

Under The Wing Of His Father

Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s) lived under the wing of his father for a short period that was not more than seven years. However, at this young age, he displayed intelligence and talents that astonished the minds. Like his father, virtues and high morals had been impressed inside him, and his eternal values were as torches of guidance and awakening in the Islamic society. Here we shall discuss some concerns of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and his love for Imam al- Jawad (a.s) and other things that have a relation to the subject of this book.

His Morals

The morals of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) were gifts from the mercy of Allah and they were like the morals of his grandfather Prophet Muhammad (a.s) who had been deputed by Allah to perfect the nobilities of character.

Ibrahim bin al-Abbas talked about the high morals of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) saying, “I have never seen or heard of anyone who was better than Abul Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s). He was never harsh to anyone at all. He never interrupted anyone when speaking, nor did he reject the need of anyone, nor did he stretch out his legs or lean back in the presence of a companion, nor did he abuse any of his servants, nor did he ever guffaw. He seated his servants with him at his table. He slept little at night and passed most of his nights awake, worshipping Allah from the beginning of the night till its end. He did many favors and paid great charities secretly, and most of that was done in the dark of the night...”

These morals were like the morals of his grandfather the messenger of Allah (a.s) who had developed the life of man and saved nations and peoples from a life of deviation and backwardness and led them to a life full of honor and dignity.

Historians have mentioned wonderful pictures of his nobilities. They have mentioned that when he was in Khurasan, after having been appointed as the heir apparent, which was the highest position in the Islamic state after the caliphate, he did not order his servants to carry out many of his affairs but rather he himself carried them out.

Once, he wanted to take a bath but disliked ordering someone to prepare the bath for him. So he went to the public bath in the market.

The bathhouse keeper did not know Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s). There was a soldier in the bathhouse who also wanted to take a bath. The soldier removed Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) from his place and ordered him to pour water over his head.

Another man, who knew Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), entered the bath and cried out to the soldier, "You will perish! Do you use the son of the daughter of the messenger of Allah to serve you?" The soldier became so astonished and bent down kissing the feet of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) while saying to him, "Why did you not disobey me when I had ordered you?!"

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) smiled at him and said leniently and kindly, "There is a reward in doing that, and I did not want to disobey you in what I shall be rewarded for."¹

Among his high morals was that whenever he sat down to a meal, he would seat his servants, even the stableman and the doorkeeper, to eat with him. He wanted by that to remove discrimination among people and to make all the members of society understand that they were equal to each other. The nobilities of character which he had were the continuity of the morals of his fathers who had established virtues and noble characters in the world of the Arabs and the world of Islam.

His Asceticism

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was ascetic regarding all the pleasures of this life and the joys of the world. He turned towards Allah the Almighty. When he was appointed as the heir apparent, he never paid any attention to the pleasures of authority and rule nor did he attach any importance to them.

He considered the walking of men behind a man seduction for the followers and degradation for the followed one. Therefore, he never wanted an official procession, and it was most hated to him to be met with shows of pomp and glorification, as the kings and caliphs would oftentimes be met with.

Muhammad bin Abbad talks about the asceticism of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) by saying, "Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) used to sit on a mat (of plants' leaves) in the summer and on a rug in the winter. He would wear coarse clothes, and when he met people he would put on some softer clothes."²

Historians mentioned that once Sufyan ath-Thawri met him while he was putting on a dress of silk. Sufyan rejected that and said to him, "Would that you had put on a dress more modest than this!" Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) took Sufyan's hand kindly and inserted it in his sleeve where there was a coarse dress under that of silk and said to him, "O Sufyan, the silk is for the people and the coarse cloth is for the truth."

Asceticism in life was one of the most prominent qualities in the morals of Ahlul Bayt (a.s). They devoted

themselves to Allah totally and saw that devotion to other than Him would not lead to the truth.

His Generosity

There was nothing in the world more beloved to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) than doing good deeds and being charitable and benevolent to people. Generosity was a part of him. Historians have mentioned many signs of his generosity. Here are a few:

1. He had spent all his wealth on the poor when he was in Khurasan and the Day of Arafa came. Al-Fadhl bin Sahl repudiated that from Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and told him, "This is a loss."

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) said to him, "No, rather it is a gain. No harm is done as long as you intend generosity and reward."

Helping the poor and being charitable to the weak for the sake of Allah cannot be considered as a loss at all. The real loss is when one spends his monies in unlawful ways, especially spending on that which does not benefit society.

2. Once, a man came, greeted him and said, "I am one of those who love you and your fathers. I have come from performing hajj, and all my money has run out. I have nothing left to help me get anywhere. If you could, please give me enough to help take me back to my home, and when I arrive there, I will pay back what you give me as charity to the poor on behalf of you."

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) got up and went into a room in his house. After a moment he stuck his hand out (of the room) and said to the man, "Take these two hundred dinars to carry out your affairs and do not repay them as charity on behalf of me!" The man left while being so delighted with the gift of the Imam.

Some of the attendants asked Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), "Why did you hide yourself from the man and give him the money without looking at him?" Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) said, "I did so in order to not see the shame of request on his face. Have you not heard the tradition of the messenger of Allah (a.s), 'He who hides when doing good, it is as if he offers the hajj seventy times, and he who declares his bad acts will be defeated.' Have you not heard the lines of the poet:

'Whenever I come to him requesting something,

I go back to my family without losing my face.'³

3. One day he passed by a poor man who said to him, "Give me to the extent of your magnanimity." Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) said to him, "I cannot do that." The poor man understood that he had made a mistake in the wording of his question and again asked, "Give me to the extent of *my* magnanimity." Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) smiled at him and said, "Yes, now I can," and he gave him two hundred dinars.⁴

The magnanimity of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) cannot be measured. Even if he gave the poor man all that

was in the earth, it would still not be to the extent of his magnanimity and mercy, which was the continuity of the magnanimity and mercy of the Holy Prophet (a.s).

These were some signs of his generosity by which he intended to delight the sad hearts that had been burdened with the bitterness and wretchedness of life.

His Knowledge

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was the most knowledgeable, most virtuous and most aware of the verdicts of religion and Sharia in his time. Abdussalam al-Harawi, who had accompanied Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), talked about his abundant knowledge saying,

"I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable than Ali bin Musa ar- Ridha'. No scholar met him without afterwards declaring what I declare. Al-Ma'moon gathered a number of theologians and jurisprudents to have a debate with Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), but Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) defeated them all until no one of them remained who did not confess that Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was the best of all. Once, I heard him saying, 'I sat in ar-Rawdha⁵ and there were so many scholars in Medina. When any one of them was asked a question, they all pointed to me and sent the question to me to answer it..."⁶

Ibrahim bin al-Abbas said, "I have never seen ar-Ridha' being asked something without his knowing the answer. I have never seen anyone more knowledgeable than him from the first age (of Islam) until his age. Al-Ma'moon tested him by asking him about everything, and he answered him correctly every time. His speech, his answers and his examples were all derived from the Qur'an. Every three days he completed reciting the entire Holy Qur'an. He said, 'If I wanted to recite the whole Qur'an in less than three days, I would, but every verse I recite, I ponder over it – about what was it revealed and at what time was it revealed. Therefore, I finish reciting the Qur'an within three days..."⁷

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was one of the masters of knowledge and intellect in Islam. He was one of those who established for Muslims their scientific and cultural life. Talking about his scientific talents requires a special, long study. May Allah make us successful to accomplish that Inshallah.

His Worshipping

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was one of the sincerest worshippers and devotees of Allah. He never neglected any of the supererogatory prayers nor any of the recommended performances. He did everything that might take him closer to Allah. Ibn Abud-Dhahaak, who had accompanied Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) in his travel from Yathrib (Medina) to Khurasan, mentioned his worshipping saying, "By Allah, I have never seen anyone more pious than him, or more intent in mentioning Allah all the time than him or more fearing of Allah than him..."⁸

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was so sincere to Allah in his worship and obedience that it seemed he had been

created just for worshipping and obedience. He had given up all the pleasures of this life and turned with devotion to Allah the Almighty.

His Dignity

His dignity and gravity were so exalted that foreheads bowed to him wherever he went. The mien of the prophets and the splendor of the kings appeared in him. It was due to his great sublimity that whenever he sat amongst people or ascended the minbar, no one could raise his voice before him.

Opinions And Words

Some famous personalities, scholars and authors have glorified and paid respects to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) in truthful words. Here are some of them:

1. Al-Ma'moon

Al-Ma'moon admired the personality of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and expressed his admiration for him on many occasions. He would tell his kin whenever they blamed him for his appointing Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) as his heir apparent,

"As for what you have mentioned about the homage of al-Ma'moon to Abul Hasan, he (al-Ma'moon) has not paid homage to him (to Imam ar-Ridha') except after thinking deeply about it, knowing that there is no one on the earth more virtuous, more pure, more pious, more ascetic in this worldly life, more eloquent, more accepted by the upper class and the public, or more devoted to Allah than him." [9](#)

He also said, "Imam ar-Ridha' is the best, most knowledgeable and sincerest worshipper of the people of the earth." [10](#)

It is because of these high qualities of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) that the Shia have believed in him as their imam and as one of those whose obedience and love Allah has imposed on people.

2. Ibrahim Bin Al-Abbas

Ibrahim bin al-Abbas accompanied Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and talked much about his high character. From among what he has said are these words:

"He (Imam ar-Ridha') often and always did good and charity secretly and most of that was done in the dark of the night. If anyone claims that he has seen someone like him, do not believe" [11](#)

3. Aarif Tamir

Aarif Tamir said, "Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was one of the imams who played a great role on the stage of

the Islamic events at his time..."[12](#)

There are many other narrations like these that declare the high qualities of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) that no one has ever had except his father's before him who raised the banner of guidance in the earth.

The Praise By The Poets

Much poetry has been composed by various poets in praise of the high qualities and noble character of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s). Here are some of them:

1. As-Souli

As-Souli[13](#) was very fond of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and has therefore said,

"The best of people, including himself, fathers, offspring and ancestors, is Ali the honored. Taktum[14](#) has brought him to us for patience and knowledge, as the eighth imam who carries out the authority of Allah."[15](#)

2. Abu Nu'Ass

The following wonderful verses of poetry have been ascribed to Abu Nu'ass, the famous poet. He composed them after he had been blamed for not praising Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) in his poems. He said,

"It was said to me: you are the best of all people

in the arts of eloquence (speaking).

Why have you not praised ibn Musa[16](#) and the high qualities gathered in him?

I said: I fail to praise the imam to whose father even Gabriel was a servant."[17](#)

3. Abdullah Bin Al-Mubarak

Abdullah bin al-Mubarak the poet has recited:

"This is Ali and guidance leads him,

from the best youths of Quraysh lies his origin."[18](#)

Muslims, in all of their classes, have unanimously agreed on glorifying and honoring Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and confessing that he was the most virtuous one of his time.

Forcing Him To Accept The Position Of Heir Apparent

Al-Ma'moon forced Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) to accept the position of heir apparent. He threatened to kill him if he would not accept this position. The reasons that led al-Ma'moon to do this were as follows:

First, the quarrel between him and his brother al-Ameen, which led the war to break out between them, and then most of the Abbasid family joined al-Ameen whom they loved more than they loved al-Ma'moon. Therefore, al-Ma'moon planned to stabilize his political situation and spread his authority by entrusting the chief and master of the Alawids, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), whom Muslims regarded highly and obeyed sincerely and saw in his personality the continuity of the personality of his grandfather the messenger of Allah (a.s), with the position of heir apparent.

Second, the revolt of Abu as-Saraya.

Third, the growth of the Shiite expansion which spread over most parts of the Islamic state, and therefore, al-Ma'moon wanted, by appointing Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) as his heir apparent, to be rid of these Shiite movements, as ibn Khaldoon has said.¹⁹

These were the reasons that led al-Ma'moon to appoint Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) as his heir apparent although Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) knew well that this position (of heir apparent) was merely a title of no consequence (al-Mamoon had no intention of allowing Imam ar-Ridha' to succeed him). Proof of this is that Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) made conditions on al-Ma'moon that "he (Imam ar-Ridha') would not appoint anyone in any position, not depose anyone, not annul any verdict, not change any available ruling and that he would just be a counselor from afar."²⁰ If Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) had believed that the intentions of al-Ma'moon were sincere, he would not have taken a negative stance towards his government; rather, he would have cooperated with him in all fields.

The Sermon Of Al-Ma'moon

When people had paid homage to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) as the heir apparent, al-Ma'moon ascended the minbar (pulpit) and gave a speech in front of the people. He said,

"O people, the homage of Ali bin Musa bin Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Ali bin al-Husayn bin Ali bin Abu Talib has come to you. By Allah, if these names were to be recited over the deaf and dumb, they would recover by the will of Allah..."²¹

Joyous Celebrations

Al-Ma'moon instructed his governors and regents of the districts throughout the Islamic state to hold public festivals and to decorate the country. He also ordered the orators to spread the virtues of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and laud the exploits of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s). He himself held a public festival in his royal court which was attended by all classes of people. He seated Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) beside him, and then

al-Abbas al-Khateeb stood up to make a speech. He gave an eloquent speech and ended it with this verse of poetry:

“People must have a sun and a moon,

you are the sun and this is the moon.”[22](#)

This homage was carried out and the Islamic world became very delighted with it. Muslims declared their support for this homage and were certain that it would achieve all their hopes and wishes.

With Imam Al-Jawad (A.S)

We have to stop a little to talk about the affairs of Imam al-Jawad (a.s) with his father Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s).

Carrying Out His Father'S Affairs

Although Imam al-Jawad (a.s) was very young, he was responsible for the affairs and tasks of his father, especially those in Medina.[23](#)

Historians say that Imam al-Jawad (a.s) ordered and forbade the servants and no one of them ever objected to his orders. Imam ar- Ridha’ (a.s) was pleased with whatever his son did.

The Letter Of Imam Ar- Redha To Imam Al-Jawad

When Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s) was in Khurasan, he sent a letter to Imam al-Jawad (a.s) which said:

“O Abu Ja’far, I have been informed that when you ride your sumpter, the mawali[24](#) make you leave from the small gate of the garden. It is because of their stinginess in that they fear someone may receive some goodness (alms) from you!

I ask you by my right over you to not enter or leave (the house) except through the main gate.

Whenever you want to go out, keep some gold and silver with you. No one should ask you for anything without your giving it to him. If one of your uncles asks you to be pious to him, do not give him less than fifty dinars, and you may give him more if you want. If one of your aunts asks you, do not give her less than fifty dinars, and you may give her more if you want. I want Allah to exalt you, so spend and do not fear stinginess from the Lord of the Throne...”[25](#)

Generosity, doing good for people and being charitable to the weak and the poor were embedded in the nature of the pure imams (a.s). Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s) drew the attention of his son Imam al-Jawad (a.s) to what the servants did with him when they led him out from the small gate lest the poor would see him.

He ordered him to leave from the main gate around which the poor and the weak would always crowd. He asked him to present them with gifts and be generous to them. This feature was one of the spontaneous elements in the morals of the infallible imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s).

Imam Ar-Redha Declares Al-Jawad As The Imam After Him

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) declared the imamate of his son al-Jawad and appointed him as the successor after him and the general authority to whom Muslims would refer in their religious affairs. Many narrators have narrated the appointment of al-Jawad as the imam after his father. We mention here some of these narrations:

1. Muhammad Al-Mahmoori

Muhammad al-Mahmoori narrated from his father as having said, "Once, I was standing near Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) in Tooss²⁶ when one of his companions asked him, 'If something happens (to you), to whom shall we refer?' He asked about the next imam after him so that they would know to whom they should obey and submit. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) said, 'To my son Abu Ja'far.'

Imam al-Jawad (a.s) was yet a child. The man said, 'I think he is very little as of yet.'

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) replied, 'Allah sent Jesus the son of Mary (as a prophet) though he was even younger than Abu Ja'far will be when he shall become the imam.'"²⁷

The answer of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was a decisive evidence that Allah the Almighty had chosen Jesus Christ (a.s) as a prophet and given him knowledge while he was still a child and younger in age than Imam al-Jawad (a.s). Prophethood and imamate are from one source, and they are not entrusted to a young or an old man, but rather, they are in the hand of Allah Who chooses for them whom He likes from amongst His people.

2. Safwan Bin Yahya

Safwan was among those who narrated traditions of the appointment of Imam al-Jawad (a.s) by his father as the imam after him.

He narrated, "Once, I said to ar-Ridha': we often asked you, before Allah granted Abu Ja'far to you, about the imam after you and you would say 'Allah will give me a boy.' Now, Allah has given you a boy and has delighted our eyes. If something happens (to you), to whom shall we refer? He pointed to Abu Ja'far (al-Jawad) who was before him and who was at that time three years old. I said, 'He is a three-year-old child!' He said, 'It does not matter. Jesus Christ (a.s) was entrusted with prophethood while he was less than three years.'"²⁸

3. Ma'Mar Bin Khallad

Ma'mar narrated the traditions of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) about the appointment of his son al-Jawad as the imam after him.

He said, "I heard him (Imam ar-Ridha') saying to his companions after having mentioned something to them, 'What else do you want? This is Abu Ja'far. I have seated him in my place and made him my successor...We are the people of a house whose young inherit from the old, one after the other and each one is equal to the other.'"²⁹

4. Abdullah Bin Ja'Far

Abdullah bin Ja'far said, "One day, Safwan bin Yahya and I went to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) while Abu Ja'far, who was three years old then, was before him. We said, 'May Allah make us die for you! If something happens³⁰ – Allah forbid – who shall be the imam after you?' He said, 'My son.' He pointed to his son al-Jawad. We said, 'Even though he is of this age!?' He said, 'Yes! Allah the Almighty has given Jesus Christ (a.s) as an argument though he was but two years old.'"³¹

5. Muhammad Bin Abu Abbad

Muhammad bin Abu Abbad narrated from his father who said, "I heard Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) saying: Abu Ja'far is my guardian and successor in my family after me."³²

And there are many other traditions related from Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) declaring the imamate of Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s) after his father and his being one of the caliphs of the Prophet (a.s) for his Umma.

The Treachery Of Al-Ma'moon Against Imam Ar-Redha

When al-Ma'moon had fulfilled the political purposes of his homage to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) as his heir apparent, he thought of betraying and getting rid of him. We shall talk in brief about the reasons that led al-Ma'moon to commit this crime.

1. Envy

The soul of al-Ma'moon was filled with envy of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) who was very famous and respectable among people because of his virtues and abundant knowledge.

Historians have mentioned that al-Ma'moon had asked the leading scholars of the Islamic districts to come to Khurasan to test Imam ar- Ridha' (a.s). They argued with him on different philosophical, theological and medical questions and on other branches of knowledge.

The scholars left Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) afterwards with complete belief in his imamate. They began spreading his virtues and sciences. When al-Ma'moon learned that, he asked Muhammad bin Amr at-Toossi to drive people away from meeting with Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s).³³

Abussalt al-Harawi exposed this matter in his response to Ahmed bin Ali al-Ansari's question of "how was al-Ma'moon pleased with killing ar-Ridha' in spite of his honoring and loving him and his having made him his heir apparent?"

Abussalt replied, "Al-Ma'moon honored and loved Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) because he was aware of his virtues which were also known to the people, and he appointed him as his heir apparent to make people think that Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) wished for this worldly life and its pleasures and would consequently be disrespected by the people, but when his virtue and respect among people grew even more, he (al-Ma'moon) sent for theologians from different countries hoping that one of them might defeat Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and then he would be disrespected by the scholars and that would spread among the public and they would then turn their backs on him.

But, every opponent from the Jews, the Christians, the magi, the apostates, the Brahman, the atheists, the Dahriyya, and every opponent from the dissenting Muslim sects was defeated by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) with his clear evidences. People began saying, 'By Allah, he is even worthier of the caliphate than al-Ma'moon' and the newsmen reported that to him (al-Ma'moon) and he became very angry and envious of that."³⁴

Envy is one of the most malicious psychological diseases that leads to all vices and undoubtedly throws man into great evil. It was envy that caused al-Ma'moon to assassinate Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and to do away with him.

2. Pleasing The Abbasids

Some historians have thought that al-Ma'moon poisoned Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) to humor the Abbasids and satisfy their passions.³⁵ The Abbasids had flared up and were very agitated when Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was appointed the heir apparent of al-Ma'moon for they feared that the caliphate might now move to the progeny of Ali bin Abu Talib (a.s). Al-Ma'moon wanted to remove this fear and worry from the Abbasids; therefore, he assassinated Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) after achieving his political goals.

3. Imam Ar-Redha Did Not Flatter Al-Ma'moon

Perhaps, one of the strongest reasons that led al-Ma'moon to assassinate Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was that Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) never flattered al-Ma'moon or humored him. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) often and always recommended al-Ma'moon to fear and obey Allah and warned him of the punishment of the afterlife.

Abussalt al-Harawi has said, "Ar-Ridha' did not flatter al-Ma'moon in any matter of truth and, in most

cases, replied to him with what al-Ma'moon disliked. This would make al-Ma'moon angry and led him to bear a grudge against him, but he would not show it. When he found no way out with him, he assassinated him.”³⁶

4. The Prayer Of Eid

Another important reason that led al-Ma'moon to bear a grudge against Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was the prayer of Eid.

Al-Ma'moon asked Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) to lead the congregational prayer of Eid, but Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) refused. Al-Ma'moon kept insisting on it until the Imam agreed but on the condition that he would lead the people in the prayer as his grandfather the messenger of Allah did. Al-Ma'moon agreed to that and ordered the leaders, the officers and the rest of the people to go to the house of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) early in the morning.

The people, in all their different classes, went out early in the morning and sat in the streets while others climbed up the rooftops, and all were looking eagerly for the coming of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s). In the morning, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) took a ghusl³⁷ and prepared himself for the Eid Prayer. He donned a white turban and let one end of it hang down his chest and let the other end hang between his shoulders. He ordered his servants to do the same. He went out barefoot holding a stick in his hand. After every step, he raised his head and said “Allahu Akbar (Allah is great).” The power of his utterance was felt, as it seemed to the people that the air and even the walls of houses were responding to him.

The leaders and the rest of people had donned the best of their clothes, were holding weapons and had prepared themselves in the manner they considered best, as they were accustomed to doing with their kings and rulers. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) continued his march in his own splendid manner which made heads turn and submit to it. He raised his voice and kept reciting, “Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar for what He has guided us to. Allahu Akbar for what He has granted us of cattle, and praise be to Allah for that which He has tried us with...”

People raised their voices while repeating what he recited and began crying, for they saw in the imam the actions of the messenger of Allah. They discovered the deviation of their rulers and saw that they were not on the truth. Marv³⁸ burst into a clamor. The leaders fell off from their mounts. Some historians have said that the lucky leaders were those who were able to find an acquaintance to lead their animals back to their homes.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), after every ten steps, stopped to recite the Takbeer (Allahu Akbar) four times. The people repeated after him. They cried loudly for they viewed the Imam as the natural continuity of the personality of his grandfather the messenger of Allah, who was the greatest liberator of the oppressed humanity.

Al-Bahri, the poet, described Imam ar-Ridha's (a.s) leaving to lead the prayer in the following words:

“They remembered by your expression, when you came out of the rows,

the Prophet and so they said Tahlil and Takbir,[39](#)

until you reached the mosque, wearing the light of guidance that was visible on you,

and walked reverently and submissively to Allah,

neither with pride nor with arrogance.

If the minbar could walk, it would hurry towards you out of yearning.”[40](#)

Al-Ma'moon was informed that the people were so highly revering and glorifying Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s). Al-Fadhl bin Sahl said to him, “If ar-Ridha' reaches the place of prayer in this state, people will be seduced by him. You had better ask him to return.” Al-Ma'moon then sent to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) to come back and he returned.[41](#)

These are some reasons historians have mentioned which made al-Ma'moon bear a grudge against Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and fear for his rule and authority, and, consequently, he decided to commit the most heinous crime in Islam, and that was the assassination of the Imam.

The Assassination Of Imam Ar-Redha

When al-Ma'moon was unable to bear Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) any longer, he decided to assassinate him. He invited him and offered him a cluster of grapes in which he had inserted some poison. He said to him, “O son of the messenger of Allah, I have not seen grapes better than these.”

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) replied, “There may be grapes in Paradise better than these.”

Al-Ma'moon asked Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) to eat from those grapes but the Imam was reluctant and said to al-Ma'moon, “Would you excuse me from it?”

Al-Ma'moon scolded and shouted at him, “You must eat them. What prevents you from eating? Are you accusing us of something?”

He then forced Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) to eat the grapes. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) ate three berries and then threw the cluster away. The poison acted upon him at once and he got up to leave their meeting. Al-Ma'moon asked him, “Where are you going?”

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) glanced at him and said in a sad and trembling voice, “To where you have directed me.” He meant to death.[42](#)

The poison reacted in his body and the pains of death attacked him. Al-Ma'moon sent a messenger to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) asking, “What would you recommend me to do?”

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) said to the messenger, "Tell him: he recommends you not to give someone a thing that you may feel regret for."[43](#)

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) meant the position of heir apparent with which al-Ma'moon had entrusted him and had bound himself by it before Allah and the nation and then he broke his trust.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) turned to Abussalt and said, "O Abussalt, they did it."[44](#) He meant his assassination was wrought by al-Ma'moon.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) began suffering from the bitter pains of the poison. His intestines were cut and his insides melted. Death was quickly approaching the imam to extinguish that shining flame which had lit the intellectual and social life in the world of the Arabs and the Muslims. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s), even in that critical ordeal, was busy in the remembrance of Allah.

The bitter pains of that severe death did not prevent him from mentioning his Lord. He breathed his last while praising and glorifying Allah. His great soul ascended to its Creator as the souls of the prophets and imams had done before him, surrounded by the angels and the contentment of Allah. The soul of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) ascended to Allah the Merciful after he had carried out his great, reformative mission of defending the religion of Allah and protecting His principles and goals.

Al-Ma'moon Announces The Imam'S Death

Al-Ma'moon hid the news of Imam ar-Ridha's death for a day and a night and then he sent for Muhammad bin Ja'far as-Sadiq and some other men of aal[45](#) Abu Talib (the Alawids), ordering them to come to him. When they came to him, he announced to them the death of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and pretended to be very sad and distressed by it. He went with them to the body of the imam and showed them that he had not been struck by a sword or stabbed with a spear. Then he addressed the holy corpse of the imam saying, "O brother, it pains me to see you in this state. I wish I had died before you, but Allah only does what He wants."[46](#)

Preparing The Holy Corpse

Al-Ma'moon prepared the corpse, washed it, shrouded it and placed it in the coffin. Then he wrote to all parts of Khurasan inviting them to partake in the honor of escorting the holy corpse of Imam ar- Ridha' (a.s) to his grave.

People of all classes hurried to escort the holy corpse of the Imam. It was a great, memorable day, the like of which Khurasan had never before witnessed. Al-Ma'moon advanced before the bier and addressed the corpse in a voice that could be heard by all. He said, "Which of these two misfortunes is greater to me: my losing you or the accusation of people against me?"

In His Last Abode

The holy corpse was brought under a halo of tahlil and takbir. Al- Ma'moon placed the corpse of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) in the tomb beside the grave of Harun ar-Rashid⁴⁷ and thus buried the clearest page of the Islamic mission that had provided people with the elements of intellect and culture.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) was buried in that pure area and his holy shrine in Khurasan has become a landmark of human dignity. It is the most honored and impregnable sanctum in Islam. People do not know a shrine of any of the saints of Allah that has such regard, honor and dignity.

The Prophet (a.s) had been informed by the unseen that one of his guardians would be buried in Khurasan. He mentioned that in his traditions and mentioned the honor and the reward that the visitors of that shrine would receive. He said, "A part of me will be buried in Khurasan. For every distressed one who visits it, Allah will relieve his distress, and for every sinner who visits it, Allah will forgive him his sins." ⁴⁸

One poet has molded this Prophetic tradition into two verses of poetry that have been written on the walls of the holy shrine. The poet says,

"He who likes to see a tomb in his sleep,
where Allah relieves the distresses of its visitors,
let him come to visit this tomb,
in which Allah has housed a choice progeny from the messenger of Allah." ⁴⁹

This special ziyarah⁵⁰ has been related from Imam al-Jawad (a.s) for his father Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s):

"Peace be upon you O the infallible imam, highborn imam, far but near, poisoned in desolation..." ⁵¹

The Merits Of Visiting His Holy Shrine

Many traditions were reported from Imam al-Jawad (a.s) talking about the merits of visiting the holy shrine of his father, Imam ar- Ridha' (a.s), and the reward Allah has prepared for the visitors. Here are some of those traditions:

1. Abdul Adheem bin Abdullah al-Hasani said, "I heard Muhammad bin Ali ar-Ridha' (Imam al-Jawad) saying: whoever visits (the shrine of) my father and suffers from the harms of rain, cold or heat, Allah will save his body from the fire (of Hell)... " ⁵²
2. Ali bin Asbaat said, "Once, I asked Abu Ja'far: what does he, who visits your father in Khurasan, get? He said, 'The Paradise, by Allah, the Paradise.'" ⁵³

3. Abdul Adheem bin Abdullah al-Hasani said, “I said to Abu Ja'far, ‘I am confused between visiting Abu Abdullah al-Husayn (a.s) and visiting the tomb of your father in Tooss. What do you advise?’ He said to me, ‘Stay here!’ He then went inside (the house) and then came out while his eyes were shedding tears down his cheeks. He said, ‘The visitors of Abu Abdullah are too many and the visitors of my father’s tomb in Tooss are too few.’”⁵⁴

Muslims Console Imam Al-Jawad

When the painful news of the death of Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s) reached the people of Yathrib (Medina), they hurried to Imam al-Jawad (a.s) to console him. They participated with him in his sorrow and pain for the death of his father. Many delegations from the other countries also came to give him their condolences. From among the delegations, there was the great poet Abdullah bin Ayyoob al- Khuraybi who had met Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s) and had devoted himself to him. He recited a poem before Imam al-Jawad (a.s) elegizing Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s).

Other groups of the Shia also came to him, condoling with him warmly for the great disaster that had afflicted him and all the Shia.

The Confusion Of The Shia

The Shia became terribly confused about the imamate after the death of Imam ar-Ridha’ (a.s), because Imam al-Jawad (a.s) was just six years and some months of age at that time.¹⁵⁵

This caused the Shia to become confused and to disagree with each other. Some thought that a six-year-old child could not be an imam and the imamate should be entrusted to an older man. A group of the Shia gathered in one of their houses. Among them were ar-Rayyan bin as-Salt, Yonus, Safwan bin Yahya, Muhammad bin Hakeem and Abdurrahman bin al-Hajjaj. They discussed the matter of the imamate and began to cry. Yonus said to them, “Stop your crying and wait until this child grows up.” He meant Imam al-Jawad (a.s). Ar-Rayyan bin as-Salt said, “If it is decreed by Allah the Almighty, then a two-day-old child can be like a hundred-year-old man, but if it is not decreed by Allah, then even if one lives for five thousand years, he will not be able to do what the masters can do or even a part of it. This is worth pondering over.”⁵⁶

This was the decisive answer that revealed the shining reality which the Twelver Shia believe in: childhood or adulthood have nothing to do with the position of imamate, which is like the position of prophethood in most of its specifications, for both imamate and prophethood are in the hand of Allah, Who entrusts with them whomsoever He chooses from amongst His people.

Delegations Of Jurisprudents And Ulama

A significant number of scholars and jurisprudents, who had been selected by the Shiite milieus in Baghdad and other countries, came to Yathrib following the death of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) in order to ascertain the new imam.

They were about eighty men, as historians have mentioned in their books. When they arrived in Yathrib, they went to the house of Imam Abu Abdallah as-Sadiq (a.s). A red rug was spread out for them. Abdullah the son of Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s) came to them and sat at the head of their meeting, claiming himself to be the imam after Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) and the religious authority of the Umma.

A man stood up and called out to the ulama, "This is the son of the messenger of Allah. Whoever has a question let him ask it." One of the ulama stood up and asked him, "What do you think about the man who says to his wife: I divorce you as many times as there are stars in the sky?"

Abdullah the son of Imam Musa al-Kadhim answered against the jurisprudence of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s) saying, "She is divorced thrice before the Gemini."

The ulama and the jurisprudents were astonished at this answer, which was different from that which the infallible imams had determined that divorce could only be achieved once.⁵⁷ We do not know why Abdullah singled out the Gemini from all the stars and planets!

Another one of the jurisprudents asked him, "What is your opinion regarding a man who has sexual intercourse with an animal?"

Again he answered contrary to the law of Allah. He said, "His hand should be cut off and he should be whipped a hundred times."

The attendees were astonished. Some of them began to cry because of these fatwas that contradicted the verdicts of Allah. They became very confused. While they were in this state, a door near the front of the meeting was opened out of which emerged Muwaffaq the servant, and then Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s) appeared with such a loftiness that made all heads bow to him submissively. The ulama and the jurisprudents stood up out of respect and began glorifying him. A man introduced him to the attendees as the imam after his father and as the great authority for Muslims.

The man who had asked the first question came to the Imam and asked him, "What do you think about the man who says to his wife: I divorce you as many times as there are stars in the sky?"

Imam al-Jawad (a.s) said, "O man, read in the Book of Allah: (Divorce may be (pronounced) twice, then keep (them) in good fellowship or let (them) go with kindness)⁵⁸ and then it is at the third (that divorce becomes irrevocable)..."

The attendants wondered at the intelligence of the imam and were certain that they had reached the aim which they had sought. The asker told Imam al-Jawad (a.s) of the fatwa of his uncle Abdullah the son of Imam al-Kadhim concerning the same matter.

Imam al-Jawad (a.s) turned to his uncle and said, “O uncle, fear Allah and do not give any fatwa when there exists in the umma one who is more aware than you.”

Abdullah bowed his head to the earth and did not know what to say. The man with the second question came to Imam al-Jawad (a.s) and asked him, “What is your opinion regarding a man who has sexual intercourse with an animal?”

Imam al-Jawad (a.s) said, “He should be subjected to a discretionary punishment, and the animal should be marked with a lasting mark on its back and taken out of the country so that the shame of it does not remain with the man.”

The asker informed Imam al-Jawad (a.s) of the fatwa of his uncle. Imam al-Jawad (a.s) strongly rejected that fatwa and, turning to his uncle, angrily said, “There is no god but Allah (O my God!)! O Abdullah, it is so great a matter to Allah that when tomorrow you will stop before Him, He will ask you: why did you give a fatwa to my people about that which you did not know, whereas there was someone in the umma who was more aware than you?”

Abdullah began making excuses and justifying his answer by saying, “I have seen my brother ar-Ridha’ answer this question with this same answer.”

Imam al-Jawad (a.s) denied this and shouted at him, “Ar-Ridha’ was asked about a gravedigger who had dug out a dead woman, made love to her and taken her clothes. He (ar-Ridha’) ordered to cut his hand off for stealing, to whip him for committing adultery and to exile him for maiming the dead.”[59](#)

The ulama and the scholars then asked Imam al-Jawad (a.s) many questions regarding different matters of jurisprudence. Historians say that there were about thirty thousand questions asked. Some historians have mentioned that the imam was asked all these thirty thousand questions in one meeting and he answered them all then and there.[60](#) We do not think that it could have been possible to answer all these questions in one meeting because time would not allow for that, but it is more reasonable to say that Imam al-Jawad (a.s) was asked thirty thousand questions in different meetings and on many different occasions.

Anyhow, the ulama became satisfied of his imamate and returned to their countries spreading the news that the next imam was Muhammad al-Jawad. They related to the Muslims what they had witnessed of his abundant knowledge and said that he was the great miracle of Islam for though he was so young in age, he possessed such a high level of knowledge of sciences that could neither be defined nor described.

It is worth noting that some of the Shia had asked Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) some questions in his lifetime, which he had answered, and then they went to Imam al-Jawad (a.s) after the death of his father and asked him the same questions to try him, but he answered them in accordance with the answers of his father.

Abu Khirash narrated, "I was attending a meeting of ar-Ridha' when some man came to him and said, 'May I die for you! My wife, who is an honest bondmaid, suckled one of my servant women at the same time when she was suckling a son of mine. Is it unlawful for me to marry that servant woman?' Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s) replied, 'There is no suckling after weaning.'⁶¹

The man then asked him about prayer in al-Haramayn⁶² and he said, 'You can offer it in its shortened form (qasr: two rak'as) if you like, and you can offer it in its full form (tamam: four rak'as) if you like.' When, later on, I went to perform the hajj, I went to Abu Ja'far (al-Jawad) and asked him these same questions and he gave me the same answers that his father had given."⁶³

Anyhow, the Shia referred to him and believed in his imamate. No Shia believed in any other than him as the imam.

[1.](#) Noor al-Absar, p.138.

[2.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.178, al-Manaqib, vol.4 p.360.

[3.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 12 p.28.

[4.](#) Al-Manaqib, vol.4 p.361-362.

[5.](#) A place in the mosque of the Prophet (s).

[6.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, vol.3 p.107.

[7.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.180.

[8.](#) Ibid., p.179.

[9.](#) Hayat al-Imam ar-Ridha', p.143.

[10.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.183.

[11.](#) Hayat al-Imam ar-Ridha' (the biography of Imam ar-Ridha'), p.143.

[12.](#) Al-Imama fil-Islam, p.125.

[13.](#) As-Souli: Abu Isaaq Ibrahim bin al-Abbas as-Souli was an eloquent author and skillful poet. From amongst his prose are these words: "The example of the companions of a ruler is like a group of people who ascend a mountain and then fall down. The one from them who is hurt most is the one who was highest in ascending..." He narrated many traditions from Imam ar-Ridha' (s). He died in Samarra' (in Iraq) in Sha'ban 243 AH, as mentioned in Al-Kuna wel-Alqaab, vol.2 p.432-433.

[14.](#) Imam ar-Ridha's mother.

[15.](#) Manaqib Aal Abi Talib, vol.4 p.332.

[16.](#) Imam ar-Ridha' (s).

[17.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', p.142-143.

[18.](#) Al-Manaqib, vol.4 p.362.

[19.](#) Tareekh ibn Khaldoon, vol.4 p.9.

[20.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.147.

[21.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.147.

[22.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2, p.146.

[23.](#) Dhiya' al-Aalameen, vol.2 a manuscript in al-Husayniyya al-Shushtariyya Library.

[24.](#) Mawla means a freed slave. Mawali is the plural form.

- [25.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.8
- [26.](#) In Khurasan.
- [27.](#) Ad-Durr an-Nadheem, p.218, a manuscript in Ameerul Mo'mineen Library.
- [28.](#) Al-Fusul al-Muhimmah by ibn al-Sabbagh, p.251, Usool al-Kafi, vol. 1 p.379.
- [29.](#) Al-Fusul al-Muhimmah, p.251, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 12 p. 103.
- [30.](#) They mean "if you die".
- [31.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 12 p.117
- [32.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 12 p.104, Ithbat al-Hudat, vol.6 p. 161
- [33.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.172.
- [34.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.239.
- [35.](#) Uyun at-Tawareekh, vol.3 p.227.
- [36.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.239.
- [37.](#) A ritual ablution.
- [38.](#) Marw was the capital of the state at that time.
- [39.](#) Tahlil is saying "La ilaha illallah (there is no god but Allah)" and Takbir is "Allahu akbar (Allah is great)."
- [40.](#) Manaqib Aal Abi Talib, vol.4 p.372.
- [41.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.150–151, Noor al-Absar, p.143.
- [42.](#) Uyun Akhbar ar-Ridha', vol. 2 p.243.
- [43.](#) Uyun at-Tawareekh, vol.3 p.227.
- [44.](#) Al-Irshad, p.355.
- [45.](#) Aal means the family or the progeny of.
- [46.](#) Al-Irshad, p.355.
- [47.](#) Harun ar-Rashid was the fifth Abbasid caliph and he was the father of al- Ma'moon.
- [48.](#) Al-Hada'iq al-Wardiyyah, vol.2 p.219.
- [49.](#) In the book Anwar al-Yaqeen, a manuscript in Kashif al-Ghita' Library, "to visit Tooss" was mentioned instead of "to visit this tomb". Tooss is the name of the area where Imam ar-Ridha' (s) has been buried.
- [50.](#) Ziyarah is a special address, like a supplication, that is offered to the infallible imams and holy saints.
- [51.](#) Hayat al-Imam ar-Ridha', p.432.
- [52.](#) Wassa'il ash-Shia, vol. 10 p.437.
- [53.](#) Ibid.
- [54.](#) Ibid., p.442
- [55.](#) In most sources, it is mentioned that the age of Imam al-Jawad (s) then was seven years and some months
- [56.](#) Dala'il al-Imama, p. 250, Firaq ash-Shia, p.59.
- [57.](#) A husband may say to his wife if you are divorced one time when he wants to divorce her and she will no longer be his legal wife. He does not have to repeat this statement three times.
- [58.](#) Qur'an, 2:229.
- [59.](#) Ad-Durr an-Nadheem, p.218, a manuscript in Ameerul Mo'mineen Library.
- [60.](#) Wassa'il ash-Shia, vol. 18, p.511–512.s
- [61.](#) It means that suckling will have no effect after weaning, and especially in this case where the servant was an adult
- [62.](#) Al-Haramayn (the two sacred places): Mecca and Medina.
- [63.](#) Ad-Durr an-Nadheem, p.219.

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