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> Disseminating knowledge and learning

The Sixth Imam, Ja'far Ibn Muhammad As-Sadiq (as)

The 6th Imam, Ja'far Ibn Muhammad As-Sadiq (as) was Born in Madinah on 17th Rabiul Awwal 83 Hijri (23.4.702 AD). Died in Madinah on 15th Shawwal, 148 Hijri (7.12.765 AD) at the age of 63. Period of Imamate 34 years.

It is known from various history books and various sources of Hadith that when Imam As-Sadiq was a young boy, he used to come to the schools and Madrasas founded by his father the 5th Imam and instead of learning as many other youngsters and older pupil did, he used to discuss serious matters of Fiqh and Jurisprudence with much older students of the Madrasas.

In one such discourses when he was only 11 years old, when he entered a class room where pupils were discussing on the subject of astronomy, he pointed out to the surprise of everyone except his own father, that the earth cannot be flat, because of the way the sun rises in the East and sets in the west and day and night change in 24 hours, it cannot be possible.

In his opinion the earth must be round, otherwise this would not have happened in such a precise manner. All the students were astonished but his father smiled and said nothing.

The above story was mentioned in a book compiled by Five French scholars at Strasbourg in France with the title, "The heart of the Shia Scholarship." The book has been translated in Persian and Urdu and it is now being translated in English with possible references.

Upbringing

Up to the age of twelve years, Ja'far (as) was brought up under the guidance of his grandfather Imam Zainul Abedeen whose main concern was to worship his maker and reflect on the tragic events of Karbala' and whose main avenue of teaching was through supplications.

Twenty two years had lapsed since then, yet the remembrance of the tragedy of Karbala' was still fresh in his memory. So, as soon as Imam Ja'far (as) 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 Baqir (as) , who was only three years old, at that tragic time. Imam As-Sadiq (as) considered it his duty to convene the recitation gatherings (Majalis) about the sorrowful event of Karbala'.

He was twelve year old when his grandfather expired. Then up to the age of 31 he passed his time under the guidance of his father Imam Baqir (as) . It was the time when Ummayyad politics was tottering and Muslims were approaching Imam Baqir (as) in thousands. Their need for knowledge was fulfilled by the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt.

In 114 Hijri(732 AD) Imam Baqir (as) died, and the responsibilities of Imamate devolved on the shoulders of Imam Ja'far Sadiq. Hisham Ibn Abdul Malik was still ruling in Damascus and political disturbances were afoot. The passion of taking revenge on Bani Ummaya was strong and several descendants of Imam 'Ali (as) were preparing themselves to overthrow the regime.

Most prominent among them was Zaid, the respected son of Imam Zainul Abedeen (as) His religious zeal and piety were known throughout Arabia. He was Hafiz of the Qur'an and he had taken upon himself the stand of removing the tyranny of the Ummayyads.

This was a very precarious juncture for Imam As-Sadiq (as) in regards to the tyranny of the Ummayyads, he agreed with his uncle Zaid for whom he had a great deal of respect. But due to his far sighted judgement Imam could clearly see that Zaid's rising against the well-organized Ummayyad forces will be of no avail. He therefore advised him not to start this venture.

But Zaid was too far out in his zeal and he would not stop. Many thousands of Iraqis had sworn their allegiance to Zaid and he was quite optimistic about his success. He took his forces to Kufa, gave a great battle but was killed in the end. The Ummayyads were as brutal as ever. They hung the body of Zaid on the gates of the city of Kufa which remained there as a reminder for several years.

One year after Zaid's death, his son Yahya gained the same path and received the same fate. Imam As-Sadiq (as) was aware of all this but realized that this was not the time to take any such active part. His main occupation was to spread the religious sciences of Ahlul Bayt as much as possible while time was on their side.

Revolution

The last days of the Ummayyads were ruffled by political disturbances. Changes in Governors were many and Imam As-Sadiq (as) witnessed the rise and fall of many kings. After Hisham, Walid, then his son

Yazid, then Ibrahim, then Marwan al-Himar came to the throne. The capture of the latter terminated the monarchy of the tyrannical Ummayyads.

During the last phase of the tottering Ummayyad rule, the Abbasids were actively engaged in their anti Ummayyad activities. They took advantage of the situation and formed an association with the slogan that “ Right to rule is for the family of the Holy Prophet.”

They pledged in one of their meetings in Madina in which Muhammad Nafse Zakiya, the great grandson of Imam Hasan (as) was present, that when the Ummayyads state topples, the Khilafat will be reverted to the Ahlul Bayt. It is clear that to rule the Islamic world was not the job of every Hashemite or Abbasid.

It was the right of those divinely appointed descendants of the Holy Prophet whom God 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, the descendants of ‘Ali (as) never tried to acquire power through political trickery.

But the Abbasids no doubt took the opportunity of the situation. Availing themselves of the silence shown by the Imams and of the compassion people had for the Hashemites (the Abbasids too were Hashemites) they saw their chances to rise to power.

But when they established themselves on the throne, they became the enemies of Ahlul Bayt, in the same degree or more than that which had been adopted by the heartless Ummayyads.

One of the prominent agents of this revolution was Abu Salma al-Khallal who was especially compassionate towards the Ahlul Bayt. When he gained power in Iraq he wrote letters to Imam As-Sadiq inviting him to accept and share the royal power.

In political struggles, such opportunities are considered golden, but the Imam who was an embodiment of selflessness and self respect, declined the offer and remained devoted to his duties of imparting knowledge.

The supporters of the Abbasid cause and the followers of Abu Muslim Khorasani then took the oath of allegiance at the hand of Abul Abbas as Saffah on 14th Rabi-usani 132 Hijri (30.11.749AD) he was acknowledged as the ruler and caliph of the Muslim world. In the year 136 Hijri Saffah died and his brother Abu Ja’far Mansur succeeded to the throne.

It has already been indicated that the Abbasids took advantage of the popularity of the Ahlul Bayt and had made their slogan to stand and protect the rights of Ahlul Bayt. They gathered the public around them on this pretext. But when they came to power and destroyed the Ummayyads, they turned against the Ahlul Bayt, particularly the descendants of Imam Hasan (as).

Abu Salama who was known for his love of the Ahlul Bayt, was killed by Saffah. Abu Muslim Khorasani whose armies marched into Iraq leading to the Abbasids gaining power was also murdered by Mansur.

He then turned all his tyranny against the descendants of Imam Hasan.

Imam Jafar Sadiq (as) was watching all this with great sadness but was unable to do anything about it. He expressed his sorrow for them in these words.

“The early Madinites (Ansars) had invited the Holy Prophet to Madinah 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 Ansars act as silent onlookers and none stands up to protect the Prophet’s offspring.”

Having said these words, the Imam returned to his house and fell ill, and was unable to move for twenty days.

Among the prisoners of Mansur was also the aged Abdullah-e-Mahedh, the grandson of Imam Hasan (as) . His son Muhammad Nafse Zakiyah rose against the oppressive regime and fell fighting near Madinah in 142 Hijri. The head of the young warrior was sent to his aged father in prison who died at the sight of this atrocious act. Another son Ibrahim rose in Kufa and was killed in the year 143 Hijri.

Many Sayyids, the descendants of Imam Hasan were killed and many of them were buried alive as part of the building walls in the city of Baghdad. Even today a wall exists on the northern side of the River Tigris near the Jisre Atiq (the Old Bridge) with an inscription on the wall in Kufic script "In the building material of this wall many descendants of Imam Hasan Ibn ‘Ali were buried alive.

Maltreatment of Imam Ja’far Sadiq (as)

In spite of all these atrocities against the Descendants of Imam Hasan (as), Imam As-Sadiq (as) went on silently propagating the teachings of Ahlul Bayt. As a result, even those who did not acknowledge him as an infallible Imam, nor knew his prestige or lineage, bowed before his knowledge and prided in being counted among his students.

Mansur the Abbasid Caliph wanted to remove the esteem in which the Imam was held by the people. He tried to bring scholars to compete with him but all of them proved incapable of arguing and succeeding even with his own students.

These so called Ulemas of the Durbar all admitted that their counterparts had acquired the religious learning from the descendants of the Prophet. The arrogant caliph ignored them and continued to undermine the popularity and respect of the Imam by other means. Failing this he decided to harass, arrest or to murder him. In every town and city hired agents were posted to monitor the activities of the followers of the Imam.

It was at this time that these followers were given the name of Rafidhoon, i.e. the rejecters. It was Mansur who coined the word Ahlal Sunna wal Jama’ah to promote a sect against the followers of Ahlul

Bayt (See Amir 'Ali, the Spirit of Islam). Anyone who was found supporting the Imam would be arrested, imprisoned or killed.

The Imam himself was summoned from Madinah to Baghdad, the newly founded Capital of the Abbasid regime. Until then it was Kufa, when transferred from Damascus after the fall of the Ummayyads. Five times he was taken away from Madinah to Baghdad, questioned or harassed in one way or the other.

Mansur could never find sufficient grounds to order his imprisonment or assassination. 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 Ahlul Bayt from him. Perceiving this, Mansur sent him back to Madinah. Even there, the Imam was not spared from persecution and harassment.

Character and Virtues

Imam As-Sadiq (as) was one of those infallible Nufus who were created by God to be models of moral excellence. The character and conduct of all those sages in different stages of their lives was the standard of excellence. The particular virtues of the Imam which were recorded by the historians included hospitality, charity, the helping of the needy in secrecy, the fair treatment of poor relatives, forgiveness, patience and fortitude.

Once a pilgrim visiting the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah, fell asleep. On waking up, he hurriedly searched his belongings and found his purse which contained One Thousand Dinars was missing. Looking around he saw the Imam was praying in one corner of the Mosque.

He accused the Imam of having picked his purse. The Imam asked about its contents and was told that it contained one thousand Dinars. The Imam then asked the man to follow him to his house where he gave the man the same amount. When the stranger came back to the mosque satisfied, once more he checked his property and found that his purse was intact in another bundle.

Greatly ashamed of his conduct, he came back to the Imam, apologized and asked him to take his money back. Imam replied with these words, "We never take back what we once give away, but if you feel guilty about it, give it to the poor of the town. " The traveler gave all the money in Charity to the poor of Madinah.

During the days of scarcity, when people tried to hoard food and other goods, Imam asked his household manager Trenchab, "The price of corn is rising day by day. How much corn is there in our warehouse," Trenchab replied that the Imam should not worry as there was a large quantity of corn in store.

The Imam replied, "Give it away to the poor and let us face the situation along with others." Then he ordered that pure white wheat flour should not be used in his kitchen, and should be mixed with equal quantities of oat flour. "We must share misfortune with the needy and the poor as long as it takes."

Disseminating knowledge and learning

His profound knowledge of religion and other sciences was famed throughout the entire Islamic world. People came from distant regions to learn from him. The number of his students reached over Four Thousand. Among them were scholars of Jurisprudence, Tafsir, Haidth such as Imam Noman bin Thabit Abu Hanifa and Imam Mali Ibn Anas.

Heads of other religions also came there to discuss with the Imams students many matters of dispute and on many occasions returned home embracing Islam. Sometimes he himself argued with the opponents especially atheists. Apart from religious sciences, he used to teach to some students mathematics, chemistry, medicine and astronomy. Jabir Ibn Hayyan, the famous pioneer of physics, chemistry and mathematics, was his disciple who wrote about four hundred treatises based on his mentor's instructions.

The jurists who learnt from him and wrote several volumes of books on jurisprudence can be counted by the hundreds.

Perhaps the most interesting of all his pupils was Abu Hanifa who gave public lectures at Kufa that attracted much attention. In giving decisions, he claimed the right to exercise the privilege of deduction (Qiyas) and of using his own judgement (Ra'y) to supplement the traditions and for this departure he was severely criticized by the scholars in Makka and Madina.

His decisions were on the point of law of Islam, however he steadfastly refused to enter the service of the Government as judge. Thus it was as a literary or academic jurist that he was able to carry on his work in Kufa under both the Ummayyads and the Abbasids.

It is probable that he strongly sympathized with the Alawids and resented the way in which they had been set aside. Masudi mentions in his history that once he had sent 10,000 Dinars to Zaid Ibn 'Ali to help him against the Ummayyads.

One is surprised to observe that these two contemporary scholars were able to carry on teaching in their respective cities, Abu Hanifa in Kufa and Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) in Madina. The two men were on friendly terms with each other and often Abu Hanifa accepted the advice of his teacher Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as)

Ibn Khalikan relates a story about an anecdote that the Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) had with his contemporary jurist of Kufa. The Imam asked, "What would you say is the proper fine for one who breaks the front molars (Rubaiyat) of a deer"? Abu Hanifa answered, "O'son of the Apostle of God I do not know the answer.

To this the Imam replied, "Can you then pretend to learning and scholarship when you do not know that a deer has no front molars, but only the incisors" (Thanaya).

On another occasion, Abu Hanifa remarked that if the Imam did not teach three things he would be able to accept him.

1. Good is from God and evil is from the deeds of men, “ whereas I say that men have no choice but both good and evil are from God.
2. In the final judgement the devil suffers in the fire,” whereas I say that the fire will not burn him, in so much as the same material will not injure itself (the Devil being from fire) “
3. it is impossible to see God in this world or the next, whereas I say that anyone who has existence may be seen, if not in this world, then in the next”. At this point Shaikh Buhlul who was one of Imam’s companions, but pretended to be a simple minded person, picked up a clod of earth and hit Abu Hanifa on the head, declaring as he made the hasty exit, that all three points are refuted.

Abu Hanifa made a complaint about him to the caliph who called Buhlul before him and asked him, why did you throw the clod of earth at Abu Hanifa. He answered, “I did not throw it”. Abu Hanifa protested, “you did throw it”.

But Buhlul replied, “you yourself have maintained that evil is from God that men have no choice, so why do you blame me? And you have also said that the same material will not injure itself. The devil is from fire and fire of hell would not hurt him. Accordingly you are from dust of the earth, tell me how it could injure you? You have also claimed that you can see God as a proof of his existence. Show me the pain you are complaining about that exists in your head ?”

Abu Hanifa had no answer to that and he eventually agreed to what Imam Ja’far Sadiq (as) taught about these things.

Nevertheless Abu Hanifa was highly respected by those friends of Ahlul Bayt for they heartily endorsed a remark made by Abu Hanifa concerning Mansur and all such oppressors whether of the Banu Umayya or Banu Abbas. Abu Hanifa eloquently declared that if such men would build a Masjid and command him to the simple task of counting the bricks, he would not do it, “for they are dissolute (Fasiq) and the dissolute are not worthy of the authority of leadership (Majlisi,Tarikhul Aiemma).

Ultimately Mansur heard this remark and cast Abu Hanifa into prison where he remained until his death. Abu Hanifa’s remarks were based on the Verse in the Qur’an (Surah II,V 118) where God said to Abraham,” I am about to make thee an Imam to mankind”, and Abraham asked, “of my offspring also”, but God answered, “My covenant embraceth not the idolaters”.

On the question of the freedom of will (Irada) which was much under discussion at the time, the Imam taught, “that God has decreed some things for us and He has likewise decreed some things through our agency, What He decreed for us or on our behalf He has concealed from us, but what He has decreed through our agency He has revealed to us. We are not concerned, therefore, so much with what he has decreed for us, as we are with what he has decreed through our agency.”

As to the question of the power (Qadr) of directing one's own actions, the Imam took a middle position, which is neither compulsion (Jabr) nor committing (Tafviz) the choice to ourselves. He was accustomed to say in prayer, "O' God, thine is the praise that I give thee, and to thee is the excuse if I sin against thee. There is no work of merit on my own behalf, or on behalf of another, and in evil there is no excuse for me or for another".

Yakubi in his Tarikh remarks in regard to Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) that , "it was customary for scholars who related anything from him to say 'the learned one informed us'." When we recall that Malik ibn Anas (94–179) the author of Mawatta was a contemporary of the Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) , at least a century before the time of Bukhari and Muslim, it is significant to find that it is the Imam Ja'far Sadiq (as) who is credited with stating what came to be regarded as the most significant and important principle to observe in judging traditions: "What is in agreement with the Book of God, accept it, and whatever is contrary, reject it".

Yakubi also relates another saying of the Imam as follows;

"There are two friends, and whoever follows them will enter paradise", Someone asked, " Who are they?" He said, "The acceptance of that which you dislike when God likes it, and the rejection of that which you like when God dislikes it."

Masudi, the famous historian, wrote one of the most important sayings of Imam As-Sadiq (as) ascribed through Imam 'Ali (as) who is said to have related that when God wished to establish the creation, the atoms of creatures and the beginning of all created things, He first made what he created in the form of small particles.

This was before the earth and the heavens were created. God existed alone in His authority and power. So He cast forth a ray of light, a flame from His splendor and it was radiant. He scattered this light in the midst of invisible atoms, which He then united in the form of our Prophet. God most high then declared unto him, "you are the first of those who shall speak, the one with power of choice and the one chosen.

To you I have trusted my light and the treasure of my guidance. For your sake I will form spacious channels, give free course to the waters, and raise the heavens. For your sake I will give rewards and punishments, and assign men to Paradise or to the Fire. I will appoint the people of your household (Ahlul Bayt) for guidance.

I will bestow upon them the secrets of my knowledge. No truth will be hidden from them and no mystery concealed. I will designate them as my proof to mankind, as those who shall admonish men of my power and remind them of my Unity (Tawheed)".

"The light descended," the Imam Ja'far continued, "upon our most noble men, and shown through our Imams, so that we are in fact the light of Heaven and of Earth. To us is salvation committed, and from us are the secrets of science derived, for we are the destination that all must strive to reach.

Our Mehdi will be the final proof, the seal of the Imams, the Deliverer of the Imamate, the Apex of the Light, and the Source of all good work. Those who follow us will have our support in the hereafter.”

Imam died in the 10th year of the reign of Caliph Mansur, 148 Hijiri(765 AD). He had worn a signet ring with the inscription,“ God is my master and my defense from His creation.” He lived to be 65 years old. It is mentioned by historians that on Caliph’s orders he was given poison in grapes which caused his death.

Imam Ja’far Sadiq (as) was buried in the cemetery of Baqee in Madina by the side of his father Imam Muhammad Baqir (as) . Before the destruction of the Baqee cemetery by the Wahhabis, the inscription on the tomb said, “Here is the Tomb of Imam Ja’far Ibn Muhammad al Sadiq.”

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