

[Home](#) > [Imam ar-Ridha', A Historical and Biographical Research](#) > [Historical Aspect of the Imam's Biography](#) > [His Distinctions and Characteristics](#) > Reluctance to Cooperate With the Rulers

His Distinctions and Characteristics

Lineage

He is Ali son of Musa son of Ja'far son of Muhammad son of Ali son of al-Husayn son of Ali son of Abu Talib (a.s.), eighth in the series of the Imams belonging to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.). His birthplace is Medina, and his resting place is Toos (Iran).

Birth and Demise

Historians disagree a great deal about the year of his birth and even in determining the month as well, and they also disagree about determining the year and the month of his death. Their disagreements are not confined to the limit of a short span of time but they may be five years apart, and the disagreement is so confusing that it is very difficult to determine clearly such matters; however, we shall point out the statements recorded in this regard without favoring any of them due to the lack of purpose of such favoring which naturally requires research and investigation and a proof for selecting what seems to be the most accurate.

He was born in Medina on Friday, or Thursday, Dhul-Hijja 11, or Dhul-Qi'da, or Rabi'ul-Awwal, of the Hijri year 148 or the year 153. He died on Friday, or Monday, near the end of the month of Safar, or the 17th of Safar, or Ramadan 21, or Jumada I 18, or Dhul-Qi'da 23, or the end of Dhul-Qi'da, of the year 202 or 203 or 206. In his *'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha'*, al-Saduq states: "What is accurate is that he died on the 13th of Ramadan, on a Friday, in the year 203."

What is most likely is that his death took place in the year 203 as stated by al-Saduq. It is the same year in which al-Ma'mun marched towards Iraq. To say that he died in 206 is not to agree with the truth because al-Ma'mun marched towards Baghdad in the year 204, and the Imam died while he was heading in the same direction.

His Mother

There is a great deal of dispute regarding the name of his mother. Some say she was called al-Khayzaran; others say she was Arwi and that her nickname was "the blonde of Nubia," while others say she was Najma and her nickname was "Ummul-Baneen." Others say she was called Sekan the Nubian; still others say she was called Takattam as may be proven from the poetry in his praise which said:

The best in self and parenthood,

In offspring and in ancestry,

Is Ali al-Muaddam,

Eighth in series of the knowledgeable

and the clement,

An Imam descending from the Proof of God,

that is Takattam.

Offspring

Disputes exist also regarding the number of his offspring and their names. A group of scholars say that they were five sons and one daughter, and that they were: Muhammad al-Qani', al-Hasan, Ja'far, Ibrahim, al-Husayn, and 'Ayesha.

Sabt ibn al-Jawzi, in his work *Tadhkiratul-Khawass*, says that the sons were only four, dropping the name of Husayn from the list. Al-Mufid inclines to believe that the Imam did not have any son other than Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s.), and Ibn Shahr Ashoob emphatically states so, and so does al-Tibrisi in his *A'lam al-Wara*. Al-'Udad al-Qawiyya states that he had two sons, Muhammad and Musa, and that he did not have any other offspring. In his claim, he is supported by *Qurb al-Asnad* in which the author says that al-Bazanti asked ar-Ridha', "For years I have been asking you who your successor is and you keep telling me that it is your son even when you had no son at all, but since God has now blessed you with two sons, which one of them is he?" *'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha'* indicates that he had a daughter named Fatima.

We are not in the process of investigating, researching and pinpointing with accuracy the number of his offspring and their names, but what seems to be more reasonable is what al-Mufid states. What is established as a fact with us is that Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s.) was his son; as regarding his other sons, nobody seems to be able to prove any facts regarding them, and God knows best.

Personality and Characteristics

Generally speaking, an Imam enjoys a unique personality and distinctive characteristics, in as far as Shi'a followers of the Imams are concerned; therefore, he is not permitted to do what others are, such as falling into error, or getting confused about a matter. Rather, infallibility is essential in him since he conveys on behalf of the Prophet (S) what seems to others to be obscure of the Message and its intricacies.

Just as we proved the infallibility of the Prophet (S), we, by the same token, prove infallibility for the Imam as well with one exception: the Imam conveys on behalf of the Prophet (S), whereas the Prophet conveys on behalf of the Almighty God. The wisdom in this argument is that should falling into error be accepted and expected from the Prophet (S) or the Imam, then doubt will result regarding the reliability of what they convey to people of juristic rules and regulations and other such matters since they are liable to err in their judgment or get confused about a particular issue.

Although the believers are not held accountable for doing what they are not supposed to be doing due to such error of judgment, the assumption of the error of judgment itself collides with the very wisdom behind the reason why prophets were sent to people at all which is to clarify to people, according to the way God Almighty intended them to, without any error or confusion, what His Will is.

The topic of infallibility is a vast one the discussion of which has no room here and which requires a dedicated research I may be able one day to tackle. What I have to clarify here is that Imamate is characterized by certain distinctive aspects such as infallibility which we cannot discuss by itself with others except after both parties agree on the basis from which it emerged; otherwise, our case would be like one who discusses the necessity of performing the ritual prayers (*salat*) with someone who does not believe in the message of the Prophet (S).

The basic point upon which we have first and foremost to agree is the definition of general Imamate, then the distinctions it requires and, finally, the proofs which testify to these distinctions. It is only then that disagreeing parties can conduct a reasonable discussion. Having been convinced by unequivocal proofs of such infallibility, and having seen the Twelve Imams (a.s.) to be fully qualified to be the only ones in whom such infallibility could be observed, we became fully convinced of their unshakable superiority over all others, and that they were the ones adorned with absolute human perfection.

An Imam, according to this viewpoint, has got to be the most learned among people and the most aware of the general needs of people such as knowledge or other necessities of life, and that he has to be the most pious, the most ascetic, the most perfect in personal conduct and norms of behavior. In other words, in order to be qualified for Imamate, one has to be superior to everyone else in all aspects of perfection and its requirements which all raise him to his position of leadership. On this basis, the character of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), who is one of these Twelve Imams, becomes clearly distinctive due to its merits. But this is not the limit of the scope of this research; rather, we shall attempt to research his

personality and the qualities which distinguished him from all others by our sifting into the legacy history has preserved for us of his conduct while still alive, and from the stances taken by the men of knowledge and by contemporary caliphs towards him.

Government's Attitude Towards the Imam

The attitude of the then rulers towards Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and the other Imams may provide us with a clear view of the distinctions which raised their personalities to the zenith. And it is essential to explain the phenomenon of the government's attitude towards them which manifested itself in the surveillance imposed upon them rather than upon other distinguished dignitaries or chiefs of the Alawides, monitoring their movements and counting their steps in all their social and personal encounters. What we can mention here to explain this phenomenon are the following reasons:

- 1) The belief of a large number of Muslims in their Imamate and in their being the most worthy of the caliphate, and their conviction that all other caliphs are considered usurpers of authority, trespassers upon the rights ordained by God to others. This is why the politicians of the time considered them their competitors whose mere presence increased the dangers surrounding them and jeopardized the security of the very existence of their government structure.
- 2) Their being the magnet which attracted leading scholars and thinkers who shrank in their presence despite their intellectual advancement and distinction in the fields of the arts and knowledge and despite their genius and intellectual prowess. This caused the caliphs to feel a stronger animosity towards them and be more grudgeful towards them due to the public fascination by them and to their attempts to be close to them and to being emotionally distant from the center of the government.
- 3) Their being the better alternative from the public's political standpoint to take charge of the responsibilities of government, bear its burdens, carry out its obligations and doing all of that most efficiently. This frightened the rulers and made the obscure future seem to their eyes even more so.
- 4) The vicious incitements about them by their opponents who bore animosity towards them and who wished thereby their elimination, and the tell-tales of even some of their own kin whose judgment was blinded by jealousy, so they kept fabricating stories and attributing them to those Imams and telling them to the rulers who were pleased to hear them since they became outlets to the grudge they felt towards those Imams and, at the same time, found in them the pretexts for annihilating and harassing them and in the end a justification to put an end to their lives and rid themselves of the complex they were suffering from due to their existence.

By these and by others can we explain the phenomenon of the rulers pursuing them and desperately trying to alienate them from the stage of events affecting the nation in order to secure a distance from the ghost of competition which could haunt them had they permitted the Imams to do as they pleased. Thus can we understand the general characteristics of the significant distinctions the personalities of

those Imams enjoyed in all sectors of the society in its various centers of activity and in its various aspirations; otherwise, how do you explain this phenomenon, and why should those rulers pay the Imams so much attention?

His Knowledge

He inherited the knowledge of his grandfather the Messenger of God (S), thus becoming its pioneering fountainhead that quenched the thirst of those who were thirsty for knowledge. History narrates a great deal of his scholarly stances and intellectual discourses in which he achieved victory over those who opposed the Divine Message, excelling in various branches of scholarship with which he provided the seekers of knowledge and the thinkers of the time.

Imam Musa a-Kazim (a.s.) is reported to have often said to his sons: "Ali ibn Musa, your brother, is the learned scholar of the Descendants of Muhammad (S); therefore, you may ask him about your religion, and memorize what he tells you for I have heard my father Ja'far ibn Muhammad more than once saying, 'The learned scholar of the family of Muhammad is in your loins. How I wish I had met him, for he is named after the Commander of the Faithful Ali (a.s.).'"

Ibrahim ibn al-Abbas al-Suli is reported to have said: "I never saw ar-Ridha' (a.s.) unable to provide the answer to any question he received, nor have I ever seen any contemporary of his more learned than he was. Al-Ma'mun used to put him to test by asking him about almost everything, and he always provided him with the answer, and his answer and example was always derived from the Holy Qur'an."

Rajaa ibn Abul-Dahhak, who was commissioned by al-Ma'mun to escort ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to his court, said: "By God! I never saw anyone more pious than him nor more often remembering God at all times nor more fearful of God, the Exalted. People approached him whenever they knew he was present in their area, asking him questions regarding their faith and its aspects, and he would answer them and narrate a great deal of hadith from his father who quoted his forefathers till Ali (a.s.) who quoted the Messenger of God (S). When I arrived at al-Ma'mun's court, the latter asked me about his behavior during the trip and I told him what I observed about him during the night and during the day, while riding and while halting; so, he said: 'Yes, O son of al-Dahhak! This is the best man on the face of earth, the most learned, and the most pious.'^{[1](#)}

Al-Hakim is quoted in *Tarikh Nishapur* as saying that the Imam (a.s.) used to issue religious verdicts when he was a little more than twenty years old. In Ibn Maja's *Sunan*, in the chapter on "Summary Of Cultivating Perfection," he is described as "the master of Banu Hashim, and al-Ma'mun used to hold him in high esteem and surround him with utmost respect, and he even made him his successor and secured the oath of allegiance for him."

Al-Ma'mun said this once in response to Banu Hashim: "As regarding your reaction to the selection by al-Ma'mun of Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his successor, be reminded that al-Ma'mun did not make

such a selection except upon being fully aware of its implications, knowing that there is no one on the face of earth who is more distinguished, more virtuous, more pious, more ascetic, more acceptable to the elite as well as to the commoners, or more God-fearing, than he (ar-Ridha', A.S.) is." [2](#).

Abul-Salt al-Harawi is quoted saying: "I never saw anyone more knowledgeable than Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.). Every scholar who met him admitted the same. Al-Ma'mun gathered once a large number of theologians, jurists and orators and he (ar-Ridha', A.S.) surpassed each and every one of them in his own respective branch of knowledge, so much so that the loser admitted his loss and the superiority of the winner over him." [3](#).

He is also quoted saying: "I have heard Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) saying, 'I used to take my place at the theological center and the number of the learned scholars at Medina was quite large, yet when a question over-taxed the mind of one of those scholars, he and the rest would point at me, and they would send me their queries, and I would answer them all.'" [4](#).

In his discourse regarding the issue of succession, al-Ma'mun said: "I do not know any man on the face of earth who is more suited (to be heir to the throne) than this man." [5](#).

Al-Manaqib records the following: "When people disputed regarding Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.), Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Yaqtini said, 'I have collected as many as eighteen thousand of his answers to questions put forth to him.' A group of critics, including Abu Bakr the orator in his *Tarikh* and al-Tha'labi in his *tafsir* and al-Sam'ani in his dissertation and in al-Mu'tazz in his work, in addition to others, have all quoted *hadith* from him." [6](#).

After an intellectual discourse with al-Ma'mun, Ali ibn al-Jahm said: "Al-Ma'mun stood up to perform the prayers ritual and took Muhammad ibn Ja'far, who was present there, by the hand, and I followed both of them. He asked him: 'What do you think of your nephew?' He answered, 'A learned scholar although we never saw him being tutored by any learned man.' Al-Ma'mun said: 'This nephew of yours is a member of the family of the Prophet (S) about whom the Prophet (S) said: 'The virtuous among my descendants and the elite among my progeny are the most thoughtful when young, the most learned when adult; therefore, do not teach them for they are more learned than you are, nor will they ever take you out of guidance, nor lead you into misguidance.'" [7](#).

Ibn al-Athir writes: "He (al-Ma'mun) discerned the descendants of Banu al-Abbas and Banu Ali and did not find anyone more than him (ar-Ridha', A.S.) in accomplishments, piety and knowledge." [8](#).

We do not need the testimony of anyone to convince us of the distinction enjoyed by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) due to his knowledge over all others. Suffices us to review the books of *hadith* which are filled with his statements and dictation in various arts which every individual, regardless of the loftiness of his degree of knowledge, became dwarfed upon meeting him, feeling his inferiority and the superiority of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

Ethical and Humane Conduct

Good manners constitute a significant part of one's personality. They unveil the innermost nature of the individual, highlighting the extent of its purity of origin when it translates belief into action. The Imam was characterized by a most noble personality which won him the love of the commoners as well as the elite, by extraordinary humanity derived from the spirit of the Message itself one of whose custodians he himself was, a person who safeguarded it and inherited its innermost secrets.

Ibrahim ibn al-Abbas al-Suli is quoted saying: "I never saw Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) angering anyone by something he said, nor did I ever see him interrupting anyone, nor refusing to do someone a favor he was able to do, nor did he ever stretch his legs before an audience, nor leaned upon something while his companion did not, nor did he ever call any of his servants or attendants a bad name, nor did I ever see him spit or burst into laughter; rather, his laughter was just a smile. When he was ready to eat and he sat to be served, he seated with him all his attendants, including the doorman and the groom." He adds, "Do not, therefore, believe anyone who claims that he saw someone else enjoying such accomplishments." [9](#).

A guest once kept entertaining him part of the night when the lamp started fading and the guest stretched his hand to fix it, but Abul-Hasan (a.s.) swiftly checked him and fixed it himself, saying, "We are folks who do not let their guest tend on them." [10](#).

Al-Manaqib states that ar-Ridha' (a.s.) once went to the public bath-house and someone asked him to give him a massage, so he kept giving the man a massage till someone recognized him and told that person who that dignitary was. The man felt extremely embarrassed; he apologized to the Imam (a.s.) and gave him a massage. [11](#).

Muhammad ibn al-Fadl narrates the following anecdote regarding the Imam's simple personality. He says:

"Ar-Ridha' (a.s.), on the occasion of Eidul-Fitr, said to one of his attendants, 'May God accept your good deeds and ours,' then he stood up and left. On the occasion of Eidul-Adha, he said to the same man, 'May God accept our good deeds and yours.' I asked him, 'O son of the Messenger of God! You said something to this man on the occasion of Eidul-Fitr and something else on the occasion of Eidul-Adha; why?' He answered: 'I pleaded God to accept his good deeds and ours because his action was similar to mine and I combined it with mine in my plea, whereas I pleaded God to accept our good deeds and his because we are capable of offering the ceremonial sacrifice while he is not; so, our action is different from his.'" [12](#).

Thus does Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) become in total harmony with his message in the area of ethics, personifying the latter into action derived from the spirit of the message whereby he ascends to the summit of human perfection, rising thereby to the shores of the individual's own real greatness. It is through this and similar means that the sincerity of faith and loftiness and dignity of the self are

recognized.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) defines for us the Islamic theory as the rules which govern the actual dealings of man with his brother man from which we can achieve the inspiration that Islam abolishes the then class distinctions among individuals and groups in the areas of public rights and the safeguarding of man's dignity, and that the difference which we must recognize regarding these areas is the difference between one who obeys God and one who does not.

A man once said to the Imam: "By God! There is nobody on the face of earth who is more honorable than your forefathers." The Imam responded by saying: "Their piety secured their honor, and their obedience of God made them fortunate." [13](#).

Another man said to him: "By God! You are the best of all people!" He said to him: "Do not swear so. Better than me is one who is more obedient to God and more pious. By God! The following verse was never abrogated: 'And We have made you nations and tribes so that you may know each other; verily the best of you in God's sight is the most pious.'" [14](#).

Abul-Salt once asked him: "O son of the Messenger of God! What do you say about something people have been criticizing you for?" He asked: "What is it?" He said: "They claim that you call people your slaves." He said: "God! Creator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the hidden and the manifest! I invoke Thee to testify that I have never said so, nor did I ever hear that any of my forefathers had said so! God! You are the Knower of the many injustices this nation has committed against us, and this is just one of them..." Then he came to Abul-Salt and said: "O Abdul-Salam! If all people, as some claim, are our slaves, who did we buy them from?" Abul-Salt answered: "You are right, O son of the Messenger of God..." Then the Imam said: "O Abdul-Salam! Do you deny the right which God has allotted for us to be charged with the authority as others deny?" He said: "God forbid! I do acknowledge such right." [15](#).

The Imam here denies such an allegation about him and his forefathers and rejects the vicious accusation which their enemies use against him to tarnish his image, considering it one of the many injustices committed against the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.). Rather, he and the Household of the Prophet (S) consider people to be equal in their general obligations except in the right of government which God ordained to be theirs solely, for others have no right to claim it for themselves. With the exception of the right to obey God in its most pristine implications which raised their status in the sight of God and man, all are the slaves of God. They share the same parents and worship the same God.

Abdullah ibn al-Salt quotes a man from Balkh saying: "I accompanied ar-Ridha' (a.s.) during his trip to Khurasan. One day he ordered preparations for his meal to which he invited all his attendants, blacks and non-blacks, so I said: 'May my life be sacrificed for yours! Maybe these should have a separate eating arrangement.' He said: 'God Almighty is One; the father (Adam) and the mother (Eve) are the same, and people are rewarded according to their deeds.'" [16](#).

The Imam does not see any difference between him and his servants and attendants except in the

degree of good deeds; other than that, all distinctions are void when the matter is related to common obligations in which all individuals are equal, for each one of them is created by the same God, and each has the same father, Adam, who was created of dust.

When we see the Imam sitting at the table surrounded by his servants, his doorman, and his groom, he is thus teaching the nation a lesson in virtuous humanity which believes in the dignity of man in order to demonstrate the theory of Islam in practice showing the nature of behavior man should undertake in his conduct towards his brother man. The loftiness of status and the elevation of career must not necessitate that a man of a less status or one whose career is less coveted should be despised or made to feel inferior to his brother man even if he is a servant.

This is so in order to eliminate the complex class distinctions which widen the gap between the members of the society whose energies would then be split into opposing parties torn by grudge and consumed by hatred.

Islam enacted the law of equality among the members of the society in the areas of general obligations in order to emancipate man's dignity from class obligations which dominated the way of life during the pre-Islamic era and were adopted by nations of old. God Almighty has said: "The best of you in the eyes of God is the one who is most pious." [17](#) The Prophet (S) said: "All of you descended from Adam, and Adam was created of dust." He also said: "No Arab can be held superior to a non-Arab except through superiority of his degree of piety."

Ibrahim ibn al-Abbas al-Suli is quoted saying: "I heard Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' saying, 'I swear by emancipation--and whenever I swore by it, I would emancipate one of my slaves till I emancipated each and every one of them--that I do not see myself as better than that (and he pointed to a black slave of his who remained in his service) on account of my kinship to the Messenger of God (S) except if I do a good deed which would render me better.'" [18](#).

Thus does the Imam define for us the good Islamic conduct of safeguarding the dignity of man and the elimination of all class distinctions except the distinction of good deeds. He, peace be upon him, does not view his kinship to the Prophet (S) as providing him with a distinction over a black slave except if such kinship is combined with good deeds which render the doer distinction and superiority. Yasir, one of his servants, said once: "Abul-Hasan said to us once: 'If I leave the table before you do, while you are still eating, do not leave on my account till you are through.' It may happen that he calls upon some of us to his service and he is told that they are eating, whereupon he says: 'Leave them to finish their meal first.'" Nadir, another servant, says: "Abul-Hasan did not require us to do anything for him except if we had finished eating our meal." [19](#).

These are samples of his actual conduct and humanity which he inherited as a fragrant legacy the perfume of which is goodness and mercy from his grandfather the greatest Prophet (S) who crowned his message with the banner of good conduct when he said: "I have been sent to perfect the code of good conduct." Such was that genuine humane legacy from whose spirit nations derive their strength and

upon which they build the pillars of their glory and through which they secure the continuation of their very existence.

His Conduct Regarding His Appearance

There is no doubt that, generally speaking, the Imams (a.s.) were more distant than anyone else from the alluring wares of this vanishing world, and most distant from its ornamentations and allurements. But the concept of asceticism according to them was not limited to wearing modest coarse clothes or eating very simple food. Rather, its limits extended beyond that, for the ascetic person is the one who does not allow the pleasures of this world to take control over him without being able to take control of them, one who does not see this world as the ultimate goal he seeks; rather, when it comes towards him, the believer is entitled to enjoy its good things, and when it forsakes him, he contends himself that God's rewards are more lasting.

Al-Aabi is quoted in *Nathr al-Durar* as saying:

"A group of sufis visited ar-Ridha' (a.s.) when he was in Khurasan, and they said to him, 'The commander of the faithful looked into the authority God Almighty entrusted to him, and he found you, members of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), to be the most deserving of all people to be the leaders.

Then he discerned you, members of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), and he found yourself the most worthy of leading the people, so he decided to entrust such leadership to you. The nation is in need of one who wears coarse clothes, eats the most simple food, rides the donkey and visits the sick.' Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was first leaning, then he adjusted the way he was sitting and said: 'Joseph (Yousuf) was a Prophet who used to wear silk mantles brocaded with gold. He sat on the thrones of the Pharaohs and ruled.

An Imam is required to be just and fair; when he says something, he says the truth, and when he passes a judgment, he judges equitably, and when he promises something, he fulfills his promise. God did not forbid (an Imam) from wearing a particular type of clothes or eating a particular type of food.' Then he recited the Qur'anic verse: 'Say: Who has forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of God which He has produced for His servants, and the good things, clean and pure (which He has provided) for sustenance?'^{[20](#)}.

Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) was asked once about his view regarding musk. He answered: "My father ordered musk to be made for him in a ben tree in the amount of seven hundred dirhams. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl wrote him saying that people criticized him for that. He wrote back: 'O Fadl! Have you not come to know that Joseph (Yousuf), who was a Prophet, used to wear silk clothes brocaded with gold, and that he used to sit on gilded thrones, and that all of that did not decrease any of his wisdom?' Then he ordered a galia moschata (perfume of musk and ambergris) to be made for him in the amount of four thousand dirhams."^{[21](#)}.

Thus does the Imam prove that the outward appearance of asceticism has nothing to do with true

asceticism; rather, it may even be a fake whereby someone tries to attract the attention of others. This is why Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and other Imams did not see anything wrong with meeting the public with an appearance of luxury in what they put on or ate as long as it did not collide with the reality of asceticism which is the building of the self from within to renounce the world and its allurements and regard it as a vanishing display with a short span of life.

This does not forbid the believer from enjoying its pleasures in the way which God made permissible. God did not create the good things in this world for the disbeliever to enjoy while depriving the believers there from. Rather, God considers the believer to be more worthy of such enjoyment when he submits himself to God and expends it in His Path.

Ibn Abbas tells us the following about Imam ar-Ridha's ascetic conduct: "Ar-Ridha' used to sit on a leaf mat during the summer and on a straw sack during the winter; he used to put on coarse clothes, but when he went out to meet the public, he put on his very best." [22](#) So, when he is by himself, away from public life, his soul finds harmony with denying what is fake, that is, the decorations and allurements of this life. But when he goes out to meet people, he puts on his best for them following their own nature of holding the appearances of this world as significant, enjoying its good things. This realistically ascetic conduct of the Imam provides us with a glorious example of the truth regarding the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and their pure view of life which is free from any disturbing fake or pretense.

Clemency and Tolerance

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) had recommended his son ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to be the Imam after him, making him his own deputy in faring with his wealth, women, sons and the mothers of his sons, without permitting any of his other sons to fare with anything after him, and he wrote his will indicating so and sealed it with his own seal, invoking the Wrath of God upon anyone who would unlawfully break the seal after having secured the testimony of a number of his own household and followers. But the brothers of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) disputed with their brother regarding their father's will and what he had left for them. According to *al-Kafi*, Yazid ibn Salit is quoted saying:

"Abu Umran al-Talhi was the judge at Medina when his (ar-Ridha's) brothers presented him as their opponent in their dispute. Al-Abbas ibn Musa said: 'May God bring through you reconciliation and happiness. At the bottom of this written statement there is a treasure and a jewel and he (ar-Ridha') wishes to keep it away from us and take it all to himself, and our father entrusted everything to him, leaving us helpless. Had I not checked myself, I would have told you so before a crowd of people.' Ibrahim ibn Muhammad, who was one of the witnesses of the will, jumped at him and said: 'Then you by God would be telling something we do not accept to be coming even from you, and we will hold you as a liar, and you will be among us blamed and despised, nicknamed by the young and the old as a liar.'

Your father knew you best if there was any good in you and your father knew you inside and out, and he could not trust you to guard two pieces of dates.' Then his uncle Ishaq ibn Ja'far jumped at him and

pulled him by the robe saying, 'You are a silly, weakling, and a fool; add these to your previous faults,' and he was supported in his view by all others. Abu Umran, the judge, said to Ali, 'Stand up, O father of al-Hasan! Suffices me today the curse your father had invoked, and your father was quite generous with you.'

No! By God! Nobody knows a son better than his father. No! By God! Your father was neither weak in his intellect nor shallow in his view.' Al-Abbas said to the judge, 'May God bring conciliation through you! Please remove the seal and read the contents.' Abu Umran said, 'No, I shall not remove it; suffices me today the curse your father invoked.' Al-Abbas said, 'I shall remove it.' He said, 'That is up to you.' So al-Abbas removed the seal and the contents spelled out their exclusion and the inclusion only of Ali, and an order that they all, whether they liked it or not, were to listen to and obey Imam Ali ar-Ridha' (a.s.). In short, the removal of the seal spelled their destruction, scandal and humiliation, whereas Ali remained the winner.

"Ali then turned to al-Abbas and said: 'Brother! I know that what made you do what you did is the fact that you have fines and debts to pay. Sa'id! Go ahead and take an account of their debts, then pay their dues on their own behalf. After that take out their *zakat* and clear their name. By God! I shall never abandon your assistance and I shall never cut my ties from you as long as I walk on this earth; so, you may say whatever you please.'

"Al-Abbas said: 'Do not give us anything other than what rightfully belongs to us, and what you hold of our own is even more.' He said: 'You may say anything you want to say, for the offer is yours; if you do good deeds, you shall be rewarded by God, and if you commit a bad deed, God is Most Forgiving, Merciful. By God! You know very well that today I have no son nor heir except you; so, if I keep anything which belongs to you from you or save what you think to belong to you, it shall always remain yours and will always be returned to you. By God! I have never owned anything since your father, may God be pleased with him, passed away except that I relinquished it to you as you have seen.'

"Al-Abbas leaped and said: 'By God it is not so! Nor God has given you authority over us..., but..., but it is our father's jealousy and he willed a will which God does not accept from him nor from you, and you know very well that I know Safwan ibn Yahya, the Sabiri seller at Kufa. If I ever get there, I shall strangle him and you with him.'

"Ali said: 'There is no power or will except by the Will of God, the Sublime, the Great... Brothers! God knows that I desire nothing other than your happiness and well-being. God! If you know that I love their well-being, and that I want nothing but good for them, that I do not sever my ties with them, that I am kind to them, concerned about their affairs day and night..., then grant me good rewards for it. But if I am contrariwise, then I invoke You, Knower of the unknown, to grant me the rewards of my intentions: good for good and evil for evil. Lord! Bring them to the path of righteousness, and make life good for them, and keep the snares of the devil away from us and from them, and assist them to be able to worship Thee, and help them see Thy guidance. As for me, brother, I desire nothing other than your happiness,

working hard for your own well-being, and God is my Witness.'

"To this, al-Abbas said: 'How well I know your mastery over words! And there is no mud with me for your spade!'" [23](#).

With these rude words al-Abbas ended his argument with his brother, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), despite the fact that the Imam was very kind and clement in his argument with him, without articulating any unkind word, that it was already established that right was on the side of the Imam, and that their own transgression dragged him into such a situation which did not befit his lofty status. This, indeed, is indicative of a great deal of clemency and tolerance towards an unlimited aggression.

Although al-Abbas discarded the norms of good manners in his confrontation with his brother by articulating disrespectful words and by committing a sin against his own father Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) by accusing him of being jealous and biased, which causes the other party to be on the offensive, or at least would push him away from a balanced temper, this is not an artificial show of clemency and tolerance from the Imam (a.s.); rather, it is derived from the spirit of genuine goodness and love whereby he and the other Imams were characterized when others challenged them.

On the other hand, the Imam (a.s.) tries to cause others to adorn themselves with the same trait of clemency and tolerance upon being wronged as an element of good relationship among them, justifying this by saying that it increases the dignity of man, for clemency and tolerance, when the ability to deal equal blows and effect equal retribution express the power of anger in man and his control over his rash temper upon being challenged, this causes others to respect and venerate such a person especially when that person shoulders the responsibilities of authority. Al-Aabi says:

"A man sentenced to be beheaded was brought to al-Ma'mun while ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was among his train. Al-Ma'mun asked him: 'Father of al-Hasan! What is your view?' He said: 'All I can say is that God only increases the dignity of those whose good will causes them to forgive.' He, therefore, forgave the man." [24](#)

Swiftness of Response

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was endowed with a readiness to respond coupled with the strength of argument and oratory to which extra-ordinary expressions freely submitted without making the over-all meaning too difficult to comprehend. His arguments with the heads of other religions, with foremost writers, and with atheists in which he outwitted them with his clear argument and decisive arguments, all provide us with a glorious indication that he used to enjoy the ability to provide a ready answer and a speed in intellectual reasoning.

This is why learned scholars held him in high esteem and hesitated to challenge him to debate in any field of knowledge as actually happened after his arguments with the highest authorities of other religions at a meeting al-Ma'mun arranged at his court and the audience were tongue-tied when he

challenged them to put for discussion whatever came to their minds.

His Patience and Perseverance

The patience and perseverance of the Imam manifest themselves clearly when he had to face psychological and emotional crises. When he went to say his farewell at the Ka'ba, Mecca, upon being ordered by al-Ma'mun to be present at his court in Khurasan, he was faced with an emotional situation involving his only son Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Jawad, but he maintained with an iron will his self-control, solacing himself with a patient heart, submitting to God's Will and Decree.

Umayya ibn Ali states: "I was sitting with Abul-Hasan (a.s.) at Mecca during the year in which he performed the *hajj* prior to his trip to Khurasan, and Abu Ja'far was with him when he was bidding the House (Ka'ba) good-bye. Having finished his tawaf, he went to the maqam and said his prayers there. Abu Ja'far, accompanied by Muaffaq, was making his *tawaf*, till he reached the Stone. There he sat and he prolonged his sitting there. Muaffaq said to him: 'May my life be sacrificed for yours! It is time you stood up.'

He answered: 'I do not wish to leave this place at all except by the Will of God,' and grief could easily be seen clouding over his face. Muaffaq approached Abul-Hasan and said to him: 'May my life be sacrificed for yours! Abu Ja'far is sitting by the Stone unwilling to leave,' so Abul-Hasan stood up, came to Abu Ja'far and said: 'Stand up, my loved one.' But his son said: 'I do not wish to leave this place...' He said: 'Do stand up, O my loved one.' After a while, he said to his father: 'How can I stand up seeing that you have already said your farewell at the House never to return again?' He said: 'Do stand up, my loved one.' He stood up and left with his father."

The Imam (a.s.) patiently put up with numerous norms of persecution and injustice inflicted upon him during the reign of (Harun) al-Rashid starting with the tragedy of his father, passing by the tragedies to which the Alawides were subjected, and ending with the unfair instigations to al-Rashid by the Imam's opponents to kill him and eliminate him.

The strength of the patience and perseverance of the Imam become manifest when we examine the thinly veiled political persecution from which he suffered during al-Ma'mun's reign especially after the latter appointed him as his heir to the throne, fully knowing that al-Ma'mun was not sincere in his intention but rather enacted a political act in which al-Ma'mun played the major role solely to provide security to the shaky foundations of his regime due to the storming events the outcome of which was reflected upon the issue of who would succeed him on the throne.

The extent of the suffering of the Imam, the degree of his bitterness and agony, and the amount of grief and sorrow which filled his heart due to the treatment meted to him by the government, can be assessed; yet he buried all of that in the depth of his mind with mute patience and perseverance. Yasir, his servant, said once: "Whenever ar-Ridha' (a.s.) returned home on Friday from the mosque, with his

face sweating and stained by blowing dust, he would raise his hands and invoke God saying, 'God! If the only way I am relieved from my distress is by death, then I invoke Thee to hasten its hour.'

Suffices to assess the extent of his patience and perseverance to simply be aware of the fact that although he was God's Argument over His creation, he was powerless to do anything while seeing right being abandoned and wrong upheld.

Generosity

In a dialogue with al-Bazanti, the Imam said: "Anyone who receives a boon is in danger: He has to carry out God's commandments in its regard. By God! Whenever God blesses me with something, I continue to be in extreme apprehension till (and here he made a motion with his hand) I take out some of it and spend it in the way God has ordained in its regard." Al-Bazanti asked him: "May my life be sacrificed for yours! You, in your status of high esteem, fear that much?" He answered: "Yes, indeed! And I praise my Creator for the blessings He bestowed upon me." [25](#).

The Imam's generosity and thoughtfulness emanate out of this good aspect of his conviction which depends on the principle of letting others share in the wealth with which God blesses him, and in what blessings and favors He bestows upon him. God's rights in this context are the shares of the needy and the poor in this world whose ability to earn a decent living was hampered by either severe employment conditions, or disability to work due to old age, or because of being left stranded away from their original home, in addition to others who were forced by the necessities of life to stretch their hands to others for help.

To ask others is humiliating, for it shatters the dignity of the person who is stretching his hand asking and by his psychological appeal to the breath of humanity in the person he is asking. In this story, the Imam guides us to realize a magnificent fact about the human psychology, that is, to give is not a favor someone does to someone else begging him for help; rather, it is his way of thanking God for the blessings with which He blessed him. The person who is blessed is in danger until he takes out of it the rights in it which are God's.

The Imam's method in giving is derived from such an angle of the human nature. Eleisha ibn Hamza says: "I was once talking to ar-Ridha' (a.s.) when a large crowd of people assembled to ask him about what is permissible in Islam and what is not. A man as tall as Adam came to him and said: 'Assalamo Alaikom, O Son of the Messenger of God! I am a man who loves you, your fathers and grandfathers, and I have just been on my way to perform the pilgrimage when I discovered that I had lost everything with me and now I do not have anything enough even for a leg of the trip. If you will, please help me with the expense of going back home, and I am a recipient of God's blessing (i.e. well to do).

As soon as I reach there, I will give to the poor as much as you will give me, for I do not qualify to be a recipient of alms.' He said to him: 'Sit, may God be merciful to you,' then he kept talking to people till

they dispersed except that man, Sulaiman al-Ja'fari, Khuthai'ama and myself. Then he (ar-Ridha') said: 'Do you permit me to enter (the room)?' Sulaiman said to him: 'May God advance your endeavor.'²⁶ So he entered the room and stayed for about an hour after which he came out and closed the door behind him, stretched his hand above the door and said: 'Where is the man from Khurasan?' The man answered: 'Here I am!' He said: 'Take these two hundred dinars, use them for your preparations for the trip; may God bring you blessings thereby, and do not spend an equal amount to it on my behalf, and leave the room in a way that I do not see you and you do not see me,' then he left.

Sulaiman then said: 'May my life be sacrificed for yours! You have made quite a generous offer, but why did you hide your face?' He answered: 'I did so for fear of seeing the humiliation on the face of the man due to my assistance for him. Have you not heard the *hadith* of the Messenger of God (S) in which he said: 'The one who hides a good deeds receives rewards equal to performing the pilgrimage seventy times; one who announces his sin is humiliated, while one who hides it is forgiven'? Have you heard the saying of the example of the first case: Whenever I approach him, one day, with a plea, I return home and my dignity is still with me. For he hides himself from the person who appeals to him when he gives him something so that he does not see the humiliation on his face, and so that the pleading person retains his dignity when he does not see the face of the benevolent one who is giving him?"

He asks him to leave without seeing him in order to safeguard himself against feeling as having the upper hand over the pleading person, and in order to relieve the pleading person from having to show his gratitude to him.

While in Khurasan, he once distributed his entire wealth to the poor on the day of Arafat, so al-Fadl ibn Sahl said to him: "Now you are bankrupt!" he said: "On the contrary! I am now wealthier than ever. Do not consider trading my wealth for God's rewards and pleasure as bankruptcy."²⁷.

He does not give others in order to buy their affection or friendship; rather, he considers giving with generosity as a good trait whereby man gets nearer to his Maker by including His servants in the wealth with which He blessed him. This is the difference between his method of giving and the method of others. Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Nawbakhti is quoted saying:

"A man passed by Abul-Hasan and begged him to give him according to the extent of his kindness. He said: 'I cannot afford that.' So he said: 'Then give me according to mine,' whereupon he ordered his servant to give the man two hundred dinars."²⁸.

The reason why the Imam abstained from giving the man according to the extent of his own kindness, as the man asked him the first time, is probably due to the fact that he simply did not have as much money as he liked to give. As regarding his own affection towards the poor and the indigent, and his way of looking after them, Mu'ammarr ibn Khallad narrates this anecdote:

"Whenever Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was about to eat his meal, he would bring a large platter and select the choicest food on the table and put on it, then he would order it to be given away to the poor.

After that he would recite the following verse: `But he hath made no haste on the path that is steep.'²⁹
After that he would say: `God, the Exalted and the Sublime, knows that not everyone has the ability to free a slave, nevertheless He found means for them to achieve Paradise (by feeding others).'"³⁰.

Thus does the Imam sense the weight of deprivation under which the poor moan and suffer; therefore, he shares his best food with them in response to the call of humanity and kindness and in harmony with the spirit of the message with which God entrusted him.

Al-Bazanti tells the story of a letter Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) wrote to his son Imam Abu Ja'far (a.s.) which personifies the generosity and spirit of giving deeply rooted in the hearts of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.); he says: "I read the letter of Abul-Hasan Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to Abu Ja'far which said: `O Abu Ja'far! I have heard that when you ride, the servants take you out of the city through its small gate.

This is due to their being miser so that nobody asks you for something. I plead you by the right I have upon you that every time you enter into or get out of the city, you should do so through its large gate, and when you ride, take gold and silver with you, and every time you are asked, you should give. If any of your uncles asks you for something, you should give him no less than fifty dinars, and you yourself may determine the maximum amount you would like to give; and if any of your aunts asks you for something, do not give her less than twenty-five dinars, and it is up to you to determine the maximum amount. I only desire that God raises your status; therefore, keep giving away and do not fear that the Lord of the Throne will ever throw you into poverty.'"³¹

Equity

The Imam (a.s.) did not have the chance to rule for any period of time so that we may discuss his practical style of government, but we can still be acquainted with that through reviewing his statements to some of his followers who very much desired that the Imam should shoulder the responsibilities of caliphate. Muhammad ibn Abu 'Abada asked him once: "Why did you delay executing the order of the commander of the faithful and why did you refuse to oblige?"

He said: "Be careful, O father of Hasan! The matter is not so." He added saying that the Imam noticed that he was crossed, so he said: "What's in it for you anyway? Should I, as you presume, become what you wish me to become, and you are as close to me then as you are right now, you would certainly be responsible for paying your dues and, in my eyes, there would be no difference between you and anyone else."

He, peace be upon him, clarifies the matter, and that there is no use to accept the caliph's offer since government will never actually be under his control. And when he notices the bitterness on the face of the person who asked him why he hesitated to accept the caliph's offer, he reminds him of his method of government should it at all be in his hands, summarizing it thus: Nobody shall have any distinction over other citizens according to the dictates of the equitable government set up by Islamic *Shari'a* regardless

of class or any other distinctions such as favoritism, friendship or support; rather, all subjects are equal in the rights they enjoy without any bias to one in preference over another, or any bias against one in order to please another.

The Imam's way of explaining his method of government is actually an outspoken way of criticizing the ruling methods followed then the foundations of which were not based on justice and equity but on special interests which guarantee for the ruler and his followers the continuity of his government and authority. The wealth, lives, possessions and everything else under the government's control was all subject to the whims and desires of the oppressive ruler and his train, distant from the principles of justice and the norms of equality secured by the Islamic message as embedded within its humanitarian method of legislation.

Method of Educating the Public

The Imams (a.s.) played a significant role in the area of educating the public, setting examples in educating through the example of one's own conduct; therefore, their methods of education were not confined merely to spreading awareness through the spoken word but went beyond that to enforcing a strict practical censorship over actions to observe the defects and shortcomings of conduct in the life of others. Here we present three examples of the norms of conduct of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) each dealing with one aspect of man's practical life:

Yasir, one of his servants, narrates that the Imam's attendants were eating some fruit one day and they were throwing away a good portion of it uneaten. Abul-Hasan (a.s.) said to them: "Praise be to God! If you have eaten to your fill, there are many who have not; so, you should feed them of it instead."[32](#).

In this incident, the Imam points out to the reality of wanton living which we observe in our life. When we feel that we have achieved full satisfaction of something, be it food or anything else, we do not try to satisfy the need of others for it, but we may even try to spoil it in one way or another without realizing the crime towards humanity implied in an action like that.

Sulaiman ibn Ja'far al-Ju'fi is quoted saying: "I was in the company of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) trying to take care of some personal business of my own and I wanted to go home. He said to me, 'Come with me and spend the night over my house.' So I went with him and he entered his house shortly before sunset. He noticed that his attendants were working with clay, probably mending stables, and there was a black man among them. He asked them, 'What is this man doing with you?'

They said: 'He is helping us, and we will pay him something.' He asked, 'Did you come to an agreement with him regarding his wages?' They said, 'No. He will accept whatever we pay him.' He, thereupon, started whipping them and showing signs of extreme anger. I said to him, 'May my life be sacrificed for yours! Why are you so angry?' He said: 'I have forbidden them so many times from doing something like that and ordered them not to employ anyone before coming to an agreement with him regarding his

wages.

You know that nobody would work for you without an agreed upon wage. If you do not, and then you pay him three times as much as you first intended to pay him, he would still think that you underpaid him. But if you agree on the wage, he will praise you for fulfilling your promise and paying him according to your agreement, and then if you give him a little bit more, he would recognize that and notice that you increased his pay."[33](#).

Here the Imam tries to point out a significant point related to the system of labor whereby each of the employer and the employee safeguards his rights. Often, disputes erupt about determining the wage the employee deserves in the absence of a prior agreement between the employer and the employee regarding a set wage. By determining and agreeing upon a set wage, each party safeguards its own right without finding a reason to dispute. An increase, though small, in the wage will surely cause the employee to feel grateful and thankful to his employer.

Al-Bazanti is quoted saying:

"Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) had one of his donkeys sent to convey me to his residence, so I came to the town and stayed with a dignitary for a part of the night, and we both had our supper together, then he ordered my bed to be prepared. A Tiberian pillow, a Caesarian sheet, and a Marw blanket were brought to me. Having eaten my supper, he asked me, 'Would you like to retire?' I said, 'Yes, may my life be sacrificed for yours.' So he put the sheet and the blanket over me and said, 'May God make you sleep in good health,' and we were on the rooftop.

When he went down, I told myself that I had achieved a status with that man nobody else had attained before. It was then when I heard someone calling my name, but I did not recognize the voice till one of his (ar-Ridha's) servants came to me. He said: 'Come meet my master;' so I went down and he came towards me, asked me for my hand to shake and he shook it with a squeeze, saying, 'The Commander of the Faithful, God's peace be upon him, came once to visit Sa'sa'a ibn Sawhan, and when it was time to leave, he advised Sa'sa'a not to boast about his visit to him but to look after himself instead for he seemed to be about to depart from this world and that worldly hopes do not do a dying man any good, and he greeted him a great deal as he bid him good-bye.'" [34](#)

In the above anecdote, the Imam (a.s.) points out the significance of realistic spiritual upbringing which is not influenced by external appearances nor is deceived by artificial psychological fantasies, for the reason why others pay attention and show concern may be solely due to seeking their self-interest, or maybe due to a sincere affection, or to any other reason, without any of these reasons being linked to the reality of the self and its significance.

The Imam tries to push us to avoid being deceived by anything which would push us away from contemplating upon our real world to which our destiny is tied, and we have to be subjective in our outlooks, assessing our realities without being influenced by casual external factors.

Reluctance to Cooperate With the Rulers

The Imams (a.s.) did not for even one day admit any legitimacy to their contemporary governments, be it Umayyad or Abbaside, due to the fact that those governments were far away from the pristine Islamic system of government and to their deviation, in spirit and in conduct, from the most simple principles and rules of human justice. Executions, deportations, confiscations of properties, transgressions, according to them, all did not hold them legally accountable, nor did they constitute a departure from the principles of creed and equity as long as they in the end served to strengthen and secure the foundations of their governments.

Anyone who appreciates his divine responsibility would try as hard as possible to stay away from participating in shouldering the responsibilities of such governments or making the latter's job easier, for this would mean his own recognition of their legitimacy and his own admission of their right to exist.

Yes; if the objective of his participation is to alleviate, as much as he can, their injustice and transgression to which innocent believers may be subjected, and to minimize the danger of their ethical and social iniquities which distance the nation from the achievement of an exemplary realization of its mission--if this is the objective, then such participation may be necessitated by one's own persistent faith, and upon this premise did the Imams refrain from encouraging any of their followers from working for such governments for that would mean assisting the aggressor and strengthening his stance.

The only exception was the case when the religion's interest dictated it. In the latter case, they used to encourage some of their influential followers to take part in the government and be employed by it as was the case of Ali ibn Yaqteen who tried several times to resign from his post at the court of Harun al-Rashid, but Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) used to encourage him to stay due to the fact that his stay meant removing injustices from many believers and the fending of some of the corruption committed by others.

We can clearly be acquainted with this negative stance of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) towards their rulers by examining what al-Hasan ibn al-Husayn al-Anbari tells us about Imam Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.). He says: "I continued writing him for fourteen years asking his permission that I accept a job in the service of the sultan. At the conclusion of the last letter I wrote him I stated the fact that I was fearing for my life because the sultan was accusing me of being a Rafidi and that he did not doubt that the reason why I declined from working for him was due to my being a Rafidi.

So Abul-Hasan wrote me saying, 'I have comprehended the contents of your letters and what you stated regarding your apprehension about your life's safety. If you know that should you accept the job, you would behave according to the commands of the Messenger of God (S) and your assistants and clerks would be followers of your faith, and if you use the gain you receive to help needy believers till you become their equal, then one deed will offset another; otherwise, do not.'"[35](#).

The Imam (a.s.) preconditions for his permission to work for the government that there should be a religious interest which decreases the damage done by the nature of the job; otherwise, it would mean a psychological and factual separation from the pristine principles of Islam and its precepts and an attachment to the corrupt world in which those rulers were living.

How could the Imam ever approve the principle of cooperating with those who played Muslim caliphs and deliberately watered down the divine content of the Islamic message by their and behavioral transgressions which demolished the psychological and spiritual borders separating the nation from the realization of the sins and pitfalls of such transgressions? Theirs were gatherings in which wine was served, entertainers entertained, singers sang, dancers danced, filling the palaces of Umayyad and Abbaside caliphs with immorality. One of them was insolent enough to invite one of those Imams (a.s.) to participate in his drinking orgy as was the case of al-Mutawakkil with Imam Ali al-Hadi (a.s.) which unveils to us the extent of corruption and the extremity of moral decay of the Abbaside caliphate.

It is quite possible that those rulers were aware of the negative attitude of the Imams towards them and their corrupt government systems. We find them, as the anecdote above proves, doubting the loyalty of the individuals who refused to cooperate with them, charging them with Rafidism due to the negative stance adopted by their Imams towards the conduct of those rulers.

Islamic caliphate suffered the tragedy of a humiliating deviation from Islam and a moral decay during the Umayyad and Abbaside dynasties which helped the wide dissemination of corruption and moral decay among various sectors of the *umma*. What sort of Muslim caliphs were those whose eyes could not sleep except after listening to the music played by their male and female singers, whose nightly meetings were not complete without the presence of wine and immorality?

What type of Islamic reality is this in which a group like that has the full say? How can anyone expect the Imams (a.s.), who were the careful custodians of rights and whose responsibility was to safeguard such rights, to permit themselves and their followers to bear any responsibility in a government led by individuals whose hands were polluted with sins and accustomed to sinning?

The negative stance of the Imams was an obvious call for the nation to be aware of its Islamic mission and principles, a loud cry to wake it up from its slumber to witness the corrupt reality lived by such Islamic "caliphs" due to the reckless and corrupt behavior of those rulers and their followers who were at the helm of leading the nation.

These are some of the characteristics and qualities which provide us with some of the outlines of the portrait of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and the picture presented here is not complete in its pristine components which represent the actual context for it, for such a task requires the researcher to rise to grasp the Imam's loftiness which is impossible to attain by any writer, and nobody can ever describe it no matter how hard he tries.

[1.](#) 'Uyoon Akhbar al-Rida', Vol. 2, pp. 180–183.

- [2.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 49, p. 211, as quoted by Ibn Maskawayhi's book Nadeem al-Tareef.
- [3.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 49, p. 100. It is narrated from al-Hakim by Abu Abdullah, the hafiz of Naishapur.
- [4.](#) Ibid.
- [5.](#) Al Irshad by al-Mufid, p. 291.
- [6.](#) Manaqib Aali Abi Talib, Vol. 4, p. 300.
- [7.](#) Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 203.
- [8.](#) Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 183.
- [9.](#) 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 184.
- [10.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 203.
- [11.](#) Al Manaqib, Vol. 4, p. 362.
- [12.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 4, p. 81.
- [13.](#) 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 226.
- [14.](#) Al Hujurat: 13.
- [15.](#) Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 174.
- [16.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 4, p. 23.
- [17.](#) Al Hujurat: 13.
- [18.](#) Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 237.
- [19.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 298.
- [20.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, Vol. 3, p. 147; Surat Al A'raaf:32.
- [21.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 516.
- [22.](#) 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 178.
- [23.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 1, pp. 316-319.
- [24.](#) Kashf al-Ghumma, Vol. 3, p. 143.
- [25.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 3, p. 502.
- [26.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 4, p. 24.
- [27.](#) Al Manaqib, Vol. 4, p. 361.
- [28.](#) Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 360.
- [29.](#) Al Balad: 11.
- [30.](#) 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 264.
- [31.](#) 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 8.
- [32.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 6, p. 297.
- [33.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 5, p. 288.
- [34.](#) Qurb al-Isnad, p. 222, and Al Kharaij wal Jaraih, p. 237, with a slight textual variation.
- [35.](#) Al Kafi, Vol. 5, p. 111.

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