(Ali Ibn Musa al-Rida (Peace be Upon him

Imam Ali ar-Rida was brought up under the holy guidance of his father for thirty-five 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 ar-Rida was a living example of the piety of the great Prophet and the chivalry and generosity of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Succession:

Imam Musa al-Kazim was well aware of the aggressive designs of the government in power against the Imamate and therefore, during his lifetime he declared Imam ar-Rida as his successor in the presence of hundred and seventy-one prominent religious divines and called upon his sons and his family to submit to him and refer to him in all matters after him. He also left behind a written document declaring the succession of Imam ar-Rida duly signed and endorsed by not less than sixteen prominent persons. All these necessary steps were taken by the great Imam to avoid any confusion that may have arisen after his death.

Imamate :

Imam Musa al-Kazim was poisoned while he was still in prison and expired on 25th Rajab 183 AH, and on the same day Imam ar-Rida was declared as the Eighth Imam of the Muslim world. Imam ar-Rida had the great task before him of coming out with the correct interpretation of the Holy Qur'an; specially under the most unfavourable circumstances prevailing under the government of Harun ar-Rashid. Many belonging to the faith were imprisoned and those who were free and could not be jailed faced untold atrocities and sufferings.

Imam ar-Rida, of course, stamped his impression upon his age by carrying on the mission of the Great Prophet in a peaceful manner even during the most chaotic periods, and it was mostly due to his efforts that the teachings of the Holy Prophet and his descendants became widespread. Imam ar-Rida had inherited great qualities of head and heart from his ancestors. He was a versatile person and had full command over many languages. Ibnu 'l-Athir al-Jazari penned very rightly that Imam ar-Rida was undoubtedly the greatest sage, saint and scholar of the second century (AH). Once, on his way to Khurasan, when he (the Imam) was brought by force by the guards of al-Ma'mun from Medina, he arrived on horseback at Nayshabur. Myriads of people gathered round him and all roads were over crowded as they had come to

meet and see their great Imam. Abu Dhar'ah ar-Razi and Muhammad ibn Aslam at-Tusi, the two great scholars of the day, stepped out of the crowd and begged the Imam to halt there for a moment so that the faithful may be able to hear his voice. They also requested the Imam to address the gathering. The Imam granted the request and in his brief address told the mammoth gathering the real interpretation of la ilaha illa Allah. Quoting Allah, he continued to say that the kalimah is the fortress of Allah and whoever entered the fortress saved himself from His wrath. He paused for a moment and continued that there were also a few conditions to entitle the entrance to the fortress and the greatest of all conditions was sincere and complete submission to the Imam of the day; and very boldly and frankly explained to the people that any disloyalty to the Prophet and his descendants would withdraw the right of the entrance to the fortress.

The only way to earn Almighty Allah's pleasure was to obey the Prophet and his progeny and that was the only path to salvation and immortality. The above-mentioned incident speaks clearly of the great popularity of Imam ar-Rida, and the love, loyalty and respect the Muslims gave their beloved Imam. al-Ma'mun, the king, was conscious of the fact that he would not survive for long if he also did not express his loyalty to the great leader and his intelligence department had made it clear to him that the Iranian people were truly and sincerely loyal to the Imam and he could only win them over if he also pretended to give respect and sympathetic consideration to Imam 'Al; ar-Rida. al-Ma'mun was a very shrewd person. He made a plan to invite Imam ar-Rida and to offer him the heirship to the throne. The Imam was summoned by a royal decree and was compelled, under the circumstances, to leave Medina - where he was living a quiet life - and present himself at the royal court of al-Ma'mun.

On his arrival, al-Ma'mun showed him hospitality and great respect, then he said to him: "I want to get rid of myself of the caliphate and vest the office in you." But ar-Rida refused his offer. Then al-Ma'mun repeated his offer in a letter saying: "If you refuse what I have offered you, then you must accept being the heir after me." But again ar-Rida refused his offer vigorously. al-Ma'mun summoned him. He was alone with al-Fadl ibn Sahl, the man with two offices (i. e., military and civil). There was no one else in their gathering. al-Ma'mun said to ar-Rida, "I thought it appropriate to invest authority over the Muslims in you and to relieve myself of the responsibility by giving it to you." When again ar-Rida refused to accept his offer, al-Ma'mun spoke to him as if threatening him for his refusal. In his speech he said, " 'Umar ibn al-Khattab made a committee of consultation (shura) (to appoint a successor). Among them was your forefather, the Commander of the faithful, 'Al; ibn Abi Talib. ('Umar) stipulated that any of them who opposed the decision should be executed. So there is no escape for you from accepting

what I want from you.

I will ignore your rejection of it." In reply, ar-Rida said: "I will agree to what you want of me as far as succession is concerned on condition that I do not command, nor order, nor give legal decisions, nor judge, nor appoint, nor dismiss, nor change anything from how it is at present." al-Ma'mun accepted all of that. On the day when al-Ma'mun ordered to make the pledge of allegiance to ar-Rida, one of the close associates of ar-Rida, who was present, narrates, "On that day I was in front of him. He looked at me while I was feeling happy about what had happened. He signaled me to come closer. I went closer to him and he said so that no one else could hear, 'Do not occupy your heart with this matter and do not be happy about it. It is something which will not be achieved.' " Quoting al-'Allamah ash-Shibli from his book al-Ma'mun, we get a very clear picture of how al-Ma'mun decided to offer his leadership to Imam ar-Rida. "Imam ar-Rida was the Eighth Imam and al-Ma'mun 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 a the rightful heir to the throne. Earlier in 200 AH 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 AH telling them in categorical terms that none of the 'Abbasids deserved to succeed him. He demanded allegiance to Imam ar-Rida from the people in this very meeting and declared that royal robes would be green in future, the color which had the unique distinction of being that of the Imam's dress. A Royal decree was published saying that Imam ar-Rida will succeed al-Ma'mun. 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 imparting the true Islamic conception of the Prophet' s teachings and the Holy Qur'an.

He spent most of his time praying to God and serving the people. Taking full advantage of the concessions given to him by virtue of his elevated position in the royal court, he organized the majalis (meetings) commemorating the martyrdom of the martyrs of Karbala'. These majalis were first held during the days of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq, but Imam ar-Rida gave the majalis a new impetus by encouraging those poets who wrote effective poems depicting the moral aspects of the tragedy and the suffering of Imam Husayn and his companions. al-Ma'mun had been very scared of the growing popularity of the Imam and he

had appointed him as his heir to the throne only for the fulfillment of his own most ambitious and sinister designs and getting the Imam's endorsement to his tricky plans.

But the Imam naturally refused to give his endorsement to any such plans which were against the teaching of Islam. al-Ma'mun therefore became very disappointed with him and decided once and for all to check his growing popularity and ensuring his own survival by acting according to the old traditions of killing the Imam. Wanting to do it in a more subtle manner, he invited the Imam to dinner, and fed him poisoned grapes. The Imam died on 17th Safar 203 AH, he was buried in Tus (Mashhad) and his Grand Shrine speaks well for the great personality the Imam possessed. Myriads of Muslims visit his Shrine every year to pay their homage to this Imam.

al-Imam ar-Rida, peace be Upon him, said:

Doing seven things without doing the seven other things is self-mockery: asking for forgiveness from Allah verbally without repenting with the heart; asking for Allah's help without undertaking any effort; making a firm resolution to do something without taking due precautions; asking Allah for Paradise without enduring the related hardships; beseeching deliverance from the Hell-fire without refraining from lusts; remembering Allah without anticipating to encounter Him.