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The Ninth Imam, Muhammad ibn 'Ali al Taqi al Jawad (as)

Born in Madina, 10th Rajab 195 Hijri (12.4.811 AD). Died in Baghdad Iraq 29th Zeeqad 220 Hijri (27.11.835, aged 25 years, Period of Imamate 17 years.

At the time of the death of Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) our 9th Imam was only 9 years old. Some people from among the followers of Ahlul Bayt and others, doubted Imam's eligibility to become Imam at this young age. Kulaini in his Kafi relates that the Mutawalli of the Holy Ka'aba questioned Imam for several days before he was satisfied and accepted him as the Imam of the Time.

It is an undeniable fact that the whole episode of the call for Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) to Tus, and his appointment as heir apparent to Mamun was a game played for political convenience to get the sympathies and support of the Persians to get his empire back from his step brother Amin. Once this was achieved Mamun had the Imam poisoned to get him out of his way.

But the fact is that Mamun being the most learned among all the Abbasid rulers, was aware that the family of the Prophet had a special type of knowledge which should be appreciated and be known to other people as long as power remained in Mamun's hands and his authority remained supreme. This became apparent when he arrived in Baghdad victorious.

He began a policy of reconciliation with the Abbasid elders and also with those who had inclinations towards the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet. He reappointed Hasan ibn Sahl as Governor of Iraq who had openly supported the cause of Ahlul Bayt. Ibn Sahl being a scholarly person, co-operated handsomely in the literary and cultural interest in the Emperor's Court.

For in spite of the fact that there was warfare and political turmoil in all directions during the reign of Mamun, the period marks perhaps the apex of the oriental renaissance. There was freedom of speech and expression which resulted in open discussions on many issues which were taboos previously.

Most significant for the life of Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) was the fact that Mamun's favors towards the Ahlul Bayt did not cease because of their scholarly and intellectual approach to Islam. Although after arriving in Baghdad Mamun replaced the Hashemite Green color to the black color of the Abbasids on flags and court dresses, he still encouraged the intellectuals to engage in open discussions about the concept of power and authority.

Indeed he took that action as political necessity for he did not want to alienate his Persian friends and supporters. For not only prominent friends of Ahlul Bayt were appointed to responsible positions, but particular public favor was shown to the family of the deceased Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as).

One of the Imam's brothers was chosen to preside at the annual pilgrimage in Makka, and it was but a short time until Mamun married his own daughter Umme Fadhl to Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) According to Yakubi, Mamun bestowed upon the bride groom one hundred thousand Dirhams, and said, "Surely I would like to be a grandfather in the line of the Apostle of God and of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as).

It is a well-known fact that the Imam gave all this money to the poor rather than spend it upon himself, which his wife Umme Fadhl, who was the daughter of Mamun did not like at all and complained to her father about this. But Mamun knew the ways of Ahlul Bayt, rejected her complaints and told her to live like the wife of an Imam of the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet.

The story of Mamun's first meeting with the young son of Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) is interesting. One day, when the young Imam was only nine years old, the caliph Mamun went out hunting. The Imam was standing silently by the road side where some children were playing. The caliph's entourage came that way. Seeing the soldiers of the caliph all the children ran away, but the young Imam remained standing at his place.

Noting this, Mamun stopped his carriage and asked, "Young man, why did you not run away like the other children?"

The Imam replied calmly, " Neither had I committed a crime, nor was I blocking the way. Why should I have run away or be afraid? And I also know that you will not cause any unnecessary trouble when your way is not blocked."

Mamun was surprised with this mature reply and asked, " What is your name?"

"Muhammad," came the reply. Whose son are you? asked Mamun. "Son of 'Ali ibn Musa (as) ."

Mamun rode on. During his hunt the hawk returned to him with a fish in its beak. Mamun was surprised. He returned back toward the city. Once again, he found children playing on the same spot, who ran away seeing the caliph's soldiers, except this young man who said he was Muhammad son of 'Ali ibn Musa (as) who remained where he was.

Mamun hid the fish in his palm, stopped his carriage near the Imam and said, "Tell me, what is there in

my fist?” The Imam replied, “God created clouds between earth and sky. The hawks of kings sometimes catch fish from there and bring it to the Kings. They hide it in their fist and ask a member of the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet, “Tell me what is there in my fist.”

Mamun said, “ Truly, you are the worthy son of Imam ‘Ali Al-Ridha’ (as) (Bihar-al Anwar ,Majlisi). Mamun took the young Imam with him, and let him live in a nearby house next to the Royal Palace.

It was during this stay of the 9th Imam nearby that Mamun had the chance of seeing him closely and gaining an insight into the intellectual abilities of this pious household.

Mamun convened many conferences during this period in which many intellectuals and scholars assembled in order to listen and learn from the Young Imam. Mamun told the Abbasid hierarchy that Imam ‘Ali Al-Ridha’'s son 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. If they doubted, they could put the young Imam to the test. This reply, though totally said in jest, amounted to a challenge. Impulsed by Mamun’s taunts they consented to judge the boy’s knowledge in a contest with the most learned authority then, namely Yahya ibn Aaktham.

Mamun convened a magnificent gathering for this open contest. There was anxiety to see this unequal match where a boy of Twelve was to contest with the seasoned and renowned Chief Justice of the Abbasid Empire. People crowded from every quarter. Historians have recorded that apart from dignitaries and nobles, 900 seats were reserved for scholars only. Mamun’s’ reign was described as the golden age of learning.

Experts of every trade and profession assembled in that great capital from every corner of the Empire. Mamun had a carpet laid by the side of his throne to seat Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) . In front of him was accommodated the Chief Justice Yahya ibn Aktham. There was a pin drop 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 Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) Mamun replied, “ You may seek permission from the Imam himself.”

Yahya said to the Imam, “ Do you allow me to put some questions to you?” “Yes, you may” replied the Imam. Yahya began by asking a question, “What is atonement for a person who hunts a game while he is dressed in the pilgrimage garb (‘Ahram).” The question itself indicated that Yahya underestimated the scholarly attainments of his opponent.

Drunk with the pride of position and knowledge, he thought that the young man 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 atonement of sins or mistakes committed by a pilgrim never

entertained his mind.

The sagacious young Imam was clever enough for the seasoned enquirer. Instead of giving a general or a vague reply, he analyzed the different aspects of the problem so dexterously that the audience immediately had a true estimate of the Imam's knowledge and of Yahya's shallow mindedness. Yahya too was puzzled and felt humiliated when the Imam addressed him in the following manner:

"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 adult or minor, did he commit the sin for the first time or had he done so before, was the hunted game a bird or something else, was it a small animal or a big one, is the sinner sorry for the 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 in Jurisprudence. While the Imam was unfolding all such details of the problem, he had judged that he was no match for his ingenious opponent. His face lost color and the audience realized the situation well. His lips were sealed and he made no reply. Mamun fully assessed his condition and thought it was useless to put any further pressure on him.

He then requested the Imam to solve all the aspects of the question. Yahya silent and puzzled, gazed at the Imam. But Mamun was bent on carrying the matter to the end. He therefore requested the Imam to put some questions to Yahya if he liked. The Imam then said to Yahya, " May I ask you a question? Disillusioned, Yahya who now had the true estimate of the Imam's capacity and had no misunderstanding about his own worth, 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 a question in reply to which Yahya admitted his ignorance. The Imam explained it too. Mamun's joy knew no bounds. What he had asserted came true.

Addressing the audience he said, "Did I not tell you that the people of the Ahlul Bayt of the Prophet have been gifted by God with limitless knowledge? None can cope with even the children of this elevated House."

The excitement of the gathering was great. All unanimously exclaimed that Mamun's guess was correct and that the Imam Muhammad Taqi al Jawad (as) was a matchless person. The Emperor then thought it advisable to marry his daughter to Imam there and then.

The Imam himself recited the marriage Khutba. This address (Khutba) became so famous that as a remembrance, it has been recited at weddings everywhere throughout the Muslim world ever since. Over joyed at this auspicious occasion Mamun displayed his full generosity, giving away millions in

charity to the poor.

When the people departed and a few of the courtiers remained including the Chief Justice Yahya ibn Akhtham, Mamun asked the Imam to tell them the law concerning the aspects into which the killing of the animal was done by a Muhrim. (Meaning a pilgrim in Aahram)

“Yes,” replied the Imam. “ If he had killed the animal outside the sacred ground and it was winged and large ,an atonement of sheep would have been necessary for him. If he had struck it down in the sanctuary, the penalty required of him would be doubled.

If he killed a young bird outside the sacred ground, then the atonement of a lamb which had been weaned off milk would have been required of him. If he had killed it in the sanctuary, then he would have been required to sacrifice a lamb and the value of the young bird. As for wild animals, if it was a wild ass, he would have been required to sacrifice a cow.

If it was an ostrich, the sacrifice of a camel would be necessary. If it had been a deer, then a sheep would have been necessary. If he had killed any of those in the sanctuary, the penalty would have been doubled. Imam continued to describe all avenues of penalties for the Muhrim to the astonishment of the audience.” (Al Irshad by Mufid) “You have done well Abu Jaafar and God has adorned you,” said Mamun to him.

Character and Virtues

Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) occupied the highest position in human virtues and moral attainments as this was the marked feature of the Prophet’s family. It was customary for the Imam to meet everyone humbly, fulfill the needs of the poor, maintain Islamic requisites of equality and simplicity, help the poor secretly, treat even foes fairly, extend hospitality, impart true Islamic knowledge to all and specially to the scholars of religion and the like, marked his saintly life—in full conformity with other members of this sacred series of infallible Imams.

Common people who could not appreciate such heights of moral excellence, might have thought 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.

Mamun too, might have thought on the same lines because spiritualism which was the chief characteristic of this household was against the practices of worldly rulers. It could be said that neither the Umayyads nor the Abbasids had any personal grudge against the Prophet or his family, the Ahlul Bayt, but they were at war with the moral standards set by them.

They always tried to destroy the center of moral excellence and human values which was shown as the polar star of ideal spiritual perfection, overshadowing their royal glory.

In order to uphold their imperialistic and luxurious norms of life, these monarchs wanted to do away with these godly saints who demonstrated righteousness, compassion, faith, piety, fraternity and justice as the main teachings of Islam. Yazid's demand of obedience from Imam Husayn (as) or Mamun's appointment of Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) as his heir-apparent were two different aspects of the same desire.

The procedures were different but the end purpose was the same. Imam Husayn (as) did not bow to pay homage, so he was slain in the battlefield. Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) did not serve the cause of Abbasid imperialism, so he was silenced with poison.

Mamun, however, took it as a great opportunity to serve his objective to patron the Imam who was only a young man. The political sagacity suggested that it would be far easier to cast a young man into the desired mold and thus it would be possible to demolish the center of the Prophet's teachings in Madina or elsewhere in the Islamic world which, although working silently, was dangerous to the imperialistic designs of the antithesis called Muslim Monarchy.

No doubt Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) did not conform to Mamun's designs, or to his desires, but this could not disappoint him. Imam Ridha's mature way of thinking and simple way of life could not be changed.

But there was the hope that in all probability a man of a tender young age, who was brought up in the luxurious atmosphere of a Royal Palace would grow into an ambitious merrymaking prince, altogether against his ancestral ways and views.

With the exception of a few enlightened persons, everybody would think on the same 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 small house, thus maintaining the Islamic values of virtue and ethics of a simple and humble life.

It is usually seen that if the bride's people are comparatively rich, they wish that the groom might live with them, if not in the same house, at least in the same town and in a house of the same standard.

The Will power of the Imam can be judged from the fact that he lived in a separate dwelling and of a humble standard in Baghdad. After one year when Mamun realized that the Imam was not pleased with staying in Baghdad, he allowed the couple to go to live in Madina.

On his return to Madina the Imam maintained the same ancestral unimposing behavior: no body guards, no pomp, no restrictions on people meeting him, no visiting times, and no discriminations against anyone meeting the Imam and learning from him.

He spent most of his day time sitting in the Mosque of the Prophet where Muslims came to avail from his knowledge and preaching. The narrators of Hadith and other students of theology came to enquire about religious sciences and the Imam guided them by explaining every complicated matter. All the world saw

that Imam Ja'far Sadiq's successor, seated on the same mat, was guiding the people towards piety which was the hall mark of Islam.

Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) allowed the same amount of freedom to his wife Umme Fadhl and imposed the same restrictions on her as his ancestors had done in the case of their wives. He did not care much about the fact that Umme Fadhl was a princess.

Although she lived with him, he married another lady who was a descendant of Ammare Yasir. God had intended to continue the line of Imamate through her and she gave birth to Imam 'Ali Naqi (as) the tenth Imam.

Imam Muhammad Taqi's speech was very charming and effective. Once during the Hajj season he addressed a gathering of the pilgrims and stated commandments of the Divine Law of Sharia'a. The audience included learned scholars who admitted that they had never heard such an eloquent and comprehensive speech.

Many scholars came to learn the teachings of Ahlul Bayt. A collection of brief and wise sayings is also left by the Imam, resembling the wisdom of his ancestor Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) Some profound discourses on theology and monotheism are also to his credit.

Mamun died in 218 Hijri (833 AD). As long as he lived no harm came to the Imam. Mamun was succeeded by his brother Mu'taman, the second heir-apparent after Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) . He came to be known as Al-Mu'tasim billah Abbasi.

His niece Umme Fadhl now began to write to him complaining more than she did during the reign of her father because Mamun always rejected her complaints. But Mu'tasim was jealous of Imam 'Ali Al-Ridha' (as) from the very beginning. He had also opposed the marriage of Umme Fadhl to Imam Muhammad Taqi (as) .

Al- Mu'tasim now got a chance to settle his differences in this matter. Imam Muhammad Taqi's (as) fame as a great scholar and the constant gathering of people 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 irritated him into enmity. In the second year of his reign he summoned the Imam from Madina to Baghdad, ordering his Governor in Madina expressly about it. Imam was compelled to set out for Baghdad leaving his son 'Ali ibn Muhammad (Naqi) with his mother in Madina.

For one year after the Imams' arrival in Baghdad, Mu'tasim did not do anything. He was hoping that the Imam would conform to the Royal ways of living and then this would be a source of infamy for the Ahlul Bayt. But when he realized that the man was becoming more popular in Baghdad with his scholarly discourses with the scholars there, he had to act to stop this as all his ancestors did before him and use

the silent weapon of poison to eliminate that thorn in his heart.

The Imam died of poison on the 29th of Zeeqa'ad 220 Hijiri (24. 11.835 AD). He was buried by the side of his grandfather Imam Musa ibn Ja'far. It is because of the two Imam's who were famous for their suppression of anger that the place was called Kazemain, the two Kazims, the enduring ones.

Razavi Sayyids

It is a fact that all Sayyids known as Razavi are actually Taqawi. Imam Ridha' (as) had no son other than Imam Muhammad Taqi. Had he other sons then the Imam Muhammad Taqi then their offspring should have been called Razavi Sayyids. But as Imam Ridha' (as) came to Iran and died in Tus many descendants of his son Imam Muhammad Taqi were also called Razavis.

One famous saying of the 9th Imam Muhammad Taqi al Jawad (as) follows:

Someone asked, "was the Messenger of God Muhammad ibn Abdullah an illiterate." Imam replied, "No, the Messenger of God knew 72 languages in which he could read, write and speak."

Someone asked the Imam about the Angels. What are they? The Imam replied, " They are the powers of God that regulate the Universe."

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