of its prohibition is similar to that of dead animals; it is equally bad in its consequences."

The Imam (ع) has said the following regarding the legislation of the pilgrimage (*hajj*): "The reason for the hajj is to seek to be the guest of Allah, to request more blessings, to part with past sins, to feel repentant about the past, and to look forward to the future. It is due to spending on the trip seeking nearness to Allah, tiring the body, abstaining from pleasures and desires, seeking nearness to Allah by worshipping Him, yielding and submitting to Him, looking up towards Him in cases of hot weather and chilling cold,

during security and fear, incessantly doing so, and due to all the benefits in it of desiring the rewards and fearing the wrath of Allah, the Dear One, the Exalted.”

As regarding marital relations between man and woman, the Imam (ع) justifies for us some legislative rules in this regard. For example, the reason why a man may marry up to four women, while a woman is prohibited from marrying more than one man, is that when a man marries four women, his children will all be related to him; had a woman married two husbands or more simultaneously, nobody would know for sure who fathered the sons she gave birth to, since they all were in cohabiting with her, and this causes a complete disorder for relating one to his father, and who should inherit who, and who is the kin of who.

The reason for repeating the divorce statement thrice is due to the time interval between each, and due to a possible desire for reconciliation or the calming of anger, if any, and to teach women to respect their husbands and deter them from disobeying them.

The reason why a husband can never remarry his wife whom he divorced thrice (articulating, in the process, the divorce statement nine times all in all), is that it is his right penalty so that men do not take divorce lightly or take advantage of women and think of them as weak, and so that the man would be considering his affairs, remaining awake and aware, so that he would lose all hope of a reunion after the ninth pronouncement of the divorce statement.

The reason why a wife during her waiting period (iddat) cannot remarry her previous husband who had divorced her twice till she marries someone else, is due to the fact that Allah had permitted divorce twice, saying, “A divorce is only permissible twice: after that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness,”¹¹¹ that is, after he had already divorced her for the third time, due to his committing something which Allah Almighty hates for him to do; therefore, He prohibited him from marrying her again except after she marries someone else in order to prohibit people from taking divorce lightly and in order to protect women’s rights.

Regarding the monetary distribution of inheritance by allotting the male heir twice the share of that of the female, the Imam (ع) says the following: “The reason for giving women half what men get of inheritance is that when the woman marries, she receives, while the man gives; therefore, Allah decided to assist the males to be able to give.”

He provides another reason why the man is given twice as much as the woman: The woman is considered dependent on the man when she needs, and he has to take care of her living expenses and to spend on her, while the woman is not required to take care of the expenses of the man, nor can she be required to pay his expenses if he was in need; therefore, Allah decreed to give the man more according to the Qur’anic verse, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more than the other, and because they support them from their means.”¹¹²

Regarding the common custom of defining the value of the dower to be equivalent to the value of five

hundred dirhams, the Imam (ع) says in a narrative: “Allah the Almighty and the Exalted has promised that if one believer pronounced *Allahu Akbar!* one hundred times, and *Subhana-Allah* one hundred times, and *Alhamdu-Lillah* one hundred times, and *La Ilaha Illa-Allah* one hundred more times, and send blessings unto His Prophet (ص) yet a hundred more, then he pleads to Him to grant him in marriage the huris of Paradise with large lovely eyes, He would surely marry him to one, then He determined women’s dowers to be five hundred dirhams. If any believer asks the hand of a woman from another Muslim brother, pays him the five hundred dirhams, and the brother does not marry him to that woman, he would have committed ‘uqooq (disobedience of Allah’s commandments) towards him, and Allah will not marry him to a huri.”

The hadith of Imam ar-Rida (ع) contains precious jewels and invaluable treasures in which man senses the depth of the idea, the magnificence of tafsir, the beauty of performance, with neither the artificial manner of expression, nor the ambiguity of meaning, nor the stubbornness of instruction. When he is asked about the reasonable comprehension of some ahadith of the Prophet (ص) in which a cloud of ambiguity hovers above their narration, he defines their actual objective with flexibility and ease, as if hadith has no other connotation except the one he provides.

Some people asked him (ع) about the meaning of this tradition: “My companions are like the stars: If you follow any of them, you shall receive guidance,” and another one saying, “Leave my companions to me.” Both of these traditions are considered by Sunnis as the foundation of their generalization of judgement regarding all companions of the Prophet (ص) barring none, thus justifying even their acts which contradicted Islamic justice, calling what they could not justify as “an error in ijtihad.”

But the Imam (ع) provides us with the actual explanation of these and other such ahadith with honesty and integrity, outlining in an easy manner their exact meaning. In his answer regarding the first tradition, he said, “Yes; he did say this hadith, meaning thereby the companions who did not make any alteration after him or any change (to the Islamic creed).”

He was asked, “How can you tell that they altered and changed?” He said, “This is due to what is reported about him (ع) that he said, Certain individuals among my companions will be pushed away by force from my Pool (of Kawthar) on the Day of Judgement just as strange camels are pushed away from the watering place, and I shall cry, O Lord! My companions! My companions!’ and it shall be said to me, You do not know what innovations they invented after you,’ so they will be pushed away towards the left side (where Hell is), and I shall say, Away with them; ruined they shall be.” The Imam continued to say, “Such will be the penalty of those who alter and change (the *hadith* and the *Sunnah*).”

This *hadith* is narrated, with a minor variation in its wording, by al-Bukhari who quotes Abdullah ibn Mas'ud citing the Prophet (ص) saying, “I shall be the first to reach the Pool, then the souls of some men from among you will be resurrected and they shall be prohibited from coming near me, and I shall say, Lord! These are my companions!’ And it shall be said to me, You do not know what they did after you...”¹¹³ A number of huffaz and narrators of hadith reported this tradition in various wordings which

maintained the same contextual meaning, proving thus that it is consecutively reported.

The Imam (ع), through his frank and proven answer, saved us the effort to look for lame excuses for the flagrant transgressions in which a number of the sahaba fell, and from far-fetched artificialities to justify the errors of conduct which they deliberately committed with determination and which the same *huffaz* could not justify except by saying that they were cases of “mistaken *ijtihad*” which, according to them, did not contradict the justice expected of them, having been pressed by their attempt to attribute absolute justice to the sahabi no matter what he did...!

A companion (*sahabi*) of the Prophet (ص) who was distinguished with the honour of being so close to the Prophet (ص) is the custodian over the fruits of the Message and the protector of its structure through his faith and deeds. He is a man who ought to be taken as a role model of conduct. He is a man, as the Imam (ع) used to say, who does not alter or change any of the statements of the Prophet (ص).

As regarding those who altered and changed, these cannot be awarded a unique distinction, just because they were companions of the Prophet (ص), which raised their status above that of other Muslims simply because they were not up to par with the level of responsibility of being honest, which is expected of them, to carry out after the demise of the Prophet (ص) and the cessation of *wahi* (divine inspiration).

The *hadith* which the Imam (ع) narrated about Ibn Mas'ud, and which is recorded by a number of those who learned the Holy Qur'an and *hadith* by heart in their books, is considered as an explanation of this *hadith* and of its connotation.

Moreover, it puts the sahaba on equal footing with the others in subjecting their behaviour to criticism and discussion, and it shatters the self-immunity which was granted to them in accordance with alleged Prophetic “statements” actually fabricated by a number of *huffaz* and traditionists without permitting themselves or others to discuss but take for granted.

In another *hadith*, the Imam (ع) proves to us, through a clear tradition by the Prophet (ص), that some individuals who were regarded as sahaba were not actually so, which shatters all the excuses used to justify the mistakes and the transgression committed by them. For example, Muhammad ibn Ishaq at-Taliqani reported that a man in Khurasan swore by divorce that Mu'awiyah was not among the true companions of the Messenger of Allah (ص), and this happened when Imam ar-Rida (ع) was present there. The jurists there issued their verdict that the man had actually divorced his wife, and the Imam (ع) was asked to provide his own opinion in this regard. He decided that the man's wife was not divorced; therefore, those jurists wrote a statement and sent it to him. In it, they asked him, “How did you come to say, O son of the Messenger of Allah (ص), that the woman was not to be divorced?” He wrote down on the same sheet saying, “It is so because of what you yourselves narrate from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri who quotes the Messenger of Allah (ص) saying about those who accepted Islam on the day of conquering Mecca, that is, Friday, the 20th of the month of Ramadan, 8 A.H., corresponding to January 14, 630

A.D., when he was surrounded by a large number of people, You are good; my companions are good; and there shall be no migration after this Fath (conquest),’ without including these (meaning Mu'awiyah) among his companions.” The jurists had to adopt the decision of the Imam (ع).

Thus did the Imam (ع) deny that Mu'awiyah was a companion of the Prophet (ص). Such a claim used to surround this man with a halo of sanctity and was used to justify the very serious transgressions which he committed. Such transgressions left their terrible marks on the structure of the Islamic government since then.

They justified such transgressions by saying that he was a sahabi, and that, as such, whatever he did or said could not possibly cast a doubt about his integrity, adding, “If we see the good aspect of his action missing, we may say that he attempted *ijtihad*, and he erred,” even if such error was at the expense of the Prophet's Message itself...!

If we accept this argument, we would be justifying all the transgressions and erroneous behaviour of some companions of the Prophet (ص) regardless of their motives or horrible consequences. The transgressions of Mu'awiyah and his norms of conduct, in which he departed from the line of the Islamic Message altogether, and which agreed with the attitude of animosity towards Islam, and whose motives and impulses were to cast doubts and suspicions, nobody is really obligated to defend and describe as within the Islamic Shari'a simply because they were the result of an erroneous *ijtihad* wherein the mujtahid is rewarded with one reward, due to his “immunity” which does not include Mu'awiyah simply because the latter was not a companion of the Prophet (ص) but was just like any other Muslim whose conduct was subject to accountability and criticism, and the verdict in his regard is based on the anticipated results of his deeds.

The directive which the Imam (ع) intended by denying that those who accepted Islam, including Mu'awiyah, were not all companions of the Prophet on the day when Mecca was conquered, is one of the strongest and deepest of his directives, for he drew a line between the Prophet (ص) and his true companions on one hand, and those who accepted Islam after the conquest of Mecca and under the pressure of a superior power and authority on the other.

Had it not been for their reaction to the precarious situation versus the might of their opponent, realizing that they had no choice except to make asylum and submit to the word of Islam, they would have otherwise dealt with Islam in a quite different manner...

Al-Ma'mun once asked the Imam (ع) why the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (ع) is called the divider of Paradise and of Hell, and how that attribute came to be applied to him. The Imam (ع) in turn asked him, “O commander of the faithful! Have you not narrated from your father from his forefathers quoting Abdullah ibn Abbas saying that he had heard the Messenger of Allah (ع) saying, Loving Ali (ع) is iman, and hating him is *kufr*?” Al-Ma'mun answered in the affirmative, so the Imam (ع) said, “If the distribution of Paradise and of Hell is done according to loving or hating him, then he is the distributor of

Paradise and of Hell.”

Al-Ma'mun then said, “May Allah never permit me to live after your demise, O father of al-Hassan! I testify that you are the heir of the knowledge of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).”

Abul-Salt al-Harawi said, “After the Imam (ع) had gone back home, I came to visit him, and I said to him, O son of the Messenger of Allah! What an excellent answer you have given the commander of the faithful!’ He said, O Abul-Salt! I spoke to him in the way he understood best, and I have heard my father telling hadith from his forefathers about Ali (ع) saying, The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, O Ali! You are the distributor of Paradise and of Hell on the Day of Judgement; you say to Hell: This is mine, and that is yours...”

In another narrative, he asked the Imam (ع) about the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (ع) as to why he did not restore Fadak to its rightful owners after becoming the caliph. He answered him by saying, “We are members of a family who, upon becoming rulers, do not take their rights from those who confiscated them. Should we become in charge of the Muslims, we shall rule them and restore their confiscated rights to them, but we do not do so for our own selves.”

Fadak remained the symbol of the lost justice according to the Ahl al-Bayt (ع); for az-Zamakhshari says the following in his great book titled *Rab'i al-Abrar*: “Harun ar-Rashid kept pressing Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) to take Fadak back, and he kept refusing. When he insisted that he should, he said, “I shall not take it back except in its boundaries.” He asked him, “And what are its boundaries?” He said, “The first is Aden;” ar-Rashid’s face changed colour, yet he asked him, “And what is the second boundary?” He said, “Samarkand;” now his face started shaking in anger.

He asked him, “And what is the third boundary?” He said, “Africa;” and the caliph’s face now turned black in outrage, yet he asked him, “And what is the fourth boundary?” He said, “The ocean, and whatever lies beyond the Caspian Sea and Armenia.” Harun ar-Rashid then said, “There is nothing left for us; so, come and take my throne as well!” The Imam (ع) said, “I had told you before that if I defined its boundaries, you would refuse to give it back to me.”

From this dialogue between Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (ع) and Harun ar-Rashid, we can comprehend the vast dimension of the significance of Fadak to Ahl al-Bayt (ع), and that it did not represent simply a piece of land and a few palm trees but a big missionary objective whose significance was linked to the significance of the Message itself in its connotation and depth.

Another person asked him about the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (ع) as to why people deserted him after knowing his distinction, his past feats, and the status he enjoyed in the eyes of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). He answered, “They deserted him and preferred others over him after having come to know his merits simply because he had killed a great number of their fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, and other relatives who defied Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ); therefore, they kept their grudge against him inside their hearts and they did not like it when he became their ruler. They did not have

grudge against anyone else as much as they had against him, for nobody else was so forceful in making jihad in the defense of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as much as he was; so, they deserted him for someone else.”

The Prophet (ﷺ) realized the seriousness of Ali's stand, the difficulty of the situation after his demise, and the dire consequences awaiting him due to his firm jihad in the Cause of Allah. The statements he (ﷺ) made regarding Ali (ع), therefore, were meant to deter those who were waiting for a chance to get even with him. Had they not been veiled by grudges, and by his own glorious past, they would have been described as the beginning of the tragedy of justice and righteousness.

We cannot find a better explanation for the change in public opinion regarding Ali's stand after the death of the Prophet (ﷺ) better than what Imam ar-Rida (ع) provided. If we set aside the clear ahadith which named the Imam (ع) as the caliph succeeding the Prophet (ﷺ) without any question and consulted the faculty of reason in all the criteria and logical orders to determine the person who should succeed the Prophet (ﷺ) as the caliph, the unavoidable outcome would certainly be none other than Ali (ع). Besides, had the grudges and the past not been the cause of the removal of Ali from the post of ruler, the question would have remained unanswered by any honest and equitable person.

Another person asked the Imam (ع), “Tell me, O son of the Messenger of Allah! Why didn't Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) fight his enemies during the twenty-five years after the demise of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as he did during the days of his caliphate?” He answered, “It is due to his following the example of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) who did not fight the polytheists of Mecca during the thirteen years after his Prophethood, or the ones in Medina during the nineteen months period of his stay there; it is due to the number of his supporters being too small.

Likewise, Ali (ع) did not engage himself in fighting his enemies because his own supporters were too few. Since the Prophethood of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was not nullified by the fact that he did not make jihad during the period of thirteen years (in Mecca) and nineteen months (in Medina), the Imamate of Ali (ع) was not nullified because he did not perform jihad for twenty-five years, for the deterring factor in both examples was one and the same.”

Among the *ahadith* of Imam ar-Rida (ع) is one narrated by Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Hamadani; he said, “I asked Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع), What is the reason for which the Almighty and Exalted Allah drowned Pharaoh even after Pharaoh had believed in Him and admitted His unity?’ He answered, Because he believed only when he saw Allah's retribution, and belief to avoid danger is not accepted. This is Allah's judgement regarding past and future generations. The Exalted and the Almighty has said,

When they saw Our Punishment, they said, We believe in Allah, the One God, and we reject the partners we used to associate with Him, but their professing the faith when they (actually) saw Our Punishment was not going to benefit them' (Qur'an, Al Mu'min [or Ghafir]:84-85).

The Exalted and Almighty has also said,

The day that certain Signs of thy Lord do come, no good will it do to a soul to believe in them then, if it did not believe before nor did it earn righteousness through its faith” (Qur’an, Al An’am: 158).

So when Pharaoh was about to be drowned, he said, “I believe that there is no God except the One in Whom the children of Israel believe, and I am of those who submit (to Allah in Islam).’ (It was then said to him), Ah now! But a little while before were you in rebellion! And you did mischief (and violence)! This day shall We save you in your body, so that you may be a Sign to those who come after thee!” (Qur’an, Yunus:90-92).

This narrative has a moral for those who wish to learn, for iman is not that one believes and returns to his Lord only when he sees no avenue of salvation before him and despair overcomes him; rather, iman is belief in Allah and going towards Him voluntarily in both cases of despair and of hope.

Another *hadith* narrated by Imam ar-Rida (ع) stated the following: “Anyone who meets a poor Muslim and greets him in a greeting different from the one whereby he greets the rich, he would meet the Exalted and the Almighty on the Day of Judgement and He is angry with him.” In this tradition, the Imam (ع) provides us with a very beautiful example of humanity enjoined by genuine Islamic conduct governing the Muslim’s conduct with his Muslim brother, for Islam united all members of the nation in its law of personal conduct; there is no distinction for the wealthy man over the deprived poor man, and all people are equal under the judgement of Islam.

Another *hadith* of the Imam (ع) is one in which he was asked by Ibn as-Sikkit, “Why did the Almighty and Exalted God send Musa (Moses) ibn Imran (ع) with a miraculous cane and white hand and the tool of sorcery, asa (Jesus [ع]) with miraculous medicine, and Muhammad (ص) with miraculous speech and oratory?”

The Imam (ع) said, “When the Almighty and the Exalted One sent Moses (ع), sorcery dominated the minds of people of his time. He, therefore, brought them from the Almighty and the Exalted One something which they never had, nor could they bring about anything like it, thus rendering their sorcery void and driving his argument against them home. When the Almighty and the Exalted God sent Jesus during a period of time when chronic diseases became widespread and people were in dire need of a cure, Jesus (ع) brought them from Allah, the Almighty and the Exalted, something they never had, bringing the dead back to life, curing those born blind and the lepers by the Will of Allah, proving his argument against them. And when the Almighty and the Exalted One sent Muhammad (ص) during the time when speeches and oratory (and I think he said with poetry, too), he brought them the Book of the Almighty and the Exalted God and with the wisdom and counsel, thereby voiding their arguments.” Ibn as-Sikkit said, “By Allah I have never seen anyone like you! What is the argument against people these days, then?” He answered, “Reason. Through it can you come to know who tells the truth about Allah, so you believe in him, and who tells lies about Allah, so you disbelieve in him.” Ibn as-Sikkit said, “This, by Allah, is the right answer...”

A miracle is a supernatural thing which the ordinary individual is unable to perform due to his limited energies and motivational powers. Miracles are different from sorcery. Sorcery is not an actual supernatural act but a swift movement which causes the viewer to see the realities turned upside down, or turns the visible picture into its contrary.

This may take place by subjecting the viewer to obscure effects which veil from his sight a certain colour or a picture. What leads us to that conclusion is the statement of the Almighty in the context of narrating how Moses (ع) fared with the wizards from the descendants of Israel, saying,

“So their ropes and canes seemed to him, because of their sorcery, as though they were crawling” (Qur’an, Taha:66).

Sorcery, then, is nothing more than stimulating the imagination, making things look different than they are, and causing one to fall under a magical spell. A miracle is an actual result of a super-natural deed intended to win the argument against people in the process of proving one’s true prophethood and mission, and it is an act which Allah causes to take place.

It is different from sorcery because it is not subjected to psychological effects, or complications in the movement, but a broadening of the energy which affects matters viewed by man due to the effect of the Might of the Almighty. In narrating the story of Moses (ع), the Almighty states,

“... and (appoint him) an apostle to the children of Israel, (with this message): I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah’s leave; and I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I bring the dead back to life by Allah’s leave” (Qur’an, Ali Imran:49).

And the Almighty has also said,

“And it was never the part of an apostle to bring a Sign except as Allah permitted. For each period is a Book (revealed)” (Qur’an, Al-Ra’d:38).

Every prophet had a miracle which distinguished him from other prophets and messengers and which was in harmony, in its own particular way, with the common phenomena prevailing upon the social condition of the time, so that the psychological effect caused by its miraculous effect would become a reality, as the Imam (ع) meant in the tradition stated above.

The miracles of prophets, according to the contexts of the verses and narratives, were not the result of the effect of a natural human energy; rather, they were the results of a creative energy whereby Allah distinguished His Prophets for the purpose of establishing the superiority of their argument when such a miracle was necessitated by their mission.

As regarding the miracles of the Imams which are reported in order to testify to their Imamate and to their being the most rightful for the post of caliphate, this is not something unusual about them since they

were selected by Allah to be His vicegerents on earth. He entrusted them to carry out the responsibilities of the message after the demise of His Prophet (ﷺ), but what must be researched is that many such miracles were proven to have been performed by them and were attested to by an acceptable medium. But the Imams never needed a miracle beyond the qualifications of knowledge and conduct which distinguished them in order to prove the authenticity of their Imamate, for the qualifications which characterized them were by themselves the miracles proving their right.

Among the ahadith of Imam ar-Rida (ع) which deal with the Islamic legislative system is one narrated by Abdullah ibn Tawoos who said, "I told Abul-Hassan ar-Rida (ع) that I had a nephew whom I married off to my daughter and who used to frequently pronounce the divorce statement. He said, If he is a descendant of one of your (Shi'a) brethren, there is nothing to worry about, but if he is from these (Sunni) brothers, then recall your daughter, for they shall have to separate.'

I said, But, may my life be sacrificed for yours, did not Abu Abdullah (ع) use to say, Beware of those divorced thrice at one time, for they shall marry more than once?' He said, Yes, this is the case if the man is one of your brethren, not one of these; whoever follows the creed of certain people is bound to follow their [juristic] rules."

As regarding the issue of divorce, which is the subject-matter of this hadith, the school of thought of the Ahl al-Bayt (ع) determines that if the divorce statement contains "thrice" in it, rather than being repeated twice again, is not considered binding but it would be if the statement were repeated twice provided it meets the other conditions such as the presence of two just witnesses, the absence of the use of force, and the woman being tahir (clean), that is, she has not cohabited with her husband prior to his pronouncement and has not taken her ghusul (ceremonial bath) yet, in addition to other conditions which validate divorce. This is what is commonly accepted, while others have decided that it will be void as the apparent understanding of this hadith suggests.

But if the husband repeats his statement, "She is divorced!" three times, it is, according to Imami (Shi'a) Muslims considered as one-time divorce with rendering the repetition null if such repetition is to be doubtful. The rest of Muslim sects regard divorce in both instands as binding and the husband cannot go back to her before she marries another husband.

Another *hadith* narrated by the Imam (ع) says, "The Almighty and Exalted One has decreed three rites each depends on yet another: He decreed the prayers and the payment of zakat; so, He does not accept the prayers of anyone who says his prayers but does not pay zakat; He decreed that one must thank Him and thank his parents, too; so, He does not accept the thanks of one who thanks Him but is not grateful to his parents; and He decreed that one should fear Him and remain in constant contact with his kin; so, anyone who does not remain in close touch with his relatives does not in turn fear Allah, the Exalted, the Almighty."

Still another says, "A believer (mu'min) cannot be truly so except after acquiring three attributes: from his

Lord, from his Prophet (ص), and from his fellow humans. From his Lord, he must learn how to keep a secret;

The Almighty and the Exalted said,

He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make anyone acquainted with his Mysteries, except an apostle whom He has chosen' (Qur'an, Al-Jinn:26-27).

From his Prophet, he must learn patience while dealing with people; the Exalted and the Almighty ordered His Prophet to be patient with people saying, Uphold forgiveness; command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant (folks). ' (Qur'an, Al-Araf: 199).

From his fellows, he has to learn patience during periods of poverty and adversity, for the Dear and the Almighty One says, ... And to be firm and patient in pain and in adversity' (Qur'an, Al-Baqara: 177).

A man asked the Imam (ع) once about the meaning of the verse saying, "Whoever relies on Allah, He suffices him." He said, "Reliance on Allah is in various degrees one of which is that you rely on Him in everything related to you, and when He does something to you which you know will not bring you anything good, you rely on His wisdom in doing it, so you nevertheless put your trust in Him willingly. Another is to believe in the Unseen regarding Allah of which you have no knowledge, so you relied on Him and on His custodians, trusting in Him in their regard, and in others." He was also asked once about the extent of such reliance.

He said, "It is that you fear none save Allah." What the Imam here means is that you submit to the Will of Allah and accept His decree. Ahmed ibn Najm asked him about the pride which spoils one's deeds. He said, "Pride is degrees; among them is that one sees his bad deed as good, so he likes it and feels proud of it; another is that one believes in Allah and feels he is doing Him a favour by believing in Him, whereas He is the One who enabled that person to believe in Him."

He, peace be with him, said once, "If one lacks five attributes, do not expect to gain anything good out of him for your life in this world or for the life to come: if his lineage is known to be untrustworthy, if his nature lacks generosity, if his temper lacks balance, if he lacks a noble conduct, and if he lacks fear of his Lord."

He (ع) was asked once who a lowly person is. He said, "Anyone who has something (a serious moral defect, habit, etc.) to distract him from Allah."

Among the jewels of his wisdom are the following; read them, digest them, and share them with those whom you love:

"Allah abhors hearsay, the loss of one's funds (through foolishness), and excessive questioning."

“To be courteous to people is to cross half the way to achieving wisdom.”

“The discretion of a Muslim is not complete except after he acquires ten merits: Allah accepts his good deeds, he is trustworthy, he sees as plentiful the little good that others do for him, while seeing his own abundant good as little; he does not fret from being asked for favours, nor does he feel tired of constantly seeking knowledge; poverty reached in order to please Allah is better for him than wealth accumulated otherwise; to be subjected to power while trying to serve Allah is better in his regard than achieving power over his foe, and obscurity he prefers over fame.” Then he said, “And the third one..., do you know what the third one is?”

It was said to him, “What is it?” He said, “Whenever he meets someone, he says to himself, He is better than me and more pious.’ People are two types: a person better than him and more pious, and one who is more evil than him and more lowly. If he meets the one who is more evil than him and more lowly, he says to himself, Maybe the goodness of this (statement) is implied, and it is better that he hears such a compliment, while my own goodness is apparent and it is detrimental to me.’ And when he sees someone better than him and more pious, he would humble himself before him trying to raise himself to his level. So if he does that, his glory will be higher, his reputation will be better, and he will become distinguished above his contemporaries.”

“Silence is one of the gates of wisdom. Silence wins the love of others. It is an indication of everything good.”

“Everyone’s friend is his reason; his enemy is his ignorance.”

“Among the habits of Prophets is cleanliness.”

“One who is blessed with plenty must spend generously on his family.”

“If you mention someone who is present, use a kunya (surname) for him, and if he is absent, mention his full name.”

“Time will come when one’s safety lies in ten things nine of which are in staying aloof from people, and the tenth in staying silent.”

“Whoever scrutinizes his behaviour wins; whoever does not do so loses. Whoever fears the consequences will live safely. Whoever learns a moral from others achieves insight, and whoever achieves insight achieves wisdom, and whoever achieves wisdom achieves knowledge. One who befriends the ignorant will be worn out. The best of wealth is that which safeguards one’s honour. The best of reason is one’s knowledge of his own self. If a true believer becomes angry, his anger does not cause him to abandon righteousness; when he is pleased, his pleasure will not tempt him into wrongdoing, and when he achieves power, he does not take more than what rightfully belongs to him.”

“If one’s attributes become plentiful, they will relieve him from having to win praise by mentioning them.”

“Do not pay attention to the view of someone who does not follow your advice for his own good. Whoever seeks guidance from the appropriate source will never slip, and if he slips, he will find a way to correct himself.”

“People’s hearts are sometimes coming towards you, sometimes keeping away from you; sometimes they are active, sometimes they are relaxed. If they come along, they will achieve wisdom and understanding, and if they stay away, they will be exhausted and worn out; so, take them when they come to you and when they are active, and shun them when they stay away or are relaxed.”

“Accompany with caution the person who has authority over you; be humble when in the company of a friend; stay alert when facing an enemy, and mingle with the public with a smile on your face.”

“Postponement is detrimental to the fulfillment of desires. Fulfillment is the gain of the strict. Wastefulness is the calamity of one who can afford it. Miserliness tears up honour. Passion invites trouble. The best and most honourable of virtues is to do others favours, to aid the one who calls for help, to bring the hope of the hopeful to reality, not to disappoint the optimist, to have an ever increase of the number of friends when you are alive, and the number of those who will cry when you die.”

“The miser one is never restful. The envious is never pleased. The grumbling is never loyal. The liar has no conscience.”

“One who struggles to satisfy the needs of his family shall have more rewards than those who perform *jihad* in the Way of Allah.”

“Assisting the weak is better for you than your act of charity.”

“No servant of Allah achieves true belief except when he acquires three attributes: 1) He derives juristic deductions from the creed; 2) He is wise regarding his livelihood, and 3) He is patient while facing calamities.”

“Beware of one who wants to offer you advice by speaking behind others’ backs; he does not realize how bad his own end shall be.”

He (ع) was asked once who the best of believers are; he said, “They are the ones who are excited with expectation when they do a good deed, who pray for Allah’s forgiveness when they commit a bad one, who show gratitude when they are granted something, who are patient when they are tried, who forgive those who anger them.”

He (ع) was asked once, “How did you start your day?” He answered, “With a shorter life–span, with our deeds being recorded, with death round our necks, with Fire behind our backs, and we do not know what will be done to us.”

He (ع) also said, “Wealth is not accumulated except by five means: extreme miserliness, a long–

standing optimism, an overwhelming care, a boycott of the relatives, and a preference of this life over the life to come.”

Ali ibn Shu'ayb said that he once visited Abul-Hassan Ali ar-Rida (ع) who asked him, “O Ali! Do you know whose subsistence is the best?” He answered, “You, master, know better than me.” He said, “It is that of the one through whom others’ subsistence is improved. Do you know who has the worst subsistence?” Ali answered, “You know better than me!”

The Imam (ع) answered saying, “It is that of the one who does not include others in it.” Then he added, “O Ali! Be thoughtful to the boons for they are wild: if they leave people, they never come back to them. O Ali! The worst of people is someone who stops his contributions to charity, eats by himself, and whips his slave (or servant).”

When al-Hassan ibn Sahl died, He (ع) said, “To congratulate one for a reward in store for him is better than to console him on a swift calamity.”

This is a truly magnificent bouquet of shining statements made by Imam a-Rida (ع) which emanate with his wisdom, overflow with his iman, and over-brim with tasty intellectual fruits, but this book is too small to contain all of them. This book was originally meant to be no more than a hundred pages, yet the Almighty has enabled it to grow, for He, and only He, helps promote and disseminate a good word and a good deed. In his statements, the Imam (ع) defines glorious ethical and educational manners and the upright conduct of a true belief, offering some glimpses of humanity for social cooperation and coexistence a Muslim is supposed to implement if he wants to be in harmony with the principles of Islam. They make up, if implemented, a milestone in the social change, turning an oppressive ignorant society into an advanced civilized one built upon virtue and love, justice and equity, respect and morality. But who is there to take upon himself such a task? Who has the power to implement the moral precepts provided by this great Imam (ع) and social reformer? The answer is too obvious to state...

We have to translate these statements into actions in our daily life and be in harmony with their ethical and humane practical implications if we wish to direct our individual and social conduct to the right direction which safeguards its principles and precepts in order to create a nation based on virtues and humanity, and build it from within in a firm spiritual structure. Such a structure is reflects its practical reality and affects its intellectual and social objectives so that it would be “the best nation that ever was” (Qur’an, Sarat Aali ‘Imran: 110).

May the Almighty enable us and your own self to follow in the footsteps of Imam a-Rida (ع), and may He strengthen our conviction, keep our feet firm on His Right Path, the Path of happiness in the life of this world and of salvation in the life to come, Allahomma aammen.

6) Imam Muhammad At-Taqi (as)

His name is Muhammad; "Abu Ja'far," at-Taqi and al-Jawad are his titles. He is sometimes called Abu Ja'far II, the first being Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع). His father's name is Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع); his respected mother is known as Subaika or Sukayna. He was born in Medina on the 10th of Rajab 195 A.H./April 8, 811 A.D. At that time, al-Amin son of Harun ar-Rashid was the monarch of Baghdad.

It is a sad story that Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع) had to face series of misfortunes since his early childhood. For only a very brief peaceful period, he enjoyed the love and availed himself of the teachings of his father. He was five years old when Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) was forced to leave Medina for Khurasan. The sire never saw his son again since then, for Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) died in Merv three years after this separation.

The astonishment of people knew no bounds when, a few years later, they saw the boy arguing and expostulating with the renowned scholars of fiqh, tafsir, hadith and kalam, and subduing them in the presence of al-Ma'mun. They had to admit that God-gifted knowledge never depends on material resources or on age.

Political exigencies had compelled al-Ma'mun to cultivate relations with the descendants of Imam Ali and Fatima (ع) in order to win the support of the Shi'as. After all, being a Hashemite himself, he was related to them though remotely. He was aware of the political need to maintain close relations with them; therefore, at one of the gatherings relof heir-apparentship, he married his sister Umm Habiba to Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) and betrothed his daughter Umm al-Fadl to the son of Imam ar-Rida (ع), this Muhammad at-Taqi (ع). He thought that those steps would enable him to win over Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) completely.

But al-Ma'mun soon realized that Imam ar-Rida (ع) continued to lead the same simple and saintly life which characterized the descendants of the Prophet (ص). The pattern of his true Islamic life, which was bound to disseminate the spirit of fraternity and equality, was obviously harmful to al-Ma'mun's authority, especially when Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) was now a member of the royal family. It was at this point that he decided to put an end to the Imam's life.

But as he thought it expedient that he should keep the Shi'as, particularly the Persians, on his side, he pretended to be very depressed at Imam Ali ar-Rida's death, as the reader has already come to know. This was also necessary for him in trying his best to prove that he had no hand in killing him. In order to isolate himself from any suspicion, he summoned ar-Rida's son, Muhammad at-Taqi, from Medina to Baghdad to marry him off to his daughter Umm al-Fadl although she was already engaged.

The appointment of Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) as heir-apparent had been an intolerable dilemma for the Abbasides; so, when ar-Rida died, they sighed in relief. They also succeeded in causing al-Ma'mun to appoint his son Trenchaman as his successor who later came to be known as caliph al-Muta'sim Billah. During the time when Imam ar-Rida was the heir-apparent, the colour of the caliph's court and royal

robes had been changed from black to green. After the Imam's death, they changed it again to black which signalled the restoration of Abbaside traditions. All these steps undertaken by al-Ma'mun sufficiently satisfied the Abbasides who thought that he was acting in accordance with their own desires.

But when al-Ma'mun proclaimed that he was going to marry his daughter off to the son of Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع), their tribal attitude was stimulated. They could no longer hide their feelings, and their delegation approached al-Ma'mun and complained in the most unambiguous statements they could make, telling him that the honours which he had showered on Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) had grieved them, and that they tolerated it because the Imam could be respected in view of his age, learning and other virtues, and that he deserved those honours only to a certain extent.

But elevating his son, who was quite young, so much as to prefer him over all other dignitaries and learned scholars did not befit the caliph. Furthermore, the marriage of al-Ma'mun's sister to Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) did not prove prosperous. Why did the caliph, then, wish to offer the hand of the princess to ar-Rida's son, anyway?

Al-Ma'mun told them that ar-Rida's son, Muhammad, was no doubt a boy of tender age, but he had inherited his father's virtues and qualities in full; the learned scholars of the Islamic world could not compete with him, and that if they doubted, they could put the boy to test. This reply, though totally said in jest, amounted to a challenge. Prompted by al-Ma'mun's taunt, they consented to judge the boy's knowledge in a contest with the most learned authority of Baghdad then, namely Yahya ibn Aktham.

Al-Ma'mun convened a pompous gathering for this open expostulation. There was anxiety to see this unequal match where a boy of eight was to contend with the seasoned and renowned Chief Justice of the land. People crowded from every quarter. Historians have recorded that apart from dignitaries and the nobility, 900 seats were reserved only for scholars. Al-Ma'mun's reign was described as the golden age of learning; experts from every trade and profession had assembled in that great capital from every corner of the world.

Al-Ma'mun had a carpet laid by the side of his throne to seat Imam Muhammad at-Taqi. In front of him was accommodated the Chief Justice Yahya ibn Aktham. There was pindrop silence among the audience who waited to hear the arguments. Silence was broken by Yahya who said, "Will His Majesty allow me to put some questions to Muhammad at-Taqi?" Al-Ma'mun answered: "You may seek that permission from Muhammad at-Taqi himself."

Yahya (to Muhammad at-Taqi): "Do you allow me to ask you a question?" Muhammad at-Taqi: "Yes, you may ask whatever you please." Yahya: "What is the atonement for a person who hunts a game while he is dressed in the pilgrimage garb?"

The question itself indicated that Yahya underestimated the status of his opponent. Intoxicated with the pride of position and knowledge, he thought that the young boy might well be aware of simple daily routine problems of prayer or fasting, but the possibility that he might be totally ignorant of the statutes of

pilgrimage or of the atonements of the sins or mistakes committed by a pilgrim never entertained his mind.

The sagacious, young Imam was clever enough to respond to the old seasoned inquirer. Instead of giving a general or a vague reply, he analyzed the different aspects of the question so aptly that the audience immediately had a true evaluation of the Imam's knowledge and of Yahya's shallow-mindedness. Yahya, too, was puzzled and felt humiliated when the Imam addressed him thus:

"Your question is utterly vague and lacks definition. You should first clarify whether the game killed was outside the sanctified area or inside it; whether the hunter was aware of his sin or did so in ignorance; did he kill the game purposely or by mistake? Was the hunter a slave or a free man? Was he an adult or a minor? Did he commit the sin for the first time or had he done so before? Was the hunted game a bird or some thing else? Was it a small animal or a big one? Is the sinner sorry for his misdeed or does he insist on it? Did he kill it secretly at night or openly during daylight? Was he putting on the pilgrimage garb for hajj or for the umra?! Unless you clarify and define these aspects, how can you have a definite answer?"

Whatever Yahya's knowledge might have been, he was undoubtedly a well-read man specialized in jurisprudence. While the Imam was unfolding all such aspects of the problem, he had concluded that he was no match for his ingenious opponent. His face lost colour and the onlookers knew the situation as it was. His lips were sealed and he made no reply. Al-Ma'mun fully assessed his condition and thought it useless to put any further pressure on him.

He, rather, requested Imam Muhammad at-Ta'qi (ع) to solve all the aspects of the question one by one so that the listeners might gain knowledge. The Imam, in spite of his young age, explained the various aspects of the question. Yahya, silent and puzzled, gazed at him. But al-Ma'mun was bent on carrying the matter to its very extreme. He, therefore, requested the Imam to put some questions to Yahya if he liked. The Imam accordingly said, "May I ask you a question?"

Disillusioned, Yahya, who now had a correct idea about the Imam's ability and had now no misunderstanding about himself, said in a humble tone: "Your grace can ask; I shall reply if I can or I shall get it solved by your own self." Then the Imam put up a question in reply to which Yahya admitted his ignorance. The Imam explained it, too. Al-Ma'mun's joy knew no bounds. Addressing the audience, he said, "Did I not tell you that this Progeny has been gifted by Allah with unlimited knowledge? None can cope with even the children of this elevated House."

The excitement of the gathering was great: all unanimously exclaimed that al-Ma'mun's assumption was correct and that Imam Muhammad at-Ta'qi (ع) was peerless. Al-Ma'mun then thought it advisable to marry his daughter off to Imam Muhammad at-Ta'qi there and then. The Imam (ع) recited the marriage sermon in person. This sermon, as a remembrance, is being recited at weddings everywhere throughout the Muslim world ever since. Overjoyed at this auspicious occasion, al-Ma'mun demonstrated his

generosity by giving away millions in charity to the poor. Common people were given with regards to his grants.

One year after the marriage, Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع) lived in Baghdad. Then al-Ma'mun allowed him to return to Medina with his daughter Umm al-Fadl surrounded with great pomp.

Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع) occupied the highest position in human virtues and moral attainments, such is the Prophet's family. To meet everyone humbly, fulfill the needs of the poor, maintain Islamic equality and simplicity, help the destitute secretly, treat even the foes fairly, extend hospitality, impart knowledge to the scholars of religion and the like, all marked his saintly life.

Common people, who could not appreciate such heights of moral excellence, might have thought that the new relationship, i.e. to become son-in-law of the most influential monarch of his time, must influence the pattern of life of the Imam and change his manners altogether. Al-Ma'mun, too, might have thought on the same lines because spiritualism which was the chief characteristic of this Progeny, was against the practices of worldly rulers.

In order to uphold their imperialistic and luxurious norms of life, monarchs like al-Ma'mun wanted to do away with these saints who personified righteousness, compassion, faith, piety, fraternity and justice as taught by Islam. Yazid's demanding obedience from Imam Husayn (ع) or al-Ma'mun appointing Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) as his heir-apparent were two different aspects of one phenomenon. The procedures were different but the purpose was the same. Imam Husayn (ع) did not bow to pay homage, so he was slain on the battlefield. Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) did not serve the cause of Abbaside imperialism, so he was silenced with poison.

Undoubtedly, Imam ar-Rida (ع) did not conform to al-Ma'mun's designs, nor desires, but this did not disappoint him. Ar-Rida's mature way of thinking and simple norm of life could not be changed. But there was the hope that in all probability a tender boy, who was brought up in the luxurious atmosphere of a royal palace, would grow up to be an ambitious, merry-making prince __ altogether against his ancestral ways and views.

With the exception of a few enlightened persons, everybody would think on such lines. But the world stood aghast to see that the young son-in-law of the most distinguished monarch of his time refused to stay in the royal palace and lived instead in a rented house, thus maintaining his ancestral anti-monarchical conduct, leading a simple and modest life.

In the Middle East, it is usually seen that if the bride's people are fairly rich, they wish that the groom might live with them; if not in the same house, at least in the same town. The will-power of the Imam (ع) can be judged from the fact that he lived in a separate dwelling. After one year, when al-Ma'mun realized that his son-in-law was not pleased with staying in Baghdad, he had to allow him to go to Medina with Umm al-Fadl.

Having returned to Medina, he maintained the same ancestral, unimposing behaviour: no body-guards, no pomp, no restrictions, no visiting times, no discrimination. He spent most of his time sitting at the Prophet's Mosque, where Muslims came to avail from his preaching. The narrators of hadith and other students of theology came to inquire about religious sciences, and the Imam guided them by explaining every complicated issue. All the world saw that Imam Ja'far's successor, seated on the same mat, was guiding the people towards faith and piety.

Imam at-Taqi (ع) allowed the same amount of freedom to his wife Umm al-Fadl and imposed the same restrictions on her as his ancestors had done with their wives. He did not care much about the fact that Umm al-Fadl was a princess. Although she lived with him, he married another lady who was a descendant of Ammar ibn Yasir. Allah had intended to continue the line of Imamate through her, and she gave birth to (later) Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع), the tenth Imam. Umm al-Fadl complained about this to her father. Surely this would have passed heavily on al-Ma'mun's heart but he could not interfere in the matter. He wrote his daughter saying, "Do not make such complaints to me in the future. I cannot stop Muhammad at-Taqi from those things which Allah has made lawful."

There are precedents, no doubt, that in view of the high personal virtues of a woman, her husband does not marry another lady. For example, while Khadija lived, the Holy Prophet did not marry any other wife. Similarly, Imam Ali (ع) married no other woman during the life-time of Fatima az-Zahra' (ع). But the same distinction could not be awarded to the daughter of a king because it was against the spirit of Islam which the Prophet's descendants were to safeguard, implement, and preserve.

Imam Muhammad at-Taqi's speech was very moving and effective. During the hajj season, he once addressed a gathering of Muslims, stating the commandments of the Divine Law of Sharaa. The audience included learned scholars who admitted that they had never heard such a comprehensive speech.

During the days of Imam ar-Rida (ع), there was a group which believed that the Imamate had come to an end with Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). They were called the Waqfiyya (Waqfism) الواقفة. Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع) admonished them so nicely, they abandoned their wrong beliefs for good. Nobody of that creed persisted in adhering to such beliefs.

Through Imam ar-Rida (ع), scholars came to learn the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (ع). A collection of brief and wise sayings is also among his legacy, resembling and ranking in wisdom next to the sayings of his ancestor Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع). Some profound discourses on theology and monotheism are also to his credit.

Al-Ma'mun died in 218 A.H./833 A.D. He was succeeded by his brother al-Mu'taman, the second heir apparent after Imam ar-Rida (ع). He came to be known as al-Muta'sim Billah al-Abbasi. His niece, Umm al-Fadl, now began to send him more complaining letters than she did during the days of her father. As al-Ma'mun had given her in marriage to Imam at-Taqi (ع) in spite of the opposition of all the

tribe, he paid no attention to her letters. Rather, he silenced her with disappointing replies. But al-Muta'sim was jealous of Imam ar-Rida (ع). He had also led the opposition in the matter of Imam at-Taqi's marriage with his niece.

Al-Muta'sim now got a chance to settle his difference in this matter. Imam Muhammad at-Taqi's fame as a great scholar and people's gathering around him, as well as the fame of his world-renown noble character, annoyed him. The failure of the political tactics, too, intensified his resentment. All these factors intensified his enmity.

In the second year of his reign, he summoned Imam Muhammad at-Taqi from Medina to Baghdad, writing to the governor of Medina expressly in this regard. Imam Muhammad at-Taqi had no choice except to set out for Baghdad leaving his son Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) with his mother in Medina.

Upon his arrival at Baghdad, Imam at-Taqi was not harmed by al-Muta'sim. But the Imam's stay in Baghdad was a forcible act which can be labelled as custody or house arrest. Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع), therefore, was killed with the very same soundless weapon which was quite frequently used against his ancestors.

He was poison, so he died on the 29th of Thul-Qida, 220 A.H./November 24, 835 A.D. and was buried near his grandfather Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع). It is due to these two saints' tombs that the place is called Kadhmain (the two Kadhims, the enduring ones). Inna Lillah wa Inna Ilayhi Rajian; surely we belong to Allah, and to Him shall we return.

7) Imam 'Ali An-Naqi (as)

His name, Ali, is usually prefixed by his titles "Abul-Hassan" and "an-Naqi," the pure one. Since both Imams Ali al-Murtada and Ali ar-Rida (ع) were also called "Abul-Hassan" each, Imam Ali an-Naqi is known as "Abul-Hassan III." His mother's name is Sumana Khatun. He was born in Medina on Rajab 5, 214 A.H./September 8, 829 A.D.

He enjoyed the love of his father Imam at-Taqi (ع) for only six years because his father had to leave for Baghdad where he died on the 29th of Thul-Qida 220 A.H./November 24, 835 A.D. and the responsibilities of Imamate devolved on his young son's shoulders. Providence was the only tutor and instructor that reared and raised him to the extreme zenith of learning.

Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was still young when the Abbaside ruler al-Muta'sim Billah died and was succeeded by al-Wathiq Billah who died in 236 A.H./850 A.D. Al-Mutawakkil, the most cruel and deadly enemy of Ahl al-Bayt (ع), ascended the throne in the same year then died in 250 A.H./864 A.D. and was succeeded by al-Muntasir Billah who ruled for only six months. On his death, al-Mustain was installed on the throne of the Abbasides in Baghdad. The latter had to part with his crown, as well as with his head, in 253 A.H./867 A.D. and was succeeded by al-Mu'tazz Billah during whose regime Imam Ali an-

Naqi (ع) died.

Al-Muta'sim remained preoccupied with war against the Byzantines and had to deal with the troubles created by the Abbaside tribesmen in Baghdad. He did not harass the young Imam who carried out his responsibilities peacefully. After him, al-Wathiq Billah, too, treated Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) fairly. But when he was succeeded by his brother al-Mutawakkil son of al-Muta'sim, the period of persecution and misfortune began on a full scale. This ruler exceeded all his predecessors in bearing animosity towards Ahl al-Bayt (ع).

During the 16 years of his Imamate, Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) had become famous throughout the Islamic world. Those who loved to learn the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) always flocked around him. In the 4th year of al-Mutawakkil's reign, the governor of Medina, Abdullah ibn Hakim, started harassing the Imam. After persecuting him personally, he sent hostile reports against him to Baghdad. He wrote the central government there saying that the Imam was assembling apparatuses of kingdom, and that his followers were in such numbers that he could rise against the government whenever he wished.

Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) became aware of such antagonism in sufficient time. In order to counteract, he, too, wrote a letter to al-Mutawakkil explaining the personal enmity the lying governor had borne against him. As a political step, al-Mutawakkil was quick to dismiss the governor. At the same time, he sent a regiment under the command of Yahya ibn Harthamah to explain to the Imam in a friendly way that the caliph wished him to stay in the capital for a few days before going back to Medina.

The Imam knew very well the motives behind this request. He knew that the polite invitation actually meant his banishment from his ancestral city. But to refuse was useless, as it would involve a forcible departure later. Leaving the sacred city was as painful to him as it had been for his respected forefathers, viz. Imam Husayn (ع), Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع), Imam Ali ar-Rida (ع) and Muhammad at-Taqi (ع). This type of harassment had almost become a legacy.

Al-Mutawakkil's letter to the Imam was full of respect and terms of endearment. The military detachment sent to escort him as retinue or bodyguards was actually a deceitful ploy. So when the Imam reached Samarra' (Surra man Ra'a), and al-Mutawakkil was informed, he neither arranged for his reception nor for his stay. He ordered to accommodate him in a wilderness where the city's beggars usually dwelt. Although the Prophet's descendants gladly associated with the poor and the destitute, and they did not covet luxurious living, al-Mutawakkil meant to thus insult the Imam who stayed there for three days; thereafter, al-Mutawakkil placed him under the custody of his secretary Razzaqi, banning his meetings with others.

It has been seen that during the imprisonment of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع), the Imam's moral charm had softened the guards' stone hearts. Likewise, Razzaqi was impressed by the greatness of Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) and began to provide for his comfort. This leniency could not remain hidden from al-Mutawakkil who transferred the Imam (ع) to the custody of Sa'd, a cruel and ruthless man in whose jail

Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) spent twelve long years.

In spite of all the hardships he had to suffer there, he spent his time worshipping his Maker, fasting during the day and praying during the night. Although confined within the four walls of a dark dungeon cell, his fame was on the wing. He was known in every house of Samarra', rather throughout all of Iraq. Millions hated the cruel ruler who had put such a man of noble character in prison.

Al-Fadl ibn Khaqan, who loved the Prophet's Progeny, had risen to the post of Minister in al-Mutawakkil's cabinet solely by virtue of his intellectual and administrative merits. On his recommendation, al-Mutawakkil ordered the Imam's imprisonment to be changed to house arrest, granting him a piece of land and allowing him to build his house on it to live therein. But Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was forbidden from leaving Samarra'. Sa'd was ordered to keep a tight surveillance on the Imam's movements, contacts and correspondence.

During this period, too, Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) set an admirable example of trust in Allah, ignoring all worldly gains. In spite of permanent residence in the capital, he neither made a protest to the caliph, nor did he ever ask him for a favour. He continued the same worshipping and hermit-like life that he had led during his imprisonment.

The tyrant had changed his behaviour but the saint had maintained his own. Even during such circumstances, Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was not allowed to live peacefully. He was not harassed physically but psychologically. His house was periodically searched for arms or dissenting correspondence undermining the position of the government. Such an act is certainly painful for a man of an innocent and noble character. To top all this, the Imam was once summoned to the royal palace where the cups of wine were in rotation.

Surrounded by his courtiers, al-Mutawakkil was very much given to merry-making, so much so that in the excess of vanity and lewdness, the arrogant and shameless ruler handed the cup of wine to the Imam and asked him to drink. This order was surely more painful than a thousand strokes of the sword, but the guardian of faith said with unruffled dignity: "Spare me this order, for the flesh and blood of my forefathers and my own have never mixed with wine." Had there been a slight sense of faith in al-Mutawakkil, he would have been impressed by the dignity of this saintly reply. But he was dead to such a feeling; he, therefore, said, "Well, if you do not like it, then sing a song for us."

The Imam replied: "I do not know that art, either." At last the haughty monarch said, "You shall have to recite a few verses of poetry, then, in any tone you like." This crude and ridiculous behaviour would have infuriated any ordinary person, but the dignified Imam remained undisturbed and sought to do what he was compelled to. He turned the ruler's order for recitation of poetry into an opportunity for preaching, and he recited the following poetic verses:

باتوا على قلل الأجيال تحرسهم غلب الرجال، فلم تنفعهم القل

واستنزلوا بعد عز من معاقلهم و اسكنوا حفرا، يا بئسما نزلوا

ناداهم صارخ من بعد دفنهم: أين الأساور و التيجان و الحلل؟

أين الوجوه التي كانت منعمة من دونها تضرب الأستار و الكلل؟

فافصح القبر عنهم حين ساءلهم: تلك الوجوه عليها الدود تقتتل

قد طال ما أكلوا دهرًا وقد شربوا واصبحوا اليوم بعد الأكل قد أكلوا

*The glories of our blood and state
Are shadows, not substantial things.
There is no armour against the fate;
Death lays its icy hand on kings.
Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down.
And in the earth be equal made
To the labourer's scythe and spade.*

*No fortress on the mountain peak
Could save the kings from the jaws of death.
Their pomp and power proved too weak;
They lie in graves, deprived of breath.*

*The cold earth asks them in contempt:
"Whither is the robe, the crown, and the throne?!"
"Did cruel Death thy beauty exempt?!"
"Did it respect thy royal blood and bone?!"*

*The grave replies
With sorrowful sighs:*

*"Those beautiful forms
Are now food for the worms!"*

Having heard these lines recited by the Imam so profoundly, the gathering became spell-bound. The drunkards making merry just a moment ago now burst into tears. Even the proud king began to weep and wail. As soon as he recovered a bit, he allowed the Imam to go home.

Another incident that disturbed him a great deal was al-Mutawakkil's oppressive order forbidding the public from visiting Karbala" and Najaf. Throughout his territories ran the order that people should not go to visit the tombs of Imam Ali (ع) and Imam Husayn (ع). Anybody disobeying this order would do so under the penalty of death. He further ordered that the buildings in Najaf and Karbala" be levelled to the ground, that all the mausoleums be razed and the land around Imam Husayn's tomb be ploughed. It was not, however, possible to stop those who loved Ahl al-Bayt (ع) from visiting those holy shrines. They disobeyed, and thousands of them were put to death indiscriminately. Undoubtedly, the Imam was as sorry for each one of them as he could have been on the death of a near relative of his. Due to this oppressive environment, he could not even preach or convey to the faithful the necessary instructions. This sorrowful situation lasted till al-Mutawakkil's death in 247 A.H./861 A.D.

At al-Mutawakkil's court, Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) was mimicked and mocked by the buffoons while al-Mutawakkil and his courtiers burst into laughter. It was such an insulting scene that once al-Mutawakkil's son could not help protesting thus: "It was somewhat tolerable if you spoke ill of Imam Ali (ع) yourself, but since you yourself say that he was related to you, how do you allow these wretched buffoons to mock him like that?"

Instead of being sorry, al-Mutawakkil jested with his son and composed two couplets abusive of his mother which he instructed the singers to sing. They used to always sing those couplets as al-Mutawakkil laughed heartily.

Another event of those wretched times is equally painful. Ibn as-Sikkit of Baghdad, the acknowledged scholar of lexicography and syntax and the genius of his time, was the tutor of al-Mutawakkil's son.

One day the cruel ruler asked this great scholar: "Are my two sons more respectable than Hassan and Husayn (ع)?" Ibn as-Sikkit loved Ahl al-Bayt. He could not control his feelings and flatly replied: "Not to speak of Imams Hassan and Husayn (ع), Imam Ali's slave Qanbar is more respectable than both of your sons." Hearing these words, al-Mutawakkil flew into a passion and ordered that Ibn as-Sikkit's tongue be cut off. This barbaric order was carried out immediately, leading to the death of one of those who cherished the Prophet's Progeny (ع).

Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was not physically connected with these events. But each was like a blow of the sword, not striking his neck but torturing his soul. Al-Mutawakkil's cruelties caused him to be the object of common hatred. Even his own children set their hearts against him. One of them, al-Muntasir, conspired with his chief slave Baqir ar-Rumi to murder al-Mutawakkil while the latter was asleep, using his own sword, thus the world heard a sigh of relief and the population of hell increased by one; the death of the tyrant and the caliphate of al-Muntasir were proclaimed. After assuming the throne, al-

Muntasir revoked the unjust orders of his father.

Visiting the shrines of Najaf and Karbala” was permitted without any restriction. The tombs, moreover, received minor repairs. Al-Muntasir’s conduct towards Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was fair. But the life of the new ruler proved to be mysteriously too short; he died in 248 A.H./862 A.D. after a brief rule of only six months. After him, caliph al-Mustaan Billah, too, did not mistreat the Imam (ع).

As stated above, Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) had built a house in Samarra’ and did not go back to Medina either out of his own free will or under the orders of the rulers. Due to his continued stay there and the lack of interference by the regime, the students of the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) surrounded him. Al-Mustaan Billah died in 252 A.H./866 A.D. and was succeeded by al-Mu’tazz Billah who was alarmed by the Imam’s popularity, so he put an end to his life.

Imam Ali an-Naqi’s conduct and moral excellence were the same as those of each and every member of the sacred series of Infallibles. Imprisonment, confinement or freedom, in every case these sacred souls were engaged in worship, helping the poor, living a most ascetic and God-fearing life, disseminating knowledge and scholarship and promoting virtue.

Totally refraining from succumbing to their own desires, greed or worldly ambitions, they lived dignified in misfortune. Dealing fairly even with the foes and helping the destitute were the qualities marking their conduct. The same virtues were reflected during the lifetime of Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) as well.

During the period of his imprisonment, the Imam (ع) had a grave dug up for him and was ready by his prayer-mat. Some visitors expressed either apprehension or bewilderment thereat. The Imam explained thus: “In order to remember my end, I keep the grave before my eyes.” Be it so, but in reality, it was a silent, unspoken protest against those cruel rulers who wanted the Imam (ع) to give up his pure Islamic teachings. It was a negation of their demand of obeisance. It showed that the worldly rulers who can frighten common men with death can never bend a saint who is ready to embrace death at any moment.

In spite of this fearlessness, he never took part in any secret or subversive activity against the government. Living permanently in a capital where daily conspiracies were sapping the roots of the Abbasside regime, he could never be accused of treason by the strong secret intelligence of those kings.

Can you imagine the extent of the political turmoil of those unstable days? Al-Mutawakkil was opposed by his own son al-Muntasir and he ended in being slain by his own Turkish slave Baqir ar-Rami. After al-Muntasir’s death, the court nobility decided to take away the government from the ruling dynasty.

The regime of al-Mustaan was shaken by the uprising of Yahya ibn Omer ibn Yahya ibn Zaid al-Alawi in Kufa, and by the occupation of Tabaristan by Hassan ibn Zaid (titled “Dai al-Haqq,” the caller to justice) and his establishment of a permanent government there; the revolt of the Turkish slaves in Samarra’ and al-Mustaan’s flight to Baghdad to take refuge in its fort, and in the end his compulsory abdication and murder by al-Mu’tazz. Add to this list the Byzantine aggression during the reign of al-Mu’tazz who feared

the danger of his own brother; Mu'ayyad's demise; Mu'waffaq's imprisonment in Basra — it was a continuous chain of chaos of which an opportunist could easily take advantage.

But Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) could not be suspected even of taking part in any of these struggles for power. Any opportunist, excited by greed or revenge, will always take arms against a regime which not only harassed him but also exiled, insulted and imprisoned him. Yet, these sacred souls considered it below their spotless honour and dignity to partake in those vainglorious bids for power. They looked down upon all these struggles and always rose above the vile level of temporal temptations, declaring that all such acts were below them and their standard of virtue.

The Imam (ع) died during the reign of al-Mu'tazz Billah in Samarra' on the 3rd of Rajab 254 A.H./June 28, 868 A.D. His death was attended only by his son Hassan al-'Askari who led the funeral prayers and arranged his burial, laying him to rest in his own residence. Now high stands his mausoleum which is being visited daily by tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world.

8) Imam Hassan Al-'Askari (as)

His name is al-Hassan, "Abu Muhammad." Being a resident of Askar, a suburb of Samarra', he is titled "al-'Askari." His father was Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) and his mother was Salal Khatun, a role model of piety, adoration, chastity and generosity. He was born in Medina on the tenth of Rabi' al-Akhir, 232 A.H./December 4, 846 A.D. He lived under the care of his respected father upto the age of 11. Then his father had to leave for Samarra' and he was to accompany him and thus share the hardships of the journey with the family.

At Samarra', he spent his time with his father either in imprisonment or in partial freedom. He had, however, the opportunity to benefit from his father's teaching and instruction. His father died in 254 A.H./868 A.D. when he himself was twenty-two. Four months before his death, the father declared his son to be his successor and executor of his will, asking his followers to bear witness to the fact. Thus were the responsibilities of Imamate vested upon him which he fulfilled even in the face of great difficulties and hostilities.

Imam Hassan al-'Askari partook in all misfortunes and hardships suffered by his father, whether imprisonment or confinement. In the early days of his Imamate, al-Mu'tazz Billah, was the al-Abbasi caliph who, when deposed in 255 A.H./869 A.D., was succeeded by al-Muhtadi.

After The latter's brief reign of only eleven months and one week, al-Mu'tamid ascended to the throne. During these caliphs' regimes, Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) did not enjoy any peace of mind at all. Although the Abbaside dynasty was involved in constant complications and disorder, each and every king thought it necessary to keep the Imam imprisoned.

One of the Holy Prophet's traditions stated that the Prophet (ص) would be succeeded by twelve princes,

the last of whom would be the Mahdi, Qa'im Ali Muhammad. The Abbasides knew well that the true successors of the Prophet were these very Imams (ع). With Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) being the eleventh of this series, his son would surely be the twelfth, the last.

They, therefore, tried to put an end to the life of Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) so that nobody would succeed him. The house arrest once imposed on Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was considered inadequate for Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع), so he was imprisoned, away from his family. Undoubtedly, the revolutionary intervals between two regimes gave him brief periods of freedom. Yet as soon as the new king came to the throne, he followed his predecessor's policy and imprisoned the Imam again. The Imam's brief life, therefore, was mostly spent inside dungeon cells.

The hardship of imprisonment reached its peak time during the reign of al-Mu'tamid Billah, although the latter knew the lineage, piety, knowledge and righteousness of the Imam as did all his predecessors.

Once, during a devastating drought, a Christian hermit was able to demonstrate that he could bring rain whenever he prayed to Allah. This led many Muslims to convert to Christianity. In order to save Islam from this calamity, Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) was brought out of jail. He noticed how that Christian hermit raised his hands in prayers, and how as soon as he did so, rain started pouring down.

He told the gathering that the piece of bone belonged to the corpse of one of the Prophets of Allah, and he proved his point by raising it himself in his hand, and upon doing so, Lo, rain started pouring down again, as if the skies were weeping for the prophet! The Imam (ع) thus removed the common doubts from the minds of the people and kept them firmly on Islam. Al-Mu'tamid Billah was so impressed that he felt too ashamed to send the Imam back to prison; so, he put him under house arrest instead. Complete freedom, however, was not granted.

During all circumstances, the Imams (ع) carried out their duties of guiding the people no matter what. Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) was subjected to numerous restrictions, so much so that those who sought to learn the teachings of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) and their Shi'a point of view could not reach him. In order to solve this problem, the Imam appointed certain confidants as his deputies in view of their knowledge of jurisprudence.

These persons satisfied the curiosity of inquirers as much as they could. But if they could not solve certain theological problems, they would keep them pending the solutions provided by the Imam (ع) whenever they got the opportunity to see him. Of course, the visit to the Imam (ع) by a few individuals could be allowed by the government but certainly not by groups who wished to see the Imam on a regular basis.

The khums (1/5 of total savings), which was being paid to the Imams by the believers who cherished them and regarded them as representatives of the Divine Law, was spent by these sacred saints on religious matters, and to sustain the Prophet's descendants. This khums was now secretly collected by these deputies who spent it according to the directives of the Imam (ع).

They, accordingly, were in constant danger of being identified as such by the government's powerful secret intelligence service. In order to avert this danger, Othman ibn Sa'd and his son Abu Ja'far Muhammad, two prominent deputies of the Imam (ع) in the capital Baghdad, ran a large shop trading in oils. This provided them with free contact with the concerned people. It was thus that even under the very thumb of the tyrant regime, those devotees managed to run the system of the Divine law unsuspected.

Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) was one of the illustrious series of the immaculate Infallibles each member of whom displayed the moral excellence of human perfection. He was peerless in knowledge, forbearance, forgiveness, generosity, sacrifice, and piety. Whenever al-Mu'tamid Billah asked anybody about his captive Hassan al-'Askari, he was told that the Imam (ع) fasted during the day and adored his Lord during the night, and that his tongue uttered no word but remembrance of his Maker.

During the brief periods of freedom and stay at home, people approached him hoping to avail from his benevolence, and they went back well rewarded. Once when the Abbaside caliph asked Ahmed ibn Abdullah ibn Khaqan, his Minister of Endowments (*awqaf*), about the descendants of Imam Ali (ع), he reported: "I do not know anybody among them who is more distinguished than Hassan al-'Askari. None can surpass him in dignity, knowledge, piety and abstinence, nor can anybody match him in nobleness, majestic grandeur, modesty and honesty."

When his father Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) died and the family was busy arranging for his burial, some servants stole certain articles, thinking that none would notice it. When the burial was over, he called the servants and said to them, "I ask you about some missing items; if you tell me the truth, I will pardon you; but if you speak falsely, I shall get all those items from you then punish you." Then he asked each for the items which he had stolen. When they confessed their guilt, he got the articles back from them and spared them the penalty.

Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) had a brief span of life, only twenty-eight years, but even during this short period of time, which was ruffled by a chain of troubles and tribulations, several high ranking scholars benefitted from his ocean of knowledge. He also uprooted the atheism and disbelief which ensued from the philosophers of that age. One of those philosophers was the renown Ishaq al-Kindi who was then writing a book on what he called "self-contradictions" in the Holy Qur'an.

When the news reached the Imam, he waited for an opportunity to refute and rebut him. By chance, some of Ishaq's students came to visit him. The Imam (ع) asked them: "Is there anyone among you who can stop Ishaq from wasting his time in this useless effort fighting the Holy Qur'an?" The students said, "Master! We are his students; how can we object to his teaching?" The Imam urged that they could at least convey to their teacher what he had to tell them. They replied that they would be ready to cooperate as much as they could.

The Imam (ع) then recited a few verses from the Holy Qur'an which the philosopher considered as

contradictory of one another. He then explained to them thus: “Your teacher thinks that some of the words in these verses have only one meaning. But according to the Arabic tongue, these words have other meanings too which, when taken into consideration, indicate no contradiction in the overall meaning. Thus, your teacher is not justified for basing his objections and allegations of contradictions on the premises of the ‘wrong meaning’ which he himself selects for such verses.” He then put up some examples of such words before them so clearly that the students absorbed the point and comprehended the precedents of more than one meaning.

When these students visited Ishaq al-Kindi and, after routine discussions, reproduced the disputed points, he was surprised. He was a fair-minded scholar, and he attentively listened to his students’ explanations.

Then he said, “What you have argued is above your capacity; tell me truly who has taught you these points?” The students first said that it was their own reflection, but when he insisted that they could never have conceived those points, they admitted that they were explained to them by Abu Muhammad Imam Hassan al-‘Askari (ع).

Al-Kindi said, “Yes; this level of knowledge is the heritage of that House, and only that House.” Then he asked the students to set all such works of his to fire. This is a famous incident, and the reader is encouraged to research it on his own. This and so many other religious services were performed silently by the Prophet’s descendants.

The Abbaside dynasty, which unfairly claimed to be “the defender of the faith,” was deeply drunk with lustful merriment. Had it ever recovered from its drunkenness and thus come to its senses, it would not have thought that those sincere and saintly souls were a “danger” to its power. It, therefore, issued orders to put some more restrictions on their movements. Imam Hassan al-‘Askari (ع), the lofty mountain of dignity and piety, put up with such unfair restrictions and unwarranted persecution with determined fortitude.

Imam Hassan al-‘Askari (ع) was a reliable authority on traditionists who have recorded several traditions in their collections on his own authority. One tradition about drinking runs thus: “The wine drinker is like an idolater.”

It has been recorded by Ibn al-Jawzi in his book *Tahrim al-Khamr* (prohibition of wine drinking) with continuous chain of references tracing its narrators. “Abu Na‘im,” namely Fadl ibn Waka, states that the tradition is true as it has been narrated by the Prophet’s descendants and some of his companions such as Ibn Abbas, Abu Hurayra, Anas, Abdullah ibn ‘Awf al-Aslami and others.

In his book titled *Kitab al-Ansab* (a genealogy book), as-Sam’ani indicates that “Abu Muhammad Ahmed ibn Ibrahim ibn Hashim al-Alawi al-Balathiri heard many traditions in Mecca from the Imam of Ahl al-Bayt (ع), i.e. Imam Hassan al-‘Askari (ع), which he recorded.” The names of some of his prominent students who, availing of his discourses, speeches and addresses, became authors of some

books, are given here:

1. "Abu Hashim," Dawud ibn Qasim al-Ja'fari, one of the deputies of the Imam, was a scholar of advanced age. He acquired knowledge from Imam ar-Rida (ع), from his son Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع), from his son Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع), and from the latter's son Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع).
2. Dawud ibn Abu Zaid an-Nishapuri¹¹⁴. He often visited Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) and Imam Hassan (ع) al-'Askari (ع).
3. Abu Tahir Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Bilal.
4. Abul-Abbas Abdullah ibn Ja'far al-Humairi al-Qummi. He was a scholar of a high caliber. He authored many books including Qurb al-Isnad which is a major source of Al-Kafi, etc.
5. Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Ja'far al-Qummi was the Imam's chief deputy.
6. Ja'far ibn Suhail Saiqal was one of his most distinguished deputies.
7. Muhammad ibn Hassan as-Saffar al-Qummi was a high ranking scholar, author of several books including the famous classic work titled Basa'ir al-Darajat. He sent written inquiries to the Imam (ع) and received their answers from him.
8. Abu Ja'far Hamani al-Barmaki (Barmakid); he obtained written answers to his questions in jurisprudence from the Imam (ع) and compiled a book using their text.
9. Ibrahim ibn Abu Hafs, "Abu Ishaq," al-Katib is a companion of the Imam and author of a book.
10. Ibrahim ibn Mehr-Yar. He has a book to his credit.
11. Ahmed ibn Ibrahim ibn Isma'eel ibn Dawud ibn Hamdan al-Katib an-Nadam. He was an authority on literature and lexicography, author of many books, and a confidant of the Imam (ع).
12. Ahmed ibn Ishaq al-Ashari, "Abu Ali," al-Qummi was an acknowledged scholar and author of several books including *Hilal as-Sawm*.

These are only a few names; the details of all the students and companions would require a whole volume. The best reference the reader may consult is the encyclopedia titled Ayan ash-Shi'ah, which is discussed above. "Abu Ali" Hassan ibn Khalid ibn Muhammad prepared a commentary of the Holy Qur'an which should be considered the work of the Imam (ع) himself. The Imam (ع) used to dictate its contents and Abu Ali recorded them. Scholars indicate that the book consisted of 1,920 pages.

Unfortunately, these precious treasures of knowledge are not available now. Baghdad was repeatedly attacked by raiders from various nations that burnt or drowned thousands of precious books. A book recently published under the title Tafsir Hassan al-'Askari (exegesis of Hassan al-'Askari) is a separate

work which was traced and rendered to the fourth century A.H. Shaikh as-Saduq, namely Muhammad ibn Ali Babawayh al-Qummi, says that it was actually dictated by the Imam (ع). But the Shaikh's sources from which he copied are obscure. The biographers are not, however, sure about attributing it to the Imam (ع).

These are the details of the Imam's scholarly attainments, a wonderful performance when one reflects on the fact that he died at the young age of twenty-eight, having served as Imam for only six years, a period constantly disturbed by the troubles already stated above.

A busy man, who is engaged in the service of religion and scholarship, usually does not have time for politics or subversive activities. But the Imam's spiritual supremacy and his increasing popularity made him intolerable to his contemporary monarchs. Al-Mu'tamid Billah, the Abbaside ruler, administered his poisoning, so the Imam (ع) died on the 8th of Rabi' al-Awwal of 260 A.H./January 1, 874 A.D. and was buried in Samarra' by his father's side. His mausoleum, in spite of hostile circumstances, has been a sacred shrine for his admirers ever since and is visited daily by tens of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world.

9) The Awaited One, Imam Al-Mahdi (as)

Muhammad son of Hassan al-'Askari (ع) is a facsimile of his name-sake and great ancestor, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (ص), in form and in manners. His mother was Nerjis Khatun, granddaughter of the contemporary Byzantine king who was a descendant of prophet Sham'un (Shemon, or Simon, trustee of Jesus Christ [ع]). He was born on the 15th of Sha'ban, 255 A.H./July 29, 869 A.D. His father, Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع), gave away loaves of bread and meat as charity and sacrificed several goats for aqiqah, birth celebration. He also instructed his pious sister, Halima Khatun, to tutor his child in the Divine Law.

Al-Mahdi (ع) is usually called by his titles rather than by his first name. These are numerous, second in number to those of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع). Famous among them are:

1. Al-Mahdi: **المهدي** This is the title which has acquired the status of a name to which reference is made in the prophecies of the Holy Prophet (ص). Hence, the concept of al-Mahdi, the Guided One, al-Muntazar, the Awaited One, is commonly acknowledged by Muslims.

Undoubtedly, there are some differences of opinion among scholars in his regard, but these deal with his life events or qualities. The belief in the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (ع) from his occultation is entertained by all except those who call themselves Muslims only for political or other necessities while not believing even in the unseen God. How can we expect such people to believe in the prophecies of the Holy Prophet (ص) regarding Imam al-Mahdi (ع)?

"Al-Mahdi" means: "the guided one." It indicates that Allah is the real Guide; all creatures are guided by Him. In this sense, the Prophet and all Imams are Mahdis, yet in reality, this title is exclusively used for

the 12th Imam.

2. “Al-Qa’im.” **القائم** This title is based on some traditions (ahadith) where Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) asserts that, “This world will not come to its end unless there rises a Qa’im from my offspring who will fill it with equity and justice after its being filled with injustice and oppression.”

3. “Sahib az-Zaman” **صاحب الزمان** (master of the time). This is in view of the fact that he is the real guide of our time.

4. “Hujjatullah.” **حجة الله** Every Prophet or Imam is Hujjatullah, the “proof” or “sign” of the Mercy Allah, our Creator; he fulfills the responsibility of guiding humanity, thus leaving for people no excuse to commit wrongdoing. Since in our time the responsibility of guiding the world is fulfilled by the 12th Imam (ع), he will be called Hujjatullah till Doomsday.

5. “Al-Muntazar” **المنتظر** (the expected or awaited one). All Muslim scholars have been repeating the prophecies regarding the reappearance of Imam al-Mahdi (ع). Not only the Muslims but even people of other religions, too, believe in a “comer” to come in the last days. His name in various creeds may be different, but the coming of such a person is universally accepted. He was expected before his birth, and after birth and disappearance. Now his reappearance is awaited, hence his title.

Those who deny al-Mahdi (ع) base their denial on the incorrect claim that there is no reference to al-Mahdi (ع) in the Holy Qur’an. There are two considerations to be borne in mind while studying the Holy Qur’an:

First: Names of individuals are not always stated explicitly. For example, the holy Prophet of Islam (ﷺ) is mentioned by name as: Muhammad, Ahmed, Taha and Yasin, whereas he is mentioned implicitly throughout the entire text of the Holy Qur’an.

Second: Scholars of the Holy Qur’an tell us that there are at least four meanings for each Qur’anic verse: “ma’na zahir,” an apparent or explicit meaning, “ma’na batin,” a hidden or implicit meaning, “tanzeel,” revelation (the circumstances under which that particular verse was revealed), and “ta’weel,” interpretation. In order to fully comprehend a verse, we have to fathom all these four meanings; otherwise, our understanding of it will be extremely shallow, and “little knowledge is a dangerous thing.”

The following references are all quoted from the most reliable Sunni sources:

On p. 443 of *Yanabi’ al-Mawaddah*, the Hanafi *hafiz* Sulayman al-Qanduzi quotes Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari narrating a lengthy hadith in which a Jew named Jandal ibn Junadah ibn Jubair accepted Islam at the hands of the Prophet (ﷺ) and the new convert asked the Prophet (ﷺ) who his wasis were. The Prophet (ﷺ) counted them for Jandal till he said, “.. and after him (i.e. Imam Hassan al-‘Askari [ع]) his son Muhammad, who shall be called al-Mahdi and al-Qa’im and al-Hujjah. He shall occult, then shall he come back.

When he comes back, he shall fill the world with justice and equity just as it was filled with injustice and iniquity; blessed are those who persevere during his occultation (*ghayba*, or absence); blessed are those who persist in their love for them, for they are the ones whom Allah described in His book saying,

'It is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah, who believe in the Unseen (ghayb الغيب)' (Qur'an, 2:2-3)."

On p. 505 of the same work, the author, who belongs to the major Sunni sect the Hanafi, quotes Muhammad ibn Muslim who cites Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) explaining the meaning of verse 155 of the same Sura which states the following: ***"We shall test you with something of fear and hunger; some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere (Qur'an, 2: 155)."***

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) indicated that there would be signs indicating the coming (reappearance) of al-Mahdi (ع) which are means whereby Allah tests the faithful:

"Something of fear" is a reference to masses perishing by contagious diseases; "hunger" is a reference to high prices of foodstuffs; "some loss in goods" is reference to scarcity and famines; "lives" is reference to mass destruction (of human lives, probably due to global wars); "fruits" is reference to lengthy periods of droughts; so when all that happens, then "give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere".

"This is its interpretation," continued the Imam, quoting verse 7 of Ali 'Imran (Qur'an, 3:7), which indicates that only those who are "firmly grounded in knowledge" are capable of interpreting the verses of the Holy Qur'an, adding, "We (Ahl al-Bayt) are the ones firmly grounded in knowledge."

On p. 321 of the same work, the author quotes Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) interpreting verse 83 of Chapter 3 of the Holy Qur'an then commenting thus: "When the Qa'im, al-Mahdi (ع), reappears, there will be no land on earth where the shahada (the testimony that La ilaha illa-Allah, Muhammadun rasulullah: There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah) is not said." This could be a prediction that by the time al-Mahdi (ع) reappears, all continents of the world will have Muslim populations. They already do.

At the end of Vol. 2 of Fara'id as-Simtayn, and on p. 269 of Ibn Khaldun's Introduction, Ibn Abbas is quoted as saying that the Messenger of Allah (ص) said, "Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) is the Imam of my nation and my successor therein after me; among his offspring is the awaited Qa'im who shall fill the world with justice and equity after it had been filled with injustice and iniquity.

By the One Who sent me in truth a bearer of glad tidings, and a warner, I swear that those who persist adhering to his Imamate even during his ghaybat (occultation) are more rare than red sulphur." Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari stood up to ask the Messenger of Allah (ص): "O Messenger of Allah! Will there be a ghayba for that Qa'im from among your offspring?" He (ع) answered: "Ay by my Allah! (then he quoted

this verse:) ‘Allah desires to purify those that are true.’ O Jabir! This is one of Allah’s orders and a secret of His which is obscure from His servants; therefore, beware of doubting, for to doubt the order of Allah, the Mighty and the Sublime, is apostasy (*kufr*).”

On p. 507, the *hafiz* al-Qanduzi states in his book *Yanabi’ al-Mawaddah* the explanation of verse 89 of Chapter 6 (al-An’am) quoting Muhammad ibn Ja’far as-Sadiq (ع) saying, “The person implied in this verse is the Qa’im, al-Mahdi (ع), who is safeguarded by Allah; even if all people perish, Allah will bring him and his companions out, for they are the ones entrusted by Allah and who do not disbelieve.”

Another author who follows the Shafi’i sect and who enjoys the title ‘*allama* is ash-Shiblinji, author of *Nur al-Absar*. He quotes Abu Ja’far (ع) explaining verse 86 of Chapter 11 (Hud) in a lengthy *hadith* in which the Imam says, “When he (al-Mahdi (ع)) reappears, he shall lean on the Ka’ba, and three hundred and thirteen men of his companions shall join him there; the first statement he shall utter there will be:

‘That which is left for you by Allah is best for you (Qur’an, 11:86).’

Then he shall say: ‘I am what is left you by Allah, His vicegerent (a descendant of Adam), and His Proof (Hujjatullah) over you;’ so whenever someone greets him, he says, ‘Peace be with you, O the one left for us by Allah’.”

The Shafi’i *faqih* Abd ar-Rahman ibn Abu Bakr as-Sayyuti, quoting the Sunan of Abu Dawud, cites Abu Sa’id al-Khudri on p. 50, Vol. 6, of his *Al-Durr al-Manthur*, saying that the Messenger of Allah (ص) had said, “The Hour shall not come till al-Mahdi (ع) takes charge on earth on my own behalf; he shall have a high forehead, a straight nose, and he shall fill the world with justice and equity after being filled with injustice and iniquity.”

He also indicates that Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal (founder of one of the four Sunni sects, i.e. the Hanbali) quotes Abu Sa’id al-Khudri quoting the Messenger of Allah (ص) saying, “I bring you the glad tidings of al-Mahdi (ع); Allah shall send him to my nation, in time quite different from your own, and after series of earthquakes, and he shall fill the world with justice and equity as it was filled before with injustice and iniquity, and all the residents of the world shall be pleased with him, and he shall distribute the wealth equitably.”

Allama al-Bahrani, quoting the Shafi’i *faqih* Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Hamawayni who in turn quotes Abdullah ibn Abbas on p. 692 of *Ghayat al-Maram* saying that the Messenger of Allah (ع) had said, “My successors, wasis and hujaj are twelve: the first of them is my brother and the last is my son.”

He was asked: “O Messenger of Allah! Who is your brother?!” He answered: “Ali ibn Abu Talib.” “Then who is your son?” “Al-Mahdi (ع) who shall fill the world with justice and equity after being filled with injustice and iniquity. By the One Who sent me in truth a bearer of glad tidings and a warner, I swear that if there is only one day left in this world, Allah will prolong that day till my son (descendant) al-Mahdi (ع) reappears, and the Spirit of Allah, Jesus son of Mary, shall say his prayers behind him (then he

quoted verse 69 of Chapter 39:)

‘And the earth will shine with the glory of its Lord’ and his domain shall encompass the East and the West.”

Before the Imam’s birth, predictions regarding him were put forth by the Holy Prophet and the Infallible Imams. Several scholars of the Sunni School of Muslim Law have written volumes exclusively on this topic. For example, *hafiz* Muhammad ibn Yousuf al-Kanji ash-Shafi’i has compiled *Al-Bayan fi Akhbari Sahib az-Zaman* (the clear evidence regarding the tidings of the Master of Age). *Hafiz* Abu Na’im al-Isfahani has written *Na’t al-Mahdi* (ع) (title of al-Mahdi (ع)).

Abu Dawud as-Sijistani has devoted one complete chapter titled “Kitab al-Mahdi (ع)” in his *Sunan* dedicated entirely to this subject. At-Tirmithi in his *Sahih*, Ibn Majah in his *Sunan*, and al-Hakim in his *Mustadrak*, have all done likewise.

One tradition recorded by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Hamawi (of Hama, Syria) which ash-Shafi’i cited in his work *Fara’id as-Simtayn* says, “Ibn Abbas heard the Prophet (ص) saying, I am the chief of the Prophets, and Ali is the chief of the Trustees (*wasīs*). My trustees (or successors) after me are twelve: the first of them is Ali and the last is al-Mahdi.”

Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari narrated saying that Fatima az-Zahra (ع) had a tablet (mushaf) on which the names of all the succeeding Imams were written down; three of them were named “Muhammad” and four were named “Ali”, all being her offspring, and the last was named al-Qa’im.

Shaikh as-Saduq, namely Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi, records in his book *Ikmal ad-Din wa Itmam an-Ni’ma* a tradition on the authority of Imam ar-Rida (ع) who narrated it from his ancestors. It states that Imam Ali (ع) addressed his son Imam Husayn (ع) once saying, “The ninth from your descendants shall rise defending the truth; he shall protect the faith and promote justice.”

As-Saduq, in his book *Ikmal al-Deen*, also quotes the Prophet (ص) as saying, “When the ninth among the descendants of my son Husayn is born, Allah will extend his life-span during the period of absence (occultation) and will project him at the appointed time.”

Imam Husayn (ع), the chief of martyrs, is quoted as saying, “The ninth of my descendants is the Imam who will rise with the truth. Allah will grant life to earth through him after its death. The true faith will supersede all religions through him. His absence shall be lengthy during which multitudes would go astray. Only a few will be on the Right Path. They shall suffer painfully.

People will oppress them, saying, Let us know when this promise is fulfilled!’ Those who will bear the pain and deprivation patiently will get the same rewards as those who accompanied the Prophet during his expeditions for Jihad.” Imam Zain al-Abidin (ع) has said, “Of us one will be born whose birth will remain secret, so much so that people will say that he was not born at all.” Imam Muhammad al-Baqir

(ع) is quoted in *Al-Kafi* by al-Kulayni as saying, "Nine Imams after Husayn are destined; the last of them will be al-Qa'im."

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) is quoted by Shaikh as-Saduq in his book '*Ilal ash-Sharai*' as saying: "The fifth descendant of my son, Musa, will be the Qa'im, a descendant of the Prophet (ص)."

As recorded in *Ikmal ad-Din* of Shaikh as-Saduq, Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) was asked once: "Are you the Qa'im with the truth?" The Imam replied: "I, too, rise truthfully, but the real Qa'im is he who will remove the enemies of Allah from earth and will fill it with justice. He shall be my fifth descendant. His absence will be lengthy during which multitudes will turn away from the faith while only a few will uphold it."

When Du'bal al-Khuzai, the famous poet, recited his poem to Imam ar-Rida (ع) which included these lines:

*The Riser will appear, I do confess,
With grace he will rise, blessed and good:
And will deal with the faithful and the faithless
And will distinguish between truth and falsehood;*

Imam ar-Rida (ع) wept. Then, raising his head, he said, "O Du'bal, these lines have been inspired to you by Gabriel. Do you know who this Riser (Qa'im) is and when he shall rise?" Du'bal said that he did not know the details, but that he had been hearing that an Imam who would purge the world from evils and fill it with justice. The Imam explained: "O Du'bal, my son, Muhammad, will come when I am gone. After him, his descendant, al-Qa'im, will come. He will be awaited during his absence. When he appears, the world shall bow down before him."

Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع) has said, "The Qa'im will be from amongst us, the third of my descendants."

Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) has said, "My successor is my son, Imam Hassan; but what will be your condition during the reign of Imam Hassan's successor?" Those who were present asked him: "Why, what do you mean by that?" Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) said, "You will not have the opportunity to see him; later, you will not be allowed even to mention his name." Then he was asked as to how they should mention him. He said, "You may say that he is the last of Muhammad's (Infallible) descendants."

Some people asked Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع): "Your revered forefathers have said that the earth would never be without a Sign of Allah (Hujjat-Allah) till Doomsday, and he who dies without knowing the Imam of his time dies the death of the days of ignorance." Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) said that that was as true as the shining day.

They inquired as to who would be the Imam and who would be the Sign of the Mercy of Allah after his

death. Imam Hassan explained thus: “He will be my son, the namesake of the Holy Prophet. He who dies without knowing him will die the death of the days of ignorance. His absence will be so lengthy that the ignorant will wander puzzled and will surely stray; the false will fall into eternal destruction. Those who will foretell the exact date of his appearing will be wrong.”

All these predictions were recorded since the time of the Holy Prophet who prophesied the advent of the Mahdi. The anecdote of Dubal demonstrates that the concept was quite common. History tells us that friends and foes of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) knew the fact, and sometimes tried to take wrong advantage thereof.

For example, one of the Abbasides named Muhammad had assumed the title of al-Mahdi (ع). Muhammad son of Abdullah Mahd, an offspring of Imam Husayn (ع), too, was considered by some people as the Mahdi. The Kaisanis had attributed the same to Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya. But these suppositions were refuted by the Imams who condemned them and explained the qualities of the true Mahdi and asserted his absence. The aforementioned events clearly indicate that the idea about the advent of the Mahdi was unanimously acknowledged.

Besides, the traditions of the Holy Prophet continuously affirmed that he would be succeeded by 12 persons. This number itself sufficed to refute the claims of the false pretenders. But when the eleventh Imam al-Hassan (ع) al-'Askari (ع) had come, people keenly awaited al-Mahdi (ع) who was sought even prior to his birth with the same eagerness as he is now awaited since his absence.

Precedents existed that many Imams did not have an opportunity for education; still, Providence Divine made arrangements to adorn them with learning and moral accomplishments which elevated them to Imamate. For example, Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) was six years old when his father Muhammad at-Ta'qi (ع) died. Imam at-Ta'qi (ع) was eight years old at the time of the death of his father Imam ar-Rida (ع). Outwardly, a boy of this age cannot be proficient in learning. But once we acknowledge that Allah had specially gifted the Prophet's Progeny, the question of age stands no more. If Jesus Christ could speak in his cradle and assert his prophethood (see the Holy Qur'an, 19:24 and 19:30-33), a believer cannot think that the childhood of Imam al-Mahdi (ع) would negate or render his Imamate faulty. Imam al-Mahdi (ع) could enjoy his father's love and instruction for a very short period of time because he was only five years old when his father died in 260 A.H./874 A.D. Even at that young age, Providence crowned him with Imamate.

When the Pharaoh of Egypt heard the prophecy that a child would soon be born to destroy his kingdom, he tried his best to obstruct the child's birth or kill him after his birth. Likewise, the Abbaside ruler knew that a child would be born to Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) who would destroy his unjust kingdom.

He, therefore, made every possible arrangement that the child would not be born, keeping Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) in continuous imprisonment away from his wife. But even the greatest worldly power cannot fight Providence. In spite of all the efforts of Pharaoh, Moses was born; similarly, in spite of the efforts of the Abbaside government, the awaited Imam came into the world.

His birth and upbringing were kept secret and, as Providence so wished, it remained so. Only a few moments did he appear in public. It was the time when his father's coffin was ready for the funeral prayers. All prominent Shi'ahs were present. The ranks had been formed. Imam Hassan al-'Askari's brother Ja'far stepped forward to lead the prayers and was at the point of reciting the Takbir when suddenly a boy came out from behind the curtains, passed the ranks quickly and took hold of Ja'far's robe and said, "Get back, Uncle; I am more than you worthy of leading the funeral prayers for my father." Ja'far at once withdrew and the boy led the prayers.

Having performed this duty, the boy went back. It was not possible that the Abbaside ruler could remain ignorant of the fact. The search for him was carried out more seriously than ever before in order to arrest and slay the boy. Some may ask: "How can a boy lead the funeral prayers in the capacity of an Imam?" The question is provided by the Holy Qur'an. Such skeptics should research the Holy Qur'an to see how another boy, namely Yahya (John the Baptist), became a Prophet of Allah even while being a young boy. See verse 12 of Chapter 19 (Surat Maryam).

The Prophet and the Imams had predicted al-Mahdi's occultation (disappearance from public eyes, absence) as has already been narrated. His occultation is divided into two periods. The first period is known as the minor occultation. It extended from 260 A.H. to 329 A.H. (874–941 A.D.) when very pious persons nominated by the Imam himself acted as his deputies.

Their duty was to convey to the Imam all problems of the Shi'as, get their solutions from the Imam or solve them themselves according to their own discretion, collect *zakat* and *khums* and spend them in the proper way, and convey the Imam's instructions to the trusted persons. Those deputies, four in number, were the most pious and learned, and they were the trusted confidants. Here are their names:

1. Abu Amr Othman ibn Sa'd ibn Amr al-Amri al-Assadi. He was a deputy of Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع), then of his son Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع). Having performed the same duty for a few years for Imam al-Mahdi (ع), he died in Baghdad and was buried there.

2. Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Othman ibn Sa'd al-Amri (son of the above). Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) foretold his being deputized. Then his father, at the time of his death, proclaimed under the orders of the Imam his appointment as deputy. He died in Jumada I of 305 A.H./November 917 A.D.

3. Abul-Qasim Husayn ibn Ruh ibn Abu Bakr an-Nawbakhti. A member of the famous Nawbakhti family, he was distinguished for his knowledge, philosophy, astrology and kalam. He was a top ranking scholar and a pious man. Under the directions of Imam al-Mahdi (ع), Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Othman appointed him as his successor. After having served for fifteen years in that capacity, he died in Shaban of 320 A.H./932 A.D.

4. "Abu Hassan," Ali ibn Muhammad as-Samari. He was the last deputy, succeeding Husayn ibn Rah as directed by the Imam. He performed this duty for nine years only and died on the 15th of Sha'ban of 329 A.H./May 15, 941 A.D. Having been asked on his deathbed as to who would succeed him, he replied:

“Providence now wishes to give the matter another shape the duration of which is known by Allah Alone.”

After the demise of Abul-Hassan, there was no deputy. In this sorrowful year, i.e. 329 A.H./941 A.D., Imam Ali ibn Babawayh al-Qummi, the revered father of Shaikh as-Saduq, and Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni, the learned compiler of Al-Kafi, also expired. Besides these sad events, an extra-ordinary phenomenon was also witnessed. In the sky so many stars did shoot that it seemed as if Doomsday had come. That year was, therefore, named “the year of the dispersal of the stars.” After this followed a dark period because none was left to approach Imam al-Mahdi (ع).

The period since 329 A.H./941 A.D. is called “the major occultation” because there is none deputized by the Imam. It was for this period that Imam al-Mahdi (ع) directed “to refer to those who know our traditions the lawful and the unlawful matters because they will guide you on our own behalf.” It is in view of this advice that the scholars and mujtahids are called the Imam’s successors. But this succession means general guidance of the people and is in no way by personal nomination. They are, therefore, quite different from the deputies who served as such during the minor occultation.

The predictions about these occultations had been made by the Infallible ones. The Holy Prophet affirmed: “He will have an occultation in which many groups will wander aimlessly; during this period, the number of those who believe in and follow him will be meager.”

Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (ع) said, “The Qa’im will have a long period of absence (occultation). The scene is full in my view when the friends of Ahl al-Bayt (ع) will wander during his absence as animals wander in search of a meadow.” Another tradition says that “He will reappear after such a long period of absence during which only true and sincere believers will uphold their religion.”

Imam al-Hassan (ع) said, “Allah will prolong his life-span during his absence.” Imam al-Husayn (ع) said, “He will remain absent during which period so many parties will go astray.” Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) said, “His absence will be so lengthy that many people will go astray.”

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) said, “Al-Mahdi (ع) will be the fifth descendant of the seventh Imam. He will remain unseen.” On another occasion, he said that Sahib al-Amr (the master of command) will have an occultation during which everybody must remember Allah, do good deeds and uphold his religion.

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (ع) said, “His person will remain unseen to the eye but the believers will never forget him; he will be the Twelfth of our line.”

Imam ar-Rida (ع) predicted that he would be awaited during his absence. Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (ع) explained: “Al-Mahdi (ع) will be awaited during his absence and will be obeyed upon his reappearance.”

Imam Ali an-Naqi (ع) clarified: “The Master of Command will be the one about whom people will say: He has not been born yet.” Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع) said, “My son’s absence will cause doubts and

disbeliefs in the minds of people except those whom Allah guides.”

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (ع) had also explained that the Qa'im of Ali Muhammad would have two periods of absence, a very lengthy one and a relatively short one. Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (ع) had similarly predicted thus: “One of the two periods of absence will be quite lengthy.”

It was due to these predictions that after the death of Imam Hassan al-'Askari (ع), his followers and sincere believers did not entertain any doubt about him. Instead of acknowledging the Imamate of some present false claimant, they only believed in Imam al-Mahdi (ع), the Absent, the Occultant.

Although absent and unrepresented, Imam al-Mahdi (ع) still guides people and defends the faith. Even though unseen, he supervises the world's affairs and guides it. This curtain will exist as long as Providence deems it necessary; the time will come soon (though “soon” may occur to many too late) when the curtain of absence will be removed, Imam al-Mahdi (ع) will reappear and fill the world with justice and equity, discarding all the prevailing injustices and iniquities. May Allah Almighty bring about his early reappearance and ease his coming, Allahomma Aameen.

اللهم أرزقنا شفاعة الحسين

1. In the writing of this chapter, I utilized one of the books which I edited: Biographies of Leaders of Islam by Sayyid Ali Naqi Naqwi, published in 1990 by Imam Husayn Foundation, P.O. Box 25-114, Beirut, Lebanon.

2. The city of Antioch is situated on the banks of the river al-asi (Orontes). It was founded about 300 B.C. by Celeucus I (Nicator) who died in 280 B.C. Celeucus I was a general of Alexander the Great. Antioch is the city where the followers of Jesus Christ were called "Christians" (rather than Nazarines) for the first time. It is the seat of a Melchite, or Maronite, and a Jacobite patriarch. It fell to the Persians in 538 A.D., to the Arabs in 637 A.D. (16 A.H.), to the Byzantians from 969 – 1084 A.D. (358 – 477 A.H.), to Seljuk Turks in 1085 A.D. (478 A.H.), to the Crusaders in 1098 A.D. (491 A.H.), to Egyptian Mamlukes in 1268 A.D. (666 A.H.), and to Ottoman Turks in 1516 A.D. (922 A.H.). It was transferred to Syria by Western powers in 1920 (1339 A.H.) but restored to Turkey in 1939 A.D. (1358 A.H.). This is why the reader sometimes may see Antioch identified as a Syrian town and some other times as Turkish! What a busy little town!

3. Merv is an ancient city located in a large oasis of the Kara Kum desert, Turkmenistan (formerly part of the Soviet Union). During the Abbaside period, it served as the capital of ancient Persia and a thriving center of Islamic culture.

4. One of the greatest of all Arab poets, al-Farazdaq was born in Basra in about 641 A.D. and died in about 732 A.D. His real name is Hammam ibn Ghalib ibn Mujashi al-Darmi at-Tamimi. He was contemporary to another very famous poet, Jarir, with whom he had exchanged extensive literary criticism which lasted all his lifelong. Al-Farazdaq once praised Imam as-Sajjad with a poem considered as one of the best masterpieces of Arab poetry, and he did so in the presence of then caliph Hisham ibn Abdul-Malik who asked him why he did not compose one like it in his own praise. Al-Farazdaq said, “Had your grandfather been like his grandfather (ع), and had your father been like his father (ع), and had your mother been like his mother (ع), I would have done so.” Hisham was so angry that he ordered him to be jailed at a place called Usfan, located between Mecca and Medina, where he continued to compose poetry taunting and belittling Hisham who finally had to set him free, hoping he would leave him alone and stop the barrage of poems exposing him and his likes from among Banu Umayyah.

5. The extent of al-Hajjaj's passion for shedding blood can be realized from this recorded and referenced incident: He entered once al-Heera's jail and commented about the prisoners saying, “I see heads the time for whose harvesting has come.” They were all beheaded and their heads were brought to him at his government mansion. He ordered a carpet to be

placed on the heads whereupon he sat and was served his lunch. Having finished eating, he said, "This has been the tastiest meal I have ever had." More about al-Hajjaj is stated in another footnote above. No wonder some Muslims do not teach Islamic history at all: It indicts them.

[6.](#) So that the reader may not misunderstand this statement, let him be informed that whenever the Abbasides built a house or a mansion, they used to bring a number of descendants of the Prophet (ﷺ) whom they would place inside the new structure's column; then they would continue the construction, making their bodies part of the construction, slowly killing them by suffocation, keeping their corpses inside the structure... For numerous such incidents, the reader is referred to the book titled Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen by "Abul-Faraj" Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Abdul-Rahman ibn Marwan ibn Abdullah ibn Marwan ibn Muhammad ibn Marwan ibn al-Hakam ibn Abul-As ibn Umayyah ibn Abd Shams ibn Abd Munaf, of the Umayyads of Quraish, famous as "al-Isfahani." This great Sunni author was born in Isfahan, Iran, in 284 A.H./897 A.D. and died in 356 A.H./967 A.D. He wrote more than 31 books, the most famous of which are: Al-Aghani, Jamharat Ansab al-Arab, Nasab Bani Taghlib, and, of course, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen. Mankind seldom produces writers as prolific and as fair this Isfahani. May he be rewarded most generously by the Almighty, Ameen.

[7.](#) Jabir's name is immortalized in both the East and the West: it is from his first name that the science of Algebra is derived. He was its pioneer and founder.

[8.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, Vol. 4, p. 375. "Al-Mansur," Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn al-Hassan, was brought in, and he was the most handsome man people ever saw. The Abbaside caliph asked him, "Are you the one nicknamed the yellow silk?" He answered, "Yes." He said, "I shall certainly kill you in a manner which I have not employed to anyone else," then he ordered him to be placed in a cylinder and it was built up on him while he was still alive; thus, he died inside it." al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, p. 136, indicates likewise.

[9.](#) 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, pp. 180-183.

[10.](#) al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 49, p. 211, as quoted by Ibn Maskawayhi's book Nadam at-Taraf.

[11.](#) Ibid., Vol. 49, p. 100. It is narrated from al-Hakim by Abu Abdullah, the hafiz of Nishapur.

[12.](#) Ibid.

[13.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 203.

[14.](#) Ibid, Vol. 2, p. 184.

[15.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 203.

[16.](#) al-Maghazili, Al-Manaqib, Vol. 4, p. 362.

[17.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 4, p. 81.

[18.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 226.

[19.](#) Qur'an, Surat Al-Hujurat: 13.

[20.](#) Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 174.

[21.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 4, p. 23.

[22.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 237.

[23.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid Al-Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 298.

[24.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, Vol. 3, p. 147; Surat Al A'raf:32.

[25.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 516.

[26.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 178.

[27.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, Vol. 3, p. 143.

[28.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al Kafi, Vol. 3, p. 502.

[29.](#) Ibn al-Maghazili, Al-Manaqib, Vol. 4, p. 361.

[30.](#) Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 360.

[31.](#) Al Balad: 11.

[32.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 264.

[33.](#) Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 8.

[34.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 297.

[35.](#) Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 288.

[36.](#) Qurb al-Isnad, p. 222, and Al-Kharaij wal Jaraih, p. 237, with a slight textual variation.

- [37.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 5, p. 111.
- [38.](#) Shaikh at-Tusi, Al-Ghaiba, p. 29.
- [39.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 28.
- [40.](#) Ibid., p. 27.
- [41.](#) Ibid., p. 28.
- [42.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 381; also al-Mufid's Al-Irshad, p. 286.
- [43.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 20.
- [44.](#) al-Kashi's Rijal, p. 398.
- [45.](#) al-'Ayyashi, Tafsir, Vol. 2, p. 115 where verse 115 of Surat al Tawba is discussed.
- [46.](#) Qur'an, Surat Ibrahim:27.
- [47.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 32.
- [48.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 226.
- [49.](#) 'Umdat at-Talib, p. 185, 1st edition (Najaf, Iraq).
- [50.](#) al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 48, p. 249.
- [51.](#) Shaikh at-Tusi, Al-Ghaiba, p. 22.
- [52.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 487. It is also mentioned in as-Saduq's book 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, in Al-Manaqib, and in Al-Irshad.
- [53.](#) Rawdat al-Kafi, p. 257.
- [54.](#) Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, Ayan ash-Shi'a, Vol. 4, Part I, p. 138.
- [55.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, At-Tarikh al-Kamil Vol. 5, p. 138.
- [56.](#) as-Sayyati, Tarikh al-Khulafa', p. 284.
- [57.](#) Ibid., p. 308.
- [58.](#) Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 49, p. 210 as quoted in Ibn Maskawayhi's book Nadam al-Farid.
- [59.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 88.
- [60.](#) Ibid., p. 112.
- [61.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, At-Tarikh al-Kamil, Vol. 5, p. 113.
- [62.](#) as-Sayyuti, Tarikh al-Khulafa, p. 290.
- [63.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, At-Tarikh al-Kamil, Vol. 5, p. 138.
- [64.](#) al-Mufid, Kitab al-Irshad, p. 290. Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, p. 375.
- [65.](#) al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, p. 375.
- [66.](#) as-Saduq, Ilal ash-Shara'i, p. 266.
- [67.](#) as-Saduq, 'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, P. 148.
- [68.](#) It appears that al-Hassan ibn Sahl was al-Ma'mun's ruler over Iraq at that time, and we cannot explain why the name of al-Hassan is mentioned in this story except in the case al-Ma'mun had called him to meet with him to consult regarding the issue of selecting Imam ar-Rida (ع) as the regent as presumes Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin in his encyclopedic work titled A'yan ash-Shi'a. But al-Fadl's letter to his brother al-Hassan regarding regency, as Ibn al-Atheer and at-Tabari and other historians indicate, negates all that, and the addition may have been the action of the narrator who was ignorant of all of that, thus causing a major problem afflicting narratives.
- [69.](#) al-Mufid, Al-Irshad, p. 291.
- [70.](#) al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, p. 375.
- [71.](#) al-Mufid, Kitab Al-Irshad, p. 291.
- [72.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 153.
- [73.](#) Founded in the third century A.D. by king Shapur I, Nishapur was a major cultural center under the Seljuks. It is the town where Omer al-Khayyam was born and buried.
- [74.](#) as-Saduq, Ilal ash-Shara'i, Vol. 1, p. 226.
- [75.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 167.
- [76.](#) Ibn Khaldun, Al-Muqaddima, Vol. 3, p. 249.
- [77.](#) at-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 8, p. 564.

- [78.](#) Ibid., p. 565.
- [79.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 491. Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Irshad, p. 294.
- [80.](#) at-Tabari, Vol. 8, p. 565. Ibn Khaldun mentions a similar story in Vol. 3, p. 250, of his work titled Al-Muqaddima fil Tarikh.
- [81.](#) at-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 8, p. 558, "Events of the Year 203 A.H."
- [82.](#) Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, Vol. 3, p. 250.
- [83.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 242.
- [84.](#) Abul-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, p. 380.
- [85.](#) Shaikh al-Mufid, Al-Irshad, p. 297. A similar narrative is mentioned in al-Isfahani's book Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, pp. 377-378.
- [86.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 1, p. 18.
- [87.](#) al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyeen, p. 378.
- [88.](#) Ibid., p. 380.
- [89.](#) Ibn al-Atheer, At-Tarikh al-Kamil, Vol. 5, pp. 175-177.
- [90.](#) Nawraz is the first day of Spring and, hence, the first day of the Persian (and Kurdish) new year. It is celebrated outdoors by enjoying the beauty of nature.
- [91.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 233.
- [92.](#) Ibid.
- [93.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 208.
- [94.](#) Ibid., pp. 19-20.
- [95.](#) Sayyid Muhsin al-Amin, A'yan ash-Shi'a أعيان الشيعة, Vol. 4, pp. 2, 143 and 144.
- [96.](#) The reader can correctly conclude that there were many Christian and Jewish scholars and scientists who received a great deal of respect and support from caliph al-Ma'mun who was a scholar in his own right. His time was, indeed, a golden period of learning and scholarship despite all contemporary political turmoils.
- [97.](#) "Mazar Sharif" means: a sacred mausoleum. It is named so because it houses the shrine of Khavajeh Abu Nasr Parsa, a pious man from the Persian region of Parsa who died and was buried there.
- [98.](#) This great encyclopedia falls in ten volumes, excluding its thorough and very well arranged Index which constitutes a volume by itself. The copy we have in our library is dated 1406 A.H./1986 A.D. and is published by Dar at-Ta'aruf lil Matbu'at (P.O. Box 8601, Beirut, Lebanon). It lists thousands of Shi'a men of letters, scholars, theologians, poets, authors, politicians, narrators of traditions, etc. It is edited by the author's son, the renown scholar Hassan al-Amin, author of many books probably the most famous of which is the 11-volume encyclopedia titled Al-Ghadir..
- [99.](#) as-Saduq, Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida, Vol. 2, p. 121.
- [100.](#) For the benefit of our reader, the full address of the said Publisher is: ATP, 10900 W. Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46231. This book should be in every personal and public library.
- [101.](#) This misleading statement exists in Vol. One of the world renown Encyclopedia Britannica III. How many other errors exist in this Encyclopedia?
- [102.](#) That copy was later deposited at the Imperial Library at Vienna. It was at a much later date translated into English and edited by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg.
- [103.](#) This statement, among many others in the Gospel of St. Barnabas, agrees with what we, Muslims, have in the Holy Qur'an. Jesus Christ was not crucified.
- [104.](#) The reader can easily see that there were two men among the disciples of Jesus named Judas; one of them was crucified, so he was rewarded in heaven, and the other was not, so he was rewarded by the Romans for his treachery. The latter is Judas Iscariot.
- [105.](#) The Great News: The New Testament (Colorado Springs, Colorado: International Bible Society, 1984).
- [106.](#) This is a rough translation of the original Arabic text. A thorough research of the Bible may yield better results and reveal the exact Biblical verse the Imam was referring to. Unfortunately, the Imam did not specify which of the four Gospels he was quoting. Consulting a Bible in Arabic may also produce the same anticipated result: the number of the exact verse and the name of the Gospel the Imam had in mind.

[107.](#) al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 14, pp. 331–333. Again, since this text is my translation from the Arabic original, the Imam’s quotations may not be exact. Consulting a Bible written in Arabic will be worthwhile and will provide the numbers of the chapters and verses to which the Imam here refers. Unfortunately, I do not have a copy of the Bible in Arabic.

[108.](#) Since there is no copyright on The Gospel of Barnabas, the copy of it consulted for this book does not contain the Publisher’s name nor the place nor the date of publication.

[109.](#) This is a direct reference to the Abbasides who regarded themselves as more worthy of ruling the Muslims than all others although they proved to be among the very worst who ever ruled the Islamic nation. The title of the founder of their government, namely “as-Saffah,” which means “the blood-shedder,” says it all.

[110.](#) The very fact that the so-called “election” of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, took place at Saqafat Bana Saida before the Prophet (ﷺ) had been buried opens the eyes even of the blind to the fact that those who were involved in such “election” masquerade were more concerned about power and politics than about burying the corpse of their Prophet (ﷺ).

[111.](#) Qur’an, Surat Al-Baqarah:229.

[112.](#) Qur’an, Surat An-Nisa’:34.

[113.](#) al-Bukhari, Sahih, Vol. 8, p. 119, Amari edition.

[114.](#) A footnote above discusses the city of Nishapur for the curious reader.

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