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The Eleventh Infallible, Hadhrat Imam Muhammad al-Taqi, Jawad al-A'imma, The Ninth Imam

Imam al-Jawad (as), the ninth Imam of the Shi'ites, was born in Medina in 195/811. His name is Muhammad, also known as Jawad and Taqi.

His other nicknames are Radhi and Muttaqi, but Taqi is the most popular of all.

His noble mother was called Sabika or Khayzaran, both of which have been recorded in his biographies. When his father died, Imam Muhammad al-Taqi (as) was about eight years old.

After the heartrending martyrdom of Imam 'Ali al-Ridha (a.s.) which took place late in the month of Safar, 203/September, 818, the office of Imamate was transferred to his honorable son Imam Jawad al-A'imma (as).

The Abbasid Ma'mun, who like other Abbasid caliphs was fearful of the Infallible Imam (as)'s spiritual popularity and innate influence as well as the spread of his virtues among the people, tried to take the son of Imam al-Ridha (a.s.) under his own special care.

To this end, Ma'mun married her daughter Umm al-Fadhl off to Imam al-Jawad (as) so that he might have someone watch him from inside his own house. Pains and offences that Imam al-Jawad (as) has suffered from this domestic agent are all recorded in the history.^{[1](#)}

Among the methods Ma'mun applied against Imam 'Ali al-Ridha (a.s.) was holding debate sessions. Ma'mun and later Mu'tasim 'Abbasi wanted – to their false supposition– to force him thereby into tight corners. They applied the same method to his son, Imam al-Jawad (as), too, especially at the beginning of his Imamate, when he was too young. Ma'mun would not realize that *Wilayat* and Imamate which are Divine blessings, are not dependent upon young or old age.

Anyhow, although at an early age and in his short life, Imam al-Jawad (as) entered scholarly debates in a period when different Islamic and non-Islamic sects were thriving, great scientists were there, sciences and arts had developed in other nations, and many books had been translated and published in Arabic.

With the Divine gift of Imamate, which had originated from his absolute *Wilayat* and Divine revelation, he promulgated Islamic precepts like his noble father and ancestors, teaching and guiding Muslims and undertaking to answering various questions. As an example, one of his debates is related as follows:

In his *Tafsir*, 'Ayyashi quotes Dharqan who was a companion and friend of Ahmad b. Abi Du'ad as saying: "One day his friend (Ibn Abi Du'ad) returned from the court of the Abbasid Mu'tasim and looked very distressed and troubled. I asked him why he was so upset that day.

He replied: 'Something shameful and belittling happened to us in the presence of the caliph and Abi Ja'far (as), son of 'Ali b. Musa al-Ridha (a.s.).' I asked how come? He replied: 'A thief was brought to the caliph and his theft was evident and he had confessed the stealing. The caliph asked how the penal law (*hadd*) would be carried out. A number of jurists were present. The Caliph ordered other jurists to be present too. He also sent for Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Ridha."

The caliph asked: "How should the Islamic *hadd* be carried out?"

I said: "The hand must be cut off at the wrist."

The caliph said: "For what reason?"

I said: "Because a hand includes fingers as well as a palm which extends to the wrist; and it is read in the verse about *tayammum*; ﴿And wipe a part of your faces and your hands with it [clean ground]﴾. (Al-Qur'an, 5: 6)" Many of the jurists present in the court confirmed my view.

A group of scholars stated: "A hand must be cut off at the elbow."

The caliph asked: "For what reason?"

They said: "Because of the verse about *wudhu* in the Qur'an which reads: ﴿... and your hands up to the elbows﴾ (Al-Qur'an, 5: 6). And this verse indicates that a thief's hands must be cut off at the elbow."

Another group asserted that the arm should be cut off at the shoulder because an arm has all these parts.

As dispute erupted, the caliph faced Imam Muhammad b. 'Ali (as) and said: "O Abi Ja'far! What do you say on this issue?"

The Holy Imam said: "Your scholars talked in this regard, spare me from further talk."

The caliph replied: "I swear you to God that you too should express your opinion."

Imam al-Jawad (as) said: "Now that you are swearing me, I will answer you. What was expressed by the Sunni scholars about theft penalty is flawed. The proper Islamic penalty is that the fingers of a hand, except the thumb, must be cut off."

The Caliph asked: "Why?"

The Holy Imam (as) replied: "Because the Apostle of Allah (S) has said that prostration (*sujud*) should be made with seven parts of the body, namely, forehead, the palms of the hands, both knees, and the tips of the toes; so if the hand is cut off either at the wrist or elbow or from shoulder, then there will remain no limb for prostration before Almighty Allah, and it is mentioned in the Qur'an as follows: ﴿The places of prostration belong to Allah ...﴾ (Al-Qur'an, 72: 18); therefore no one should cut them off."

Mu'tasim got very delighted at this logical and Divine precept. He approved it and commanded the amputation of the thief's fingers to be carried out according to Imam al-Jawad (as)'s precept."

Dharqan goes on to say: "Ibn Abi Du'ad was intensely upset as to why his opinion had been rejected in the presence of the caliph." Three days later, he went to Mu'tasim and said: "O Amir al-Mu'minin! I have come here to admonish you, and I do this as a token of gratitude for your favors on me." "What is it?" Asked Mu'tasim.

Ibn Abi Du'ad said: "When you hold a meeting consisting of the jurists and scholars to bring up a question or two, all the civil and military nobles are present, and even the retainers and doormen and guards witness the meeting and the debates being carried out in your presence. As they see that your great scholars' opinions are worthless vis-à-vis those of Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Jawad, little by little people will get attracted to him and the caliphate will slip from your dynasty to the household of 'Ali (as), which will tremble the foundations of your power and glory."

This slanderous and spiteful admonition left its impact on Mu'tasim, who since then had been seeking to extinguish this glazing torch and block up this overflowing fountain of science and piety.[2](#)

Before Mu'tasim, Ma'mun too had applied the same procedure to Imam al-Jawad (as), as at the beginning of Imam al-Jawad (as)'s Imamate, Ma'mun proceeded again to hold debate sessions and among other things he asked Yahya b. Aktham, the grand Judge in his court, to propound some questions to the Imam (as) hoping he would be able to mar the Imam (as)'s reputation and status. It was of no avail, however, and the Imam left behind all these sessions with pride and confidence.

Once, as a compromise between Yahya b. Aktham and Ma'mun, a meeting was convoked and Imam al-Jawad (as) and all nobles and scholars were called in to witness what questions Aktham was going to ask the Holy Imam (as) and how he would manage to answer them.

Upon arrival the Imam (as) was respectfully welcomed by Ma'mun. The latter asked Yahya to raise whatever questions he wanted to ask. Yahya, an elderly man, upon permission from Ma'mun and Imam

al-Jawad (as), turned his face to the Imam (as) and inquired: "Do you permit me to ask you a question on jurisprudence?" The Imam (as) replied: "Ask whatever you wish".

Yahya b. Aktham asked: "What do you say about a *muhrim* (one who is in his/her pilgrim's garb) who kills a game"?

Imam al-Jawad (as) said: "Did the *muhrim* kill the game in the Holy Precinct or out of it? Was he discerning or ignorant? Was this killing willful or unintentional? Was he a slave or a master? Was he a boy or an adult? Was it the first time or not? Was the game bird or not? Was the *muhrim* insisting – after killing the game – or regretful? Did he kill the game at night when it was in its nest or in daylight and openly? Was the *muhrim* intending to perform the Hajj or the 'Umra?"

Yahya was extremely amazed and perplexed, not knowing how to answer. He cast his head down shamefully. The courtiers exchanged glances. Being greatly disturbed, Ma'mun addressed the Abbasids and those present that were all in total silence: "Did you see what he did? Did you get to know Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Ridha?"³

Then he changed the topic to disperse the amazement of the audience.

Imam al-Jawad (as)'s position, however, got more deeply rooted following these debates.

During his 7 years of Imamate, Imam al-Jawad (as) dealt with dissemination and instruction of the truths of Islam, and had eminent disciples and companions, each being a pinnacle of the Islamic culture and scholarship. Some of them are as follows:

Ibn Abi 'Umayr Baghdadi, Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Sanan Zahiri, Ahmad b. Abi Nasr Bizanti Kufi, Abu Tammam Habib Aws Ta'i, the well-known Shi'ite poet Abu al-Hasan 'Ali b. Mahziyar Ahwazi, and Fadhl b. Shadhan Neyshaburi who all lived in the 3rd century.

Like their Holy Imam (as) who was continually kept under surveillance, they too were somehow persecuted and annoyed. Fadhl b. Shadhan was expelled from Neyshabur by 'Abd Allah b. Tahir who then searched through the content of his books. When he was informed about the topics of the books which were on monotheism and the like, he was not convinced, and insisted to further know about his political views, as well.

The poet, Abu Tammam was not an exception in this respect, either. The Amirs who were themselves among writers and poets refused to hear his poems or have a copy of them, though he was the best poet of his time and well-known in the Islamic and Arabic history of literature.

When his poems were read to them unprecedentedly, they would enjoy and praise them, but as soon as they found out that the poems belonged to Abu Tammam, that is, the Shi'ite poet who was faithful to Imam al-Jawad (as) and an advocate of his school, they would order the poems to be torn up. Ibn Abi 'Umayr, the most reliable scholar, also was extremely annoyed, incarcerated, and flagellated in the eras

of Harun and Mu'mun.

His books, which were the Major sources in science of religion, were taken away from him and destroyed, and so on.⁴ This was the way the despotic ruling system of the Abbasids treated advocates of scholarship and virtue, and how tyrannical it was!

Martyrdom of Imam al-Jawad (as)

This newly blossomed flower of *Wilayat* and infallibility, though living but a short while, would refresh the souls with his fragrant aura. The intellectual works and traditions narrated from Imam al-Jawad (as), as well as the problems answered and the wise sayings left behind by His Holiness will forever remain as ornaments to the leaves of history of Islam. He lived 25 years, of which 17 years were spent in his Imamate.

The Abbasid Mu'tasim invited Imam al-Jawad (as) to go to Baghdad from Medina. Imam al-Jawad (as) arrived in Baghdad in Muharram, 220/January, 835. Mu'tasim connived with his niece Umm al-Fadhl, i.e., Imam al-Jawad (as)'s wife, and Ja'far son of Ma'mun, to murder the Holy Imam (as).

As mentioned before, this connivance was a result of the ominous thought that the caliphate was likely to be transferred from the Abbasids to the 'Alawis. That was why they began to spur Umm al-Fadhl, telling her that she was the daughter and niece of caliphs and respecting her was obligatory in every aspect; and that her husband, Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Jawad (as), preferred his son 'Ali al-Hadi's mother to her.

They both kept coaxing Umm al-Fadhl to the extent that, as is the case with barren women, she was instigated by jealousy and got annoyed with his honorable young husband and finally surrendered to Mu'tasim and his brother's plot.

Then the two criminals inserted fatal poison in some grapes and sent them to the Imam (a.s.)'s house for Umm al-Fadhl, the disgraced woman, to feed them to his husband. She placed the dish of grapes before Imam al-Jawad (as), and began to commend them, persuading and insisting the Imam (as) to eat from the grapes. Imam al-Jawad (as) had some. In a short while he felt the effect of poison inside him and an intense pain took him over. The disgraced woman got repented and began to cry as she saw her young husband in that agonizing state, though her repentance was of no avail.

Imam al-Jawad (as) asked her: "Why are you crying? Now that you are killing me, your crying is of no use. Know that in these few days of your worldly life, the Almighty Allah will inflict such ailment on you and you will find yourself in such a state that you will not be able to relieve yourself from."

There are some other reports on how Imam al-Jawad (as) was poisoned.⁵

Imam al-Jawad (as)'s Wives and Children

Imam al-Jawad (as)'s wife was Umm al-Fadhl, daughter of Ma'mun. She did not bear him any children. Imam Muhammad al-Taqi (as) had another spouse who was an *umm walad* named Samana Maghribiyya. His children are reported to have been four sons and four daughters as follows:

1. Hadhrat Abu al-Hasan Imam 'Ali al-Naqi (Hadi) (as)
2. Abu Ahmad Musa Mubarka'
3. Abu Ahmad Husayn
4. Abu Musa 'Imran
5. Fatimah
6. Khadija
7. Umm Kulthum
8. Hakima

Like his ancestress Fatimah al-Zahra (as), Imam al-Jawad (as) lived a short life which was replete with sufferings and oppressions. The malevolent prevented this blazing torch from shining on. The ninth Imam (as) left the transient world for the Eternal one late in the month of Dhu'l Qa'da, 220/October, 835. His sacred tomb is in Kazimayn (or Kazimiyya), Iraq, at the rear of the radiant tomb of his grandfather Imam Musa b. Ja'far (as), which is a pilgrimage center for the Shi'ite and lovers of the Infallible Imams (as).

Some Sayings of Imam al-Jawad (as):

1. Trust in the Almighty Allah is the cost to every valuable thing, and a ladder to any lofty height.
2. Believers' honor is in their independence from others.
3. Beware of being Allah's lover and friend in public and His enemy in private.
4. Whoever does favor to a brother in Faith, will be granted an abode in the Paradise [in return].
5. How would a person be ruined and wasted when Allah has accepted his devotion? How may anyone be salvaged when broken away from Allah and joined others? The one who acts in an unscholarly way (i.e., through the way of ignorance and naivety) will cause devastation rather than improvement.
6. Beware of friendship with ignorant and evil people, for they are like unsheathed swords, which look beautiful but produce ugly results.

7. Being the traitors' trustee suffices someone to show his fraudulence and roguery.

8. A believer is in need of three virtues: success from Allah, a self-preacher who constantly admonishes him from within, and access to advisers who would help him to attain guidance.^{[6](#)}

^{[1](#)}. Imam dar 'Ayniyat-i Jami'a, p. 76.

^{[2](#)}. Majmu'a-yi Zindigi-yi Chahardah Ma'sum 'Alayhim al-Salam, p. 511.

^{[3](#)}. Majmu'a-yi Zindigi-yi Chahardah Ma'sum 'Alayhim al-Salam, p. 511. For the Imam's answers, see the same source p. 505.

^{[4](#)}. Imam dar 'Ayniyat-i Jami'a, from page 77 on (with slight changes).

^{[5](#)}. Majmu'a-yi Zindigi-yi Chahardah Ma'sum 'Alayhim al-Salam, p. 520.

^{[6](#)}. Muntahi al-Amal.

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