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Part 4: The Shi'ah and 'Alawi Uprisings

Lesson 15: The Shi'ah and 'Alawi Uprisings during the Period of Umayyad Caliphate

The Shi'ah uprisings and armed confrontations commence at Karbala' and the 'Ashura' movement, but we shall not touch on the topic of Karbala' for the meantime.

After the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn ('a) in the 60s AH, two Shi'ah uprisings—that of the *Tawwabun* and Mukhtar—took place whose leaders were not 'Alawis but rather common pious Shi'ah. (We discussed them at length earlier.)

As these two uprisings were staged by Shi'ah, they boasted a completely Shi'i nature. There is no difference of opinion concerning the leaders of the *Tawwabun* that they were from among the companions of the Prophet ('a) and Shi'ah of the Commander of the Faithful ('a).¹ We have also stated in detail the view of leading Shi'ah figures and *rijal* scholars who unanimously believed in his good intention and the authentic narrations identified the slander against him coined by his opponents.

With respect to the impact of the movements in the spread of Shi'ism, it must be said that the *Tawwabun* movement was short-lived and as such, it had no opportunity to propagate Shi'ism though it was important in terms of the qualitative spread of the Shi'ah faith, deepening the love for the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) in the hearts making the Shi'ah more devoted and firm in their beliefs.

The uprising of Mukhtar, however, was effective in the spread of Shi'ism and Mukhtar was able to add non-Arabs in the ranks of the Shi'ah as it was not like that earlier.² Since that time, Shi'ism spread in the eastern part of the Muslim territories, and we could see its peak in the movement of the black-wearing ones and the 'Abbasids.

The chain of 'Alawi uprisings which took place during the latter part of the Umayyad rule had a sort of relationship with the movement of the 'Abbasids because Banu Hashim—including both the 'Alawis and the 'Abbasids—were united during the period of the Umayyad caliphate and there was no conflict between them. In fact, the first two 'Abbasid caliphs, Safah and Mansur, had earlier paid allegiance to Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah who was one of the descendants of Imam al-Hasan (‘a).

After the victory of the 'Abbasids, however, the same Muhammad along with a number of his family members was killed by the 'Abbasid caliph Mansur. Throughout the second century AH, the 'Alawi uprisings were related to one another more on the basis of the Zaydi ideology though the 'Abbasids capitalized greatly on the uprising of Zayd. As Amir 'Ali, one of the contemporary historians, says in this regard:

The death of Zayd strengthened the 'Abbasid campaigners and confirmed the campaigns in full swing at the time for the caliphate of the descendants of 'Abbas. That barrier of probable competition was removed from their way and it turned well suitable with the trend of the events related to Abu Muslim such that it was built for the overthrow of the Umayyads.[3](#)

a. The Uprising of Zayd

Zayd, the noble son of Imam as-Sajjad (‘a) and brother of Imam al-Baqir (‘a) rose up and staged an uprising against the cruelties of the Umayyad caliph Hashim and his agents. Zayd who went to Damascus to complain against Yusuf ibn 'Amru, the then governor of Iraq, was belittled and reproached by Hashim, and upon his return from Sham, he was surrounded by the Shi'ah in Kufah, urging him to rise up against the Umayyads. But because of the wound he suffered at the heat of his fight, his uprising did not succeed and he himself attained martyrdom.[4](#)

Regarding the personality and uprising of Zayd, various narrations have been transmitted with a group of narrators who reproach him. The Shi'ah scholars and authorities, however, are of the opinion that Zayd was a noble and meritorious man and strong evidence fails to prove his deviation. Shaykh al-Mufid has this to say concerning him:

Many of the Shi'ah regard him as Imam and the reason for this is that Zayd rose up and called on the people for the pleasure of Muhammad's progeny. The people thought that he was referring to himself though it was not the case because he knew that his brother, Imam al-Baqir (‘a), was the rightful Imam and the Imam also introduced to him the Imamate {*imamah*} of his son, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a).[5](#)

After reporting the narrations related to Zayd, 'Allamah Majlisi also writes, thus:

Be it known that the reports concerning the status of Zayd are varied and contradictory but there are more reports expressing his dignity, grandeur and merit and that he had no incorrect assertions and most of the Shi'ah '*ulama*' have praised him. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to regard him positively and avoid reproaching him.[6](#)

Ayatullah al-Khu'i thus says about Zayd: "The narrations praising Zayd and indicating his dignity and grandeur and that he rose up to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil are much benefited while the narrations vilifying him are weak {*dha'if*}." [7](#)

Ample proof and evidence bear witness to the fact that Zayd's uprising had the secret permission and tacit approval of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a). One of these proofs was the statement of Imam ar-Ridha (‘a) in response to Ma'mun, when the Imam said:

My father Musa ibn Ja'far narrated that he heard his father Ja'far ibn Muhammad to have said: "...Zayd consulted me about his uprising and I said to him, 'My dear uncle, if you like to be that person who shall be hung in Kinasah, [8](#) then that is your way'." When Zayd left Ja'far ibn Muhammad, Ja'far said: "Woe to him who will hear the call of Zayd but will not respond to it." [9](#)

Yes, Zayd was a true Shi'ah and one of those who believed in the Imamate of Imam as-Sadiq (‘a). As he used to say,

In every period, one person from among us, *Ahl al-Bayt*, is the proof {*hujjah*} of God and the proof at our time is my nephew, Ja'far ibn Muhammad. He who follows him shall never be misled and he who opposes him shall never be guided. [10](#)

Concerning the fact that Zayd was not regarding himself the Imam and not calling the people toward himself, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) says:

May God have mercy upon my uncle Zayd. If he only emerged victorious, he would remain faithful (to his promise). My uncle Zayd was calling the people toward the leadership of the person chosen from among the progeny of Muhammad and I am that person. [11](#)

In particular, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) assumed the guardianship of the family of Zayd after his martyrdom, [12](#) and he used to attend to the families of those who were martyred alongside Zayd and once distributed one thousand dinars among them. [13](#)

It can be said, therefore, that Zayd's uprising, like that of the *Tawwabun* and Mukhtar, was completely Shi'i and justifiable; that it was against oppression and for the purpose of enjoining that which is good and forbidding that which is evil; and that his method was separate from that of the Zaydi sect.

b. The Uprising of Yahya ibn Zayd

After Zayd's martyrdom in 121 AH, his son Yahya continued his father's struggle. He went to Khurasan through Mada'in and remained in disguise for sometime in the city of Balkh until he was arrested by Nasr ibn Sayyar.

He was imprisoned for sometime until he was able to escape after the death of the Umayyad caliph Hashim, and many people from among the Shi'ah of Khurasan gathered around him. He headed toward

Nayshabur and engaged in a battle with its governor, 'Umar ibn Zurarah al-Qasri and defeated him. But, at last, in 125 AH at Jawzjan, he was wounded in the forehead and was killed at the battle arena while his forces dispersed. [14](#)

In contrast to Zayd's uprising, his son Yahya's uprising was tainted by Zaydism. This fact can be discerned from the dialogue that took place between him and Mutawakkil ibn Harun, one of the companions of Imam as-Sadiq ('a), in which he somehow expressed his belief in the Imamate of his father while regarding himself as his father's successor. In addition to other requisites, he considered fighting by sword as a requisite of Imamate. [15](#)

It is at this point that the Zaydi sect takes form and its way becomes separate from that of the Shi'ah Imamiyyah and Ithna Ash'ari. The followers of the Zaydi sect do not even refer to the infallible Imams ('a) on juristic questions {*masa'il al-fiqhiyyah*}.

Lesson 15: Summary

The uprisings of the Shi'ah begun with the movement of 'Ashura'. The uprisings of the *Tawwabun* and that of Mukhtar were obviously staged to take vengeance for the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn ('a). None of the leaders of these two uprisings was an 'Alawi. Rather, they were distinguished Shi'ah and they had a great impact on the spread of Shi'ism.

The uprising of Zayd ibn 'Ali was against the cruelties of Hashim, the tyrant Umayyad caliph. Zayd was a noble and meritorious person, and he rose up in order to enjoin what is good and forbid what is wrong. Imam as-Sadiq ('a) has validated him.

Yahya ibn Zayd went to Khurasan after the martyrdom of his father and rose up there against the Umayyads, but he, like his father, was wounded in the battle and died. The uprising of Yahya, in contrast to that of his father, was completely Zaydi in nature.

Lesson 15: Questions

1. When did the Shi'ah uprisings commence?
2. What motivated the uprising of Zayd?
3. How did the uprising of Yahya differ with that of Zayd?

[1.](#) See Dr. Sayyid Husayn Ja'fari, *Tashayyu' dar Masir-e Tarikh*, trans. Sayyid Muhammad Taqi Ayatullahi, 9th edition (Tehran: Daftar-e Nashr-e Farhang-e Islami, 1378 AHS), pp. 268–273.

[2.](#) Rasul Ja'fariyan, *Tarikh-e Tashuyyu' dar Iran az Aghaz ta Qarn-e Hashtum-e Hijri*, 5th edition (Qum: Shirkat-e Chap wa Nashr-e Sazman-e Tablighat-e Islami, 1377 AHS), p. 76.

[3.](#) Amir 'Ali, *Tarikh-e Gharb va Islam {History of the West and Islam}*, trans. Fakhr Da'i Gilani, 3rd edition (Tehran: Intisharat-e Ganjineh, 1366 AHS), pp. 162–163.

4. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Mas'udi, *Murawwij adh-Dhahab* (Beirut: Manshurat Mu'assasah al-A'lami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1411 AH), vol. 3, pp. 228, 230.
5. Shaykh al-Mufid, *Al-Irshad*, trans. Muhammad Baqir Sa'idi Khurasani (n.p.: Kitabfurushi-ye Islamiyyeh, 1367 AHS), p. 520.
6. Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, 2nd edition (Tehran: Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah, 1394 AH), vol. 46, p. 205.
7. Sayyid Abu'l-Qasim al-Khu'i, *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), pp. 102–103.
8. Kinasah had been one of the places in Kufah. See Yaqt ibn 'Abd Allah, *Mu'jam al-Buldan*, 1st edition (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1417 AH), vol. 4, p. 153.
9. Shaykh as-Saduq, *'Uyun Akhbar ar-Rida*, 1st edition (Beirut: Ma'assasah al-A'lami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1404 AH), vol. 1, p. 225, section {bab} 25, hadith 1.
10. Shaykh as-Saduq, *Al-Amali* (Qum: Al-Matba'ah, 1373 AH), p. 325.
11. Shaykh at-Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal* (Rijal Kashi), researched by Sayyid Mahdi Raja'i (Qum: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt at-Turath, 1404 AH), p. 2 and see Mahdi Pishva'i, *Sireh-ye Pishvayan*, 8th edition (Qum: Mu'assaseh-ye Tahqiqati va Ta'limati-ye Imam Sadiq ('a), 1378 AHS), pp. 407–409.
12. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin* (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 331.
13. *Al-Irshad*, p. 345.
14. Ibn Wadhih, *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, pp. 326–327, 332.
15. Mutawakkil ibn Harun says: "I paid a visit to Yahya ibn Zayd when he went to Khurasan after his father was killed. I greeted him and he asked where I come from and I replied that I come from Hajj pilgrimage. Then he asked about the condition of his relatives and cousins in Medina and he particularly asked about the condition of Ja'far ibn Muhammad ('a). I also told him about the condition of the Imam and his lamentation for his (Yahya's) father Zayd. He then said: 'My uncle, Muhammad ibn 'Ali prevented my father from waging war against the Umayyads and relayed to him the would-be end of my father's plan. Did you pay a visit to my cousin, Ja'far ibn Muhammad?' 'Yes,' I retorted. He asked, 'Did you hear him telling something about my activity?' 'Yes,' I responded. He said, 'What did he say about me? Please inform me.' I said: 'May I be your ransom! I do not like to tell you that which I have heard from him.' He said, 'Are you frightening me with death? You tell whatever you have heard.' I said: 'I heard the Imam saying that you shall be killed and be hung in the same manner that your father was killed and hanged.' So, the color of his face changed and said: 'Yamhu'llah ma yasha' wa yuthabbat wa 'inda umm al-kitab. O Mutawakkil! God, the Exalted, confirmed His religion through us and gave us knowledge and sword, and we possess both of them. But our cousins possess knowledge only.' I said: 'May I be your ransom! The people incline more toward your cousin Ja'far than you.' He said: 'My uncle, Muhammad ibn 'Ali and his son, Ja'far, are calling the people toward life while we call them toward death.' I said: 'O son of the Messenger of Allah! Who is more knowledgeable, you or he?' He lowered his head for sometime and then raised it, saying: 'All of us have knowledge. The only difference is that that which we know is also known to them and that which they know is not known to us.' He then asked me: 'Have you recorded something from my cousin?' 'Yes,' I replied. He said: 'Show (them) to me.' I showed to him some of the hadiths of Imam as-Sadiq to him and some of the supplications in *Sahifah as-Sajjadiyyah*..." *Sahifah al-Kamilah as-Sajjadiyyah*, trans. 'Ali-Naqi Faydh al-Islam (n.p.: Intisharat-e Faydh Islam, n.d.), pp. 9–12.

Lesson 16: The Shi'ah and 'Alawi Uprisings during the Period of 'Abbasid Caliphate

The uprisings during the period of the 'Abbasid caliphate up to the first half of the fourth century AH can

be divided into two—the well-organized and programmed Zaydiyyah uprisings and the earlier unplanned and sporadic uprisings.

The Uprisings of the Zaydis

The Zaydis who constituted a large portion of the Shi'ah population during the first, second and three centuries AH and regarded the right to caliphate and Imamate as belonging to the descendants of Fatimah ('a) and the 'Abbasids as usurpers, staged well-organized, cohesive and preplanned uprisings some of which had led to the establishment of governments in places such as Tabaristan, Maghrib and Yemen.

The Zaydis regarded Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah and Ibrahim as among the Zaydi Imams because Yahya ibn Zayd had designated them as his successors. It is here that close relationship emerged between the Zaydis and the descendants of Zayd, on the one hand, and the offspring of Imam al-Hasan ('a), the so-called Banu al-Hasan, on the other.

Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah, who was his brother's successor, Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah and hoisted the banner of revolution against the 'Abbasids in Basrah, introduced another son of Zayd, 'Isa, as his successor. 'Isa fled after the assassination of Ibrahim and died in secrecy during the caliphate of the 'Abbasid caliph Mahdi. [1](#)

After the death of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah and Ibrahim, the Zaydis failed to agree on the leadership of a particular person and they were always looking for a brave and pugnacious Imam from the descendants of Fatimah ('a) who could lead them. But until 301 AH they were not able to agree on the identity of the Imam until such time that Hasan ibn 'Ali al-Hasani, known as Atrush, staged an uprising in Khurasan in that year, went to the regions of Gilan and Mazandaran, and succeeded in settling the task of the Zaydis. [2](#)

It is for this reason that the 'Abbasids were harsh against the Zaydis and were trying to eliminate the individuals who were capable of leading them, particularly the descendants of Zayd among them. To this end, the 'Abbasids hired spies and set up rewards for the capture of such individuals. [3](#) For instance, when 'Isa ibn Zayd passed away secretly, Harun arrested and imprisoned his son, Ahmad ibn 'Isa merely on the basis of suspicion. [4](#)

Of course, the distinguished men among the Banu al-Hasan who were regarded as leaders of uprisings did not follow the Zaydi way and modus operandi and were not much attached to Zaydiyyah fundamental beliefs. For this reason, when conditions during battles became unfavorable and defeat seemed probable, the Zaydis would abandon their leaders in the battle arena and ending their uprisings in failure (similar to what happened to Yahya ibn 'Abd Allah).

Idris, Yahya's brother, was the only one among them who was able to achieve relative victory [5](#) and that

was because he fled to Africa which was far from the 'Abbasids' reach. He campaigned against the Abbasids there and succeeded in forming a government.[6](#)

Among the leaders of the uprisings who did not accept the fundamentals of the Zaydi belief and follow the way and method of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) was Yahya ibn 'Abd Allah, brother of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah, who went to Khurasan after Muhammad's defeat and from there he headed toward the land of Daylam— present day Gilan and Mazandaran—but the ruler there, who was not a Muslim yet, wanted to arrest Yahya and turn him over to the agents of Harun on account of his threats.

At the time, Yahya was compelled to seek the protection of Fadhl Barmaki, Harun's vizier. Fadhl also offered him protection, but instead of protection and security, he was imprisoned in Baghdad until his death.[7](#) He was one of the students trained by Imam as-Sadiq ('a) and whenever narrating a *hadith* from the Imam, he would say: "My dear Ja'far ibn Muhammad thus said..."[8](#)

Finally, since he was following the way and method of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) in terms of jurisprudence {*fiqh*}, the Zaydis opposed him and distanced themselves from him. So, he was forced to surrender himself to Fadhl ibn Yahya, Harun's vizier.[9](#)

The Uprising of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah

The zenith of the 'Alawi uprising was during the second century AH. One of the most noted of these uprisings was during the time of the 'Abbasid caliph Mansur which was led by Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah. His activity had started prior to the victory of the 'Abbasids and with the exception of Imam as-Sadiq ('a), the Banu Hashim generally pledged allegiance to him.

Even the Sunni scholars and jurists such as Abu Hanifah, Muhammad ibn 'Ajlan, the jurist of Medina, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Sabrah, 'Abd Allah ibn Ja'far, Hashim ibn 'Urwah, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar, Wasil ibn 'Ata', 'Amru ibn 'Ubayd, among others swore allegiance to him, attributing to him the transmitted Prophetic sayings about the uprising of al-Mahdi ('a).[10](#)

But his uprising during the period of the 'Abbasids was defeated because it was launched prematurely. In Basrah his brother Ibrahim's uprising also ended in failure due to the treachery of the Zaydis, but his brothers were scattered and this state of affairs continued up to the time of Harun. Idris ibn 'Abd Allah fled to Maghrib and he was accepted there by the people.

Yet, he was in the end poisoned by the agents of Harun. After him, his followers installed his young child to replace him naming him "Idris ath-Thani". For sometime, the government of the Idrisis flourished in North Africa. Yahya, another one of Muhammad's brother, went to Tabaristan after his death.

Yet another one of Muhammad's brother named Musa ibn 'Abd Allah fled to the north of Iraq and Mesopotamia. Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah's sons, named 'Ali, 'Abd Allah and Hasan, went to Egypt, India and Yemen, respectively, and were for some time the source of concern for the 'Abbasid

The Uprising of Ibn Tabataba'i al-Hasani

After the death of Harun and the conflict over the issue of succession between his two sons, Amin and Ma'mun, the Shi'ah taking advantage of this opportunity staged more uprisings with the uprisings of the 'Alawis reaching their climax at this time. During that period, the whole of Iraq (with the exception of Baghdad), Hijaz, Yemen, and south of Iran were detached from the 'Abbasid control owing to the existence of competent military commanders such as Abu's-Saraya on the side of the 'Alawis.[12](#)

The army of Abu's-Saraya shattered every contingent they encountered and overrun every city they visited. It is said that in the battle fought by Abu's-Saraya two hundred thousand soldiers of the 'Abbasid caliph were killed although the interval between the day of the uprising and the day when he was beheaded was not more than 10 months.

Even in Basrah which was the demographic concentration of the Uthmanis, the 'Alawis earned support such that Zayd an-Nar staged an uprising in the mentioned city. In Mecca and the districts of Hijaz, Muhammad ibn Ja'far known as Dibaj who was called "*Amir al-Mu'minin*" {Commander of the Faithful} staged an uprising. In Yemen Ibrahim ibn Musa ibn Ja'far revolted against the 'Abbasid caliph.

Muhammad ibn Sulayman ibn Dawud ibn Hasan rose up in Medina. In Wasit where most of the people inclined toward the 'Uthmanis, there was the uprising of Ja'far ibn Zayd ibn 'Ali as well as that of Husayn ibn Ibrahim ibn Hasan ibn 'Ali.

In Mada'in Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn Muhammad launched a rebellion. In sum, there was no place (in the Muslim territories) where the 'Alawis by their own initiatives or at the request of the people did not revolt against the 'Abbasids. It went to the extent that the people of Mesopotamia and Sham, who were known for having cooperation with the Umayyads and the descendants of Marwan, gathered around Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-'Alawi, the intimate friend of Abu's-Saraya, and in a letter to him they wrote that they have been waiting for his envoy to deliver his message.[13](#)

The Uprising of Hasan ibn Zayd

In the year 250 AH during the caliphate of Musta'in, an 'Abbasid caliph, Hasan ibn Zayd, who was formerly residing in Rey, went to the districts of Tabaristan, called on the people to seek the pleasure of Prophet Muhammad's ('a) progeny, took control of the regions in Tabaristan and Jurjan after a series of skirmishes,[14](#) and founded the government of the 'Alawis in Tabaristan which lasted up to 345 AH.[15](#)

Throughout his two decades of rule, Hasan ibn Zayd overran the regions of Rey, Zanjan and Qazwin many times. During the same year of his uprising, he dispatched one of the 'Alawis named Muhammad ibn Ja'far to Rey who after sometime was captured by the Tahiris.[16](#) In 251 AH he sent Husayn Ahmad

al-‘Alawi who rose up in Qazwin and expelled the agents of the Tahiris.[17](#)

Similarly, Hasan ibn Zayd’s brother, Husayn ibn Zayd overran the regions of Larijan and Qasran, north of present day Tehran, and earned the allegiance of the people there for his brother.[18](#) As Tabari says regarding the events in 50 AH, “In addition to the government in Tabaristan, the government of the region of Rey extending roughly as far as Hamedan was under the control of Hasan ibn Zayd.”[19](#)

As such, in addition to the northern regions of Iran which were near the sphere of influence of Hasan ibn Zayd and in which uprisings took place in his name, the ‘Alawis in Iraq,[20](#) Sham[21](#) and Egypt[22](#) found courage too, gathering the people around them and staging uprisings, until such time that in 270 AH Hasan ibn Zayd passed away.

After his death his brother, Muhammad ibn Zayd succeeded him and ruled Saman until 287 AH. Finally, in that year (287 AH) he attained martyrdom in a battle between him and Muhammad ibn Harun, a Samanide commander.[23](#)

In 287 AH, after the martyrdom of Muhammad ibn Zayd, Nasir Kabir known as Atrush in the region of Gilan and Daylam rose up in the midst of the people, calling them to Islam and ruled there for 14 years[24](#) until such time that he went to Tabaristan in 301 AH and took control of government there.[25](#)

The Uprising of Yahya ibn al-Husayn

In 288 AH Yahya ibn Husayn al-‘Alawi, known as “*Al-Hadi ila’l-Haqq*” {The Guide toward the Truth}, staged an uprising in Hijaz and the Zaydis gathered around him. On the same year he entered San‘a with the cooperation of Yemeni tribes, and was addressed as the Zaydi Imam.

Although he had skirmishes with Yemeni tribes, in the end he was able to take control of the region and establish a government. Yet, in 298 AH he died from poisoning. He had been remembered as one of the greatest Zaydi figures. In terms of knowledge and learning, he also had an excellent station. As such, the Zaydi sect in Yemen became known with his name: “Hadawiyyah”.[26](#)

His sons were Zaydi Imams and rulers of Yemen.[27](#) The leadership and rule of Zaydiyyah in Yemen continued through the children and grandchildren of “Al-Hadi ila’l-Haqq” until 1382 AH when Arab republicanism in Yemen was established.

Lesson 16: Summary

The Zaydis during the first three centuries AH constituted a large number of the Shi‘ah, and they staged regional uprisings which led to the formation of governments.

The leadership of the Zaydis was transferred from the line of Yahya ibn Zayd to the grandchildren of Imam al-Hasan (‘a). As such, they were always leading the uprisings in spite of the fact that they did not

believe in the Zaydi fundamental beliefs.

One of the highlights of the 'Alawi uprisings took place during the time of the 'Abbasid caliph Mansur and was led by Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah. The second one was during the time of Ma'mun when on account of the existence of military commanders such as Abu's-Saraya, the 'Alawis attained success after success. The third one was after 250 AH when the 'Alawis of Tabaristan were able to set up a government, with which other 'Alawis found courage to stage uprisings in various regions.

Lesson 16: Questions

1. Describe the Zaydi uprisings.
2. What is the basis of the uprising of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah?
3. When did the uprising of Ibn Tabataba'i take place?
4. In what year did the uprising of the 'Alawis of Tabaristan happen?

[1.](#) 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin* (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 345.

[2.](#) 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Mas'udi, *Murawwij adh-Dhahab* (Beirut: Manshurat Mu'assasah al-A'lami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1411 AH), vol. 4, pp. 393, 394; Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa'n-Nihal* (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1364 AHS), vol. 1, p. 139.

[3.](#) For example, after receiving the news of Ahmad ibn 'Isa's escape from prison, Harun (ar-Rashid) commissioned a certain person named Ibn Kurdiyyah to go to the districts of Kufah and Basrah, to feign Shi'ism, and distribute money among the Shi'ah and Zaydis so as to become informed of Ahmad ibn 'Isa's hiding place. He was able to identify this hiding place through much effort and distribution of large amounts of money, but in the end, Ahmad was not arrested. *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*, pp. 492, 496.

[4.](#) Ibid.

[5.](#) Idris ibn 'Abd Allah, brother of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah, participated in the uprising of Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hasani Shahid Fakh which took place during the time of the 'Abbasid caliph Hadi. After Husayn's defeat, he went to Egypt disguised among Hajj pilgrims (on their way back home) and from there he proceeded toward Maghrib. In Maghrib people gathered around him, and thus he acquired power and set up a government, but a certain person poisoned him at the order of the 'Abbasid caliph Harun. Thereafter, people named his small child "Idris". When Idris II grew up, he ruled there and the Idrisi rule in Maghrib lasted for about one century. *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, vol. 3, p. 326.

[6.](#) *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*, pp. 406-408.

[7.](#) Ibid., p. 393.

[8.](#) Ibid.

[9.](#) Ibid., pp. 392-393.

[10.](#) Ibid., pp. 251, 254-255, 347.

[11.](#) *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, vol. 3, p. 326.

[12.](#) Ibn Wadhih, *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, p. 445.

[13.](#) *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*, pp. 435-436.

[14.](#) Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir ibn Rustam Tabari, *Tarikh at-Tabari*, 2nd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1408 AH), vol. 5, p. 364.

[15.](#) Jalal ad-Din 'Abd ar-Rahman Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'* (Qum: Intisharat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1411 AH), p. 525.

[16.](#) *Tarikh at-Tabari*, vol. 5, p. 365.

[17.](#) Ibid.

[18.](#) Ibid.

[19.](#) Ibid.

[20.](#) Ibid., pp. 36, 395, 430.

[21.](#) Murawwij adh-Dhahab, p. 327.

[22.](#) Ibid., p. 326.

[23.](#) Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 542.

[24.](#) Murawwij adh-Dhahab, p. 283.

[25.](#) Ibid., p. 327.

[26.](#) See 'Ali Rabbani Gulpaygani, *Firq va Madhahib-e Kalami*, 1st edition (Qum: Markaz-e Jahani-ye 'Ulum-e Islami, 1377 AHS), vol. 1, p. 134.

[27.](#) *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, p. 525.

Lesson 17: Sporadic Uprisings

Most of these uprisings were staged without prior organization and based on individual decisions against the tyranny of caliphs and rulers toward the Shi'ah and 'Alawis. Mostly reactionary and intransigent in nature, the most important of these uprisings were the following:

a. The Uprising of Shahid Fakh

It was Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hasani (known as Shahid Fakh) who revolted during the caliphate of the 'Abbasid caliph Hadi. His uprising was against the extreme cruelties of the caliph of the time vis-à-vis the Shi'ah and 'Alawis. Narrates Ya'qubi, "The 'Abbasid caliph Musa al-Hadi was pursuing the Talibis. He seriously threatened them, curtailing their stipends and grants, and wrote to {the rulers of} the different regions and districts to be harsh toward the Talibis."[1](#)

'Abbasid caliph Hadi had also appointed as ruler of Medina a person from among the descendants of 'Umar who was very harsh against the Talibis, interrogating them daily. It was in protest of these cruelties that Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hasani rose up and ordered the recital of "*hayya 'ala khayri'l-'amal*" {"Come to the best of deeds"} in the *adhan* {call to prayer} in Medina, asking the people to give their allegiance on the basis of the Book of God and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (S), and called on them to the leadership of the chosen one from the progeny of Prophet Muhammad (S).

His policy was agreed upon by Imam al-Kazim ('a) though the Imam said that he will be killed.[2](#) For this reason, the Zaydis kept aloof from him and he along with less than 500 men stood against the 'Abbasid army under the command of Sulayman ibn Abi Ja'far, and in the end, he and a number of his companions attained martyrdom in a place between Mecca and Medina called "Fakh".[3](#)

Imam ar-Ridha ('a) said, "besides Karbala' there was no tragedy more severe and tragic than {the tragedy in} Fakh."[4](#)

In general, ‘Alawis leaders, with the exception of Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah Nafs az-Zakiyyah, did not possess popularity. The Imami Shi‘ah and companions of the pure Imams (‘a), with the exception of only a few, did not participate in those uprisings.

b. The Uprising of Muhammad ibn al-Qasim

Muhammad ibn al-Qasim’s revolt had taken place in 219 AH. He was a descendant of Imam as-Sajjad (‘a), a resident of Kufah, and had been regarded as one of the ascetic, devoted and pious ‘Alawis and *sadat*. The reason behind his uprising was the pressure exerted by Mu‘tasim against him and as such, he was compelled to leave Kufah for Khurasan. As Mas‘udi says,

In this year, that is, 219 AH, Mu‘tasim threatened Muhammad ibn al-Qasim. He was truly ascetic and pious and when Mu‘tasim threatened him, he went to Khurasan. He stayed in the cities of Khurasan such as Marv, Sarkhis, Taleqan, and Nasa.⁵

As narrated by Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani, a population of around forty thousand men gathered around him. In spite of this, his uprising did not succeed and this huge population deserted him and in the end, he was arrested by the Tahiris, sent to Samarra and imprisoned.⁶ Of course, he was freed by the Shi‘ah and his followers, but after that there was no news of him and he passed away secretly.⁷

c. The Uprising of Yahya ibn ‘Umar at-Talibi

Yahya ibn ‘Umar at-Talibi, a descendant of Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib at-Tayyar, enjoyed an unprecedented position among the people of Kufah on account of his asceticism and piety. Because of the cruelty and belittlement of the ‘Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil and the Turkish soldiers against him, he was forced to rise up in Kufah against them and when he was taking control of the helm of affairs, he implemented justice and equity. As such, he earned extraordinary popularity in Kufah, but his uprising was thwarted by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Tahir. The people were in commotion when they were mourning for him.⁸ As Mas‘udi says, “People from near and far recited elegies for him, and the young and old cried for him.”⁹

And as narrated by Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani, in terms of elegy, none of the ‘Alawis who had attained martyrdom during the ‘Abbasid period equaled him in the number of poems recited for him.¹⁰

Factors behind the Failure of the Uprisings

Two factors behind the failure of these uprisings can be identified: weakness in leadership and lack of coordination and cohesion of the forces. In most cases, the leaders of these movements had no proper plan or program and their activity was not based on the correct Islamic standards. As such, most of these revolts were not endorsed by the infallible Imams (‘a).

If ever some other uprisings whose leaders were competent figures ended in failure, it was because their plan and program were such that their defeat was predictable. Therefore, if the infallible Imam of the time would openly endorse them, in case of the failure of the uprising, the basis of Shi'ism and Imamate and the principal nucleus of the Shi'ah forces will be in jeopardy.

On the other hand, the forces of the uprisings generally lacked coordination and cohesion. Although there were sincere and true Shi'ah among them who remained faithful to the objective up to the point of death, most of these people did not believe in their objective, or they did not agree with the leaders of the 'Alawis, and most of them abandoned their commander and leader at the scene of the battle. In this regard, 'Allamah Ja'far Murtadha writes:

The reason behind these failures is nothing except that the Zaydi uprisings were political movements par excellence, and their only peculiarity was that they were campaigning to follow anyone from among the descendants of the Prophet (S) who would brandish his sword against the government, and they lack the intellectual purity and ideologically strong beliefs emanating from the profundity of the soul and depth of conscience.

These (uprisings) were based on such a stupid feeling and shallow cultural awareness which are not even an amalgamation of emotion with reasoning and conscience that could constitute a firm foundation of commitment and mission. On account of this, these (uprisings) were sucked down into the whirlpool (of breakdown) and many lives were wasted along their path. Rather, contrary to the factors of defeat which stem from within the revolutionary forces, relying on such an emotional and intellectual force is like the thirty one's reliance on a mirage.

And it is exactly this point that clearly shows how a people would seriously and decisively encounter events and when the water was already turning the wheels of mill and the time for harvest nigh, they would incline toward "peaceful" and "quiet" life. [11](#)

Lesson 17: Summary

The sporadic uprisings were mostly without any prior planning, and were undertaken with one individual's decision. They were usually staged as a form of reaction to the cruelties of the tyrant caliphs and rulers. Among these uprising was that of Husayn ibn 'Ali al-Hasani known as Shahid Fakh which was against the extreme harshness and cruelties of the 'Abbasid caliph Hadi.

On account of the pressure exerted on him by the 'Abbasid caliph Mu'tasim, Muhammad ibn al-Qasim who was one of the ascetic and pious 'Alawis, was compelled to go to Khurasan and stage an uprising there.

The revolt of Yahya ibn 'Umar at-Talibi was also the results of the tyranny of the agents of the 'Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil.

And as to why most of the uprisings of the ‘Alawis ended in failure, one must seek the reasons behind this in the weakness of leadership and the lack of cohesion of the forces.

Lesson 17: Questions

1. Briefly describe the sporadic uprisings.
2. What are the reasons behind the failures of these uprisings?

1. Ibn Wadhih, Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi, 1st edition (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 2, p. 404.
2. ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 372.
3. Ibid., pp. 380–381.
4. Sayyid Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman Kiya’i-Gilani, Siraj al-Ansab (Qum: Manshurat Maktabah Ayatullah al-‘Uzma al-Mar‘ashi an-Najafi, 1409 AH), p. 66.
5. ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Mas‘udi, Murawwij adh-Dhahab (Beirut: Manshurat Mu’assasah al-A‘lami Li’l-Matbu‘at, 1411 AH), vol. 4, p. 60.
6. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, pp. 464–467.
7. Murawwij adh-Dhahab, vol. 4, p. 60.
8. Ibid., p. 160.
9. Ibid.
10. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 511.
11. Sayyid Ja‘far Murtada al-Amili, Zindigani-ye Siyasi-ye Imam Jawad (‘a), trans. Sayyid Muhammad Husayni, 8th edition (Qum: Islamic Publications Office affiliated to the Society of Teachers of the Islamic Seminary in Qum, 1375 AHS), p. 19.

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