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Successors of the Prophet (S)

Hence, it may be said with certainty that the Prophet who was earnestly anxious about its safety, could not leave the tender plant of Islam unattended and exposed to danger.

At the same time, it was also not possible to leave the selection to the choice of the people for the successors of a Prophet must have special qualities of knowledge, piety and infallibility. Obviously it is not possible for anybody except Allah to know who possesses these qualities. These are not the things to be decided by consultation or election.

Hence, it is evident that the successor of a prophet must be nominated by Allah Himself. That is why the Prophet of Islam, all through his life and especially during the last year when he felt that his demise was imminent, introduced Imam ‘Ali (A) as his successor on various occasions. We have all heard the story of Ghadir-al-Khum. It was one such occasion. This story is recorded in all books of history.

This event took place towards the end of the Prophet's life when he was returning from the Farewell Pilgrimage (the last Hajj). At a place known as Ghadir-al-Khum, the Prophet formally proclaimed Imam ‘Ali (A) as his successor in the presence of tens of thousands of people.

Unfortunately, certain people for various reasons did not allow this will of the Prophet to be carried out and thus became the source of a split among the Muslims.

Each of the eleven other members of the Prophet's family (Ahlul Bait) who succeeded him, was also nominated by the Imam preceding him. The chain of authority of the reports of these nominations are recorded in our authentic books of traditions.

As mentioned earlier, the Imams are selected exclusively through nomination by the Holy Prophet and the preceding Imam. In fact, they are appointed by Allah who alone can determine their suitability.

Besides, history bears testimony to the fact that Imam ‘Ali (A) and other Imams possessed such outstanding virtues as made them exclusively well-fitted for the leadership of the Muslims. Study of history and the sources of Islamic traditions shows that none of the companions of the Prophet was equal to Imam ‘Ali (A) in knowledge, piety and virtue.

Functions and Qualifications of an Imam

Islam prescribes very high qualification for a divine leader. He should be the most knowledgeable, the wisest, and the most gallant of all. He should also be immune from every kind of sin, mistake and error.

The Prophet and the Imams, besides being religious leaders, are in their capacity as leaders of society, responsible for all government functions, and as such should possess the requisite qualifications to shoulder that responsibility.

The Prophet is the founder of religion and Imam is its protector. Both of them are appointed by Allah. At the most the Prophet alone receives revelation, and the Imam is heir to all the prophetic knowledge. He does not receive revelation, but he is master of all the details of Prophet's religious system.

Both the Prophet and the Imam have a special constructive role, and do not shirk any sacrifice in the interest of the Muslim society.

The role, played by Imam Husayn (A) in fighting the hypocrites and in toppling over the machine of tyranny, by Imam Baqir (A) and Imam Sadiq (A) in spreading Islamic knowledge and other sciences, and by Imam 'Ali Ridha' (A) in defending Islamic tenets and in providing intellectual guidance against the invasion of foreign ideas at the time of spread of Islam over vast territories of the world, are undeniable.

The same is true of the role played by other Imams in their respective circumstances. Thus besides performing the functions which were common to all of them as religious heads, each of these leaders had a special mission in conformity with the special circumstances of his age and time, and he did not refrain from making any sacrifice in carrying it out.

It has already been proved that an Imam must be nominated by Allah and his Prophet for none else can know who is infallible.

As such it is the bounden duty of the Prophet to introduce his successor to the people. Should he not do so, he would fail in his prophetic mission. That is why we believe that the Holy Prophet did nominate his successor and Imam of the Muslims.

The Prophet not only nominated his immediate successor but also named all the succeeding Imams. In a large number of traditions, which have come down to us from the Prophet, the number of the Imams has been stipulated as twelve. The Holy Prophet said that there would be 12 Caliphs after him and all of them would belong to the tribe of Quraish. The first one would be 'Ali and the last one the promised Mahdi (A). In certain other traditions names of all the 12 Caliphs have been expressly mentioned.

Amir Al Mo'mineen Imam ‘Ali (A)

Imam ‘Ali (A), the first Imam, was the cousin of the Holy Prophet. He was born on Friday, the 13th Rajab in the Holy Ka'aba.

He was brought up under the tutelage of the Holy Prophet. As Imam ‘Ali (A) says: "The Holy Prophet brought me up in his own arms and fed me with his own morsel. I followed him where ever he went like a baby camel following its mother.

Each day a new aspect of his character would beam out of his noble person and I would accept it and follow it as a command." This is why Imam ‘Ali (A) was the treasure of the prophetic knowledge.

Ten years in the company of the Holy Prophet had kept him so close and inseparable that he was one with him in character, knowledge, self-sacrifice, forbearance, bravery , generosity, oratory and eloquence. From his very infancy, he prostrated before God along with the Holy Prophet. As he himself said: "I was the first to pray to God along with the Holy Prophet."

"Imam ‘Ali (A) persevered in the footsteps of the Holy Prophet," says a famous historian Allama Masoodi, "all along his childhood." God created him pure and holy and kept him steadfast on the right path.

Though Imam ‘Ali (A) is indisputably the first to embrace Islam when the Holy Prophet called upon his listeners to do so, yet by the very fact that since his infancy he was brought up by the Holy Prophet and followed him in every action and deed including prostration before God, he can be said to be born a Muslim.

Imam ‘Ali (A), at all times, accompanied the Holy Prophet to help and protect him from his enemies. He used to write down the verses of the Holy Qur’an and discuss them with the Prophet as soon as they were revealed by the holy messenger, the Angel Gabriel. He was so closely associated with the Holy Prophet that as soon as a verse was revealed to him during the day or night, Imam ‘Ali (A) was the first to hear it.

The Holy Prophet has said to Imam ‘Ali (A):

a) "O ‘Ali ! you are my brother in this world as well as the Hereafter."

b) "I am the city of knowledge and ‘Ali is the gate."

The character and calibre of Imam ‘Ali (A) as judged by Allama Masoodi is, "If the glorious name of being the first Muslim, a comrade of the Prophet in exile, his faithful companion in the struggle for faith, his intimate associate in life, and his kinsman; if a true knowledge of the spirit of his teachings and of the Book; if self-abnegation and practice of justice; if honesty, purity, and love of truth ; if the knowledge of law and science, constitute a claim to pre-eminence, then all must regard ‘Ali as the foremost Muslim.

We shall search in vain to find, either among his predecessors or among his successors, those attributes."

In the last year of his life, the Holy Prophet had gone to Mecca to perform pilgrimage. On his return journey when he reached Ghadir al-Khum, this verse was revealed to him. "O Messenger, convey to the people what has been sent down to you from your Lord; for if you do not do that, you will not be doing justice to His Message. Allah will protect you from the mischievous deeds of the people."

The Holy Prophet stopped there and ordered other Muslims also to stop. Some 70,000 people assembled around him. He ordered a pulpit to be raised. After the pulpit was ready he ascended it and lifted ‘Ali (A) on his hands so that the people may see him.

Then he said: "Whoever considers me to be his master and patron; he should consider ‘Ali also to be his master and patron. O Allah! Be the friend of him who is friend of ‘Ali and be enemy of him who is enemy of ‘Ali."

Gibbon says, "The birth, the alliance, the character of ‘Ali which exalted him above the rest of his countrymen, might justify his claim to the vacant throne of Arabia. The son of Abu Talib was in his own right the chief of Bani Hashim and the hereditary prince or guardian of the city and temple of Mecca."

Imam ‘Ali (A) had the qualifications of a poet, a soldier and a saint; his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings; and every antagonist, in the combats of the tongue or of the sword, was subdued by his eloquence and valor.

From the first hour of his mission to the last rites of his funeral, the Holy Prophet was never forsaken a generous friend. Whom he delighted to name his brother, his vicegerent, and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses.

In the 40th year of Hijra, in the small hours of the morning of 19th Ramadhan, Imam ‘Ali (A) was struck with a poisoned sword by a Kharejite while offering his prayers in the Mosque of Kufa.

He died on the 21st day of Ramadhan, and was buried in Najaf al-Ashraf. He was born in the House of God, the Holy Ka'aba and martyred in the House of God, the Mosque of Kufa. The Lion of God, the most brave- hearted and gentle Muslim that ever lived, began his glorious life with devotion to Allah and His Apostle and ended it in the service of Islam.

"And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive but you do not perceive."

Imam Hasan (A)

The elder son of Imam ‘Ali (A) was born on 15th Ramadhan, 3 A.H. in Medina. Having received the

happy news of his grandson's birth, the Holy Prophet came to the house of his beloved daughter Fatima, took the newly born in his arms and named him, Hasan.

The first phase of seven years of the second Imam's infancy was blessed with the gracious patronage of the Holy Prophet, who gifted him all his great qualities and adored him with divine knowledge to such an extent that he was outstanding in his knowledge, tolerance, intelligence, bounty and valour, he being infallible by birth and decorated with heavenly knowledge by God.

The demise of the Holy Prophet was followed by an eventful era when the Islamic world came in the grip of the fever of expansionism and conquest. But even under such a revolutionary phase, Imam Hasan kept devoting himself to the second mission of peacefully propagating Islam and the teachings of the Holy Prophet along with his great father Imam ‘Ali (A)

The majority of Muslims pledged their allegiance to him. No sooner had he takes the reins of leadership into his hands than he had to meet the challenge of Muawiyah, the Governor of Syria, who declared a war against him.

In compliance with the Will of God and with a view to refrain from causing the massacre of Muslims, however, he entered into a peace treaty with Muawiyah on terms which saved Islam and stopped a civil war.

But this peace treaty was never meant as a surrender by him of the permanent leadership to Muawiyah. It was meant only as an interim transfer of the administration of the Islamic heritage, subject to the condition that the administration would be surrendered back to Imam Hasan (A) after Muawiyah's death and then it would in turn be inherited by Imam Husayn (A).

Having relieved himself of the administrative responsibilities, Imam Hasan (A) kept the religious leadership with himself and devoted his life to the propagation of Islam and the teachings of the Holy Prophet in Medina."

Imam Husayn (A)

Imam Husayn, the third Imam was born on 3r'd of Shaban, 4 A.H. in Medina. On his birth, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) prophesied that the faith of Islam would be rescued by his second grandson Husayn (A).

Yazid was known for his devilish character and brutish conduct. He was known as the most licentious of men. The people having known and understood the character of Yazid, formed a convenant by which Muawiyah could not appoint Yazid as his successor.

There, however, existed an undertaking known to a few, whereby Muawiyah had pledged to appoint Imam Husayn (A) as his successor. This undertaking was given by Muawiyah to Imam Hasan (A).

Muawiyah violated this undertaking and nominated Yazid as his successor .

Yazid demanded allegiance from the Holy Imam Husayn (A), who could have never agreed to it at any cost. The people, fearing death and destruction at the hands of the tyrant, had yielded to him out of fear. Imam Husayn (A) said that come whatever may, he would never yield to the devil in place of God and undo what his grandfather, the Holy Prophet had established.

The refusal of the Holy Imam to pay allegiance to this fiend marked the start of the persecution of the Holy Imam. As a result, he had retired to Medina where he led a secluded life. Even here he was not allowed to live in peace, and was forced to seek refuge in Mecca where also he was badly harassed and Yazid plotted to murder him in the very precincts of the great sanctuary of Ka'aba.

In order to safeguard the great sanctuary, Imam Husayn (A) decided to leave Mecca for Kufa just a day before the Hajj (pilgrimage). When asked the reason for the mysterious departure from Mecca, fore-going the pilgrimage which was to be held only the next day, Imam Husayn (A) said that he would perform the year's pilgrimage at Karbala', offering the sacrifice not of any animals, but of his kith and kin and some faithful friends.

When the Holy Imam with his encourage had reached Karbala', he declared: "This is the land, the land of sufferings and tortures." He alighted from his horse, and ordered his followers to encamp there saying, "Here shall we and our children be martyred. This is the land about which my grandfather, the Holy Prophet had foretold, and his prophecy will certainly be fulfilled."

At dawn of l0th Muharram, the Imam glanced the army of Yazid and saw Ibn Sa'ad ordering his forces to march towards him. He gathered is followers and addressed them thus: "Allah has, this day, permitted us to be engaged in holy War, and He shall reward us for our Martyrdom. So prepare yourselves to fight against the enemies of Islam with patience and perseverance.

O sons of the noble and self-respecting persons, be patient! Death is nothing but a bridge which you must cross after facing trials and tribulations so as to reach the Heaven and its joys. Which of you do not like to go from this prison (world) to the lofty palaces (Paradise)?"

Having heard the Imam's address, all his companions were overwhelmed and cried out, "O our Master! We are all ready to defend you and your Ahlul-Bait, and to sacrifice our lives for the cause of Islam."

Imam Husayn (A) sent out from his camp his followers one after another to fight and sacrifice their lives in the way of the Lord. Lastly, when all his men and children had laid down their lives, Imam Husayn brought his six-month old baby son 'Ali Asghar, and holding him on his own hands, demanded some water for the baby, dying of thirst.

The thirst of the baby was quenched by a deadly poisoned arrow from the brute forces, which pinned the baby's neck to the arm of the helpless father. At last when the six month old baby was also killed, Imam

Husayn (A) addressed God: "O Lord ! Your Husayn has offered in your way whatever you had blessed him with. Bless your Husayn, O Lord, with the acceptance of this sacrifice.

Everything Husayn could do till now was through your help and by your grace." Lastly Imam Husayn (A) came into the field and was killed. The details of his merciless slaughter are heart-rending. The forces of Yazid, having killed Imam Husayn (A), cut and severed his head from his body and raised it on a lance. The severed head of the Holy Imam began glorifying God from the point of the lance saying "Allaho Akbar." All glory be to God Who is the Greatest!

Imam Zain-ul-Abedin (A)

The fourth Imam 'Ali (A) was born in Medina on 15th Jamadi-ul-Awwal, 37 A.H. (685 A.D.). He was popularly titled as "Zain-ul-Abedin."

The Holy Imam Zain-ul-Abedin lived for about 34 years after his father and all his life he passed in prayers and supplication to God and in remembrance of his martyred father. It is for his ever being in prayers to God, mostly lying in prayerful prostration, that this Holy Imam was popularly called "Sajjad."

The Holy Imam was not given the time to offer his prayers peacefully, nor could he deliver any sermons. This God's Vicegerent on earth, therefore, adopted a third course which proved to be very beneficial to his followers. This was in compiling supplicative invocations for the daily use of man in his endeavor to approach the Almighty God. The invaluable collection of his edited invocations is, known as "Sahifatul Kamilah"

The collection is an invaluable treasury of wonderfully effective invocations to the Lord in an inimitably beautiful language. Only those who have ever come across those invocations would know their excellence and blessedness. Through these invocations, the Imam gave all the necessary guidance to the faithful during his seclusion.

Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir (A)

The fifth Imam Muhammad (A) was born in Medina on first Rajab, 57 A-.H. (677 A.D.) He was popularly titled as "Al-Baqir."

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A) was brought up in the holy lap of his grandfather Imam Husayn (A), for three years. For 34 years he was under the gracious patronage of his father, 'Ali Zain-ul-Abedin.

A famous scholar belonging to the Sunnite school says: "Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (A) has disclosed the secrets of knowledge and wisdom and unfolded the principles of character, his God-given knowledge, his divinely-gifted wisdom, and his obligation and gratitude towards the spreading of knowledge.

He was a sacred and a highly talented and spiritual leader and for this reason, he was popularly titled as "Al-Baqir" which means "the expounder of knowledge." Kind of heart, spotless in character, sacred of soul and the Imam devoted all his time in submission to God (and in advocating the teachings of the Holy Prophet and his descendants).

It is beyond the power, of a man to recount the deep impression of knowledge and guidance left by the Imam on the hearts of the faithful. His sayings about devotion and abstinence, knowledge and wisdom and about religious exercise and submission to God are so great in number that the size of this book is quite insufficient to cover them all (Sawayeq-e-Mohreqa, p. 120).

Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq (A)

The sixth Imam Ja'far (A) was born on Friday. The 7th Rabi-ul-Awwal, 83 A.H. at Medina. His famous title was as-Sadiq. He was brought up by his grandfather; the Holy Imam Zain-ul-Abedin (A) for 12 years, and then remained under the sacred patronage of his father the Holy Imam Muhammed al-Baqir (A) for a period of nineteen years.

The period of his Imamate coincided with the most revolutionary and eventful era of Islamic history which saw the downfall of the Ummayyad Empire and the rise of the Abbasid Caliphate. The internal wars and political upheavals were bringing about speedy changes in the government. Thus the Holy Imam witnessed the reigns of various kings starting from Abdul Malik down to the Ummayyad ruler Marwan Ibn Hakm.

He further survived till the time of Abul Abbas al-Saffah and Mansoor among the Abbasids. It was due to the political strife between two groups viz. the Ummayyads and the Abbasids for power that the Imam was left alone undisturbed to carry out his devotional duties and peacefully to carry on his mission to propagate Islam and spread the teachings of the Holy Prophet.

The downfall of the Ummayyads and the rise of the Abbasids constituted the two principal plots in the drama of Islamic history. This was the most chaotic and revolutionary period when the morals of the Muslims had gone down and the teachings of the Holy Prophet were being neglected, and a state of anarchy was rampant.

It was amidst such deadly gloom that the virtuous personage of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A) stood like a beacon of light shedding its luster to illuminate the ocean of sinful darkness around. The world got inclined towards his virtuous and admirable personality. Abu Salma Khallal also offered him the throne of the Caliphate.

But the Imam keeping up the characteristic tradition of his ancestors flatly declined to accept it, and preferred to content himself with his devotional pursuits and service to Islam. On account of his great learning, he was always triumphant in his many debates with the priests of rival orders like the Christians

and the Jews.

The versatile genius of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A) in all branches of knowledge was acclaimed throughout the Islamic world, this attracted students from far-off places towards him till the number of his disciples had reached four thousand. The scholars and experts in Divine Law have quoted many traditions from Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A).

His disciples' compiled hundreds of books on various branches of science and arts. Besides, Fiqha ' (religious laws), Hadis ' (tradition), Tafsir ' (commentary), the Holy Imam also imparted lessons in mathematics and chemistry to some of his disciples. Jabir Ibn Hayyan Tartoosi, a famous scholar of mathematics, was one of the Imam's disciples who benefited from the Imam's knowledge and guidance and was able to write 400 books on different subjects.

It is an undeniable historical truth that all the great scholars of Islam were indebted for their learning to the Ahlul-Bait who was the fountain of knowledge and learning for all.

Allama Shibli writes in his book, "Seerat-un Nomam": "Abu Hanifa remained for a considerable period in the attendance of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A) acquiring from him a great deal of precious knowledge in Fiqh and Hadis. Both the sects- Shia and Sunni - believe that the source of Abu Hanifa's knowledge was mostly derived from his association with Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A)."

The Imam devoted his whole life to the cause of religious preaching and propagation of the teachings of the Holy Prophet. Because of his great knowledge and fine teachings, the people gathered around him, giving him devotion and respect that was his due. This excited the jealousy of the Abbasid ruler Mansoor Dawaneeqi, who fearing the popularity of the Imam decided to do away with him.

Imam Musa Al-Kadhim (A)

Imam Musa (A), the seventh Imam, was born at Abwa on Sunday- the 7th Safar, 128 A.H.

Al-Kadhim was his famous title. His matchless devotion and worship of God has also earned him the title of "Abdus Saleh" (virtuous slave of God). Generosity was synonymous with his name and no beggar ever returned from his door empty handed. Even after his death, he continued to be obliging and was generous to his devotees who came to his Holy tomb with prayers and behests which were invariably granted by God.

The Holy Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A) breathed his last on 15th Rajab 148 A.H. and with effect from the same date Imam Musa al-Kadhim (A) succeeded as the seventh Imam. The period of his Imamate continued for 35 years.

In the first decade of his Imamate, Holy Imam Musa al-Kadhim (A) could afford a peaceful execution of the responsibilities of Imamate and carried on the propagation of the teachings of the Holy Prophet. But

soon after, he fell a victim to the ruling kings and a greater part of his life passed in prison.

His kind and generous attitude towards the people was such that he used to patronize and help the poor and the destitute of Medina and provide for them cash, food, clothes and other necessities of sustenance in secret. It continued to be a riddle for the receivers of gifts throughout the Imam's lifetime as to whom their benefactor was, but the secret was not revealed until after his death.

Time and circumstances did not permit the Holy Imam Musa al-Kadhim (A) to establish institutions to impart religious knowledge to his followers as his father, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (A) was never allowed to address a congregation. He carried on his mission of preaching and guiding the people quietly. He also wrote a few books of which the most famous is "Musnad al-Imam Musa al-Kadhim".

Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha' (A)

Imam 'Ali (A) was born at Medina on 11th Zilquad, 148 A.H. He was also known as Abul Hasan. His famous title was ar-Ridha'.

Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha' (A) was brought up under the holy guidance of his father for 35 years. His own insight and brilliance in religious matters combined with the excellent training and education given by his father, made him unique in his spiritual leadership. Imam Ridha' (A) was a living example of the piety of the great Prophet and the chivalry and generosity of Imam 'Ali (A).

Imam Ridha' (A) had inherited great qualities of head and heart from his ancestors. He was a versatile person and had full command over many languages. Ibn Asir Jazeri penned very rightly that Imam Ridha' (A) was undoubtedly the greatest sage, saint and scholar of the second century (A.H.).

Imam Ridha' (A) was the 8th Imam and Mamoon could not help holding him in great esteem because of the Imam's piety, wisdom, knowledge, modesty, decorum and personality. Therefore he decided to nominate him as the rightful heir to the throne. Earlier in 200 A.H. he had summoned the Abbasids.

Thirty three thousand Abbasids responded to the invitation and were entertained as royal guests. During their stay at the capital; he very closely observed and noted their capabilities and eventually arrived at the conclusion that not one of them deserved to succeed him. He therefore spoke to them all in an assembly in 201 A.H.

Telling them in categorical terms that none of the Abbasids deserved to succeed him. He demanded allegiance to Imam Ridha' (A) from the people in this very meeting and declared that in future, royal robes would be green, the color which had the unique distinction of being that of the Imam's dress. A royal decree was published saying that Imam Ridha' (A) shall succeed Mamoon and that his title shall be 'Ali Ridha'-Min-Ale-Muhammad.

Even after the declaration of succession when there was every opportunity for the Imam to live a

splendid worldly royal life, he did not pay any heed to material comforts and devoted himself completely to impart the true Islamic ideology of the Holy Prophet's teachings and the Holy Qur'an. He spent most of his time praying to God and serving the people.

Imam Muhammad At-Taqi (A)

Imam Muhammad (A) was born at Medina on Friday, the l0th Rajab, 195 A.H. (811 A.D.). His famous title was at-Taqi.

Imam Muhammad at-Taqi was brought up by his holy father Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha' (A) for 4 years. Under the force of circumstances, Imam 'Ali ar- Ridha' (A) had to migrate from Medina to Khorasan (Iran), leaving his young son behind him.

The Imam was fully aware of the treacherous character of the ruling king and was sure that he would return to Medina no more, So before his departure from Medina he declared his son Muhammad at-Taqi his successor, and imparted to him all his treasure of divine knowledge and spiritual genius.

The span of the life of Imam Muhammad at-Taqi was shorter than that of his predecessors as well as his successors. He became Imam at the age of 8 years and was poisoned at the age of 25, yet his literary attainments were many and he commanded great respect and esteem.

The Holy Imam was the symbol of Prophet Muhammad's (S) affability and Imam 'Ali's (A) attainments. His hereditary qualities comprised of gallantry, boldness, charity, learning, forgiveness and tolerance.

The brightest and most outstanding phases of his nature and character were to show hospitality and courtesy to all without discrimination, to help the needy, to observe equality under all circumstances, to live a simple life, to help the orphans, the poor and the homeless, to impart learning to those interested in the acquisition of knowledge and guide the people to the Right Path.

For the consolidation of his empire, it was realized by Mamoon, the Abbasid Emperor, that it was necessary to win the sympathy and support of the Iranians who had always been friendly to the Ahlul Bait. Consequently Mamoon was forced, from a political point of view, to establish contacts with the tribe of Bani Fatima at the expense of the ties with Bani Abbas and thereby win the favour of the Shia.

Accordingly he declared Imam Ridha' (A) as his heir even against the Imam's will and got his sister Umme Habiba married to him. Mamoon expected that Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha' (A) would lend him his support in political affairs of the state.

But when he discovered that the Imam was little interested in political matters and that the masses were more and more submitting themselves to him due to his spiritual greatness, he got him poisoned.

Yet the exigency which directed him to nominate Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha' (A) as his heir and successor still

continued. Hence he desired to marry his daughter Ummul Fazl to Muhammad at- Taqi (A), the son of Imam 'Ali ar-Ridha' (A) and with this object in view summoned the Imam from Medina to Iraq.

The Bani Abbas were extremely disconcerted when they came to know that Mamoon was planning to marry his daughter to Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (A). A delegation of some leading persons waited on him in order to dissuade him from his intention. But Mamoon continued to admire the learning and excellence of the Imam.

He would say that though Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (A) was still young, yet he was a true successor to his father in all his virtues and that the profoundest scholars of the Islamic world could not compete with him. When the Abbasids noticed that Mamoon attributed the Imam's superiority to his learning, they chose Yahya Ibn Aksam, the greatest scholar and juror of Baghdad, to contend with him.

Mamoon issued a proclamation and organised a grand meeting for the contest which resulted in a huge gathering of people from all parts of the kingdom. Apart from nobles and high officials, there were as many as nine hundred chairs reserved for scholars and learned men only. The world wondered how a young child could contest with the veteran judge (Qazi ul-Quzat) and the greatest scholar of Iraq in religious laws.

Imam Muhammad at-Taqi (A) was seated beside Mamoon on his throne face to face with Yahya Ibn Aksam, who addressed the Imam thus :

"Do you permit me to ask you a question ?"

"Ask me whatever you wish," said the Imam in the typical tone of his ancestors. .

Yahya then asked the Imam, "What is your verdict about a man who indulges in hunting while he is in the state of "Ehram" ? (In the code of religious law, hunting is supposed to be forbidden for a pilgrim).

The Imam at once replied, "Your question is vague and misleading. You should have definitely mentioned whether he hunted within the jurisdiction of the Holy Ka'aba or outside, whether he was literate or illiterate, whether he was a slave or a free citizen, whether he was a minor or a major, whether it was for the first time or he had done it previously also whether, his victim was a bird or some other creature, whether the prey was small or big, whether he hunted in the day or at night, whether the hunter repented for his action or persisted in it, whether he hunted secretly or openly, whether the "Ehram" was for Umra or for Hajj.

Unless all these points are explained, no specific answer can be given to this question."

Qazi Yahya was staggered in listening to these words of the Imam and the entire gathering was dumb-founded. There was no limit to Mamoon's pleasure. He expressed his sentiments of joy and admiration thus, "Bravo! Well done! O Abu Ja'far ! (Ahsanta Ahsanta ya Abu Ja'far), Your learning and attainments are beyond all praise."

As Mamoon wanted that the Imam's opponent be fully exposed, he said to the Imam, "You may also put some questions to Yahya Ibn Aksam."

Then Yahya also reluctantly said to the Imam, "Yes, you may ask me some questions. If I know the answer, I will tell it, otherwise I shall request you to give its answer."

Thereupon the Imam asked a question to which Yahya could not reply. Eventually, the Imam answered his question.

Then Mamoon addressed the audience thus: "Did I not say that the Imam comes of a family which has been chosen by Allah as the repository of knowledge and learning ? Is there anyone in the world who can match even the children of this family ?"

All of them shouted, "Undoubtedly, there is no parallel to Muhammad at-Taqi (A)."

At the same assembly Mamoon wedded his daughter, Ummul Fazl to the Imam and liberally distributed charity and gifts among his subjects as a mark of rejoicing. One year after his marriage, the Imam returned to Medina from Baghdad with his wife and there he set about preaching the commandments of Allah.

Imam 'Ali An-Naqi (A)

Imam 'Ali an-Naqi (A) was born at Surba in the environs of Medina on Friday 15th Zilhajj. 212 A.H.

Imam 'Ali (A), like his father, was also elevated to the rank of an Imam in his childhood. He was six years old when his father Imam Muhammad -at-Taqi (A) died. After the death of Mamoon Rashid. Mo'tasim succeeded him, and was later followed by the Caliph Wasiq Billah. In the first five years of the reign of Wasiq. Imam 'Ali an-Naqi (A) lived peacefully. After Wasiq Billah, Mutawakkil came to power.

Being too occupied in state's affairs. Mutawakkil did not get any time to harass the Imam and his followers for four years. But as soon as he freed himself from state's affairs, he started to molest the Imam.

The Holy Imam devoted himself to the sacred mission of preaching in Medina and thus earned the faith of the people as well as their allegiance and recognition of his great knowledge and attributes. This reputation of the Imam evoked the jealousy and malice of Mutawakkil against him.

The Governor of Medina wrote to Mutawakkil that Imam 'Ali-an-Naqi (A) had been manoeuvring a coup against the government and a multitude of Muslims were pledged to his support. Although enraged by this news, Mutawakkil still preferred the diplomacy of not arresting the Holy Imam. Under the garb of pretended respect and love towards the Imam, he planned to put him under life-imprisonment after inviting him to his palace.

Imam Hasan Al-Askari (A)

Imam Hasan (A) was born at Medina, on Monday, 8th Rabi-ul-Akhar, 232 A.H. He was popularly known as al-Askari.

The Holy Imam Hasan al-Askari (A) spent twenty two years of his life under the patronage of his father, the Holy Imam ‘Ali an-Naqi (A) after whose martyrdom he became his divinely commissioned Imam.

During his times the Abbasid rulers were entangled in political tussles. They, however, very much dreaded the existence of the rightful and divinely ordained Imam of the Holy Prophet, the Holy Imam Hasan al-Askari (A) and knew that the son of this Holy Imam would be the "Mahdi" or "Guide" to humanity for all times until the Day of Judgment.

So these rulers inflicted all sorts of calamities on the Holy Imam and hence the greater part of his life passed in prison and many restrictions were placed on his movements. In spite of this, he were placed on his movements. In spite of this, he always discharged the duties of Imamate with cheer and matchless perseverance.

The Holy Imam was ever busy in imparting religious knowledge and guiding people towards the straight path. History shows that the commentators of the Holy Qur’an have often quoted the interpretation of the verses of the Holy Qur’an from this Holy Imam.

Al-Mo'tamad, the Abbasid ruler of the time, realizing that the world was ringing with the praises of this Holy Imam, became restless with jealousy, and dreading that the people would openly declare their allegiance to the Imam, had him martyred.

Imam Muhammad Al-Mahdi (A)

There existed a good deal of harmony and uniformity between the aspects pertaining to the births of Prophet Muhammad (S), the last Apostle of God and Imam Mahdi (A), the last Imam. Just as the coming of the Holy Prophet was prophesied well in advance by the preceding prophets, similarly the impending news of the gracious birth of Imam, al-Mahdi (A) was foretold by the Holy Prophet (S).

Innumerable traditions in this context, quoted rightly from the Holy Prophet (S), from the glowing contents of many books of Masanid, Sehah and Akhbar, and of Shia scholars, did exist. Many Sunni scholars have accumulated these traditions in complete volumes also, e.g. "Albayan fi Akhbar-Sahib-al-Zaman" by Hafiz Muhammad Ibn Yusuf Shafe'i and "Sehah-e-Abudaud" and "Sunan Ibn Maja". All the above books record the traditions bearing evidence of the coming of this Holy Imam.

He was born on 15th Shaban, 255 A.H. in the city of Samarra. The momentous and singular aspect of his birth greatly resembled those under which the Prophet Moses was born. The birth of Moses (A) had signalled the downfall and extinction of the empire of Pharoah, who had ordered the slaying of all the

newly born male children of Bani Israel. The Abbasid kings were similarly apprehensive of the continuous traditions of the Holy Prophet about the birth of Imam Mahdi (A), who was to bring about a curse to their (Abbasid) very empire.

They were, therefore, lying in ambush to discover the birth of the Imam and so put an end to his life. But the event of the Imam's birth was enveloped and shielded by the same Divine protection and miraculous phenomenon which had marked the historical birth of Prophet Moses (A). His birth remained strictly confidential and his nursery shrouded in secrecy except to a few devotees.

When the mother of the Imam was brought before al-Mo'tamad and inquiries made about the birth of the twelfth Holy Imam (A), she, in order to safe- guard her own life as well as to protect her son, replied that she had never felt the symptoms of maternity and labour pain; so, for the moment, he did not harass her, but did put her under the strict surveillance of Qazi Abu Shorab, entrusting with him the task of killing any child born to her.

Soon after this incident, the Abbasid kingdom passed through a revolutionary phase which greatly bewildered Al-Mo'tamad. He was forced to face the invasion of Sahib al-Zanj, who raided Hejaz and Yemen and let loose the hounds of loot and arson throughout the Abbasid kingdom, subjecting the administration of Baghdad, the capital to utter chaos.

Al-Mo'tamad was, therefore, naturally too occupied with warfare to pay any attention towards the mother of Imam (A), who was consequently released after six months and questioned no further about the birth of the twelfth Holy Imam.

The Holy Imam was brought up by his father Imam Hasan al-Askari (A), the eleventh Imam, who resorted to the same underground and secret measures in rearing his child as Abu Talib had adopted in connection with safe-guarding the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S). He used to take care of his child in one portion of the house for a few days and then shift him to another with a view not to disclose the exact whereabouts of the child.

While Imam Hasan al-Askari (A) kept the birth of the child and the affairs of his infancy a well-guarded secret, he did put him within access of some exclusive devotees and sincere friends in order to familiarize them with their would-be Imam to whom they would pledge their allegiance.

Mentioned below are the few names, quoted from the authentic books of both Sunni and Shia sects, of people who had the honour of having personally seen the Holy Imam Mahdi (A). When Imam Hasan al-Askari's (A) son was born, he named him Muhammad and, on the third day after his birth, bringing forth the child to show him to some of his followers, declared thus :

"Here is my successor and your would-be Imam ! He is the very Qaim to whose reverence your heads will bow down. He will re-appear to fill the earth with blessings and justice after it will have been abourding in sins and vices."

Muawiyah Ibn Hakeem, Muah Muhammad Ibn Ayyub and Muhammad Ibn Usman mentioned that they called upon Imam Hasan al-Askari (A) with a deputation of forty persons. The Holy Imam showed them his newly-born child and said :

"This is your Imam after me! All of you should unanimously submit your allegiance to him and should not allow any controversy on the subject which will lead you to peril! Mind that he will no more be visible to you."

Imam Hasan al-Askari (A) died on the 8th Rabi-ul-Awwal, 260 A.H. and the day marked the inception of his son's Imamate being the source of spiritual, guidance for the whole universe. As, according to God's Will, all the affairs pertaining to the Holy Imam were to remain strictly behind the curtain, he commissioned some of his deputies and ambassadors, who had been looking after the religious affairs from the time of his father to act as the associates between the people and the concealed Imam.

They conveyed the problems and religious queries of the people to the Imam and brought back the verdicts and the answers of the Imam to the people. It was by the Will of God that he disappeared and will again reappear by the Will of God. This will be a prelude to the Day of Judgment.

During the period of the 'absence', it is our duty, to be expecting the appearance of the Imam. We must devise a sound and judicious system of social development based on the Qur'an and present it to the world. We must prove the excellence and efficacy of divine laws to the people, and attract their attention to the divine system.

We must fight superstitions and false beliefs, and pave the way for the establishment of Islamic world government. In the light of the teachings of the Qur'an and traditions we must chalk out a program for solving the world problems and put it at the disposal of world reforms. We must enlighten the thoughts of the people of the world and, at the same time, prepare ourselves for the appearance of the Imam and the emergence of a just world government.

The Followers of Progeny of the Holy Prophet

Those who believe that Imam 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib (A) was the immediate successor of the Holy Prophet are called Shia (Followers). The Shia regard Imam 'Ali (A) and his eleven infallible descendents as their leaders and Imams, and follow them. The true Shia is he who follows the example of Imam 'Ali (A) and other Holy Imams and considers them to be perfect. Imam Muhammad Baqir (A) said to Jabir. ; "O Jabir ! Is it enough for a person to be Shia if he claims that he is a supporter of the House of the Prophets ? By Allah, our supporter is only he who is pious and who obeys Allah. Previously, our supporters (Shia) were known for their humility, honesty, remembrance of Allah, fasting, prayer, being good to their parents and helping the neighbors, the needy, the debtors and the orphans.

They were known for their truthfulness and recitation of the Holy Qur'an. They never spoke slightingly of

anybody. They were trusted by all." Jabir said : "O Son of the Prophet! I'm not aware of anybody who possesses these qualities now-a-days." The Imam said: "O Jabir ! Don't be misled by various beliefs. Do you think it is enough for salvation that one professes to be the supporter of ‘Ali (A) without adherence to the commands of Allah ?

If somebody says that he is the supporter of the Holy Prophet, but does not follow his teachings, he will not be saved, though the Holy Prophet was superior to ‘Ali (A). It is the duty of the Shia to fear Allah and to obey His commands. Allah has no kinship with anybody. Allah likes only those who are pious and who obey His commands. By Allah! There is no way to gain nearness to Allah except obeying Him. We cannot guarantee emancipation from hell. He who obeys Allah is our friend and he who disobeys Him is our enemy. None can become our friend except through piety and good deeds."

Imam Sadiq (A) has said: "Be pious and devout. Be truthful, honest and polite. Behave well with your neighbors. Attract people to the right path through your good behavior and good conduct. Don't bring disgrace to us through your evil deeds.

Prolong then your bowings and prostrations in prayer, for when a man prolongs his bowings and prostrations (Sajda), the Devil is annoyed and perturbed. He cries: "What a shame! These people obey Allah, whereas I disobeyed Him. They prostrate, whereas I abstained from prostration."

On another occasion, the Imam Sadiq (A) said : "The disciples of Jesus (A) were his Shia (means followers, friends and supporters) but they were not better than our Shia. They promised him their support, but did not fulfill their promise and did not fight in the way of Allah.

On the other hand, our Shia, since the demise of the Prophet up till now, have never hesitated to support us. They have made every sacrifice for our sake. They were burnt; they were tortured; they were expelled from their homes, but they did not give up our support."

What We Believe About Other Muslims

Though we differ with the Sunni on the question of Caliphate and Succession to the Holy Prophet, we consider all Muslims to be our brethren and co-religionists. Our God is the same, our Prophet is the same, our Religion is the same, our Book is the same and our Ka'aba is the same. We consider their honor and progress to be our honor and progress, their success and victory to be our success and victory and their disgrace and defeat to be our disgrace and defeat. We share with them both happiness and grief .

In this respect we have been inspired by our great leader, Imam ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib (A). If he wanted he could defend his right to Caliphate, but in the higher interests of Islam, he, not only abstained from fighting the caliphs, but also on critical occasions rendered help to them. He never hesitated to take any action in the interest of the Muslims.

We believe that the only way how the Muslim world can live as a strong nation, regain its past glory and get rid of foreign domination is that the Muslim keep themselves away from dissension and discord, concentrate their energies on the achievement of goals and take collective steps in the way of the glory of Islam and the progress and advancement of the Muslims.

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