

Imam ar-Ridha', A Historical and Biographical Research

*Biography of the 8th Imam (a), his characteristics, role, activities, works,
counsels and select traditions (hadith).*

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Introduction

Imam Abul-Hasan II, Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha', is the eighth in the series of the Imams from the Household of the Prophet in whose personalities all the standards of greatness have been personified; so, they became its most magnificent example and most genuine fountainhead.

His life was characterized by a somber tragic stamp from its grievous beginning till its painful end. Bitterness seldom parted from his soul during the periods he lived, i.e. the reign of Harun al-Rashid and the beginning of the regime of al-Ma'mun, the latter's son.

At the outset of his life, he witnessed the norms of trials and tribulations which filled the life of his father Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.)¹, the patient Imam whose mere existence was the cause of worry for the ruling government and the source of its suspicious doubts despite his peaceful stance, distancing himself from any causes for a direct confrontation therewith.

The Abbaside caliph al-Mahdi III ordered the Imam (a.s.) to go to Baghdad so that the caliph would secure from him promises and pledges that he would not oppose his authority or mobilize a revolution against him to put an end to his regime, and the Imam (a.s.) did not go back home till al-Mahdi joined his Lord and his shoulders bent by the load of the regime's sins and immoral actions to be succeeded by al-Hadi.

The latter tried to put an end to the life of the Imam, but he did not live long enough, so al-Rashid acceded to the throne, thus the parching flames of the tragedy started incinerating the existence of the Alawis headed by Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), and the dungeons of Baghdad, Basrah, Wasit and other cities could not limit the regime's passion for seeking revenge against its opponents.

Its antagonistic attitudes caused it to invent norms of revenge worse than what those dungeons could provide, such that humanity shudders from. Instructions issued by the government required the builders to fill the hollow building cylinders and columns with the still alive bodies of the elite among Alawi youths and non-Alawi sympathizers and to cause them to die thus out of suffocation.

This ugly method of eliminating the government's opponents was not something invented by al-Rashid, but it was a continuation of a custom started by al-Mansour to seek revenge against some Alawi youths as history tells us.²

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) received the lion's share of the atrocities suffered by the Alawis during that period of time. Al-Rashid imprisoned him due to his being the top Alawi leader, subjecting him to extreme pressures at his horrible dungeons for fourteen years according to some accounts till he became tired of thinking of methods and means of inflicting pain on him; therefore, he ordered al-Sindi ibn Shahik, through his minister Yahya ibn Khalid, who was in charge of the last prison in which the Imam was imprisoned, to poison him and rid him of the presence of one who robbed him of his tranquility and peace of mind. Meanwhile, the Imam (a.s.) was painfully and bitterly watching closely the bloody events which consumed many of his own family and kin.

He was destined to relive the tragedy through which his father had lived from its beginning to the end without being able to decrease its intensity, for he was powerless to do so. Maybe he even awaited the same fate at the hands of the ruling gang, for the dispute was one of a conflict of principles between the rulers on one hand and the Alawis on the other; it was not a personality conflict.

After the martyrdom of his father and the perishing of al-Rashid, then the ending of the days of al-Amin in the way they ended, and al-Ma'mun receiving the reins of government, the winds of yet another tragedy of a different type started blowing at the Imam (a.s.). It was a tragedy the Imam (a.s.) lived with extreme bitterness.

Al-Ma'mun, due to certain political reasons which we will discuss separately in this research, decided to use the Imam (a.s.) as a bargaining chip between him and the Abbasides in Baghdad on one hand, and between him and the Alawis on the other, and also between him and the Shi'as of Khurasan as well.

The ploy of relinquishing the throne was foiled when the Imam (a.s.) refused to accede to it. Then he was forced to play a role in the masquerade of the succession to the throne. We are here concerned about dispelling some of the ambiguity which shrouded it, the ambiguity which dragged many researchers into a helter-skelter situation the results of which became obscured from their superficial sight the scope of which did not exceed the skimming of the surface, nor did they take the trouble to delve deeply into the depths of their research.

It is worth mentioning here that when the Imam (a.s.) refused to accept the caliphate from the abdicating caliph, al-Ma'mun, or to take charge of the post of heir to the throne, he had no reason except his own awareness of the real depth of the goal al-Ma'mun anticipated to achieve by his plan, and that the desire to abdicate was not genuine enough to be taken seriously; rather, it was a political maneuver whereby al-Ma'mun desired to perfect his game during a particular period of time, a game which was dictated by political circumstances posing serious threats to his seat of government. It was a situation on which the very destiny of al-Ma'mun depended.

The expected finale was thereafter enacted when al-Ma'mun completed his acting part, which he had rehearsed beforehand, perfecting the playing of his intricate role in such dexterity and skill which secured a period of tranquility for his regime, something which he could not have otherwise achieved had he not done so, as we will discuss later in this research.

In addition to the above, we shall attempt to deal with the comprehensive aspects of the life of the Imam (a.s.) so that the picture becomes clear to us when we wish to review the life of a great Imam such as Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

Muhammad Jawad Fadlallah

Notes

1. Acronyms of Alaihis Salam (peace be upon him).
2. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 4, p. 375. He said: 'Al-Mansour Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn al-Hasan was brought in, and he was the most handsome man people ever saw. He asked him, 'Are you the one nicknamed the yellow silk?' He answered, 'Yes.' He said, 'I shall certainly kill you in a manner which I have not employed to anyone else,' then he ordered him to be placed in a cylinder and it was built up on him while he was still alive; thus, he died inside it." Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 136, indicates likewise.

Preface: Our Belief in Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.)

Imam ar-Ridha' is one of the bed-rocks of Islamic thought and one of its main rich sources of knowledge. After the demise of his father Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), the secrets of the Divine Message and the keys to its treasures became attainable to him, so he quenched his thirst there from and derived the source of his intellectual contribution from the same.

He is one of the Twelve Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) who enriched the Islamic thought with various types of knowledge due to the knowledge they instructed their students to write down, or in providing their answers to the questions put forth to them by others, or to what history has narrated to us of their scientific and theological discourses with followers of other Muslim sects.

The distinction which characterized the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and which attracts our attention when we study their biographies is the fact that they were obligated to others to provide them with knowledge while nobody was obligated to accept it from them. This is a divine bliss with which God endowed them in order to achieve through them the establishment of His Proof against His creation, something with which they were credited even by the rulers among their contemporary opponents and by the most prominent thinkers among their contemporaries.

Supporting this phenomenon is the fact that some sciences and their details were not distinctly clear during their time, nor were their effects obvious, but they became clear and their ambiguities were dispelled by the teaching of the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) such as the science of chemistry of which Imam Ja'far As-Sadiq (a.s.) is considered as the very first pioneer and founder of its principles and rules, and the science of medicine about which Imam ar-Ridha' provides us, in his letter to al-Ma'mun, with a glorious system and an innovative approach in the way he explained its particularities and regulations, in addition to various other sciences of which their legacy is full and to which their contribution surpassed that of anyone else in setting their corner-stones and in pointing out their various requirements.

None among the contemporary scientists was credited for being the instructor of Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) in chemistry, or of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in medicine. Rather, it was the fountainhead established for them by their grandfather, Bearer of the Message (S) ¹, while they inherited it son from father.

We may notice that the Imams (a.s.), upon being asked about the source of their knowledge of the answers to the questions put forth to them, refer it to their own particular comprehension of the Book (Qur'an), or to what they derived from the book of their mother Fatima (a.s.), or to what they learned from their forefathers who in turn learned it from the Messenger of God (S). They did not refer it to the narration of a sahabi of the Prophet or a tabi'i or to any other learned scholar or man of knowledge.

Their familiarity with various branches of knowledge and with all norms of learning in general was a cause for the nation's admiration of and reverence for them. They were granted the final say in their disputes, in solving a problem which may have then risen among their contemporary

scholars or men of learning. Every time they were asked about something, they would produce an answer for it in such a most astonishing easily convincing manner which unties the knot of what is complex, turning it into a commonsense knowledge, or in turning the theoretical into a practical necessity, without any ambiguity or confusion.

Such a unique distinction was not shared besides them by anyone from among the scholars of the nation or its wise men despite their various ranks in knowledge and degrees of wisdom and power of reasoning.

Suffices us for a proof a magnificent dialogue which is recorded in the books of history and biography between Imam al-Jawad (a.s.), who was then a child, and Yahya ibn Aktham, the supreme judge (or judge of judges) of the then Abbaside regime in the meeting prepared by al-Ma'mun to underscore distinction and superiority of the Imam over all others when al-Ma'mun faced opposition to his decision to marry the Imam to his daughter Ummul-Fadl due to his young age.

He was presumed to be in need of someone to educate him and teach him theology. The conclusion of the dialogue was a victory for the very young Imam in his stance and the shrinking of the judge and the crowd of learned scholars and pillars of *Fiqh* and Sunnah and their admission of his distinction and the greatness of his status.

Nobody ever reported that any Imam was slow in providing the answer to any question put forth to him, a question which dealt with various branches of knowledge and with different issues, despite the fact that some of them were actually not old enough to provide such answers.

The Amali of Sayyid al-Murtada narrates the following:

Abu Hanifa said: "I saw once Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) as a young boy in the corridor of his father's house and I asked him: 'Where does a stranger among you respond to the call of nature if he has to?' He looked up at me and said: 'He goes behind a wall, hides from the view of the neighbor, keeps a distance from running rivers, residential sewers, highways, mosques, without facing the Qibla or leaving it behind him; then he turns, raises, and deposits as he pleases.'" Abu Hanifa continues to say: "Having heard these answers, I saw him to be a nobler person than I first thought, and his status grew greater. Then I asked him: 'May my life be sacrificed for yours; what is the source of renunciation?' He looked up at me and said: 'Sit down and I tell you about it.' So I sat down, and he said this to me: 'Renunciation comes either from the servant, or his Lord, or from both. If it were from the Almighty God, He is more just and fair than renouncing or wronging His servant or punishing him for what he did not do. And if it were to come from both of them, He would be his accomplice, and the strong One is more apt to do justice to His weak servant. If it comes from the servant alone, he is to bear its burden, and he should be the one to forbid, and for him is the reward and punishment, and for him were both Paradise and Hell prepared.' I said (citing the Holy Qur'an): '... a progeny, one from another...'"².

But some Imams, such as Imam al-Jawad, Imam al-Hadi, and Imam al-Askari (a.s.), were not old enough to be acquainted with various branches of knowledge and fields of arts, had we claimed that their knowledge was the product of the tutoring of tutors or the teaching of teachers, but they were a

progeny, one from another, as Abu Hanifa said, that derived knowledge from the substance of the Message and the Fountainhead of Prophethood. That was a distinction for which the Almighty chose them from among His creation in order to make them light-poles of the path of guidance, and to make the word of faith and righteousness through them the uppermost throughout the world.

Al-Tabrani, in his *Al-Tarikh al-Kabir*, and al-Rafi'i in his *Musnad*, depending on the authority of Ibn Abbas, quote the Messenger of God (S) saying:

"Whoever is pleased to live the way I have lived and to die the way I shall die, to live in the Garden of Eden which my Lord planted, let him emulate my Progeny after me and follow the example of my Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) after my demise, for they are my descendants; they were created out of my own mould and were blessed with my own power of comprehension and knowledge; woe unto those who deny their distinction in my nation, those who sever their ties with my loins! May the Almighty deprive them of my intercession."³

Imam Ali (a.s.) says: "I and the elite among my descendants, and the virtuous among my progeny, are the most clement when young, the most learned when old."⁴

Some historians and researchers, having exhausted themselves in the attempt to explain this phenomenon in a way which seems reasonable to them, may try to suppose that some Imams had mentors and instructors to educate them. They claimed that Imam Zainul-Abidin, Imam al-Baqir, and Imam As-Sadiq, peace be upon them, were tutored by some Sahaba and *Tabi'in*, without relying on any historical document except mere conjecture, going to extremities in their guesswork and presumption.

What proves the fallacy of such presumptions and allegations is that whenever the Imams were questioned about something, they would not base their answers on what any of the Sahaba or *Tabi'in* had said, but on one of their own ancestors up to the Messenger of God (S), or to the books of knowledge with which they were distinguished and which they inherited from their grandfather the Messenger of God (S), something which anyone who researches their legacy and is acquainted with their statements comes to know. And it may quite be the case that some of them would state so very clearly which supports our own conclusion.

Yet if we suppose that some Imams did indeed attend the sessions of some of those Sahaba or *Tabi'in*, their attendance does not by any means indicate that they became their students, or that they took them as their own mentors, for one of the outcomes of tutorship at that time was the narration of *hadith*, whereas it was never reported that any Imam narrated *hadith* from any source other than his own forefathers.

If they did in fact narrate incidents through other avenues, such as the avenues of the Sahaba or *Tabi'in*, such narration was not related in any way to the sciences of the Islamic legislative system (*Shari'a*), or to any other art; rather, it dealt with matters related to the biography of the Prophet (S), or in their own process to prove a point against those who did not follow them by citing what the ancestors of such non-followers had themselves narrated.

From such a stand-point, we can refer the reason for some Sunni traditionists who considered the *hadith* of Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) as "weak," thus neglecting to record it, to the same argument, and we can also conclude after reading their statements that Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) was not tutored by any mentor mentioned with reverence by them.

For example, in his *Tabaqat*, Ibn Sa'd, while discussing Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.), said, "He narrated a great deal of *hadith*; he is not considered as an authority on *hadith* and the *hadith* he narrated is considered weak. The reason for this is that he was once asked whether he had learned the *ahadith* he narrated from his father, and he answered in the affirmative; on another occasion, he was likewise asked, and his answer was that he had read them in his (father's) books."

Abu Bakr ibn Ayyash was asked once, "Why did you not learn *hadith* from Ja'far and you were his contemporary?" He answered, "I asked him once whether he had himself heard the *ahadith* which he narrated, and he denied that saying that it was a narration heard by his forefathers."⁵

What was "wrong" with the *hadith* narrated by Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) according to Ibn Sa'd is that some of what the Imam narrated had been what he had read in the books of his father, rather than learning it from others, and since it was not known which *hadith* he had learned was narrated from his forefathers and which was learned from others, he decided to reject all of them on that account.

But this cannot be an acceptable excuse for him, especially since a great deal of what the Imam narrated did indeed give credit to others, and since his father was quoting the *hadith* his own forefathers had heard from the Prophet (S); so, why did Ibn Sa'd reject even such *ahadith*?

As regarding his excuse for not accepting the Imam's *hadith* due to its abundance, we cannot understand such an excuse at all; had this been the case, he would not have narrated the abundant *hadith* of Abu Huraira and his likes who attributed more *hadith* to the Messenger of God (S) than was actually reported by those who kept company with the Messenger for a much longer period of time, and who were much closer to him, than they themselves did. But the presence of the element of bias and prejudice does indeed interfere when someone makes an assessment, causing the person calculating to miscalculate.

Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) is not harmed by Ibn Sa'd considering his *hadith* as "weak" just as do Abu Bakr ibn Ayyash and Yahya ibn Sa'id. The latter goes further than that by saying: "... and I personally have a great deal of doubt about him," while discussing the Imam's *hadith*. Had Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) narrated *hadith* from Abu Huraira, Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan, or Marwan ibn al-Hakam, he would have been afforded the highest pinnacle of reverence by these persons, but the "fault" of his narrations is that they were narrated by his forefathers and were derived from their books the knowledge of which was derived directly from the Messenger of God (S).

The statements of these individuals, anyway, lead us to the conclusion that his narratives were heard from his own forefathers, rather than being quotations from others; otherwise, they would have indicated who those

"others" were. All in all, it supports our view that he and the rest of the Imams did not have mentors besides their own fathers.

Our belief in the Imams is not, as some would like to state, due to their knowledge of the unknown, or to their independent right to legislate, but due to their being conveyers on behalf of the Bearer of the Message of what is obscure to the nation of the secrets and implications of the Message, the custodians of the particularities of the legislative system, the ones who are most familiar with the rules and their implementation.

We may grasp all of this from the sacred *hadith* which was produced and verified by the masters of *hadith* and Sunnah from both sects. He (S), in the wording of Ahmed, has said:

"I am about to be called upon and respond, and I am leaving with you the Two Weighty Things: the Book of God, and my Progeny. The Book of God is like a rope extended from heavens to earth, and my Progeny are my Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), and the Most Knowing has told me that they both shall never part from each other till they meet me by the Pool; so, see how you shall fare with them after me."⁶

According to al-Tirmithi and al-Nisai, he has also said, "O people! I have left with you that which, as long as you uphold to, will never suffer you to stray, and that is, the Book of God and my Progeny, members of my Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.)."

Tabrani adds the following to the above: "So, do not go ahead of them else you should perish, nor should you teach them, for they are more knowledgeable than you are."

Ibn Hajar has said: "This proves that anyone among them who is qualified for lofty positions and theological offices should be preferred over all others."⁷

The clarity of this *hadith* does not need any detailed explanation, nor does it require precise interpretation and instruction, for the Book is the first source of guidance, and the Progeny, the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) (members of the Prophet's household) are its second source, and the nation is required to uphold to their path in order to secure for itself to stay away from the paths of misguidance.

Put in a clearer way, we say that this *hadith* implies in its context that Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) enjoy a unique distinction, that they by themselves are independent of the achievements of others, for the Prophet (S) made them peers only of the Holy Qur'an in explaining the contents of the Message and the facts related thereto. This cannot be logical if we presume their reliance on others, for those "others" would then be more eligible to be equal to the Book of God than them.

Had it been otherwise, why did not the Prophet (S) choose the Sahaba and their followers to be peers of the Book other than the Progeny or in addition to them?

Other narrators have reported this *hadith* in a different way of wording as in Malik's Mawti where a narrator states saying: "Malik told me that it came to his knowledge that the Messenger of God (S) said, 'I have left for you two Things; as long as you uphold to them, you shall never stray, and these are: the Book of God, and the Sunnah of His Prophet.'"

In his Al Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, Ibn Hajar narrates it, taking its narration for granted ⁸. Al-Tabrani, too, quoted it in his al-Awsat, and so did Ibn Hisham in his Seerat without mentioning his references. All of these authors may have all relied while quoting it on the Mawti which mentioned it without its isnad.

What is quite unusual is that Professor Muhammad Abu Zuhra, in his work Al-Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.), states that the Sunni references which narrated the *hadith* with the wording of "my Sunnah" are more reliable than those which narrated it with "my Itrat (Progeny)," despite the fact that only Ibn Malik's Mawti narrates the *hadith* with the word "Sunnati (i.e. my Sunnah)." The other three books which quoted it with the same wording of "Sunnati" also narrated it with the wording "Itrati" as well.

As regarding the books which narrated it in the wording "Itrati," these comprise most books of *hadith*, exegesis (*tafsir*), and tradition such as Muslim's Sahih, al-Darimi's Sunan, Abu Dawud's Sunan, Ibn Maja's Sunan, al-Nisai's Khasais, Ahmed's Musnad, al-Hakim's Mustadrak, al-Tabari's Dhakhair and also Hilyat al-Awlia, Kanzul 'Ummal, in addition to the *tafsir* books of al-Razi, al-Tha'alibi, al-Nishapuri, al-Khazin, Ibn Kathir, and many others.

It was narrated through Sunni authorities in thirty-two *ahadith* by more than twenty companions of the Prophet (S) as Ibn Hajar states. Through Shi'a avenues, it was narrated in eighty-two *ahadith*. Despite all this, Professor Abu Zuhra does not find in these books and avenues, some of which are held to be the most authentic, and despite this consecutive narration which not too many other *ahadith* enjoy..., what brings him comfort with and confidence in this *hadith*!

Yet, a narration taken for granted or supported by one documentation, one which is not reported except by one single source, is considered by the professor to be "most authentic," bypassing all the consecutive narration supporting its rival narratives and an almost total consensus agreement regarding their authenticity...

Despite all of this, Professor Abu Zuhra considers himself to be "subjective," and what he writes is inspired only by innocent knowledge rather than dictated by personal bias; therefore, he presumes himself to record only what is dictated by the balances of justice and equity, and we shall have a lengthy discussion of him in our forthcoming book Al-Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) in which we shall examine a degree of his own trespassing beyond these very limits and will shed a light on the bias and fanaticism his views are charged with.

There is a point I would like to tackle in this discourse: it is the deliberate vicious policy of ignoring the Imams of the Prophet's Household followed by the adherents of other sects while discussing views and debating their proofs. While you find them giving ample attention to the narrations reported through the companions of the Prophet and those who followed suit in their footsteps, and to their own, relying on them as proofs and bases of argument, even going to as far as presuming that their own additional contribution is a Sunnah to be emulated, these same individuals, when it comes to the Imams from the Prophet's own family, stop short of discussing

their views and the narrations which they had narrated or were narrated about them.

This is so despite the fact that the founders of these sects, such as Abu Hanifa, Malik, Sufyan al-Thawri, Abu Ayyub al-Sajistani and others, who are considered as the creative pioneers who inspired the outset of these sects, were actually graduates of the school of Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) who was one of the Imams of the Prophet's family. Even Abu Hanifa used to be of the view that the reason why he was in the vanguard of his peers was due to his being a student of Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.), and history has recorded his famous statement: "Without those two years, al-Nu'man (Abu Hanifa) would have been annihilated,"⁹ meaning thereby the period he lived as a student in the Imam's school, and also his other statement when he was asked about the best Faqih he ever saw; he said: "Ja'far ibn Muhammad (As-Sadiq, A.S.)."

History has preserved a great deal of the statements of Sunni imams and renown personalities giving credit to Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) and other Imams from the Prophet's family which, all in all, lead one to realize their superiority over others and the need of those "others" for their knowledge. Yet, despite all this, we find al-Bukhari in his Sahih abstaining from considering a narration as authentic for no reason other than the fact that its chain of narrators ends up with Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) about whom he has some "doubts."

In Tahtheeb al-Tahtheeb, Ibn Hajar says that the difficulty in distinguishing what is authentic and what is not forced al-Bukhari not to report any of his (As-Sadiq's) *hadith*¹⁰. Yet Ibn Hajar did not tell us how al-Bukhari was able to distinguish between what was authentic and what was not of the *hadith* Abu Hurairah and other fabricators and inventors of *hadith* had reported.

He may find for himself the excuse that the companions were all equitable which is a justification worse than the error being justified due to the fact that this is simply a false pretext since the behavior of some of those companions and their exchanging of charges of deviation and counter-charges undermined such claim of "equitability."

We cannot understand an explanation for this odd phenomenon except prejudice and the influence of the standing sectarian environment which was charged with the venom of grudge and bitter animosity towards the Household of the Prophet (S), the environment which is but an extension of desperate efforts of Mu'awiya and his agents, the caliphs of iniquity, who succeeded him in widening the gap they created between the masses of the Muslim nation and the members of the family of the Prophetic mission and their practical isolation from general populace whose conduct cannot remain on the Straight Path without that family, according to the declaration of their great grandfather the Greatest Prophet (S) as stated in the previously quoted *hadith* and in other *ahadith* which fill the books of *hadith* and Sunnah of both parties.

Other than this, how else can you explain al-Bukhari's odd refusal to quote Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) while he, at the same time, does not hesitate to quote individuals such as Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan, Marwan ibn al-Hakam,

Imran ibn Hattan who hailed Ibn Muljim for murdering the Commander of the Faithful (a.s.), Umer ibn Sa'd who instigated the murder of Imam al-Husayn (a.s.) and others who were the social outcasts of the nation and the most immoral among them?

How else can you explain what al-Sayyuti meant when he said that there was nothing wrong with the *hadith* narrated by Imam al-Hasan al-'Askari (a.s.) except that his narration of a virtue of Fatima al-Zahra (a.s.) did not agree with his own "scholarly" taste, and that for this reason the narration was considered a fabrication?! ¹¹ .

It was destined that the plot to isolate the Imams from among the Prophet's family from public affairs should enjoy a total success during the epochs of the Umayyad and Abbaside ruling dynasties barring brief periods due to certain political factors. During those brief periods, some such Imams (a.s.) were able to quench the scholarly and intellectual thirst of their students. Despite the scarcity of such periods and their short span of time, those Imams were able to benefit the nation in the areas of the secrets of branches of knowledge and intricacies of arts with which they filled numerous books and chronicles.

The stronger factor which prompted the regime to take a negative stance towards the Imams of the Prophet's family is that these Imams and their followers were never convinced that such a regime was legitimate or that those who were holding its reins were qualified for leading the nation. According to them, the conduct of these "leaders" did not represent the adequate conduct of message-bearers who rule with a commitment to carry out the responsibilities of such a message so that the nation would follow in their footsteps and correct its path should it at all deviate from the straight path.

This lack of conviction caused them a great deal of trouble during their lifetime despite their outward toleration of the government, and those troubles were not confined to them alone but were extended to their Shi'as and followers whose share was the lion's.

It is important to point out here the extent of the impact of this negative stance of the government towards these Imams and their disciples on the writings of the narrators and recorders of *hadith*, for the pens of the latter were poisoned by the motives and ill intentions of the rulers; therefore, we find them excluding the narrations and *ahadith* if one of their narrators happens to be a Shi'a reporter or traditionist even if he enjoyed the highest degree of reliability and authenticity.

Their only excuse is that he was simply a Shi'a; therefore, they make the false claim that the narration was not authentic because one of its narrators was so and so, i.e. a Shi'a, or one who practiced Shi'aism secretly, or a foul "*Rafidi*," or apply to him some other bad name, thus revealing their sectarian prejudice which overturns the balances of a conscientious investigation and insight upside down.

Contrariwise, Shi'as who followed those Imams applied a different criterion wherein the judgment regarding the authenticity of a narration or the lack thereof according to them was to ascertain the truthfulness or

untruthfulness of the narrator regardless of his sect or school of thought. Upon such a premise, the authenticity or the lack thereof was based.

There were numerous narrations among whose chain of narrators were non-Shi'as, yet they were accepted and applied by the Shi'as who even based their own juristic judgment upon them. There is no room here to elaborate on this topic; those who wish to investigate the extent of accuracy of this fact are referred to the books of their famous dignitaries to see for themselves.

This proves the fact that the attitude of Sunnis towards their Shi'a brethren regarding scholarly borrowing and loaning was not subject, during the time of the Imams (a.s.), to sectarian or political motives for these took place during later periods when arguments about sects appeared, and the science of *kalam* was discussed in detail, and partisans demonstrated their bias to what they thought to have proved the accuracy of their own sect.

All this led to the widening of the gap of dissension which even caused violence to erupt among the followers of various sects. It even led one party to call the other "*Kafir*" (infidel) and corrupt, justifying the spilling of the blood of its adherents. The sad tales of such bloodshed are bitterly narrated by history.

Add to this the deliberate attempt by the rulers to instigate such ugly prejudices and pave the path for those whose objectives were malicious to spew their venom and nurture thereby the elements of dissension in order to keep the nation from questioning the legality of the corrupt government or questioning its iniquities and injustices, and in order to prolong its own enjoyment and pleasure without anyone questioning what it was actually doing.

Yet after all this, why do the Shi'as adhere to the sect of this particular Household rather than any other Islamic sect?

The answer to this question, in our view, is quite clear. It does not require an effort to find it out and simplify its arguments.

Man, by nature, is bent upon selecting the best path when approaching crossroads in order to secure salvation for him and attain the goal he aspires to achieve. He has to think long enough before making a move in order to know exactly which path he has to take so that he will not be confused while seeking the truth. It is only natural that man, in order to define his safest path, should refer to one who is familiar with his approaches and avenues when, at his outset, he stands confused as to where to start from.

We may not differ while defining the "expert" who should be followed when he defines the path for us in this regard, for such an "expert" is none other than the Bearer of the Message and its Promoter (S), and we have to follow his directives and instructions in this regard. When we fail in our attempt to know what we need to know, we have to refer to the complete definitions followed in this regard which would take us to the desired result.

The texts narrated about the Custodian of the *Shari'a* may suffice for us when we seek such a definition since he himself had outlined for us the best path we have to choose. In addition to his tradition of the Two Weighty Things in which he described the Book and the Progeny as the dividing line

between guidance and misguidance, there is another explanatory tradition with a more explicit text in which he (S) is quoted as saying:

"The similitude of my Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) among you is like the Ark of Noah: whoever boards it is saved, and whoever lags behind it is drowned."¹²

Al-Tabrani adds another: "The similitude of my Household among you is like the Gate of Hitta for the Children of Israel: whoever enters is forgiven."¹³ The clarity of this tradition in defining the safest path needs no explanation since he made salvation dependant upon following them, making the sinking into the calamities of misguidance an indication of lagging behind them.

Another tradition states: "Stars are protectors of the inhabitants of earth against drowning, and my Progeny (Ahl al-Bayt, (a.s.) are the protectors of my nation against dissension in the creed; therefore, if a tribe among the Arabs differs from them (in religious matters), it would then become the party of the devil."¹⁴

Having quoted these traditions, Ibn Hajar comments thus:

"The reason for comparing them with the ark is that whoever loves them and holds them in high esteem as means to thanking God Who granted them such honors, following the guidance of the learned men among them, is saved from dissension, and whoever abstains from doing so is drowned into the seas of ingratitude and annihilated at the crossroads of tyranny."¹⁵

Besides, they were the overflowing fountainhead which produced the leading scholars and founders of schools of thought; so, what stops us from emulating these men by staying away from what they themselves had stayed away from? Add to this the consensus view regarding these men's integrity and immaculate conduct, their superiority over others in knowledge, their being the final arbitrators regarding any difficult problem faced in the legislative system or any other system according to the testimony of the leading scholars and philosophers, nay, of even men of the government, and the endorsement of everyone of their views and the submission wholeheartedly thereto.

For these reasons and for others, we have upheld the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) of the Prophet (S) and preferred them over all others, following the path they outlined for us without paying attention to others especially since they enriched us with whatever valuable information and intellectual riches any Muslim needs in his daily life and for which the Message was revealed unto their grandfather the Greatest Prophet (S).

Thereupon, it is worthwhile to research the biographies of these great Imams and examine their details and characteristics and highlight the aspects of greatness of their unique personalities in order to correctly emulate them. We have also to compare their conduct with that of others so that their distinctions become manifest to us, the distinctions which raised their status to the very summit of human perfection.

In this study, we shall try our best to examine the biography of one of those Imams who is the eighth in the series of the Twelve Imams. He is Imam Ali son of Musa ar-Ridha' whose contemporary epoch was full of historical events in whose shaping he played a significant role the effects of which were reflected upon the then contemporary Islamic history.

The reason which invited us to prefer to study the biography of Imam ar-Ridha' over those of other Imams (a.s.) is that he, despite the many characteristics of his contemporary time, and despite the magnitude of the events and occurrences which filled his days, has not been independently researched as far as we know.

What I sincerely desire is to be honest in my exposition and analysis, free from the psychological complexes of prejudice and sectarian fanaticism, and I also wish the reader will be likewise so that he may be my companion while conducting this research, and God is the Master of success and uprightness.

Notes

1. Acronyms of Salallahu Alaihi Wasallam (Peace and Greetings of God be upon him).
2. Aamali of Sayyid al-Murtada, Vol. 1, p. 151.
3. Kanz al-'Ummal, Vol. 6, p. 217. Also hadith number 3819 recorded down by al-Hafiz Abu Na'eem in Hilyat al-Awliyaa, and he is quoted by Ibn Abul Hadeed in his commentary, quoting similar ahadith recorded in Ahmed ibn Hanbal's Musnad.
4. Kanz al-'Ummal, Vol. 6, p. 396. It is also narrated from al-Ma'mun and recorded in Vol. 1, p. 204, of Akhbar ar-Ridha' with the addition of "So do not teach them, for they are more learned than you, and they do not take you out of guidance, nor do they let you enter into misguidance," and al-Ma'mun attributed this statement to the Messenger of God (S).
5. Tahtheeb al-Tahtheeb, Vol. 2, p. 103.
6. This hadith of the two weighty things is recorded by a large number of pioneers of hadith: It is recorded by both al-Tirmithi and al-Nisai from Jabir, by al-Tirmithi from Zayd ibn al-Arqam, by al-Tabrani from Zayd ibn Thabit, and they are all quoted by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi in Vol. 1, p. 44, of his Kanzul 'Ummal. It is also recorded by Imam Ahmed [ibn Hanbal] from the hadith narrated by Zayd ibn Thabit through two authentic avenues in Vol. 5, pp. 182-189 of his Musnad. It is also narrated by Sa'eed al-Khudri from two avenues and recorded in Vol. 3, pp. 17-26. Al-Hakim, in Vol. 3, p. 873, of his Mustadrak, says, "This is an authentic hadith through consecutive narration according to both Shaikhs [Bukhari and Muslim] who did not record it down, while al-Thahbi admitted in his Talkhees al-Mustadrak its authenticity according to their own standards of authenticity." Ibn Abu Shayba, Abu Ya'li, Ibn Sa'd, all record it from Abu Sa'eed as is recorded in Vol. 1, p. 47, tradition number 945, of Kanzul 'Ummal. Ibn Hajar quotes it on p. 75 of his Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, and so do others who learned hadith by heart and by traditionists with an insignificant variation in their texts. Having quoted this hadith in his Al-Sawa'iq, Ibn Hajar says, "Be informed that the hadith enjoining us to uphold to them both is plentiful and is narrated in numerous ways by more than twenty companions of the Prophet (S)." This hadith enjoys a many testimonies which agree with each other, and Dar al-Taqreeb Baynal Mathahib al-Islamiyya in Cairo published a graduate thesis dealing with its Sunni sources and authored by some virtuous contemporaries.
7. Al Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, p. 135, by Ibn Hajar, chapter titled "Recommendation of the Prophet (SAW) in Their Regard."
8. Al Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, p. 148. The same may be read in Hadith al-Thaqalayn which was published by Dar al-Taqreeb Baynal Mathahib al-Islamiyya of Cairo.
9. Mukhtasar al-Tuhfa al-Ithnai 'Ashariyya by al-Aloosi, p. 8.
10. Tahtheeb al-Tahtheeb, Vol. 2, p. 103.
11. Al Laali al-Masnoo'a fil Ahadith al-Mawdooa by al-Sayyuti, Vol. 1, p. 396.
12. Al-Tabrani has recorded it relying on the authority of Abu Dharr al-Ghifari on p. 151 of Vol. 3 of his Al Sahih al-Mustadrak.
13. Al-Tabrani has recorded it in his Al Awsat from Abu Sa'eed. It is hadith number 18 of the fifth section of the forty traditions recorded on p. 216 of al-Nabahani's book Al Arba'een Hadith.
14. Al-Hakim records it in Vol. 3, p. 149, of his Mustadrak, quoting Ibn Abbas, then adding, "This hadith is authentic in its consecutiveness, and they [Bukhari and Muslim] did not record it."
15. Al Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa, p. 91.

Historical Aspect of the Imam's Biography

His Distinctions and Characteristics

Imam and the Waqfis

Imam and the 'Caliphs'

The Regency

Imam's Role in Eliminating al-Fadl ibn Sahl

The Tragic Ending

Imam and Alawide Revolts

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 overtaxed 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 bathhouse 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 benefit 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 no

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 *ummah*. 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.

Notes

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 Kharaj wal Jaraih, p. 237, with a slight textual variation.
35. Al Kafi, Vol. 5, p. 111.

Imam and the Waqfis

Immediately after the demise of his father, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was tried by an acute calamity which deepened the tragedy of losing his father. On one hand, he was suffering from the attempts of the rulers and their supporters at his life and, on the other hand, he was painfully and bitterly witnessing the horrible division which caused dissension among his father's followers. It was caused by the promotion of an invented idea which called for the Imamate to be terminated with Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), claiming that he did not actually die but was still alive, that he was the Qa'im (Mahdi) of the Progeny of Muhammad (S), that his absence was similar to the absence of Musa ibn 'Imran (Moses son of Amram), and that, accordingly, the Imamate should not transfer to his son Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

Pioneers of Waqfism

The first to promote this idea were few men who were among the most distinguished followers of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) such as Ali ibn Abu Hamza al-Bataini, Ziyad ibn Marwan al-Qandi, and Uthman ibn Isa al-Ruwasi. These three persons are considered the first to invent this "sect," openly claimed to be its adherents, and invited others to promote it.

Objectives of the Waqfis

This new "sectarian" trend did not result from a pure belief and a mere conviction; rather, it was prompted by materialistic and worldly desires which affected the thinking of its inventors and caused them to deviate from the Right Path. Those individuals tried to find excuses for their falling into such "sect" by narrating narratives they had heard from Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) without being actually familiar with their implications, nor did they accurately comprehend their contexts either. This may be deliberate especially since Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), while still alive, had explained to them their actual implications.

For example, Al-Ghaiba quotes al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan saying: "I said to Abul-Hasan Musa (a.s.): 'Can I ask you a question?' He answered, 'You must rather ask your own Imam.' I inquired, 'What do you mean? I do not know of any Imam other than your own self.' He said: 'He is my son Ali to whom I gave my title (of Imam).' I said: 'Master! Please help me save myself from Hellfire! Abu Abdullah (a.s.) had said that you yourself are the Qaim, the caretaker of this issue.' He said: 'Was I not?' Then he added, 'O Hasan! No Imam preaches to a nation except when he is their Qaim; so, when he leaves them (dies), his successor will be the Qaim and the Hujja (Proof) till he too leaves. We (the Imams) are all Qaims; therefore, from now on, redirect all your dealings to my son Ali, for by God I swear twice that I did not do that but God did out of His love for him.'"¹

This narrative reveals to us the reality behind the confusion in which those who deviated by Waqfism were swept. It also proves that the theory of Waqfism was not born after the demise of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) but was alive even during the time of Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) according to the narration of events which could not be explained even by their narrators. In this narrative, the Imam tries to explain to these individuals their

misunderstanding of those implications and their erroneous interpretation thereof in a way upon whose premise the Waqfis establish their claim.

Imam Denounces Waqfism

The Imam did his best to emphasize the error of that concept and its collision with reality by continuously stating that the Imamate after his demise would be the responsibility of his son Ali, and he even made a number of his followers and family testify to that. For example, Haider ibn Ayyub says: "We were in Medina at Qaba where we used to meet Muhammad ibn Zaid ibn Ali. He came to us one day much later than anticipated, so we asked him what caused him to be so late.

He said, 'Abu Ibrahim invited seventeen men of us, all descendants of Ali and Fatima, God's blessings be upon both of them, and he required us to bear witness to his will and testimony that his son Ali would be his successor and representative during the remainder of his own life and after his demise, and that the issue was in effect since then.' Then Muhammad ibn Zaid said, 'By God, O Haider! He has today tied the knot of Imamate for him, and the Shi'as will accept him as the Imam after his father's demise.'"².

Abdullah ibn al-Harith said: "Abu Ibrahim called us to his presence and we responded. He said, 'Do you know why I have gathered you all here?' We answered in the negative. He said, 'Bear witness that this Ali, my son, is my regent, executor of my will, and my successor after me; whoever entrusted me with something, let him take it back from him, and whoever insisted on seeking audience with me, let him obtain his written approval for that.'"³

Abdul-Rahman ibn al-*Hajjaj* is quoted saying that Abul-Hasan Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) had nominated his son Ali for the Imamate and wrote a statement to this effect in the presence of sixty witnesses from among the most distinguished dignitaries of Medina.⁴

In these clear texts, and in others, he is seen emphasizing his nomination of his son as the Imam and, at the same time, he is declaring that his death was imminent, thus in advance falsifying the claim of the Waqfis.

Advocates of Waqfism Reveal Their Own Nature

There are many narratives narrated by some advocates and inventors of Waqfism which clearly prove to us their false claims. For example, Ziyad ibn Marwan al-Qandi narrates the following:

"Once I visited Abu Ibrahim and his son Ali was with him. He said to me, 'O Ziyad! His (son's) statements are as good as mine, his speech is like my speech, and his instructions are as binding as mine.'"⁵.

Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Maithami, a Waqfi, says: "Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn al-Fadl al-Hashimi told me the following: 'I visited Abul-Hasan Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) and he was suffering from an acute illness. I asked him: 'If the matter regarding which I pray God that it would not happen (Imam's death) comes to pass, who shall we follow?' He said: 'My son Ali; his writing is as though I wrote it, and he is my regent and successor after me.'"⁶.

Ghannam ibn al-Qasim is quoted saying: "Mansour ibn Younus Barzaj told me that he had visited Abul-Hasan, that is, Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), and

he said to him, 'Have you come to know what new undertaking I have undertaken today?' He answered in the negative, so the Imam said, 'I have appointed my son Ali as my regent and successor after me; so, enter his room and congratulate him and tell him that I ordered you to do so.' So he entered his room and congratulated him and informed him that his father had ordered him to do so, yet Mansour reneged after that, and he even confiscated the funds (of Muslims) entrusted to him."⁷.

What is most significant in this narrative is the Imam's initiation of the dialogue with Mansour to tell him about his successor, then his ordering him to enter his son's room to congratulate him and to tell him that he was doing so because his father ordered him to. What the Imam wanted to accomplish by doing all of that was to make a practical point for the record against Mansour by making him recognize the Imamate of his son after him in a way which does not permit him at all to preach Waqfism except if he reneged as actually happened after that.

Imam Musa Ibn Ja'far (a.s.) Warns the Waqfis

There is another stance for the Imam which is not without an exciting moment involving one of the main advocates of Waqfism. His stance was like a clear warning to those who created the controversy of this "sect" and promoted it; al-Bataini states:

"I said to Abul-Hasan, 'Your father had informed us of his successor, and we wish you could inform us of yours.' So he took my hand and shook it, then he recited the verse: 'God will not mislead people after He had guided them, in order that He may make clear to them what to fear (and avoid)'."⁸.

The recitation of that verse came almost like a prophecy about the future of what that person and his friends would do and how they would fall into the slippery paths of misguidance; therefore, he shakes his hand and recites a verse which predicted that those folks' deviation would take place after proof had been made manifest against them. The Imam, as a matter of fact, refers clearly to the Waqfi movement after him and even reads the epitaph of the faith of those who advocate Waqfism in a narrative narrated by Muhammad ibn Sanan who says:

"I visited Abul-Hasan one year before he was conveyed to Iraq, and his son was with him. He called upon me to be attentive, and I responded. Then he said, 'There will be a movement this year..., but do not let it bother you.' Then he lowered his head contemplating, picking the ground, then he raised his head and recited the verse, 'God leads the oppressors astray and does what He pleases.'⁹ I said, 'And what is that, may my life be sacrificed for yours?' He said, 'Anyone who denies the right of this son of mine and refuses to recognize his Imamate after me will be equal to one who denied the right of Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) and did not recognize his Imamate after Muhammad (S).' So I understood that he was implying that his death was near, and that he was appointing his son as his successor."¹⁰.

Materialistic Objectives of Waqfis

History tells us that those who invented the dissension of this "sect" were chief officers of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) and keepers of the funds collected for him from his Shi'a followers. When he died, Ali ibn Abu

Hamza al-Bataini had with him as much as thirty thousand dinars; Ziyad ibn Marwan al-Qandi had seventy thousand dinars, and Uthman ibn Isa al-Ruwasi had thirty thousand dinars and six concubines.

They did not relish the idea of delivering these funds to his son and executor of his will after him; therefore, they invented the trick of denying the death of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), claiming that he was still alive, and that they would not hand those funds except to him upon his return. Ahmed ibn Hammad said: "One of the officers, Uthman ibn Isa, was staying in Egypt, and he had with him a great deal of wealth and six concubines.

So Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) wrote him demanding the delivery of the concubines and the money, but he wrote him back saying that his father did not die. He (ar-Ridha') wrote again saying, "He died, and we have distributed his legacy; the news about his death is correct, and there are eye witnesses to that.' Yet he (Uthman) wrote back saying, 'If your father is not dead, then you have no right to claim what is his, and if he did die, as you say, then he never ordered me to give anything to you, and I have emancipated the concubines and married them.'"

According to the version of his letter as recorded in *Al-Ghayba*, he wrote, "Your father did not die; rather, he is still alive and in charge, and anyone who says that he died is on the wrong track."¹¹.

Both Ali ibn Abu Hamza al-Bataini and Ziyad al-Qandi tried to resist the Imam's attempt to pursue them and reject his demand that they should deliver the funds by denying that they had had any money that belonged to his father with them, but Younus ibn Abdul-Rahman, whom they both tried to allure with money to join their call for Waqfism, revealed to us their crime of theft and confiscation of his Imam's funds; he said:

"Abu Ibrahim died and each of his chief executive officers had a great deal of money with him, and this is the reason why they claimed Waqfism, that is, their own desire to keep the money for themselves. Ziyad al-Qandi had seventy thousand dinars and Ali ibn Abu Hamza al-Bataini had thirty thousand dinars. Having seen all of that and come to realize the truth behind it and to know what I knew of the dilemma of Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.), I encouraged people to support him, so both men asked me to meet them and asked me: 'Why are you doing that? If you want wealth, we can make you wealthy,' and they offered ten thousand dinars for me if I accepted, and they told me to change my mind, but I refused and I said to them, 'We all have been narrating one particular *hadith* from the Truthful Imams that, 'When innovations in religion are promoted, let the learned person promote his knowledge disproving them, and if he does not, the light of *Iman* will be taken away from him;' so, I would not abandon the *Jihad* in the Way of God at any rate.' For this reason, they opposed me and concealed enmity towards me."¹².

Imam Reveals the Real Motives of the Waqfis

In one of his letters to al-Bazanti, the Imam (a.s.) reveals the truth behind these individuals' call for Waqfism; he says:

"As regarding Ibn al-Sarraj, the reason why he called upon people to disobey us and not to be loyal to us is that he confiscated funds which my father al-Hasan had entrusted to him before he died, and he argued about it

with me and refused to give it back even when all others did so and delivered to me all items entrusted to them. But when my father al-Hasan passed away, he took the opportunity of the disobedience of Ali ibn Abu Hamza and his friends to me and claimed he felt sick. By my life, he was not sick at all, but he wanted an excuse for confiscating the money and running away with it.

As regarding Ibn Abu Hamza, he is a man who adopted an interpretation of one *hadith* which he himself invented, and he did not do a good job at his interpretation for he did not have enough knowledge to digest his own invention, but he passed it on to people anyway and he fell into the trap which he did not know he had set for himself; so, he hated to prove himself a liar while trying to disprove what he himself had claimed through *ahadith* which he interpreted without knowledge thereof, and he realized that if he did not make sure to represent my forefathers as truthful, he would not be certain whether what he had heard about al-Sufiani and others was true or not.

He, therefore, told people that what my forefathers had said did not disprove any of his claims, but his knowledge was short of comprehending the implications of the *ahadith* my forefathers had narrated and the truth related to them; so, he caused dissension or at least put some doubt in people's minds about what he was narrating, and in the end he fell into a pitfall he thought he was trying to avoid..."¹³.

The fact that the Imam (a.s.) did not mention the money incentive as being the major factor which caused al-Bataini and his friends to profess Waqfism does not prove its absence, for the Imam (a.s.) was dealing with refuting these individuals' claims and proving their arguments wrong. As regarding Ibn al-Sarraj, since the man did not claim an excuse of his own, his own confiscation of the funds during the life-time of the Imam's father was the subject of the Imam's criticism.

A Leading Waqfi Confesses

What leads us to believe that the Waqfis did not establish their claim of Waqfism on a concrete reality, and that Waqfism was invented merely to satisfy the desire for a materialistic gain, is the story of the confession of one of the leaders of Waqfis at the time of his death. He admitted the horror of his sin of confiscating the money and not delivering it to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

Al-Toosi's work *Al-Ghayba* quotes al-Husayn ibn Fadal saying, "I used to see an old man from Baghdad at the house of my uncle Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Fadal, and he used to tease him quite often. He said to him one day, 'There is nobody worse than you, Shi'a folks (or you *Rafidis*, according to another version of the story).' My uncle said to him, 'Why so, may God curse you?'" He said: 'I am married to the daughter of Ahmed ibn Abu Bishr al-Sarraj who, before breathing his last, told me that he had with him ten thousand dinars which actually belonged to (Imam) Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), and that he did not deliver it to his son after him and testified that the man had not died yet.

Then he pleaded us saying, 'For the sake of God, save my skin from the Fire and deliver it to ar-Ridha'! Please do so for the sake of God!' By God,

we did not deliver a bit of it to him, and we left the man being burnt in Hellfire!"¹⁴.

Waqfism Spreads and Gains Momentum

These individuals fooled a select group from among the followers of the Imam (a.s.) and convinced them to believe, through casting doubts and suspicions, in Waqfism, so they finally fell to it and embraced the innovation. Among them were Abdul-Rahman ibn al-*Hajjaj*, Rifa'a ibn Musa, Younus ibn Ya'qoob, Jameel ibn Darraj, Hammad ibn Isa, Ahmed ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Naseer, al-Hasan ibn Ali al-Washsha, and other dignitaries who used to be companions of the Prophet's Progeny.

But they came back to their senses, recognized the Imamate of ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and abandoned Waqfism. Others whose adherence to Waqfism was bought with a lot of money did not listen to any argument and preferred to uphold their beliefs and died wronging their own souls such as Hamza ibn Bazeer' who was described by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the "wretch."

Ibrahim ibn Yahya ibn Abul-Ballad is quoted saying: "Ar-Ridha' once inquired, 'What did this wretch Hamza ibn Bazeer' do?' I said that he became an old man. He said, 'He claims that my father is still alive! Today, they all doubt their own claim, but tomorrow they will die atheists.' Safwan said that he told himself he understood what the Imam (a.s.) meant by saying that they were doubtful, but he did not understand his reference to atheism.

After a short while, Safwan continues, one of their men was reported to have said at the time of his death that he disbelieved in the God of his Imam (meaning Imam Musa ibn Ja'far, A.S.). Safwan said, 'This is the interpretation of the (Imam's) *hadith*.'"¹⁵ Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), indeed, suffered a great deal while fighting them and refuting their false beliefs, unveiling their real intentions and disclosing their reality before the public so that no weaklings would be duped by them.

Confusion of Some Waqfis

What is interesting is that after the demise of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.), some of those folks called for the Imamate of his son Ahmed; so, when the latter accompanied Abul-Saraya during Ibn Tabataba's uprising against the Abbaside regime, they disapproved of his action and reverted to believe in Waqfism rather than submitting to the belief in the Imamate of his son ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the successor of his father. Muhammad ibn Ahmed ibn Aseed said:

"After the demise of Abul-Hasan, Ibrahim and Isma'il sons of Abul-Asmal suggested to go and visit his son Ahmed, which they did, spending quite some time with him. When Abul-Saraya went out (to fight the Abbasides), Ahmed ibn Abul-Hasan joined him; so, we approached Ibrahim and Isma'il and said to them, 'This man has just joined Abul-Saraya; so, what is your view in the matter?' He said that both men found his behavior unacceptable, and they discontinued supporting him and said, 'Abul-Hasan is alive! We remain following the belief of Waqfism,' and I think that this man (meaning Isma'il) died doubtful."¹⁶

This dissension continued for a long time during which the disputes and disagreements between them and the ones on the Right Path were at their

peak till God caused the false beliefs to disintegrate and become extinct due to the fact that they were not based on firm durable foundations.

Notes

1. Al Ghayba by Shaikh al-Toosi, p. 29.
2. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 28.
3. Ibid., p. 27.
4. Ibid., p. 28.
5. Al Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 381; also al-Mufid's Irthaa, p. 286.
6. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 20.
7. Al-Kashi's Rijal, p. 398.
8. Al-'Ayyashi's Tafsir, Vol. 2, p. 115 of Surat al Tawba, verse 115.
9. Ibrahim:27.
10. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 32.
11. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 113 and also Shaikh al-Toosi's Al Ghayba, p. 47.
12. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 112.
13. Qurb al-Irshad, p. 206.
14. Shaikh al-Toosi's Al Ghayba, p. 48.
15. Shaikh al-Toosi's Al Ghayba, p. 50.
16. Al-Kashi's Rijal, p. 400.

Imam and the 'Caliphs'

The Imam (a.s.) was contemporary to a short period of al-Rashid's regime during which he suffered the tragedy of the assassination of his father Imam Musa al-Kazim (a.s.) and other Alawides. After the murder of his father, he was not safe from the moves of some of those who flattered the rulers and followed their course and pretended to show their loyalty by instigating enmity against the regime's opponents, encouraging their elimination, thinking that that would increase the rulers' liking for them and nearness to them, that it would strengthen their position and grant them unique distinctions and raise them to the highest pinnacles.

Attempts to Eliminate the Imam

Ja'far ibn Yahya says: "I heard Isa ibn Ja'far say to Haroun (al-Rashid) upon leaving al-Riqqa for Mecca, 'Remember your oath by the dignity of the descendants of Abu Talib that should anyone after Musa (al-Kazim, A.S.) claim Imamate, you would strike his head with the sword. This Ali, his son, claims so, and people are addressing him in the same way they used to address his father.' He looked at him angrily and said, 'Why? Do you expect me to eliminate each and every one of them?'" Musa ibn Mahran says that when he heard Ja'far ibn Yahya say so, he went to him (i.e. to Imam ar-Ridha') and told him what he had heard. Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) responded by saying, "What do I have to do with them? By God, they cannot hurt me in the least."

Such incitements were not confined within a reasonable limit but went beyond it to dangerous ones where instigation might cause al-Rashid to pay serious attention, for the Barmakis were most antagonistic towards the Descendants of the Prophet (S) and the most cruel among them in their grudge, so much so that it is reported that Yahya ibn Khalid al-Barmaki was the one who ordered the murder of Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.)¹ when the Abbaside caliphate was under their mercy.² Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) rendered God's retribution against the Barmakis to their persecution and oppression the worst of which was suffered by Imam al-Kazim (a.s.).³ Suffices for proof is the fact that Yahya ibn Khalid was the one who plotted the ugly plot against Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) after causing Haroun al-Rashid to be angry with him, instigating al-Rashid against the Imam (a.s.) and using some naive weaklings among the Alawides to achieve his goal.⁴

It was, indeed, an attempt which spelled the extent of grudge felt by Yahya ibn Khalid whose purpose was to pressure al-Rashid into murdering Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and make him join his father. He said to him one day: "This Ali, his son, has seated himself in place and claimed the matter (Imamate) for himself." He (al-Rashid) said: "Is it not enough for us what we have done to his father? Do you wish that we should kill them all?"⁵ Al-Rashid's answer points out to the extent of anguish he was suffering deep inside, and it reveals the bitter struggle exploding deep inside him. Suffices him to live carrying the guilt of murdering the pure soul of the Imam's father whom he subjected to numerous types of trials and tribulations till he joined his Lord well-pleased and satisfied after having faithfully executed the responsibilities of Imamate which were entrusted to him honestly and

faithfully, while the tyrant's soul was no longer able to bear any bigger sin anymore.

Al-Rashid Moves to Eliminate the Imam

Finally, al-Rashid is surrounded by a large number of courtiers instigating him to kill Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and they finally succeeded in stirring his feeling of anger against the Imam (a.s.), stimulating his beastly instinct to eagerly kill. Abul-Salt al-Harawi narrates saying that one day he was sitting with the Imam (a.s.) at his house when a messenger from Haroun al-Rashid came in and ordered the Imam (a.s.) to present himself before the caliph.

The Imam (a.s.) said: "O Abul-Salt! He does not call upon me at such a time of the night except for trouble. By God! He cannot do anything which I hate to me because of what I had come to know of certain statements said by my grandfather the Messenger of God (S)." Abul-Salt continues his narrative to say that he accompanied the Imam (a.s.) when he entered the court of Haroun al-Rashid.

When the latter looked at him, ar-Ridha' (a.s.) read those words of the Prophet (S), and when he stood before al-Rashid, the latter looked carefully at him and then said, "O Abul-Hasan! We have ordered a hundred thousand dirhams for you, and write down the needs of all your family." When the Imam (a.s.) left the court, the caliph kept looking at him as he was leaving and said behind his back: "I wished, and God wished otherwise, and what God wished was good." Thus did God save the life of the Imam (a.s.) who sought refuge with Him, seeking His assistance through the sincere words he had come to know that his grandfather the Messenger of God (S) had articulated. Al-Rashid, on the other hand, went back to himself satisfied after destiny had opposed his vicious intention just to realize that what God had done was indeed better than what he himself had intended to do.

Sincere Attempts

Contrariwise, there were sincere attempts to distance Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) from danger which were undertaken by some of his followers who had tasted the bitterness of pain during the adversity suffered by his father Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) who suffered a great deal of oppression and persecution at the hands of the stubborn tyrant Haroun al-Rashid.

Those attempts required the Imam (a.s.) to cease publicly promoting his mission and to distance himself from the situations which would clearly attract the attention of the government to him and become a cause for its revenge and desire to eliminate him. But the Imam (a.s.) who was confident of his stance did not pay attention to those attempts, and he was of the view that they were simply unnecessary due to some knowledge he had learned from his forefathers which assured him that al-Rashid would not be able to harm him in any way.

For example, Safwan ibn Yahya is quoted saying: "When Abul-Hasan Musa (a.s.) passed away and ar-Ridha' (a.s.) started preaching his mission, we were worried about his life and we said to him, 'You have declared something of great magnanimity, and we worry about your safety because

of this tyrant.' He said, 'Let him try his best, for he shall not have the means to hurt me.'"⁶

Muhammad ibn Sinan said: "During the reign of Haroun, I said to Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.), 'You have made yourself well-known because of this matter and followed in the footsteps of your father while Haroun's sword is dripping with blood.' He said, 'What made me bold in this regard is that the Messenger of God (S) had said: 'If Abu Jahl harms even one hair on my head, then bear witness that I am not a Prophet,' and I tell you that if Haroun took one hair away from my head, then bear witness that I am not an Imam.'"⁷

Vicious Intentions

Some Waqfis tried to warn him against declaring himself as the Imam (a.s.) and openly acting as such, and he answered them saying that such a matter did not require a warning, and that the fear that Haroun might hurt him was groundless. Those individuals had only one objective in mind: to discourage the ar-Ridha' (a.s.) from making himself known as the Imam and making his Imamate public so that they might be able to promote their "sect" which claimed that the Qa'im was Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) and that he was still alive as we mentioned above. Let us review the dialogue between the Imam (a.s.) and some of those Waqfis. Abu Masrooq has stated:

"A group of Waqfis entered the house of the Imam (a.s.) once and among them were men like Abu Hamza al-Bataini, Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Ammar, al-Husayn ibn Umran, and al-Husayn ibn Abu Sa'id al-Makari. Ali ibn Abu Hamza said to him, 'May my life be sacrificed for you! Tell us how your father is doing.' He said, 'He, peace be upon him, passed away.' He said, 'Who did he recommend to succeed him?' He answered, 'Myself.' He said, 'You are claiming something which none among your forefathers claimed, starting from Ali ibn Abu Talib downwards.'

He said, 'It was said by the best of my forefathers and the most distinguished among them: the Messenger of God (S).' He asked, 'Do not you fear them for your safety?' He said, 'Had I worried about my safety, I would have been in a position to do something to protect myself. The Messenger of God (S) was approached once by Abu Lahab who threatened him; the Messenger of God (S) said to him: 'If I am scratched by you even slightly, then I am indeed a liar.'

That was the first time the Messenger of God (S) incited someone, and this is the first time I do likewise and tell you that if I am scratched by Haroun even slightly, then I am indeed a liar.' Al-Husayn ibn Mahran said to him, 'If this comes to pass, then we will have achieved our objective.' He said, 'What do you exactly want? Should I go to Haroun and tell him that I am the Imam (a.s.) and that he is nobody?'

This is not how the Messenger of God behaved at the outset of his mission; rather, he said so to his family and followers and those whom he trusted from among the public. You believe that Imamate belongs to my father, claiming that what stops me from admitting that my father is alive is my own fear. I do not fear you when I say to you that I am the Imam; so, how can I fear you if my father is indeed alive?"⁸

The Imam's expectation proved to be true; al-Rashid breathed his last without hurting the Imam (a.s.) a bit.

From the Series of Tragedies

One incident that took place during the reign of al-Rashid reminds us of the chain of tragic events from which the Alawides suffered during the reign of al-Mansour. In Medina, Muhammad ibn Ja'far declared rebellion against the government; therefore, al-Rashid sent an army under the command of al-Jaloodi to crush his rebellion, ordering al-Jaloodi to behead the man if he could lay his hand on him.

Al-Rashid, furthermore, was not satisfied with just that. He instructed his commander to assault the houses of the descendants of Abu Talib and loot everything their women had without leaving even one piece of clothing on them. Al-Jaloodi tried to execute al-Rashid's order in person; therefore, he attacked the house of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) using his cavaliers. Having seen him, the Imam (a.s.) put all the women in one house, and he stood at its door.

Al-Jaloodi said to Abul-Hasan: "I have got to enter the house and strip the women of everything just as the commander of the faithful ordered me." Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said: "I can do that for you, and I will not leave anything for them." The Imam (a.s.) kept requesting him to accept, swearing that he would do just that till the man calmed down and consented. Abul-Hasan took their wares, including their ear-rings, anklets, shirts, and every valuable item in the house, small or big.

This incident, if true, does not depict an unusual behavior by al-Rashid towards the Alawides since he was full of grudge and animosity towards them. What encourages us to believe in it is what Ibn al-Athir narrates about al-Rashid at the time of his death, shortly before meeting his Maker. He was moaning and groaning while saying, "How horrible my evil deeds are towards the Messenger of God! How Horrible!"⁹ This is a clear expression of the admission of the calamities he inflicted upon the family of the Prophet (S), of his horrible sins, of a bitter regret which was consuming his soul at the time of its departure.

Imam During al-Amin's Reign

As regarding his life during the reign of al-Amin, we cannot review any incident regarding the government's stance towards Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and this may be attributed to the confusing environment in which the Abbaside caliphate found itself due to internal dissents which led in the end to a serious split among the members of the ruling dynasty, the split which was caused by al-Amin deposing his brother al-Ma'mun from the post of heir to the throne and the nomination of his son Musa in his place after listening to the advice of al-Fadl ibn al-Rabee' who had a personal vendetta against al-Ma'mun and who feared him for his post should he become the caliph instead, since he had already opposed him openly.¹⁰

Such a shaky situation is credited for the fact that al-Amin and his ruling apparatus diverted their attention from Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and from pursuing him, and we can regard that period of the Imam's life as a peaceful respite with which circumstances blessed him in order to be able to dedicate

his time to carry out the responsibilities of his mission and disseminate its pristine principles among the nation.

Imam During al-Ma'mun's Regime

As regarding the period of the Imam's life during which he was contemporary to al-Ma'mun's regime, this may be the richest and most eventful of all his life, for his personality enjoyed a significant role in the turning of events and their reflection thereupon. But first we have to provide a general expose of the intricate events which caused Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to enjoy a significant role in the shaping of the events of that period. After that, we have to conduct a general study of the personality of al-Ma'mun and of its distinctions, since he was the number one man around whom the contemporary political events revolved. Such a study may even lead us to research some other leading personalities of the time that played and assumed a large role in the political wheel of the time.

Al-Ma'mun's Personality

As regarding al-Ma'mun, there is no doubt at all that he was one of the strongest personalities of the Abbaside caliphate during its first epoch, and one of the most moderate, highly intellectual and highly learned of its scholars. He encouraged scholarship during his regime and promoted free discussions out of his passion for increasing his own knowledge and expanding its spheres.

He was also known to demonstrate an inclination towards Shi'ism, preferring Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) to and recognizing his superiority over all other sahaba. Narrators of *hadith* have recorded lengthy dialogues with a number of narrators of *hadith* and scholars of the Sunnah and with orators which reveal a glorious intellectual depth and an absorption of his view which he strongly and enthusiastically advocated.

Al-Ma'mun's Inclination Towards Shi'ism

There is a disagreement regarding his school of thought. Some think that he was Shi'a, while others think that he only pretended to be so out of his regard for the feelings of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and other Alawides while in reality he was otherwise. But his discourses, debates, and his serious method in challenging what was regarded as accepted facts by those who opposed his views, all dispel any doubts regarding his acceptance of Shi'ism.

Moreover, there are certain noteworthy measures he undertook which support this view such as his belief that the Holy Qur'an was the Word of God created by Him, and his insistence that scholars and faqihs should indicate and promote this view, so much so that he caused quite a reaction among contemporary Islamic circles to the extent that it was referred to as the ordeal of the Holy Qur'an.

His father, al-Rashid, differed from him in this regard. When he heard that Bishr al-Marisi endorsed the concept that the Holy Qur'an was created by God, he said: "If I ever lay my hand on him, I shall strike his neck with the sword."¹¹ Also, he believed in the temporary marriage of mut'a, and he refuted the views of the second caliph in this regard with arguments which have already been recorded by foremost historians.

Add to all the above his preference of Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) over all other companions of the Prophet (S) and his view that Ali was more worthy of succeeding the Messenger of God (S) as the caliph. Yet another supporting argument is his serious attempt to make the cursing of Mu'awiya a tradition and enforce it on his subjects; he announced to people once the following:

"There shall be no pardon for anyone guilty of praising Mu'awiya, and the best of creation after the Prophet (S) is Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.)."¹²

That was in response to Mu'awiya who made the cursing of Ali a tradition which continued during the reign of all Umayyad governments till the days of the caliph Umer ibn Abd al-Aziz who put an end to it in order to safeguard the government of the Umayyads against the disgust people felt towards such ignominious tradition, sympathized with the Alawides, and returned Fedak to them when they requested him to do so.

Al-Ma'mun, in fact, sincerely felt guilty about the crimes his predecessors had committed against the Alawides as a letter he wrote to some Hashemites testified and in which he said: "The Umayyads killed anyone (among the Alawides) who unsheathed a sword, while we, the Abbasides, have been killing them en masse; so, ask the great souls of the Hashemites what sin they committed, and ask the souls of those who were buried in Baghdad and Kufa alive..."¹³

Al-Ma'mun's inclination towards Shi'ism is the result of many factors of a permanent impact upon his way of thinking, starting with his childhood when a Shi'a educator planted deeply in his soul the allegiance to Ali and the family of Ali (a.s.), and ending with his residence in parts of Khurasan where mostly Shi'as lived. Al-Ma'mun himself narrates an anecdote with a moral which taught him to sympathize with Shi'as.

It involved an encounter with his father al-Rashid who was very well known for his cruelty, tyranny, arrogance and hatred of the Alawides, especially Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) whose life he ended with poison. Al-Ma'mun states that when Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) met al-Rashid at Medina, al-Rashid showed a great deal of humbleness before the Imam (a.s.) and a great deal of respect for him to a degree which attracted his own attention; so, he continues to say, "When there was nobody else present, I said, 'O commander of the faithful! Who is this man whom you have held with such a high esteem, respected a great deal, stood up to receive, and even seated in the most prominent place while seating yourself in front of him, and you even ordered us to hold the rein of his horse?!'

He said, 'This is the Imam of the people, the Proof of God's Mercy to His creation (Hujjatullah) and His caliph among His servants.' I asked, 'O commander of the faithful! Are not all these attributes yours and fulfilled in your person?' He replied, 'I am the Imam of the masses by force and through oppression, while Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) is the Imam in truth. By God, son, he is more worthy of being the successor of the Messenger of God (S) as the caliph than I am and anyone else among the people! By God! If you yourself attempt to take such caliphate from me, I shall take it away from you even if that means pulling your eyes out, for power is blind!'"¹⁴

From all these arguments we can conclude that al-Ma'mun was indeed a believer in Shi'aism, convinced of the principles of this school of thought which are based on the preference of Ali (a.s.) for caliphate over all others upon which principle al-Ma'mun insisted while debating others. As regarding his conduct with Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), his forcing him to be his regent, and his possible assassination, all these fall under the same precept adopted by his father al-Rashid that "power is blind."

Differences of Personalities of al-Amin and al-Ma'mun

There was a clear difference in mentality and way of thinking between al-Amin and his brother al-Ma'mun. Al-Ma'mun was broader in mentality and more open-minded than his brother, and he was more receptive to new ideas, more deep in his political and theological philosophy. Al-Ma'mun, moreover, was more serious than his brother in the administrative management of the government.

Al-Amin did not enjoy these merits, and the reason may be the fact that he was pampered and spoiled by his parents, that he was brought up to feel distinctly superior to his brother al-Ma'mun. Add to this his temper of hereditary stubbornness which he inherited from his mother who was daughter of Ja'far son of (caliph) al-Mansoor; as regarding al-Ma'mun's mother, she was a women who gave birth to several children, and her name was Marajil. Al-Amin's mother raised her son to be aware of the class distinctions by narrating to him some interesting anecdotes involving herself and al-Rashid whenever the latter felt a psychological and emotional inclination towards his son al-Ma'mun.

Al-Rashid Evaluates his Sons

Al-Rashid was aware of the intellectual differences among his sons, but he could not clearly express it out of his respect for the feelings of his favorite wife and to safeguard the status of her son. He is quoted as having said: "I am aware of the fact that Abdullah is gifted with determination like that of al-Mansour, with asceticism like that of al-Mahdi, and with dignity like that of al-Hadi.

Had I wished to link him to the fourth (meaning himself), I would have done so and preferred Muhammad over him. I am aware of the fact that he follows his own inclination, wastes what is in his possession, and shares slave and free women in his views. Had it not been for the mother of Ja'far, and the inclination towards the Banu Hashim, I would have preferred Abdullah over him."

Differences of Conduct of Both Brothers

The vast difference which separates the brothers unveils when we review the biography of each one of them and study its distinctions and attributes. Al-Ma'mun was a practical man, strong in his administrative management skills, serious, wise regarding his conduct, far-sighted in his political or academic ambitions, loves knowledge and scholars, so much so that he was nicknamed "scholar of the Banu al-Abbas (the Abbasides)."

Al-Amin was the opposite of all of this in his general conduct. He inclined more towards merry-making and entertainment which is the natural

outcome of his spoiled childhood and adolescence. To prove this point, we have to read this interesting incident which spells out the type of general conduct of al-Amin during the moments which preceded his assassination. Ibn al-Athir states the following in his *Tarikh* (chronicle):

"Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi narrated saying that he was with al-Amin when he fell under the political pressure of Tahir. He says that al-Amin came out during one night to cheer himself up and forget about his depression, so he went to a house he had had in the Khuld suburb, then he sent for Ibrahim. When Ibrahim was brought to him, he said, 'Do you see how nice this evening is, how beautiful the moon appears in the sky and how its light is reflected on the water of the Tigris? Would you like to have a drink?' He answered that that was up to him, so he drank a bottle of wine, and Ibrahim entertained him with the songs he knew he liked best."¹⁵

It is beyond imagination to conceive how a monarch undergoing a horrible political crisis which was about to uproot his throne could resort to such an extravagant behavior so far from permitting him to contemplate upon the fate threatening him and jeopardizing his very existence. Some other such extravagant norms of behavior narrated about al-Amin the caliph since he ascended the throne and till his last moments clearly indicate that he was not a man of government in the wide sense of the word, nor were he a leader.

Dissension Begins

Indications of dissension between both brothers started appearing before al-Rashid's death, and historians render that to the fact that al-Rashid had handed the reins of government over to his son al-Ma'mun in Khurasan and secured the oath of allegiance to him from the army commanders and civilian dignitaries there, granting him all what he had of money and other items of value.¹⁶ When the news reached him in Baghdad, he did not relish it at all but considered it as a premature action undertaken by his departing father and something he himself was entitled to do in his capacity as the first regent who had the authority to determine such matters.

Confused Behavior of al-Rashid Towards His Sons

Al-Rashid seemed to sense deep inside his soul the psychological gap which separated his son al-Amin from him when he detained the messenger his son had dispatched to Khurasan in the pretext of bringing him back news about his father's health conditions whereas in reality he was carrying secret letters to army leaders and civilian notables to be delivered to them immediately after the death of his father al-Rashid.

The letters contained orders to carry out the duties the recipients were expected to perform. The objective was to depose his brother al-Ma'mun from actual authority vested upon him by his father. Al-Rashid tried to extract an admission from the messenger that he was carrying secret letters from al-Amin to army leaders and civilian notables, but he did not succeed even when his patience reached its limit and he threatened the messenger to have him killed, and he almost did so before death overtook him whereupon the messenger was subsequently released and the letters were delivered as

planned. The result was the army leaders and their troops renege on the promises they swore to al-Rashid, causing a great deal of political chaos.¹⁷

We can easily discern the confusing ordeal which dominated the conduct of al-Rashid regarding his arrangement of the issue of his own succession by his sons. He was not satisfied with just securing assurances and taking the most serious of oaths from his sons al-Amin and al-Ma'mun, so he went during the *hajj* season to Mecca to require his sons to write down their pledges, then he hung what they wrote down on the walls of the sacred Ka'ba in the presence of a multitude of people so that those who did not witness the event would be told by those who did so on that day.

Al-Rashid Divides the State

Yet he was still not quite satisfied, so he went a step further to divide the domains of the state to three sections, granting al-Amin authority over Iraq and Syria up to the end of his western possessions; to al-Ma'mun he gave the territories from Hamadan up to the eastern borders of his domains; to al-Qasim he gave the peninsula, the sea ports, and the metropolises after having secured the oath of allegiance for him after his brother al-Ma'mun and giving him the option to keep or depose al-Ma'mun.¹⁸

Thus, al-Rashid thought, the ghost of dissension would be averted, and the government after his death would be secured for all his sons since he gave each one of them a portion thereof whereby he would maintain a force strong enough to deter the transgression of any other brother. Despite all of that, however, al-Rashid could not put an end to the causes of his dilemma deeply rooted within himself as the incident of the messenger who was sent by his son al-Amin suggested.

Apprehension of the Public Regarding the Division

People predicted ominous consequences to take place because of what al-Rashid had done. Some of them said that he sowed the seeds of evil and war among them, and they feared the consequences, and indeed what they feared came to pass.¹⁹ Some wise men said that he caused them to fall into an inner conflict the perils of which victimized the subjects.²⁰

Ambition of Some Followers Deepens Division

The conflict among the two brothers was worsened by the incitement of some top rank politicians in each party, and there were many reasons for incitement and entrapment. On one hand, we find al-Fadl ibn al-Rabee', who caused the army to renege on its sworn promise of support for al-Ma'mun in Khurasan as soon as al-Rashid died and marched with it to Baghdad in order to strengthen al-Amin's position, trying to aggravate the tension between al-Amin and his brother al-Ma'mun, instigating the first to nullify the allegiance to al-Ma'mun and change it to his son Musa, depending in so doing on various means of incitement which in the end pushed al-Amin to assault his brother.

Al-Fadl, by doing so, was trying to get rid of al-Ma'mun as the regent for fear that should he come to rule, he would certainly seek revenge against him due to his going back on his promise to support al-Ma'mun whom he slighted and the allegiance to whom he broke after the death of al-Rashid.²¹

On the other hand, we find al-Fadl ibn Sahl, the Khurasani leader, who was appointed in his post by al-Ma'mun, trying to secure the government for al-Ma'mun by his brilliant methods after pledging to help him reach the throne and dethrone his brother al-Amin at any price and stand in the face of al-Amin's attempts to deprive him of his regency. Al-Fadl and his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl, in addition to the rest of Khurasani leaders and chiefs, were aware of the precarious situation in which they would find themselves should destiny decide that al-Amin must have victory over his brother al-Ma'mun especially since they had already declared their allegiance to al-Ma'mun and reneged in their promise to al-Amin.

War is Waged and al-Ma'mun Wins

The gap between the brothers became wider, and the presentiments of the tragedy to befall the two brothers were in sight when al-Amin announced in Baghdad his decision to drop the name of his brother al-Ma'mun from Friday sermons and substitute it with that of his own son Musa whom he named his successor, and he sent letters to places far and wide in this meaning. Al-Ma'mun rose to defend his right and started planning to overrun Baghdad, the capital of the government, while al-Amin was gathering troops to take over his brother's domains.

Both armies finally clashed and fierce battles ensued in more than one location, and in the end al-Ma'mun came out victorious, took control of Baghdad and killed al-Amin. All of that became possible due to the planning of al-Fadl ibn Sahl, who was nicknamed "Dhul-Riyasatain," i.e., the man who had a say in two states, and his brother al-Hasan, assisted by an elite group of military experts and top political advisors.

Having won victory over his brother, al-Ma'mun tried to make Marw the base of power for the Abbaside dynasty instead of Baghdad due to the advice of his army leaders and top political aides who were credited with regaining his right to the caliphate after al-Amin had deposed him, and because of his own feeling of gratitude towards the city that assisted him and brought him victory during the darkest periods of his political crisis.

Notes

1. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 226.
2. 'Umdat al-Talib, p. 185, 1st edition (Najaf, Iraq).
3. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 48, p. 249, quoting Al Kafi.
4. Shaikh al-Toosi's Al Ghayba, p. 22.
5. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 226.
6. Al Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 487. It is also mentioned in Al 'Uyoon, Al Manaqib and Al Irshad.
7. Rawdat al-Kafi, p. 257.
8. A'yan al-Shi'a, Vol. 4, Part I, p. 138.
9. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 130.
10. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 138.
11. Tarikh al-Khulafa by al-Sayyuti, p. 284.
12. Ibid., p. 308.
13. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 49, p. 210 as quoted in Ibn Maskawayhi's book Nadeem al-Farid.
14. 'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 88.
15. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 162.
16. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 134.
17. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, pp. 134-135.
18. Ibid., p. 112.
19. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 113.
20. Tarikh al-Khulafaa by al-Sayyuti, p. 290.
21. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 138.

The Regency

Immediately after setting the firm foundations of government and his becoming the sole caliph, al-Ma'mun, according to the tradition started by Mu'awiya who secured the oath of allegiance for his son Yazid to succeed him on the throne, had to name his successor, and he had to be extremely careful about this weighty matter due to the precarious circumstances he underwent during his collision with his brother and thereafter.

It was not easy for him to select just anyone from his immediate family or from others; rather, he had to subject each step he undertook in this regard to precise calculations linking past outcomes to future expectations and taking into consideration the sentiments of Shi'a Alawides who dominated Khurasan and the territories under its control. Among the latter party may be included men such as "Dhul-Riyasatayn" and his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl who were among the most powerful elements that paved the way for him to survive the dangerous stage during his confrontation with his brother al-Amin, although we doubt such an inclusion which we will discuss later.

Al-Ma'mun, however, did not find the idea of taking caliphate out of Banu al-Abbas and giving it to others, Alawides or non-Alawides, easy for he, despite his ideological inclination towards Shi'aism which lacked a practical implementation, would spare no effort to safeguard the legacy which he inherited from his forefathers in its framework and context. We can be acquainted with the accuracy of this theory if we research the plausible reasons which led him to force Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to accept regency.

Regency Between the Imam and al-Ma'mun

While researching the motives which prompted al-Ma'mun to force Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to be his heir to the throne, we will find out that they were far-sighted political motives al-Ma'mun hoped thereby to achieve selfish gains for both himself and the Abbaside caliphate, for al-Ma'mun was quite an intelligent man in selecting Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) for this post since he represented the opposition group.

But Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), upon rejecting his selection for this post, proved to be more aware of al-Ma'mun and his aims than al-Ma'mun had thought. Al-Harawi quotes the Imam saying: "By God! Ar-Ridha' did not accept this matter willingly, and he was transported to Kufa against his wish, then he was taken from there, passing by Basrah and Persia, to Marw."¹

Why the Imam Rejected the Regency

The reason we understand as to why he rejected it is that the Imam realized that al-Ma'mun, by selecting him, aimed at using him as a bargaining ticket between him and the Abbasides on one hand, between him and the Alawides on another, and between him and the Shi'as of Khurasan and other areas on yet another hand; otherwise, what is the wisdom in the insistence of al-Ma'mun that ar-Ridha' (a.s.) should accede, and why did he even threaten him if he insisted on his rejection?

Al-Irshad narrates that al-Ma'mun discussed the subject of regency with ar-Ridha' (a.s.), saying, "I have decided that you should be my successor." The Imam said: "Exempt me from that, O commander of the faithful, for I have neither the ability nor the strength for that." He said: "I have decided that you should be my successor." The Imam said: "Exempt me from that, O commander of the faithful." Al-Ma'mun responded with a statement which was more of a threat than anything else; he said to him: "Umer ibn al-Khattab entrusted six persons to consult regarding caliphate, one of them was your grandfather Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.), and he preconditioned that anyone who went against their decision should be executed; therefore, you will have to accept what I have decreed for you, for I see no way that I can ever change my mind." ²

The Imam, therefore, had to agree. ³ It is also narrated that a lengthy discussion went on between both men in which al-Ma'mun offered the Imam to be the caliph and the Imam refused to accept, then he offered him the regency and he refused too, so al-Ma'mun said to him, "You always say what I hate to hear, and you think that you are safe from my might; therefore, I swear by God that you should either accept the regency willingly or I shall force you to do so; therefore, accept out of your own will; otherwise, I shall certainly strike your neck with the sword." ⁴

Al-Ma'mun Reveals His Intentions

Al-Ma'mun himself revealed to us the far-sighted implication of his choice for regent in a letter to Banu Hashim answering their objections regarding the promise of regency to the Imam in which he said: "As regarding my intention behind choosing Ali ibn Musa (a.s.) as the regent, although he is qualified for it, out of my own selection of him, the reason for that is my desire to safeguard your lives and protect your properties by establishing permanent friendly ties between us and them, and it is a method I employed to honor the descendants of Abu Talib and to heal their wounds with very little of what they are entitled to. You claim that I desired that they would be the recipients of benefits thereof and to be in charge, while I have in mind the interest of your posterity and children after you even while you are unaware, blindly stumbling, not knowing what plans others have in store for you." ⁵

He does not wish to transfer the government from Banu al-Abbas to the descendants of Abu Talib, as the Abbasides imagined; rather, he aimed by such an action to contain the consequences which might cause a great deal of trouble for the government. In other words, he aimed by taking such a political action, to retain a position of strength for the Abbasides.

Al-Ma'mun and the Astronomer Nawbakhti

What proves the fact that al-Ma'mun was not serious in his offer to the Imam to be the regent is a narration stating that al-Fadl al-Nawbakhti, who was an astronomer thought to be Shi'a, wanted to test al-Ma'mun's intentions, so he wrote him saying: "The order of the stars indicates that naming ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the regent at this time cannot be done; otherwise, the person named will suffer a catastrophe.

Therefore, if al-Ma'mun's intentions agree with what he proclaims in public, he ought to postpone this matter till a more conducive time." To this, al-Ma'mun answered him warning him against discouraging Dhul-Riyasatayn from contracting that agreement at that time, and that if he did not, he would know that the postponement was instigated by al-Nawbakhti. He also ordered him to return his own letter back to him so that nobody else would come to find out about it.

He then came to know that al-Fadl was aware of the fact that time was not ripe for contracting the regency because he himself had knowledge of the science of the stars; therefore, al-Nawbakhti feared that the change of mind of al-Fadl ibn Sahl was because of him personally, and he would thus be killed by al-Ma'mun, so he rode to him and convinced him through his own knowledge of astronomy that time was indeed ripe for it, contrary to the reality, because he was more knowledgeable than him about astrology, and he kept confusing him till he finally convinced him.⁶

This leads us to conclude that the offer of regency to the Imam was nothing more than a trap al-Ma'mun had set for him to achieve some political gains that would save his government a great deal of trouble, and he certainly was not sincere in his conduct towards the Imam; rather, that was only a transient stage he had to go through with precision in order to achieve his anticipated objectives.

Al-Ma'mun's Objective Behind Regency

As regarding his request that the Imam should accept to be the caliph after he himself abdicates, his objective was more than just proving to the public that the Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) were certainly after the glory of this life, coveting it, and that their asceticism and distancing themselves there from was only because they were unable to reach their worldly goals as some stories claim⁷ and on which yet other conclusions are based.

The Imam, in fact, did not underestimate the power to rule nor did he willingly stay aloof from its responsibilities; how could he do so while viewing himself as more worthy of the post of the supreme ruler and more capable than him in managing its affairs with equity? The fact is that he was confident that such thing would not happen for him, and that the whole matter was a clever political trick performed by al-Ma'mun which he wanted to carry out by using Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as a ploy.

When al-Ma'mun offered to abdicate the throne for the Imam, he was calculating the matter to end up with one of two cases: either the Imam would agree, or that he would refuse, and in either case, he would gain for himself and for the Abbaside government a victory, for the Imam's agreement would be preconditioned upon accepting that he, al-Ma'mun, would be named the regent, thus securing the legitimacy of his own caliphate after the Imam before all parties; otherwise, al-Ma'mun was not so naive or short-sighted to the extent that he would offer his own post on a silver platter to the Alawides and become a subject dealt with as such.

If al-Ma'mun came to be a regent, it would be easy for him to put an end to the life of the Imam in order to succeed him without anyone finding out, thus satisfying the ambitions of the Alawides for the government while

convincing their Shi'as of his own legitimate caliphate. Al-Ma'mun had his own particular methods in eliminating his political foes, and we will mention the mysterious method he employed to put an end to the life of Dhul-Riyasatayn al-Fadl ibn Sahl and his murder of those who killed him despite their admission that he was the one who incited them to assassinate al-Fadl.

As regarding the case of the Imam refusing to accept the caliphate, this, al-Ma'mun calculated, would cause him to be very widely criticized by his own Shi'a followers and companions due to their own belief that caliphate was rightfully his and he had to accept it, but the Imam's companions were endowed with a great deal of political awareness to the extent that they would not be tricked by a trick like that carried out by al-Ma'mun. Also, he would be excused by various Shi'a factions for not accepting it for himself and his family, and that he tried so but could not succeed and thus would silence those who might dispute with him in this regard from Shi'a opposition groups.

Forcing the Imam to Accept the Regency

Having failed to convince the Imam that he, al-Ma'mun, would abdicate the throne for him, al-Ma'mun requested him to accept to be the regent and to name him the succeeding caliph after him, but the Imam again insisted on refusing, so much so that al-Ma'mun had to seek the assistance of some of his best aides despite the fact that they themselves were not convinced that it was such a good idea, thinking that al-Ma'mun was serious. Al-Irshad states:

"A group of historians and court biographers who were contemporary to the caliphs say that when al-Ma'mun wanted to name Ali ibn Musa (a.s.) as his successor, and having thought seriously about the matter, he ordered al-Fadl ibn Sahl ⁸ to come to him and he informed him of his intention, ordering him to seek the assistance of his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl in this regard, and he did just that. So they met with him, and al-Hasan kept pointing out the magnanimity of the consequences of his idea, acquainting him with the outcomes resulting out of taking his family out of it and affecting his own life.

Al-Ma'mun, thereupon, said to him: 'I pledged to God that if I lay my hand on the person who deposed me, I would hand the caliphate over to the best person among the progeny of Abu Talib, and I do not know anyone better than this man on the face of earth.' So, when both al-Fadl and al-Hasan saw his determination to carry out this matter, they stopped opposing him and he sent them to ar-Ridha' (a.s.). They offered him caliphate, but he refused, and they continued pressing him till he finally agreed, so they went back to al-Ma'mun and told him about his approval whereupon he was very pleased."⁹

Abul-Faraj al-Asbahani stated something similar to the above with this variation: "He dispatched them to Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and they offered it to him, and they continued pressing him while he was refusing till one of them said to him, 'If you agree, let it be so, but if you do not, we shall surely harm you,' and he threatened to kill him. Then one of them said,

‘By God he ordered me to strike your neck with my sword if you go against his wish.’”¹⁰

Imam's Awareness of al-Ma'mun's Schemes

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) knew beforehand about al-Ma'mun's intentions through his knowledgeable foresight of the circumstances which led al-Ma'mun to vest the regency upon him, and he was contented that he would not actually accede to the throne in the future. Al-Madaini quotes one of his sources saying: "When ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was seated during the regency celebration, with the orators and poets surrounding him and the flags fanning him, one individual who was present there and then said, ‘I was close to him that day, and he looked at me with an optimistic smile on his face regarding the event, and he beckoned for me to come close. When I did, he told me while nobody except me could hear him: ‘Do not let this excite you, and do not be overly optimistic, for it would never materialize.’”¹¹

With Ahmed Amin

Before I present the actual reasons for the story of regency, according to the historical understanding of its circumstances, I would like to point out the superficiality of comprehension, or sectarian prejudice, which is more likely, of some researchers that led them to render the reason why al-Ma'mun pressured Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to accept his nomination as the regent to the following:

"Alawide Imams claim that if they get to rule, they would rule with absolute justice, but there is always a difference between claim and reality. Al-Ma'mun complained about this and observed how the Imams disappear from public eyes to commit sins without being seen and recognized by the public for what they really are; therefore, he said, ‘It is for the good of the people that these Imams should come out and people should know their liability to falling into sins so that they would not respect them anymore, nor would they hold them as holy, for when they appear on life's stage, and people clearly see how they rule and how they commit what God has ordained as prohibitive, they would no longer be respected by the public. But if they continue to be persecuted, hiding from positions of prominence, satisfied with preaching, people will maintain their sympathy for them,’ he, therefore, decided to appoint Ali ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his successor...”¹²

The above is what professor Ahmed Amin states. This statement is not unusual coming from a man like him who is very well known for his prejudice and fanaticism and opposition to the concept of Shi'aism and allegiance to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.).

Comments

1. The experience of the Alawide government which was lived by the Muslim umma during the caliphate of Imam Ali (a.s.) proves that Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) are more worthy of ruling the subjects than others because their goal behind ruling is to establish a just and equitable society, and to rule the nation with the policy of absolute justice as brought forth by the message of Prophet Muhammad (S).

2. When Shi'as say that the household of the Prophet (S) are more worthy of being the caliphs, they mean only the Twelve Imams and nobody else.

We have the right to ask here: What sin or prohibitive act did any of the Imams of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) commit away from public eyes? Where are the historical facts which support such a claim? Does Ahmed Amin consider the stance of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) towards the Umayyad and Abbaside dynasties and their opposition thereof a sin and a prohibitive act?

3. Al-Ma'mun appointed Ali ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the heir apparent to the throne; what sins did this Imam commit, and what prohibitive acts was he guilty of and which caused him to lose public respect?

And what did Ahmed Amin and his predecessors discover of the deeds done by the Imam after becoming the regent which Ahmed Amin tries to project in a negative way out of his hatred for the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and in support for the Umayyads?

4. As regarding the example he tries to use and upon which he tries to build his conclusion regarding the conduct of the Fatimide government in Egypt, or regarding other intermittent Alawide governments during the various Abbaside periods, and the fact that they were not any better than other governments, Umayyad or Abbaside, in line or in scope, such an example is not realistic simply because Shi'as do not consider such governments to be legitimate, and they do not have any allegiance to them as long as they were distant from the pristine line of the Prophetic message called for by the Prophet (S) and his Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) after him.

Whatever the case may be, statements like these made by Ahmed Amin are not considered out of the ordinary, for his degrading fanaticism and his deviation from the line of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) give him plenty of excuses for saying what he says...

Imam's Contempt for the Regency

The Imam (a.s.) expressed his contempt for the regency through statements he made which express his inner bitterness and pain and during times when he was suffering from emotional irritation. He was unable to do anything in the face of the stubborn insistence of the government to accept its designs without enjoying the freedom of choice, of expression, and of movement. Moreover, the Imam (a.s.) knew beforehand that the regency was only a transient step undertaken by the Abbaside government and dictated to it by circumstances of that period.

And when the government achieves its end objective, the beginning starts, and the Imam (a.s.) feels psychologically irritated for such disguised use of his own person, and such irritation is spelled out during times of extreme bitterness. Yasir the servant said: "Whenever ar-Ridha' (a.s.) returned home from the mosque on Friday, his face washed with his sweat, stained with dust, he would raise his hands and supplicates saying, 'God! If my deliverance from my suffering is by death, then I plead You to please hasten that hour,' and he remained distressed till he breathed his last, blessings of God be upon him."¹³

The companions of the Imam (a.s.) could not easily understand why he accepted the post of regent, although inwardly they were satisfied with the soundness of the Imam's stance and at the same time fully aware of the

psychological agony the Imam (a.s.) was suffering from. The Imam's answers to their repeated questions were exciting in their way of expressing the political necessity which caused the government to force him to be the regent. Muhammad ibn Arafah narrated saying that he once asked the Imam (a.s.): "O Son of the Messenger of God! What caused you to be involved in the regency issue?" The Imam (a.s.) answered: "It is the same that caused my grandfather the Commander of the Faithful (a.s.) to be involved in the shura."¹⁴

A man, who seemed as if he was finding fault with the Imam's action, once asked him, "May God make you godlier, what forced you into this arrangement with al-Ma'mun?" Abul-Hasan (a.s.) in turn asked him, "Who is better, man, the Prophet or the wasi?" The man answered, "Well, of course, it is the Prophet." The Imam (a.s.) asked again, "Who is better, a believer or a disbeliever?" The man answered, "A believer, of course." The Imam (a.s.) then said: "Al-Aziz, Egypt's vizier, was a disbeliever, whereas Yousuf (Joseph) was a prophet; al-Ma'mun is a Muslim whereas I am a wasi, and Yousuf asked al-Aziz to appoint him as a governor, saying, 'And appoint me to take charge of the wealth of the land, for I am protector, knowledgeable,' whereas I was forced to accept it."¹⁵

Yasir, his servant, is quoted saying, "When ar-Ridha' (a.s.) became heir to the throne, I heard him saying after having raised his hands to the sky in supplication, 'Lord! You know that I am forced to accept; so, please do not hold me responsible just as You did not hold your Servant and Prophet Yousuf when he took charge in the government of Egypt.'" ¹⁶

These narratives suffice us to highlight the Imam's viewpoint regarding the issue of regency, for he at times depicts his ordeal to us by invoking the Almighty to remove his distress and anguish from him even by death, and at another time he compares his situation with that of Prophet Yousuf (a.s.) who accepted a post under the government of Egypt's Pharaoh while, at the same time, he reveals to us the difference between the two situations: While Yousuf gladly accepted his post and clearly requested it, he, on the other hand, was forced to accept.

After all this, no doubt remains in our mind about the Imam's conviction that the whole matter was a farce, and that he did not agree to it in principle.

Political Motives Behind the Regency

We can summarize the causes which forced al-Ma'mun to decide the issue of regency in the following:

1. In order to please the Shi'a public opinion in Khurasan and its territories which were credited with paving the road for al-Ma'mun's accession to the throne and for a victory over his brother al-Amin, thus he would secure a legitimate stamp for his government when the Imam (a.s.) agreed to be his successor, since the Imam's agreement meant a recognition of the legitimacy of al-Ma'mun's caliphate. Such recognition would guarantee for him the loyalty of his subjects in those regions, and I personally think that this is the most significant reason which caused al-Ma'mun to do so because it would put an end to the argument of traditional opponents to the Abbaside government who used to always criticize such government and consider it illegitimate and baseless. For this reason, we can

find no public discontent with the regency; on the contrary, it was a cause for elation and joyful endorsement in various circles.

It is not unlikely that al-Ma'mun may have felt that some underground movement was preparing to assault his throne, snatch the government from him and hand it over to the Alawides; therefore, he tried to encircle that movement by making the Imam (a.s.) a partner with him in the forefront of the government by naming him his regent.

Such an action may win him the sympathy of the Khurasanis especially after all the suffering they had to put up with and the persecution of the Abbaside caliphate which murdered them and pursued them throughout the country as fugitives in a manner which caused bitterness and agony. What supports this cause are some paragraphs of a letter al-Ma'mun wrote to Banu Hashim in which he said: "You claim that I desired that they would be the recipients of benefits thereof and to be in charge, while I have in mind the interest of your posterity and children after you even while you are unaware, blindly stumbling, not knowing what plans others have in store for you."

What these ambiguous statements imply, especially after the writer admitted that the nomination of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was something the man rightfully deserved due to his qualifications, is that al-Ma'mun sensed the danger of the precarious political situation around him, and he feared losing his grip on the reins of government since the popular base was faithful to the Alawides. Add to this the fact that many leading elements in the political and military establishments were strong supporters of the Alawides. We can appreciate this fact by evaluating the extent of the public acceptance of the nomination of the Imam (a.s.) for the regency, and if there was any opposition, its voice was so weak it vanished amidst the tumultuous voice of overwhelming support.

Al-Ma'mun did not wish the Alawides to take charge; rather, he only wished to preemptively encircle the crises which might uproot the Abbaside government if he let events shape themselves on their own.

2. To avoid a clash with the Alawides who always threatened the Abbaside government by their rebellions and uprisings during various epochs, presuming that the Abbasides had usurped the government from them, having stated that their call to uproot the Umayyads was on behalf of ar-Ridha' (a.s.), descendant of the Progeny of Muhammad (S), especially since al-Ma'mun wanted his government to be stable and to avoid disturbances and crises which might weaken his position as the supreme ruler since he was still engaged in a political struggle of survival with Baghdad, the capital of the caliphate, and it was not a coincident that the issue of regency took place at the outset of that struggle.

But the Alawides had already succeeded in winning the sympathy and public support of the Islamic world and were able to maintain that to their credit. An excellent proof for that was the wide response their revolutions won among various Islamic circles. All of that was due to the violent persecution and merciless pursuits, to the murdering and banishment, and to the norms of torture and retribution from which they suffered at the hands of

the ruling apparatus, so much so that even al-Ma'mun testified to that in his letter to Banu Hashim quoted above.

But al-Ma'mun in his afore-mentioned letter to Banu Hashim supports our argument in making this one of the causes of his decision regarding naming the Imam (a.s.) as his successor; he says, as we quoted above,"... The reason for that is my desire to safeguard your lives and protect your properties by establishing friendly ties between us and them which is a method I employ in being clement to the descendants of Abu Talib and to heal their wounds with very little of what they are entitled to."

When he ties the knot of regency for the Imam (a.s.), he wishes to put out the fire of rebellion in the souls of the Alawides and their followers and to keep the ghost of danger away should they oppose the Abbasides and try to compete with them in their bid for the government, and he did, indeed, achieve what he wanted.

3. To warn the Abbasides about what they had already done to him and how they reneged on their oath of allegiance to him, by their rebellion against him and removal from regency, that all of their actions would not disable him from overcoming them and subjecting them to his authority and, moreover, take the caliphate out of their dynasty and hand it over to their Alawide adversaries.

It is possible that the tense psychological atmosphere between al-Ma'mun and the Abbasides in Baghdad posed a real challenge, and al-Ma'mun found no way to force them and stir their deeply rooted sensitivities better than sending them a threatening signal that he was going to take the caliphate out of their court and throw it into that of their Alawide adversaries who constituted a point of weakness in the Abbaside psyche. Al-Ma'mun found no better weapon to threaten them with stronger than that in the face of their challenges which almost uprooted his position when they all agreed to depose him in response to the call of his brother al-Amin.

Abbasides Defy al-Ma'mun

The effect of that violent challenge stamped the behavior of the Abbasides since then, for they deliberately and for the second time decided to dethrone him in a counter challenge, warning him that it would not be easy for him to get the caliphate out of their hands and hand it over to their adversaries, and that they could seat on the throne anyone they wanted from among themselves even if he had been the least qualified. In fact, they went ahead and did just that; they appointed Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi who was nicknamed "Ibn Shakla," and who was one of the most famous singers during the entire Abbaside dynasty rule. They swore the oath of allegiance to him and others followed suit.

The Abbasides Treat Caliphate Lightly

It is very regrettable what the Abbasides did. It is an act of the most horrible nature to take so lightly the sacred institution of Islamic caliphate, and a flagrant sin committed against the most sacred divine post after Prophethood. It only shows the terrible extent of apathy reached by the Muslim masses when they accepted the nomination of such a promiscuous

person as the caliph to whom they would pay homage and whom they would obey.

Al-Ma'mun Backs Off and Apologizes

Such a reaction stirred the reservations of al-Ma'mun as seen in a letter he wrote after the death of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and during his march to Iraq. Ibn al-Athir writes:

"When he (ar-Ridha' (a.s.)) died, al-Ma'mun wrote al-Hasan ibn Sahl informing him of Ali's death and his calamity of losing him, and he wrote to the residents of Baghdad, to the Abbasides and their subjects informing them of his death and inviting them to enter into his loyalty, and they wrote him back in the most rude manner."¹⁷

Such a violent challenge in which the Abbasides reacted to al-Ma'mun and the latter's fears that they might persist in their rebellion lead the historian to conclude that al-Ma'mun used one of his tricks to eliminate Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in order to put an end to the anger of the Abbasides and other residents of Baghdad who were outraged because of the nomination of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) which was the reason why they terminated their loyalty to him.

Doubt in al-Ma'mun's Sincerity

Had al-Ma'mun been sincere in his intention to bring justice to the oppressed, and had he been serious in his handling of the issue of succession to the throne, why did he not name Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s.), son of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), after the death of his father and who was regarded as his father's successor and who was praised by al-Ma'mun for his knowledge and piety and superiority to all other Hashemites? Or did al-Ma'mun desire not to enter into a similar experience which might undermine his position and drag him into his downfall and collapse? Or did al-Ma'mun then fulfill the purpose from which he named the Imam (a.s.) as his successor and there was no need any more to enter into another such scheme?

4. By restricting the movement of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and forbidding him, after forcing him to accept regency, from demanding caliphate for himself, thus al-Ma'mun secures the strangulation of the element of competition from whose nightmares his preceding caliphs used to suffer and which explained their cruel and oppressive conduct towards the Imams.

Al-Ma'mun Places the Imam Under Surveillance

Al-Ma'mun was not satisfied with all of that; he went ahead and subjected the Imam (a.s.) to a strict surveillance whereby he was closely watching all his internal and external movements, and he indirectly defined the extent of his contacts with others; al-Rayyan ibn al-Salt narrates the following:

"Hisham ibn Ibrahim al-Rashidi was the closest person to ar-Ridha' (a.s.) before he was taken to the caliph's palace, and he was a courteous and brilliant scholar. Ar-Ridha' (a.s.)'s contacts used to be transacted through him and under his supervision, and he used to collect all monies on his behalf before he, Abul-Hasan, was taken away. When he was taken away to the palace, Hisham ibn Ibrahim contacted Dhul-Riyasatayn and he tried his

best to win his favor and started informing him and al-Ma'mun about ar-Ridha' (a.s.)'s movements, thus he won their confidence and did not conceal anything regarding the Imam (a.s.) from them. Al-Ma'mun, therefore, appointed him as the Imam's chamberlain, and nobody could have audience with the Imam (a.s.) except whoever he liked, and he enforced a tight surveillance over the Imam (a.s.), so much so that none of his supporters could reach him without Hisham's approval, and he used to inform al-Ma'mun and Dhul-Riyasatayn of anything and everything ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said at home."¹⁸

Al-Ma'mun's Motives Behind Enforcing Surveillance

What prompted al-Ma'mun to take such a harsh measure was his great apprehension that the Alawides who predominated Khurasan, encouraged and directed by the Imam (a.s.), might move to topple his government, which is something we do not think it was logically improbable.

Strictness of Followers of the Imams

Al-Ma'mun was probably aware of how followers of the Imams measured their own movements and transactions according to the prior instructions of their Imams so that their actions would be legitimate. For this reason, al-Ma'mun did not need to enforce surveillance over the movements of the Alawide popular base which paid homage and allegiance to the Imam (a.s.), as much as he needed to enforce a strict surveillance over the Imam's actions and contacts. In order to verify this conduct which Shi'as have always undertaken in their practical dealings with their Imams, we ought to quote what al-Rayyan ibn al-Salt stated.

He mentioned that one Abbaside, Ibrahim ibn Hisham, used to defame and degrade the Imam (a.s.), so al-Rayyan told ar-Ridha' (a.s.) about that and sought his permission to silence that man for good, whereupon the Imam (a.s.) strongly forbade him from doing so. Then he said to him, "This Fadl ibn Sahl is dispatching me to Iraq to carry out errands for him and this Abbaside man is leaving three days after that for Iraq. What do you say if I should instruct your followers in Qum to dispatch twenty or thirty men and disguise as thieves or highway robbers and when he passes by them they would attack and kill him, and people would say that he was killed by highway robbers?"

The Imam (a.s.) kept silence; he neither said 'Yes' nor 'No'; therefore, he went to the inn-keeper and hired a horseman to go to Zakariyya ibn Adam with a letter informing him that there were matters he could not possibly include in the letter and that he would disclose them to him if he met him at such and such a place on a particular day. He said, "Leave me and the man alone," so he bade him farewell and left. The man went back to Qum where Mu'ammarr had just arrived, so he consulted the matter with him, whereupon Mu'ammarr said, "We do not know for sure whether his silence meant he is ordering us to do it or not. He did not explicitly order you to do anything; therefore, it is not wise to harm the man," so he changed his mind, and Zakariyya abstained from going to meet him. He passed by the Abbaside man without harming him in the least."¹⁹

Despite the fact that the Imam (a.s.) the second time did not explicitly tell al-Rayyan what to do and remained silent, having first strongly forbidden him from doing it, which gave him the impression that he approved of the plan al-Rayyan had suggested to eliminate the Abbaside man because of his silence, Zakariyya ibn Adam did not do anything except after consulting Mu'ammara in this matter who told him not to do anything since the Imam's silence could not be interpreted for sure as an order or not. This shows us the degree of precision in following the orders and instructions of the Imams.

These are the realistic reasons, within the historical understanding of the period through which the government was passing, which can be used, in part or as a whole, to realize exactly why al-Ma'mun named the Imam (a.s.) as his regent.

Naive Analyses of the Regency Issues

It is naive to say that the incentive for the regency was al-Ma'mun's desire to fulfill his pledge to God to hand the caliphate over to the best person among the descendants of Abu Talib if he was able to regain his post, as al-Saduq (R.A.) concluded, for such a statement, if it was indeed said by al-Ma'mun in his answer to al-Fadl and his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl, was said only to confuse the matter to others. Equally naive is that which alleged that the reason for it was to expose the reality of the Imams and their pretense of asceticism and that their pretense was only due to their inability to attain it. But al-Ma'mun was more keen and more knowledgeable than others of the reality of the Imams. He knew that such posts would not in the least affect their stance and the public's regard towards them. Yet acceding to the post of caliph would not be in the eyes of the nation in conflict with the principle of asceticism if the objective is to establish an equitable society and to rule the nation by the principle of absolute justice.

The Imams and their followers, however, regard government as one of their rights which was usurped from them by others; otherwise, how can you prove that there is a conflict between one's asceticism and his acceptance of a government post? Did it undermine the asceticism of Imam Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) and that of others who became caliphs and who were known for their asceticism?

These, finally, are the reasons which we can mention to clearly show us the other face of al-Ma'mun revealing the real background of his politics which were ambiguous in dimension regarding his regency arrangement.

Queries

If al-Ma'mun had really been serious in his offer for Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) that he should accept the post of caliph while he himself would abdicate, or even in his offer of regency, we still have to answer some queries without the answers to which we cannot take al-Ma'mun's offer that seriously; they are the following:

1. Why did al-Ma'mun send a messenger to Medina to bring the Imam (a.s.) to him escorted by a police force?

2. Why did he specify that the route he should take would pass by Basrah, al-Ahwaz, Persia, and then Marw?

3. If al-Ma'mun was truly convinced that the Imam (a.s.) was most qualified for caliphate, why did he not address the public on his behalf without forcing him to take such a hard journey to Marw under such specific route arrangement?

4. Why did he forbid him from leading the Eid prayers after insisting repeatedly that he should do so?

These questions may seem to some as naive and superficial, but they are deep enough to be considered in the calculation of the historian who aims at evaluating the event and its intricacies.

Al-Ma'mun Was the One Who Suggested It

What appears to us after observing the general political circumstances and from discerning al-Ma'mun's political awareness which was adulterated with both caution and precision, that al-Ma'mun was the one who came out with the idea of the regency as the above quoted narratives indicate. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl tried to dissuade him from doing so when he was magnifying for him their consequences, but he finally had to yield upon facing al-Ma'mun's insistence.

Al-Fadl Could Not Have Suggested It

It is far-fetched to suggest that al-Fadl ibn Sahl was the one who came with the idea especially since he was a lackey and a recipient of the cash of the Barmakis and of their followers' who were all very well known for their open deviation from the line of the Alawides; so, how could it be possible that he would recommend to al-Ma'mun to choose ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his successor except if the general political atmosphere of the caliphate necessitated that it should bypass the sectarian issues?

Ibn al-Athir goes beyond this in his *Tarikh* to suggest that al-Fadl was actually Shi'a and that he was definitely the one who suggested to al-Ma'mun to choose Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his successor.²⁰ He may even have narrated this in some of his narratives; for example, Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn Ahmed al-Salami writes in his book *Tarikh Khurasan* (history of Khurasan) saying: "Al-Fadl ibn Sahl suggested to al-Ma'mun to name Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his regent²¹, and this view is adopted by a group of historians."

Al-Salami also narrates saying that al-Fadl ibn Sahl, when one day al-Ma'mun was discussing how he successfully transferred the caliphate with some of his very close friends (among whom al-Fadl was present), he wondered, "How would you compare my action in this regard to that of Abu Muslim [al-Khurasani]?" One of them answered, "Abu Muslim transferred caliphate from one tribe to another, whereas you have transferred it from one brother (al-Amin) to another, and there is a difference between the two cases of which you are aware." Al-Fadl said, "If it were up to me, I would rather transfer it from one tribe to another," and he suggested to him to name Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his regent, so he secured the oath of allegiance for him and thus dropped that of al-Mutamin Billah.²²

Abdullah ibn Tahir is quoted saying: "Al-Fadl ibn Sahl suggested to al-Ma'mun to seek nearness to the Almighty God and to the kin of His Messenger (S) by naming Ali ibn Musa (as successor) in order to wipe out the harm they had received at the hands of al-Rashid, and he could not easily reject a suggestion he made; therefore, he dispatched from Khurasan Rajaa ibn Abul Dhahhak and Yasir the servant and ordered them to seek the company of Muhammad ibn Ja'far and Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far (and go to ar-Ridha', A.S.), and that was in the year 200 A.H."²³

Al-Ma'mun Asserts the Idea Was His

In contrast with the above, al-Rayyan ibn al-Salt says: "There was a huge multitude of army leaders and civilian dignitaries as well as huge crowds of commoners assembled to witness the nomination of ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and they were saying that that was due to the arrangement of al-Fadl Dhul-Riyasatayn, and al-Ma'mun came to know about it, so he sent for me in the midst of the night, and I stood before him. He said, 'O Rayyan! It has come to our knowledge that people say that the nomination of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was the arrangement of al-Fadl ibn Sahl Dhul-Riyasatayn.' I said, 'O commander of the faithful! They indeed say so.' He said, 'Fie upon you, O Rayyan! How dare anyone come to the caliph, after his subjects are completely loyal to him and so are his leaders and he is well-seated in his post, and tells him to hand over the caliphate to someone else? Is this conceivable?' I said, 'By God, no, O commander of the faithful! Nobody dares to do that.' He said, 'No, by God! What they say is not true, but I shall tell you of the reason for that.' Then he mentioned the reason to be his pledge to God that if he regained his post and became in charge, he would conduct regency the way God wanted it to be."²⁴

Historical Analysis of Its Attribution to al-Fadl

If we observe the Imam's conduct towards al-Fadl, his view about the Imam (a.s.), and his warning to al-Ma'mun against giving him the reins of leadership of his government, we cannot help endorsing the view which says that the choice of regent was something al-Ma'mun thought about and politically calculated. Al-Fadl was not ignorant of the status of the Imam (a.s.) and the power of his influence should he side with al-Ma'mun, and he was not naive to the extent that he would jeopardize his powerful influence by getting involved in al-Ma'mun's apparatus in a confrontation with a more powerful influence.

As regarding what others have stated that it was he who suggested to al-Ma'mun to do so, this may be attributed to the fact that if any event happened to the ruling apparatus, its credit was often given to the person with the strongest influence in that apparatus, the one who was strong enough to face the public opinion bearing full responsibility for any action taken by the government.

Abul-Fadl, according to public opinion of the time, enjoyed the widest influence and the strongest word with the caliph al-Ma'mun, and when al-Ma'mun was about to make a decision regarding the appointment of the Imam (a.s.) as his successor, people would think that al-Fadl must have been inspired the idea.

It was held that he must have been the one who subjected al-Ma'mun to his views in all his political measures, enforcing a complete control over them. For this reason, we see that when the letter of al-Hasan ibn Sahl reached Isa ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid, in which he was informing him that al-Ma'mun was getting ready to nominate ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his successor and that he had already ordered him to remove the official black government uniforms and substitute them with green ones and ordered the army and its commanders as well as Banu Hashim to swear the oath of allegiance to him as such and to require all the residents of Baghdad to do likewise, some people said they would swear allegiance but would not wear green while others said that they would do neither and that they would not let the descendants of the Abbasides lose their grip over the government, adding that it was a "conspiracy" inspired by al-Fadl ibn Sahl.²⁵

The accusation of the people of Baghdad of al-Fadl was inspired only because of his having the strongest influence over the government, and we think it is not too far to believe that the publicity of the rumor that the idea was suggested to al-Ma'mun by al-Fadl was actually the doing of al-Fadl himself in order to safeguard his own status in public opinion since he did, indeed, have the strongest influence over the caliph's actions.

When al-Ma'mun asks one of his close friends about his own opinion regarding the comparison between what he did and what Abu Muslim had done, he brags about transferring the caliphate from one tribe to another just as Abu Muslim had done in order to boast to his listeners of having the ability to do with the caliphate whatever he pleased, and that the arrangement of the regency issue was done according to his own instructions rather than those of anyone else.

Al-Fadl Sows Mischief Between the Imam and al-Ma'mun

Al-Fadl actually did try to transfer the caliphate from one tribe to another in order to satisfy by so doing his own personal conceit and in pursuit of his own personal ambition to be a second Abu Muslim, so he enters the residence of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) accompanied by Hisham ibn Amr to say: "O son of the Messenger of God! I have come to you to speak in private; so, please clear the place," then al-Fadl brings out of his pocket an oath sworn by the sanctity of emancipation, divorce, and whatever has no *kaffara*, and both men say to him, "We have come to you to say a word of truth and honesty, and we know that your word is most effective, and the right belongs to you. O son of the Messenger of God! What we say with our tongues is attested to by our own conscience; otherwise, we would emancipate all that we have, and all our women are henceforth divorced, and I shall be required to perform the pilgrimage thirty times on foot... that we shall kill al-Ma'mun and put you in charge so that right goes back to you," but he did not listen to them but cursed them and said, "You both have proven ungrateful to the blessings God has blessed you with; therefore, you will not be safe from what you have said, and I shall not get what you promise even if I were to agree to what you say."

When al-Fadl and Hisham heard the Imam (a.s.) say so, they realized that they were mistaken in their calculations; therefore, they went back to al-Ma'mun after telling ar-Ridha' (a.s.) that they were only testing him. Before

leaving, they were told by the Imam (a.s.), "You have lied, for your hearts certainly relish what you have just said to me, but you found me not exactly as you had hoped." When they entered al-Ma'mun's court, they said: "O commander of the faithful! We have just visited ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and we tested him and wanted to sift his mind about you, so we said what we said and he said too," whereupon al-Ma'mun said, "You have done well." So when they came out, ar-Ridha' (a.s.) went to see him and they remained by themselves and ar-Ridha' (a.s.) informed him of what they both had said and enjoined him to protect himself from their mischief. When al-Ma'mun heard that from ar-Ridha' (a.s.), he knew that the Imam (a.s.), not those two men, was the truthful.

Subjective Analysis of the Dialogue

Should this story be true, it would be a proof showing us the precise political dimension of a dangerous move whereby al-Fadl tried to score a victory for himself and strengthen his own position which was being weakened by his being distanced from the power nucleus after the nomination of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the successor. Al-Fadl, by so doing, was either serious in his offer or a pretender.

If we suppose that he was serious, what would then his objective be? What we can understand as an interpretation of the situation is that al-Fadl was trying by so doing to involve the Imam (a.s.) in the plotting of a conspiracy to assassinate al-Ma'mun, and when caliphate was to be transferred to the Imam (a.s.), since he was the heir to the throne, al-Fadl would be in a position to hold the reins of government and enforce his control over its authority, making the Imam's participation in the plot as a blackmail against the Imam (a.s.) whereby he could threaten him should he try in any way to restrict his influence. Or, after eliminating al-Ma'mun, it would be easy for him to eliminate Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as well through a little help from groups opposing the Imam's caliphate.

Had al-Fadl been truly honest in his offer to transfer the caliphate to the Alawide dynasty and to eliminate al-Ma'mun, and had he been confident of the practicality of the idea, what made it necessary for him to consult the Imam (a.s.) regarding all of that since caliphate would be transferred to the Imam (a.s.) automatically and without any obstacle after the elimination of al-Ma'mun since he was the appointed successor?

If we suppose that he was a pretender in his offer, as al-Fadl tried to assert after the Imam's rejection of his plot, then the goal he was trying to achieve becomes quite clear, for he would then desire to disturb the standing relationship between the Imam (a.s.) and al-Ma'mun and, at the same time, prove to al-Ma'mun his loyalty to his government and concern about its security.

Imam Foils al-Fadl's Attempt

The Imam (a.s.) foiled his attempt to achieve his goal in either possibility, and Imam ar-Ridha''s assertion to al-Ma'mun that al-Fadl was quite serious about his offer is a strong reason added to the other reasons which caused al-Ma'mun to eliminate al-Fadl at a later time. Having absorbed all the above, we can be easily satisfied that the regency concept

was due to al-Ma'mun's conviction of the persisting need for it in order to achieve some political gains the government was concerned about achieving.

We can also be satisfied that the publicity al-Fadl ibn Sahl awarded that arrangement cannot be proven even when many historians insist it could, for attributing Shi'aism to him was due to the rumors which said that al-Fadl was the one who offered al-Ma'mun the most encouragement to name ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as his successor, but we opt for the opposite due to the lack of evidence after having analyzed all situations as stated above.

Al-Ma'mun Calls Imam to Him

Having evaluated the general status of the political policies of his government, which were surrounded with tumultuous events starting with Baghdad going back against its promise of support to him and passing by the Shi'a Alawide throngs surrounding his base of government in Khurasan and ending with the Alawide rebellions in Iraq, Hijaz and Yemen, al-Ma'mun thought of curing this weak point by a brilliant acceptable political move which would be something to divert the attention of the Alawides and the Shi'a residents of Khurasan and, at the same time, a terrible threat to the Abbaside throngs in Baghdad that would guarantee influence for his position and control over all parties, and this could not be achieved without naming Imam Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the successor to the throne. And so it happened; he sent letters to the Imam (a.s.) ordering him to go to Marw.

The Imam (a.s.) refused, and a great deal of correspondence ensued between both men till al-Ma'mun convinced him finally and through his own special ways to go there, sending him a special force to escort him on his way which included al-Dhahhak, or, according to al-Mufid and Abul Faraj al-Asbahani, al-Jalloudi. History books do not say much about that trip except small bits and pieces which do not provide us with a clear vision of its nature and mission.

Al-Ma'mun Determines Imam's Route

Al-Ma'mun had already ordered his messenger to take a group of dignitaries who were descendants of Abu Talib to the Basrah highway, then to al-Ahwaz and Persia, keeping in mind that the alternate route, which was Kufa-al-Jabal-Kerman Shah-Qum, was mostly inhabited by Shi'as and it has their strongholds, and they might be carried away by their enthusiasm upon finding out that the Imam (a.s.) was among them and might decide to keep him there and thus involve the government in dangerous consequences which might cause its weakening and collapse.

Imam in Nishapur

When he entered Nishapur, he stayed at a neighborhood called al-Qazwini where there were crowds of pigeons, the pigeons which they call today ar-Ridha' (a.s.) pigeons, and there was a spring there the water of which had receded, so he hired workers who repaired it till its water became plentiful. He had a pool built on its outside where stairs were also built according to his instructions leading to the low level of the spring water, so

the Imam (a.s.) went down, made his ablution, came out and said his prayers on the outside.

Story of the Gold Chain

According to *Tarikh Nishapur*, as quoted in *Al-Fusool al-Muhimma* by Ibn al-Sabbagh the Malekite, when the Imam (a.s.) entered Nishapur on his way to Marw, he was inside a dome with curtains conveyed on a gray mule, and he went through Nishapur where the two Imams who memorized the *ahadith* of the Prophet (S) and the students of the Sunnah of the Prophet (S), namely Abu Zar'a al-Razi and Muhammad ibn Aslam al-Toosi, with countless scholars and seekers of knowledge, traditionists and critics, and they both approached the Imam (a.s.) saying, "O most honorable dignitary and the son of the master Imams! By the rights of your purified forefathers (a.s.) and your glorious ancestors, could you please let us see your blessed face, and could you narrate for us *hadith* from your forefathers quoting your grandfather Muhammad (S) whereby we can remember you?" So he ordered to have the mule halted, and he cooled the eyes of the throngs with his blessed sight. He had two locks of hair on his shoulders, and people from all classes were standing and looking at him, some loudly crying and rolling in the dust before him while others were kissing the hooves of his mule. The noise became much louder, and the leading scholars loudly called upon people, "O folks! Listen and learn! Listen to what benefits you and do not harm us by your loud screams and cries!"

The person who requested permission to write down then was Abu Zar'a Muhammad ibn Aslam al-Toosi. Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said: "My father Musa al-Kazim (a.s.) narrated to me from his father Ja'far As-Sadiq (a.s.) from his father Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) from his father Ali Zaynul-Abidin (a.s.) from his father, the Martyr of Karbala (a.s.), from his father Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) saying: `My loved one, and the pleasure of my eyes, the Messenger of God (S), narrated to me once that Jibrail (Gabriel) told him that he had heard the Lord of the Throne, Glorified and Praised be His Name, saying, `The kalima of *LA ILAHA ILLA-ALLAH* is My citadel; whoever said it would enter My citadel, and whoever entered My citadel was safe from My retribution.'" Then he let the curtains loose on the dome and went away while the scribes outnumbered twenty thousand.

Abu Na'im said in *Hilyat al-Awliya*, after quoting the narrative above, "This is a firm *hadith* famous in this way of narration through the line of narrators from among the Purified Ones (a.s.) who quote their forefathers, and some of our predecessors who were traditionists used to say whenever this tradition was narrated that if this narrative was narrated to a madman, he would come back to his senses."

Imam Continues His Trip to Marw

The Imam (a.s.) after that continued his trip till he finally reached Marw where al-Ma'mun had prepared a comfortable place for him and surrounded him with excellent manifestations of respect and veneration and all means of honoring and glorification. It was then that al-Ma'mun started to execute the plan he had planned for the regency.

Imam Preconditions

Finally the Imam (a.s.) bowed his head with the agreement to be the caliph's successor, but it was not before he had taken from the government an excitingly negative stance; he preconditioned that he would not be required to bear any responsibility, general or specific, related to the government and its ruling systems, and al-Ma'mun accepted the condition quite reluctantly, but he did try at times to involve the Imam (a.s.) in such responsibilities, and the Imam (a.s.) kept refusing, reminding him to honor his condition.

Having been convinced to accept, the Imam (a.s.) said to al-Ma'mun: "I also agree not to name anyone in a post nor remove anyone from a post, that I do not cancel any decree or tradition, and to stay as an advisor," and he agreed to all of that.²⁶

In another encounter, al-Ma'mun tried to pressure the Imam (a.s.) into participating in the state affairs; Mu'ammār ibn Khallad said that Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) had said to him, "Al-Ma'mun said to me, 'O father of al-Hasan! You may consider some of those individuals, whom you trust to be governors of the areas where corruption is manifest,' and I said to him, 'If you honor your part of the agreement, I shall certainly honor mine. I agreed to what I agreed on the condition that I do not issue orders or overrule others, nor depose anyone or appoint anyone, nor do I go anywhere except wherever God sends me. By God! Caliphate was something I never desired, and I used to live in Medina where I go through its alleys on the back of my animal, and when its residents or others ask me to do them a favor, I do them a favor, and thus they become like my own uncles. My letters still carry weight in various lands and you have not increased me in whatever blessing God has bestowed upon me.' So he said, 'I shall honor it.'"²⁷

Analyzing Imam's Negative Stance Towards Such Responsibility

We have no choice here except to clear some of the ambiguity which encompasses this negative stance of the Imam (a.s.) towards the government, for why should he refuse to cooperate with al-Ma'mun in carrying out the state affairs?

Before doing anything, we have to evaluate the Imam's viewpoint towards the government and its "legitimacy" under the leadership of al-Ma'mun and the counsels of al-Fadl ibn Sahl and his views regarding its leaders and heads.

Of course, his viewpoint was not positive due to his belief that a government was not legitimate as long as it remained distant from his own leadership in his status as the pristine Imam (a.s.) named so by the Messenger (S) himself according to a series of instructions conveyed by one Imam (a.s.) to the next. For this reason, we see how his companions unanimously disagreed that he should accept the post of regent which carried an implied recognition of the then caliphate. We can see the only justification they accepted was that the Imam (a.s.) was forced to accept it, and that that post which was forced on him would not change his stance towards the government one iota, for he did not enter into it except like that who entered to exit²⁸ and that what caused him to agree was the same that caused his grandfather the Commander of the Faithful (a.s.) to agree to be part of the shura committee.²⁹

Had Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) wished to share the burdens of government with al-Ma'mun, it would have been regarded as his recognition of the legitimacy of the makeup of that government, and an endorsement of all its actions undertaken by its higher authorities, but he preferred to assume the role of an advisor who kept his stances in order to safeguard the interests of Islam the safeguarding of which was his own very mission in life.

But the Imam (a.s.) did not want to grant al-Ma'mun the status of a custodian over his behavior and actions, nor would he be the executor of his will and the person to fulfill his every ambition, for he did not have the ambition to achieve a stronger ruling status, or the one who controls the government apparatus, so that he would provide al-Ma'mun similarly to what al-Fadl ibn Sahl and others provided. Those individuals used to press to win his favor, flatter him, and carry out his desires whatever they might be so that they would be the first to win a stronger position in the government vehicle.

Let us suppose that the Imam (a.s.) had accepted the principle of taking part in managing the state affairs. That would mean his exposure to an overwhelming and fierce opposition by others who consider Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as an element differing from their systems in conduct, program, framework and context, and he might push them away from the cycle of government especially since he could not accept all their actions most of which may go beyond the limits legislated for them. Or such a confrontation may expose the Imam's stance to dangerous repercussions which may historically affect his being and personality even if through cheap means and methods they plot behind the scenes to accuse him in order to incite the wrath of the government against him and also distort the sacred halo with which others surround him.

Do these persons lack special means to cast a shadow of doubt on the movements of the Imam (a.s.) and misinterpret his behavior to the caliph al-Ma'mun? Take the case of that person who raised al-Ma'mun to the throne after turning the tables upside down on the government in Baghdad, removed al-Amin from his throne through whatever political and military means he had, was he then not capable of plotting to eliminate the Imam (a.s.), or hurt his reputation, in order to secure for himself to remain in the center of power?! In fact, despite the generous amount of intelligence al-Ma'mun enjoyed by forcing the Imam (a.s.) to accept regency, the Imam (a.s.) was likewise aware of his situation, keen to the consequences when he practically distanced himself from the areas of responsibility.

Regency Celebrated

When the Imam (a.s.) accepted regency, al-Ma'mun wanted to celebrate the event in a grand style, so he conducted a meeting with his closest aides on a Thursday, then al-Fadl ibn Sahl went out and informed the public of the decision al-Ma'mun had made regarding Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and that he chose him to be his successor and named him "ar-Ridha'" and ordered them to wear green and come on Thursday to swear the oath of allegiance to him as such and take a year's allowance from the state treasury.

On that day, people in their various social classes, leaders, chamberlains, judges and others, all draped in green outfits, rode to the designated place

where al-Ma'mun had seated himself, putting for ar-Ridha' (a.s.) two huge pillows. He even spread the carpet in person for ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and seated him on it near him while wearing a turban and carrying a sword. Then he ordered his son al-Abbas ibn al-Ma'mun to be the first to swear allegiance. Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) raised his hand, with its back facing his face and its palm facing them. Al-Ma'mun said to him: "Stretch your hand so that people swear allegiance to you."

Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said: "The Messenger of God (S) used to put his hand like that before accepting people's allegiance." People swore the oath of allegiance to him while his palm was thus facing them. Tens of thousands of dirhams were brought in; orators delivered speeches and poets said their poems exalting the merits of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and the status to which al-Ma'mun had chosen him for.

Then Abu Abbad called upon al-Abbas son of al-Ma'mun. He stood and came close to his father and kissed his hand. His father ordered him to sit, then Ali Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad was called upon, and al-Fadl ibn Sahl said to him, "Come up," and he did till he was close to al-Ma'mun. He stood there but he did not kiss his hand. He was told to go and take his money. Al-Ma'mun then called him and told him to go back to his place, which he did. Abu Abbad kept inviting one Alawide and one Abbaside to take their money till all cash was depleted. Then al-Ma'mun asked ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to deliver a sermon.

The Imam (a.s.) praised God and glorified Him, then he said: "We have over you a right designated by the Messenger of God, and you have a right over us as well; so, if you perform your obligation towards us, we will be bound to perform yours."

Historians do not record any other sermon he delivered besides this one on that occasion. Al-Ma'mun ordered a new dirham currency to be minted with ar-Ridha''s name on it. Ishaq ibn Musa ibn Ja'far married the daughter of his uncle Ishaq ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad and ordered him to accompany people to the pilgrimage, and sermons were delivered at ar-Ridha''s home town mentioning his name in them as the designated successor of the caliph.³⁰ Al-Ma'mun ordered that all countries must mention ar-Ridha' (a.s.) during their sermons and pray for him in his capacity as the successor of the caliph of the Muslims.

Poems in his Praise

Poets praised him in a most excellent way. Among such poems were verses composed by Abu Nuwas which are considered the best, for people blamed the poet for not praising ar-Ridha' (a.s.), whereupon he said:

*It was said to me that mine was the best rhyme,
Articulate in arts of brilliant speech and chime,
That I have pearls of beautiful speech
Bearing fruits in the hands that can reach;
"So why did you leave the praise of the son
Of Musa, and equal to his merits is none?"
I said how could I possibly praise and be fair
To one whose father Jibreel did serve and care?*

Al-Ma'mun said: "Very well said," and he paid him as much as he paid all the poets combined and considered him as a close friend. The school of thought of Abu Nuwas was Shi'a, and myths of promiscuity were narrated about and attributed to him regarding which we have our own view which dissociates the poet from what was attributed to him.

Abu Nuwas went out of his house once and noticed that there was a horseman who was riding beside him. He asked who the man was without seeing his face, and he was told that he was Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.), whereupon he instantly composed these verses:

*Had the eyes sought you for a goal,
And the mind doubted you and the soul,
The heart would surely you recognize
Even when not seen by the eyes.
If people wish to see you but do not know,
Your fragrance will tell them where to go.*

Once he saw the Imam (a.s.) leaving the court of al-Ma'mun and riding his mule, he came close to him, greeted him and said, "O son of the messenger of God! I have composed a few verses about you and would like you to hear them." He said, "Let us hear them," so he said:

*Cleansed and Purified they are,
When mentioned, they are sanctified,
Wherever they may be, near or far;
When roots and lines are identified,
If not Alawides, they indeed are
With nothing to boast or pride
In their lineage, in their deed;
For when God created man and eyed
You He selected and favored indeed
And raised above the rest and all
With the knowledge of His Qur'an
And of its verses you stand tall.*

Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said, "You have composed verses nobody else beat you to them before," then he asked his servant how much spending money he had with him, and the servant told him it was three hundred dinars. The Imam (a.s.) said, "Give it to him all," then he ordered him to hand him his mule as well.³¹

As regarding Da'bal, the poet of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), I did not come across his poetry in praise of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) on the occasion, but I have come across his poetry as recorded in books of history which have brought us his famous poem rhyming with the `t' in which he depicted for us the horrible tragedies from which the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) suffered the bitterness of injustice and oppression at the hands of their contemporary caliphs and their oppressive rulers. Da'bal seems in his poem to aim at stirring the sympathy of the nation in order to wake up the sense of loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and to support them against their enemies who usurped their rights by his magnificent narrative style of the bloody tragedies whereby they were terrorized during various epochs of the Umayyad and Abbaside dynasties. The poem begins with:

*They answered each other with an echo and sighed,
Mourners in non-Arab tongued wailed and cried...*

Then he explains the facts the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) went through since the demise of the Prophet (S), passing by the incident of the saqifa and the nation's stance towards the caliphate then, and ending with the calamity that befell Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.). After that he dedicates the rest of the poem to praising the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), highlighting their particular merits and qualities. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was moved particularly by two verses of the poem, and that was reflected clearly on his face, when Da'bal said,

*I find others share their share,
Their hands of what is theirs are bare...;*

The Imam (a.s.) cried and said, "You have said the truth, O Da'bal..." And Da'bal had indeed struck on the Imam's sensitive chord of the dilemma from which the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) were suffering when he said:

*When they were pulled taut, they did stretch
Tense hands that couldn't their muscles touch,*

The Imam (a.s.) kept making a motion with his hands and repeating, "tense, indeed; they are tense..." The poem is considered one of the best in Arabic poetry in its ease of expression, the reality of exposition, the craftsmanship of its organization, and the excellence of its performance.

When Da'bal finished, ar-Ridha' (a.s.), according to the author of Al-Aghani, rewarded him with ten thousand dirhams of the ones minted with his name on them, and gave him one of his own shirts which some residents of Qum offered to buy from the poet for thirty thousand dirhams but he refused; therefore, they waited till they had a chance to take it away from him by force. He then said to them, "It is meant to be for seeking nearness to God, the Exalted, and it is prohibited from you," and he swore that he would never sell such a relic except if they agreed to give him a portion of it to put in his coffin, so they gave him one sleeve which was later put inside his coffin.

He wrote his poem titled *Madarisu Ayatin*, as is said, about a garment (from the Imam) which he wore as the ihram robe, and he ordered it to be put in his coffin upon his death. Da'bal was feared for his tongue, and caliphs used to dread his criticism. Ibn al-Mudabbir said, "I met Da'bal once and said to him, 'You have more guts than anyone else when you composed these verses about al-Ma'mun:

*I belong to the people whose power and might
Killed your brother and honored you with your right;
From its long apathy they made your status bright,
And lifted you from the deepest pit and plight.*

So he said to me, 'O Abu Ishaq! I have been carrying my cross board with me during the past forty years without finding anyone to crucify me on it!'"³²

An Interesting Anecdote

One of the interesting and often narrated anecdotes says that Da'bal left Marw after Da'bal had already said his famous poem rhyming in the 't' and passed by the watering place belonging to Fawhan when highway robbers intercepted his caravan and took it all as a booty after tying its men

including Da'bal. The robbers took possession of all the wares of the caravan and kept dividing it among themselves when one man, quoting Da'bal, said:

I find others share their share,

Their hands of what is theirs are bare...

Da'bal heard him and asked him, "Who said that line?" The man answered, "A man from the tribe of Khuza'a called Da'bal ibn Ali." Da'bal said, "I am Da'bal who composed that poem, and this verse is one of its verses," whereupon the man leaped and rushed to their chief who was saying his prayers on top of a hill, and he was a Shi'a. He told him what he had heard. The chief came and asked Da'bal if he was the man and Da'bal answered in the affirmative, so the man challenged him to recite the entire poem. When he did, he untied him and untied all the other men in the caravan and returned all their belongings back to them just to please Da'bal.³³

This story, although we are not sure if it is true, expresses anyway the implication this verse carries.

Opponents of the Regency Arrangement

The regency arrangement was the source of horror mixed with outrage and anger of the Abbasides and their followers, and this became manifest by their removal of all political influence of al-Ma'mun from Baghdad and by reneging on their pledge of allegiance to him which caused him a great deal of political disasters.

There was also a group of men among his closest courtiers and leaders who refused to endorse his decision and spoke of their disagreement with him and insisted on their disagreement till he found himself forced in the end, according to some reports, to arrest them for fear of foiling his plan. Among those arrested were three men, namely al-Jalloudi, Ali ibn Abu Imran, and Ibn Munis. Al-Saduq narrates saying that they were killed after being arrested³⁴, although some historical facts conclude that this was not so, for both Tabari and Ibn Athir, discussing the events of the year 205 A.H., say that al-Ma'mun appointed Yazid ibn Isa al-Jalloudi to fight al-Zatt in Yemen³⁵, and so does al-Yaqubi.

Researching History

We find it hard to believe that the al-Jalloudi whom al-Ma'mun killed was not the same al-Jalloudi who fought al-Zatt, and it is possible that he was not killed because of the intercession on his behalf by ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

It is strange that those leaders should revolt against the wish of al-Ma'mun and insist on their rebellion and dissension to the extent that they were executed, and here we have no choice except to endorse the authenticity of this story according to the common books of criteria in understanding history. Al-Saduq narrated the story of their execution in a way which was closer to a stage play, in which he used precision to distribute the roles among it cast, than anything else. It is likely that Ali ibn Abu Imran whom al-Saduq named among those three men was actually Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran who will be discussed later and who was killed with others by al-Ma'mun after having been accused of taking part in the murder of al-Fadl ibn Sahl.

Silent Opposition

There were other elements of dissent who did not relish the nomination of the Imam (a.s.) as the successor and to the possibility of taking caliphate out of the Abbasides, but they submitted to reality while hiding ill intentions just to avoid a clash with the government in which they are not strong enough to oppose its will. But they could not keep it to themselves for too long; instead, they expressed the bitterness they felt towards such an "irresponsible" act, according to their way of thinking, of the caliph.

Ishaq ibn Musa ibn Isa ibn Musa accompanied a group of people for the *hajj* where he prayed for al-Ma'mun and for his successor Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.), whereupon he was challenged by Hamdawayhi ibn Ali ibn Isa ibn Musa ibn Isa ibn Mahan who leaped at him and called for a black (Abbaside color) robe to wear, and when he could not find one, he took a black flag and wrapped himself in it saying: "O people! I have now conveyed to you what I was ordered to convey, and I do not recognize anyone other than the commander of the faithful and al-Fadl ibn Sahl," then he descended.³⁶

This incident leads us to believe that there was a silent underground opposition which did not wish to enter into a struggle to define its position regarding the government, in addition to the opposition which had already and publicly taken a stance contrary to the will of the government as had happened in Baghdad and elsewhere.

At any rate, those who rejected the regency arrangement did not realize what prompted al-Ma'mun to bring it about during those shaky political circumstances which the Abbaside government lived, and al-Ma'mun was not naive enough to reveal to these parties the secret which he had very well kept to himself till he reached the final destination point of the plan he had planned.

Eid Prayers

One of the manifestations which was not destined to finalize of the regency celebration was the Eid prayers which al-Ma'mun insisted that the Imam (a.s.) should conduct in person because he himself had caught a very bad cold, or he may have had another excuse. Al-Irshad quotes Ali ibn Ibrahim who in turn quotes Yasir the servant and al-Rayyan ibn al-Salt saying that when the Eid approached, and ar-Ridha' (a.s.) had already been named as the caliph's successor, al-Ma'mun invited him to ride to the place where the occasion was to be celebrated and to say the prayers and deliver the sermon, and ar-Ridha' (a.s.) sent him a word saying, "You know what terms exist between both of us; so, please exempt me from conducting the prayers to people." Al-Ma'mun answered saying, "My intention is that people's hearts must rest at peace regarding you and they should come to know your excellences."

Messengers kept going between both men carrying messages and when al-Ma'mun insisted on his suggestion, he sent him a message saying, "If you exempt me, I would appreciate it, and if you do not, I shall come out just as the Messenger of God (S) and the Commander of the Faithful Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) did," whereupon al-Ma'mun said, "Come out however you please," and he ordered the leaders and chamberlains and the public to go

early to ar-Ridha's house. People waited to see Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in the alleys and on rooftops, and women and children too gathered waiting for him to come out.

The army commanders and their troops stood guard at his door mounted on their horses till the sun started rising. Abul-Hasan washed, put on his outside clothes and wore a turban made of cotton, leaving a portion of it drape down on his chest and a small portion of it between his shoulders. He rubbed his hands with some perfume and took in his hand a cane and told his servants to do likewise. So they all came out, and he was barefoot, and he raised his trousers up to half the leg and his clothes were hanging loosely on him. He walked for a short while, raised his head above and made the *takbir* and his servants did likewise.

Then he walked till he reached his doorstep. When the leaders and troops saw him looking like that, they all alighted in the speed of lightning, so much so that lucky was the one among them who happened to have a knife to cut the leather stirrups so that he could jump faster than others, take his sandals off and remain barefoot just as the Imam (a.s.) had done. Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) made *takbir* again, and everyone else did likewise, so much so that it seemed to everyone as if the sky and the walls echoed with him, and Marw was shaken with the noise of weeping and hassle when its residents saw Abul-Hasan and heard him say *Allahu Akbar! Allahu Akbar!...*

Sending Imam Back

Al-Ma'mun came to know about all of that. Al-Fadl ibn Sahl Dhul-Riyasatayn said to him, "O Commander of the faithful! If ar-Ridha' (a.s.) reaches the mosque in such a condition, people will be fascinated by him and we all will have to fear for our lives; so, send him a messenger and tell him to go back." Al-Ma'mun sent him a message saying, "We have overburdened you and wore you out, and we do not wish that you should suffer any hardship on our account; so, go back home, and let people say their prayers behind whoever they have been praying." Abul-Hasan, therefore, asked for his sandals back, put them on and went back. People on that day differed regarding their prayers, and he did not participate in their prayers.

Analyzing Imam's Handling of Eid Prayers

Thus did the Imam (a.s.) desire to give the Eid prayers their great spiritual meaning and separate them from the fake appearances which were attached to them by ruling caliphs who were using them to make a display of the power they commanded and to secure the sense of awe and greatness in the minds of the public. Such a splendid show whereby the Imam (a.s.) tried to bring the legislative system back to its pristine genuineness was something with which the public were not familiar at all, and it was a magnificent surprise that the emotions of the masses were amalgamated with the Imam's position which was rebellious in nature against the traditions followed by the caliphs on such occasions.

People lived during those moments a supreme spiritual outburst which deepened within their souls the sense of belief and distanced them from artificial and fake appearances. Such an objective stance the Imam (a.s.) took was an open invitation to the nation to reevaluate the ruling apparatus

that played havoc with their lives and properties, and inspire to them to see how fake the government apparatus was and how distant from the reality of the Islamic message. This is why al-Fadl was swift to warn al-Ma'mun about the embarrassment of the situation and alert him against people falling in love with the Imam (a.s.) and turning in hatred against the government if he did not send the Imam (a.s.) back. Al-Ma'mun was moved by al-Fadl's warning; therefore, he had to send someone to ask the Imam (a.s.) to go back home.

Some of the Imam's Dawah Methods

The Imam (a.s.) had his own particular method in promoting the dawah, for he took advantage of some exciting situations in order to open people's eyes to see how corrupt the government and its ruling system was, having no freedom of movement due to the restrictions al-Ma'mun and his minister al-Fadl ibn Sahl had enforced on him of strict surveillance over all his actions and speeches.

Among such situations which were dictated by the nature of his mission was his conditional acceptance of the regency that he would not have to issue orders nor cancel the orders of others, that he would not depose or nominate anyone, nor have anything to do with the state affairs. All in all, this indicates that he did not feel that the government was legitimate enough for him to cooperate with and which would raise some questions by people around him.

A final note. This is the story of the regency issue. I have tried while writing it to be faithful to history in discussing its complexities and developments without having any goal except to clear the Imam (a.s.) of the accusations against him which may still be raised by some people who have a particular way of understanding history within the frameworks of texts without examining the main subject-matters while studying history. These include: the evaluation of the general circumstances, the political impacts which stamp the nature of a government, the social pressure which may have something to do with defining some situations and taking a few steps dictated by the necessity of coping with a government. How nice it would be if the long story of history were researched on the basis of analyzing the situations and evaluating the circumstances! It is only then that the cloud would be removed from a great deal of scenes and pictures, and we can be more realistic in our judgment of events.

Notes

1. Uyoon al-Akhbar, chapter on ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 141
2. Al-Irshad, p. 290. Also Maqatil al-Talibiyyin by Abul-Faraj al-Asbahani, p. 375
3. Al-Maqatil, p. 375
4. Ilal al-Sharai', p. 266
5. Al-Bihar, Vol. 49, p. 208 quoting Ibn Maskawayh's book Nadeem al-Fareed
6. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, P. 148
7. Ilal al-Sharai', Vol. 1, p. 226
8. It appears that al-Hasan ibn Sahl was al-Ma'mun's ruler over Iraq at that time, and we cannot explain why the name of al-Hasan is mentioned in this story except in the case al-Ma'mun had called him to meet with him to consult him regarding the issue of selecting Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) as the regent as presumes Sayyid al-Amin in his work A'yaan al-Shi'a, But al-Fadl's letter to his brother al-Hasan regarding regency, as Ibn al-Athir and Tabari and other historians indicate, negates all that, and the addition may have been the action of the narrator who was ignorant of all of that which constitutes a major problem inflicting narratives.
9. Al-Irshad, p. 291
10. Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 375
11. Al-Irshad, p. 291
12. Al-Mahdi and the Mahdis, "Iqra" series, pp. 61 & 62, by Ahmed Amin
13. Uyoon al-Akhbar, Vol. 3, p. 141
14. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 167
15. Al-Ayyashi's Tafsir, Vol. 2, p. 180 of Surat Yousuf, verse 55
16. Al-Sadooq's Amaali, p. 72
17. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 193
18. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 153
19. Qurb al-Isnad, p. 200
20. Ibid.
21. As quoted in Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 165
22. Ibid., p. 147
23. Ibid., p. 147
24. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 151
25. Tabari, Vol. 8, p. 555, under the heading "Events of the Year 201."
26. 'Ilal al-Sharai', Vol. 1, p. 226
27. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 167
28. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 139
29. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 140
30. Al-Irshad, p. 291, and Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, pp. 375-376
31. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 143. Some may doubt that these verses were actually composed by Abu Nuwas since he died at least three years before Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was named as the regent, for it is said that he died in 195, or in 198, whereas others put the year of his death quite differently from either. The regency event is supposed to have taken place in the year 201. If this is accepted, then he could not have been present there nor could he have composed verses on the occasion. There are two possibilities here:
 1. The first is that the poet was indeed Abu Nuwas, the renown poet, but he composed them at a different time, which is quite possible since he is known to have composed verses in praise of the Imam;
 2. The second is that it was said by another Abu Nuwas who was known as Abu Nuwas al-Haqq who was a follower of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.), and his name was Abu al-Sari Sahl ibn Ya'qub, and he used to behave in a morally loose manner and flatter people and even pretend that he was a Shi'a in order to save his skin. When Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) heard that about him, he called him the true (al-Haqq) Abu Nuwas, according to Al-Kuna wal Alqab (nicknames and titles) by al-Qummi, Vol. 1, p. 170.What ought to be verified is the claim that the "true" Abu Nuwas lived long enough to be contemporary to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and we have no evidence that that was the case. It is possible that he was counted among the followers of Imam al-Hadi (a.s.) by someone who did not actually live during the time of the Imam (a.s.) which proves the contrary; therefore, the first possibility seems to be more likely, and God knows best.

32. Al-Aghani, Vol. 2, pp. 69-81
33. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 264
34. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol 2, pp. 159-164
35. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, p. 197
36. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 44

Imam's Role in Eliminating al-Fadl ibn Sahl

Al-Ma'mun granted al-Fadl the nucleus of power and his complete personal confidence when he permitted him to fare with all government issues, vesting upon him the responsibility of all state affairs without doubting even a little bit his loyalty and readiness to consume himself while safeguarding him and his throne.

Al-Fadl, on the other hand, made very good use of that confidence and generous award for the enhancement of his own status. He took hold of the reins of government and surrounded al-Ma'mun with a curtain of deception, completely isolating him from the reality of the general political situation, acting on his own according to the dictates of his own interest as an absolute ruler single-handedly issuing decisions suitable to strengthen his own position.

Al-Fadl Controls the Government

With the talent of cunning and conniving, al-Fadl was able to control the sentiments of the leaders and heads who made up the governing apparatus, forcing upon them his own power and awe without anyone being able to go beyond the limits al-Fadl had defined for him, for the price would then be the loss of his job and maybe his life as well.

The only person whom he could not control nor influence was Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) who was closely watching the suspicious movements of al-Fadl, trying from a distance to warn al-Ma'mun against the sure danger awaiting him due to the actions of al-Fadl and his supporters, but al-Ma'mun did not want to show any sign of mistrust of the man who saved his power and returned his usurped throne to him after the winds of dissension emanating from Baghdad almost eliminated him and his government.

Al-Fadl Tests al-Ma'mun's Attitude Towards Him

Al-Fadl was not completely unaware of the secret warnings to al-Ma'mun regarding his suspicious movements and what political gains he aspired to achieve in order to satisfy his aspirations and ambitions for which he had prepared plans with sure results.

Al-Fadl may have been contented with the strength of his own position and the invulnerability of the plans he had prepared to secure the safety of his status, without imagining that al-Ma'mun might one day consider eliminating him. In Khurasan, he controlled all the centers of power by winning the support of the leaders and chiefs there. In Iraq, he was able through his cunning to depose Tahir ibn al-Husayn from the post of leadership after he had subdued Baghdad to his control when al-Ma'mun instructed al-Fadl to depose Tahir and banish him to Riqqa and install his own brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl in his place, and al-Ma'mun immediately responded favorably to that.

Such a swift positive response from al-Ma'mun was a clear signal to al-Fadl that he was the only man who monopolized control over the center of power and who could control al-Ma'mun's mind regarding how to run the government, and that the whisperings which started being circulated inside closed halls suggesting a change in al-Ma'mun's heart towards al-Fadl were completely far away from the truth.

Ambiguity of al-Ma'mun's Handling of al-Fadl

We cannot understand the secret in the continuation of such a loose stance of al-Ma'mun towards al-Fadl and whether it was due to a secret plan al-Ma'mun had prepared to trap al-Fadl and get rid of him after going beyond reasonable limits in his control over the running of the general administration of the government. Was that the outcome of the element of trust in al-Fadl's actions and the complete confidence in his loyalty after all the sacrifices he had offered in order to bring authority back to him?

In fact, al-Ma'mun's political insight and genius, and his alert awareness of events, make us doubt the second portion of this rhetorical question, for al-Ma'mun was not a naive person who tried hard to freeze himself and practically isolate himself from government, while his minister had a free hand to do whatever he wished and whatever his own ambitions dictated to him.

Elimination of Harthama

No matter what the reason was, there are historical evidences asserting to us the fact that al-Ma'mun was not reserved in adopting some suggestions inspired by al-Fadl. For example, Harthama was one of the leaders who did a very good job in creating a military atmosphere conducive to al-Ma'mun's government and in securing its foundations.

At the same time, he was one of those who were critical of the policies of al-Fadl and his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl. Like other leaders, he did not appreciate such an extravagant norm of conduct adopted by al-Hasan ibn Sahl in his dealing with other leaders and chiefs and, in his view, that was according to instructions from his brother al-Fadl and to a plan agreed upon by both of them. For this reason, he decided to speak his mind to al-Ma'mun and to acquaint him with the disturbing situation clouding the government and with the failure of the extravagant policy adopted by al-Fadl and his brother.

Al-Fadl Incites About Harthama

Al-Fadl, possibly because of his intelligence and cunning, sensed the intriguing intentions of Harthama and that he was determined to incite the caliph against him and his brother, or maybe he came to know about that from his own watchdogs and informants whom he chose to monitor the movements of the leaders and chiefs and to inform him of their news; after all, it was only natural that al-Fadl should have an intelligence system to guarantee internal security. The result is that in order to foil the man's attempt, al-Fadl asked al-Ma'mun to order Harthama to go to Syria and Hijaz, but Harthama was more stubborn than al-Fadl had expected. Ibn Khaldun narrates the following in his *Tarikh*:

"Having finished with Abul-Saraya, Harthama returned, and al-Hasan ibn Sahl was in Madain and he did not go to visit him there. He went from 'Aqr Qoob to Nahrawan heading towards Khurasan just to be faced with a barrage of letters from al-Ma'mun ordering him to go to Syria and Hijaz, but he insisted instead on meeting him, remembering how he used to provide him and his father with counsel, with the objective to acquaint him with the schemes of al-Fadl ibn Sahl who was deliberately hiding news from

him, about the worry of the public because of that, and because of his extravagance, and also about his stay in Khurasan. Al-Fadl came to know about that, and he incited al-Ma'mun about him, claiming that the man had given a post to Abul-Saraya because he was among his soldiers, and that he had deliberately gone against his instructions expressed in the letters he had sent him. To forgive him, al-Fadl went on, would be to encourage others to do likewise.

Al-Ma'mun became angry and waited to see him. When he reached Marw, he ordered the drums to be beaten so that nobody could hide the news of his arrival from al-Ma'mun. When al-Ma'mun inquired about the beating of those drums, he was told that Harthama had arrived roaring and snarling, so he ordered him to see him at his court. Al-Ma'mun said to him, 'Harthama...! You have antagonized the Alawides! By the life of Abul-Saraya, had it been up to you to annihilate all of them, you would have done just that.' When he started to apologize, he was not given a moment to say anything; instead, al-Ma'mun ordered him to be kicked in the stomach, to have his nose cut, and to be dragged to prison where he sent someone to kill him."¹

Analysis of Harthama's Stance

We do not claim that Harthama was a loyalist, and that he was indeed trying to save the government from collapsing by inciting against al-Fadl and his brother. His motive, rather, may have been the wave of terror among the leaders and chiefs regarding the horrible fate which threatened their positions and influence as a result of deposing Tahir ibn al-Husayn and excluding him from prominent government positions and the appointment of al-Hasan ibn Sahl on the affairs of Iraq, according to the suggestion of al-Fadl to al-Ma'mun. That provided us with an accurate specimen of the selfish nature of al-Fadl's policy which he used to apply towards those who showed strength in their military or political stances so that both he and his brother would remain the stronger pole round which the government revolved.

Harthama aimed by his incitement to protect his position which he rightfully deserved due to his sincere services to the government, but al-Fadl was successful in instigating al-Ma'mun against him before he arrived there, and the rest is what you have just heard.

Leaders Move to Eliminate al-Fadl

Harthama's defeat before al-Fadl was a strong factor behind a swift move undertaken by the leaders who were expecting for themselves a fate similar to that of Harthama and Tahir ibn al-Husayn, but none of them alone possessed enough courage to disclose this dangerous situation the state was going through to al-Ma'mun due to al-Fadl's behavior.

Imam as Savior

The only hope those leaders had had to save the deteriorating situation was to request Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to disclose the reality of the situation to al-Ma'mun since he was the only one who could not be harmed by al-Fadl nor could anyone incite al-Ma'mun against him. Ibn Khaldun writes:

"When these discords took place in Iraq because of al-Hasan ibn Sahl, and due to people's resentment of his and his brother's excessive influence over al-Ma'mun, then the nomination of Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and the transfer of the caliphate from the Abbasides, al-Fadl ibn Sahl was concealing all of that from al-Ma'mun, and he was going to extremes in such concealment, for fear al-Ma'mun might change his heart about him and his brother.

When Harthama came, he knew that he was going to tell al-Ma'mun about all of that, and that al-Ma'mun trusted the advice of Harthama; so, he perfected his incitement against him with al-Ma'mun till he made him change his mind about the man and kill him, and he did not even listen to what he wanted to say; therefore, the displeasure of the Shi'as there as well as of the residents of Baghdad increased against him, and dissensions became widespread.

The commanders of al-Ma'mun's army started talking about it, but they could not inform him of it, so they approached Ali ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and asked him to convey the matter to al-Ma'mun. And so it was. He informed him of the rioting and killing in Iraq and that people criticized him for the favorite status of al-Fadl and al-Hasan, and for his (ar-Ridha's) nomination. Al-Ma'mun asked, 'Who else besides you knows all of that?' He said, 'Yahya ibn Ma'ad, Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran and other prominent army leaders.' So he called them to him, and they did not reveal anything except after he had pledged for them their own security, and they told him exactly what ar-Ridha' (a.s.) had already told him."²

Tabari provides us with a clear and more precise picture of Imam ar-Ridha's situation; he says:

"It was rumored that Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad the Alawide told al-Ma'mun about the dissension and inter-killing among people, that since the assassination of his brother, al-Fadl was concealing the news from him, that his own family and the public criticized him for certain reasons and said he was a bewildered madman, and that since they saw that he was doing all of that, they swore the oath of allegiance to his uncle Ibrahim ibn al-Mahdi as the caliph.

Al-Ma'mun said, 'They did not swear the oath of allegiance to him; rather, they accepted him as a governor ruling them in the way al-Fadl had instructed him.' He informed him that al-Fadl had indeed lied to him and that he cheated him as well, adding, 'The war between Ibrahim and al-Hasan ibn Sahl is raging; people criticize him for the status you gave him (al-Fadl) and his brother, and they criticize your nomination of myself as your successor.' He asked, 'Who else in my army is aware of that?' He said, 'Yahya ibn Ma'ad, Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran, and a number of prominent military commanders.' So he called them to his court, and they were Yahya ibn Ma'ad, Abdul-Aziz ibn Imran and Musa and Ali ibn Abu Sa'id who was son of al-Fadl's sister, and Khalaf the Egyptian, and he asked them about what he had heard, but they refused to tell him anything unless he guaranteed their safety against the threat revenge of al-Fadl ibn Sahl. He guaranteed that for them, and he wrote each one of them a statement in his own handwriting to that effect.

Then they told him about the discords among his subjects, about the deliberate misinformation he heard from al-Fadl regarding Harthama, and that Tahir ibn al-Husayn had done an excellent job serving him and opened many lands to his government and strengthened his caliphate, and when he accomplished all of that, he was rewarded by banishment to Riqqa where he was not permitted to receive funds from anyone, till his authority was weakened and his troops mutinied, that had his caliphate been in Baghdad, he would have had a better control and nobody would have dared to mislead him as al-Hasan ibn Sahl had, that the land from one end to the other was shaking under his feet, that Tahir ibn al-Husayn had been forgotten that year since the murder of Muhammad in Riqqa without being utilized in these wars while someone who was a lot less qualified was in charge..."³

Al-Ma'mun is Convinced of the Gravity of the Situation

The picture now was turned upside down in the eyes of al-Ma'mun, but he did not try to change his conduct with al-Fadl because the latter was in charge of the government base in both Khurasan and Baghdad. In Khurasan, the psychological war which he waged by deposing Tahir ibn al-Husayn and by having Harthama murdered quenched the desire among the leaders and chiefs for mutiny, pushing them to yield to his wishes and expectations after having felt that al-Ma'mun represented no more than a magic wand in the hands of al-Fadl. As regarding Baghdad, it was in the grip of his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl who was considered the right hand of al-Fadl and the big stick whereby he threatened al-Ma'mun.

Al-Fadl Seeks Revenge Against Instigators

As regarding those men who exposed to al-Ma'mun the reality of al-Fadl's conduct and the dangers it implied, they were terrified when al-Fadl tore down the assurances of and were written by al-Ma'mun guaranteeing their safety against his wrath and revenge upon coming to know about their incitement and their support of what Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) had said about him. Tabari says:

"When that became certain to al-Ma'mun, he ordered preparations to go to Baghdad, and when al-Fadl ibn Sahl came to know about those preparations, he came to know only about some of them, so he interrogated them and even whipped and jailed some of them and pulled the hair out of the beards of others, so Ali ibn Musa came to his court and told him what had happened to those men and reminded him of his assurances to them, and he answered him by saying that he was only tolerating."⁴

This historical text clearly tells us about the extent to which al-Ma'mun went in avoiding a headlong collision with al-Fadl or letting him know that anyone had incited him against al-Fadl, especially since he came to know that he was harming the leaders who were pressured by him to speak the truth about al-Fadl, giving them written assurances that al-Fadl would not harm them. This text also tells us that al-Ma'mun was the one who planned the assassination of al-Fadl which took place later as some assassins admitted to al-Ma'mun face to face.

Al-Ma'mun Pretends to be a Star Gazer

It is interesting that chance should play a major role in the execution of al-Ma'mun's plan to eliminate al-Fadl, and it may even have been a deliberate "chance" arranged by al-Ma'mun himself, and we do not think that is unlikely.

While on his way to Baghdad, al-Fadl, who was in the company of al-Ma'mun, received a letter from his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl in which he said, "I have looked in the changing of this year according to the calculation of the stars and I found out that you will in such and such month, on a Wednesday, taste the pain of red-hot iron and of the burning fire, and I am of the view that you should today go in the company of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and the commander of the faithful to the bath-house to take a bath and then pour blood over your body so that the ill luck of this omen leaves you." Al-Fadl, therefore, sent a letter to al-Ma'mun asking him to go with him to the bath-house, and to request Abul-Hasan (a.s.) to join them too.

Imam Refuses to Go to the Bath-House and Gives a Warning

Al-Ma'mun wrote a letter in that meaning to ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and Abul-Hasan wrote him back saying that he would not enter the bath-house the next day, nor would he recommend that the commander of the faithful should enter it either, nor even al-Fadl. But al-Ma'mun repeated his request twice, and Abul-Hasan wrote him again saying, "I shall not enter the bath-house tomorrow for I saw in a vision the Messenger of God (S) last night telling me not to enter the bath-house tomorrow; therefore, I do not advise the commander of the faithful nor al-Fadl to enter the bath-house tomorrow," whereupon al-Ma'mun wrote him saying, "You have, master, said the truth, and so has the Messenger of God (S); I shall not enter the bath-house tomorrow, and al-Fadl knows best what he does..."⁵

Al-Fadl is Murdered

Finally, al-Fadl entered the bath-house just to be received by the swords of the assassins as the letter he had received from his brother al-Hasan ibn Sahl had predicted.

We do not think it is unlikely that that letter was prepared by al-Ma'mun imitating the style of the man's brother, al-Hasan, in order to avoid being accused of murdering al-Fadl. It is also possible that al-Ma'mun wished to get rid of both al-Fadl and Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) by that method of mysterious assassination, but the Imam (a.s.) was alert in the face of al-Ma'mun's cunning and scheming and he resisted the insistence of al-Ma'mun in entering the bath-house with him and with al-Fadl by tact and caution. The last paragraph of the anecdote tells us clearly that the letter was a plot by al-Ma'mun to kill both al-Fadl and the Imam (a.s.); otherwise, why did al-Ma'mun abstain from warning al-Fadl against entering the bath-house although the Imam (a.s.) had asked him to do just that?

Assasins are Close Friends of al-Ma'mun

What provides evidence is the fact that those who killed al-Fadl were among the closest courtiers and train of al-Ma'mun and, according to one story, they later on faced al-Ma'mun with their accusation that he was the one who asked them to do it. Al-Tabari says:

"When he reached Sarkhas, a group of men assaulted al-Fadl ibn Sahl at the bath-house and struck him with their swords till he was dead, and that was on a Friday two nights before the end of Sha'ban in the year 202 A.H. They were arrested and it became clear that those who assassinated al-Fadl were among al-Ma'mun's closest courtiers and they were four in number: Ghalib al-Mas'oodi the black man, Qistantine (Constantine) the Roman, Faraj al-Daylami, and Muaffaq of Sicily; they killed him and he was sixty years old and they ran away. Al-Ma'mun posted a reward of ten thousand dinars for anyone who would bring them to him, and they were brought to him by al-Abbas ibn Haitham ibn Bazar-Jamhar al-Daynuri, and they said to al-Ma'mun, 'But you ordered us to kill him!' He ordered them to be killed.

It is also said that when those who killed al-Fadl were arrested, al-Ma'mun interrogated them, and some of them said that Ali ibn Abu Sa'id the son of al-Fadl's sister had dispatched them, while others among them denied that, and he ordered their execution. After that he ordered Abdul-Aiz ibn Imran, Ali, Musa, and Khalaf, to be brought to him, and he interrogated them. They denied having any knowledge of the matter, but he did not believe them and ordered their execution too, sending their heads to al-Hasan ibn Sahl in Wasit as a trophy and informing him about his own pain because of the tragedy of the murder of al-Fadl and that he appointed him in his place."⁶

Thus did al-Ma'mun get rid of the strongest power base within his government which threatened his authority and his fate, leaving only one obstacle in his way to guarantee to uproot the rebellion in Baghdad by dealing with its root causes which included the presence of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) who, according to the Abbasides, was a difficult knot they could not be loyal to al-Ma'mun except if he untied it, for its presence meant the end of the Abbaside rule and the beginning of the Alawide rule.

Imam's Motives for Causing the Elimination of al-Fadl

The reason which caused the Imam (a.s.) to involve himself in the horribly violent struggle which was raging between al-Fadl and the army commanders was the desire to safeguard the strength of the then Islamic entity and to distance it from the elements of disintegration and collapse which might cause its outside enemy to consider assaulting it and might push him to conduct hot adventures whose dear price would be paid by the Muslims.

Through his far sight, the Imam (a.s.) saw that al-Fadl's un-loyal policy would certainly cause something like that in addition to what was being committed of iniquities, oppression and transgression from whose perils the Muslims were suffering, while the Imam (a.s.) viewed himself as being responsible to do something in the face of such an irresponsible behavior. There was no method whereby the Imam (a.s.) could have limited such conduct except by acquainting al-Ma'mun with the situation as it actually was and to uncover for him al-Fadl's cheating card.

The Imam (a.s.) had made that clear for us in a discussion he made with al-Ma'mun in which he said, "O commander of the faithful! Fear God in your treatment of Muhammad's nation. God did not grant you such government and preferred you over others for it so that you might ignore the

rights of the Muslims and hand such a responsibility over to someone else who would rule them contrary to what God has ordained..."⁷

The Imam (a.s.) was not concerned about a status or a post as much as he was concerned about maintaining the unity of the Muslims, about their strength and their collective power before the enemy which watched them within or without their ranks, as much as he was concerned about promoting social justice among the circles of the Muslims and lifting the nightmare of oppression from them.

For these reasons, we find him suggesting to al-Ma'mun that it was necessary to contain and put an end to dissensions, and that that would be possible only by dealing with their causes among which his own regency which was not in the best interest of the government, or that the causes which had necessitated them may have served their purpose already, for the post did not mean anything to the Imam (a.s.) as long as it collided with the supreme Islamic interest.

From here, we can see the Imam (a.s.) refusing the principle of sharing the responsibilities of the government upon becoming the regent, but he did not refuse to be an advisor counseling from a distance. That was only because he did not want to have a share in bearing the burdens of the oppression and the sins which he was not going to accept to be committed in his name as a member of the ruling system. But he was not unable of carrying the responsibility of offering advice and counsel when doing so would result in removing oppression and eliminating the danger of weakening the Muslims or disuniting them.

All of this did not contradict the Imam's attitude regarding the illegitimacy of the government because of its being based on the usurpation of authority from its rightful owners, for the issue in the eyes of the Imam (a.s.) was not an issue of government but of the interest of Islam and the safeguarding of the unity of the Muslims in the face of the evils of adventurers and grudging people. This is what distinguishes the Imam (a.s.) from others. He could not possibly sacrifice the interest of Islam in order to maintain a post of influence. During various epochs, the Imams (a.s.) put up with their contemporary governments despite their belief in their illegitimacy only for the sake of looking after and maintaining the interests of the Muslims.

Notes

1. Ibn Khaldun, Vol. 3, p. 245
2. Ibn Khaldun, Vol. 3, p. 249
3. Tabari, Vol. 8, p. 564
4. Tabari, Vol. 8, p. 565
5. Al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 491, and Al-Irshad, p. 294
6. Tabari, Vol. 8, p. 565. Ibn Khaldun mentions a similar story in Vol. 3, p. 250, of his work
7. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 6, p. 159

The Tragic Ending

It was not politically feasible for al-Ma'mun to reach Baghdad accompanied by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), for that would stir the winds of dissension against him and he might not be strong enough to withstand them. From this standpoint, our belief that al-Ma'mun was the one who plotted to end the life of the Imam (a.s.) by giving him poisoned grapes is strengthened, and the historical environment at the time helps us confirm this belief even when Ibn al-Athir, in his *Tarikh*, thinks that that was not possible. Prominent scholars and historians such as Shaikh al-Mufid and others have also doubted it, while others such as Sayyid ibn Tawoos, Sibt ibn al-Jawzi, and al-Arbili in *Kashf al-Ghumma*, have all dismissed it outright. The latter strongly defended his view, but it was nevertheless no more than a simplistic and superficial defense. Al-Ma'mun's letter to the Abbasides and the residents of Baghdad, which he wrote after the demise of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), gives such an impression. "He wrote the Abbasides and their supporters and to the people of Baghdad informing them of the death of Ali ibn Musa and that they had resented his nomination of him as his successor, asking them now to go back to their loyalty to him."¹

This may be understood as a clear admission that the death of the Imam (a.s.) was not natural during those circumstances, and the text Ibn Khaldun provides in expressing the contents of this letter provides even clearer clues to accusing al-Ma'mun of murdering him; he says in his *Tarikh*:

"... And al-Ma'mun sent messages to al-Hasan ibn Sahl, to the people of Baghdad, and to his supporters apologizing for naming him his regent and inviting them to go back to his loyalty."²

What can be understood regarding al-Ma'mun's regret and realization of his mistake regarding the regency arrangement is that such regret is meaningless if it had happened after the Imam's death; rather, it must have occurred prior to that, so he paved the way to correct it by assassinating the Imam (a.s.) in order to please the Abbasides, their supporters, and the people of Baghdad. If we are to stay alone with just the political circumstances through which al-Ma'mun was living during that shaky period of his reign, overlooking the historical texts whose contexts lead us to such a conclusion, we would still be able to point the finger to al-Ma'mun regarding the crime of assassinating Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) without being biased to any group or prejudiced against the accused.

Al-Saduq narrates saying, "While ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was breathing his last, al-Ma'mun said to him, 'By God! I do not know which of the two calamities is greater: losing you and parting from you, or people's accusation that I assassinated you...'"³

In another narrative by Abul-Faraj al-Asbahani, al-Ma'mun said to him, "It is very hard for me to live to see you die, and there was some hope hinging upon your stay, yet even harder for me than that is that people say I have made you drink poison, and God knows that I am innocent of that."⁴

This exciting situation of al-Ma'mun discloses the fact that the accusation of his own murder of the Imam (a.s.) was the subject of argument, maybe even of conviction, even then, for al-Ma'mun asserts

people's accusation of him and he tries to extract an admission from the Imam (a.s.) clearing him of it, as Abul-Faraj mentions.

Simplistic Justification of al-Ma'mun's Situation

It is interesting how some people find it hard to believe that al-Ma'mun would assassinate the Imam (a.s.) simply because of all the grief, crying, abstention from eating and drinking, which he feigned to show his distress at the Imam's death, as if they expected al-Ma'mun to show his happiness and excitement at his death in order to give credibility to the accusation others concealed. But the excuse of these folks is their superficiality in understanding history, and their short-sightedness.

How the Imam Was Murdered

Stories regarding the method al-Ma'mun employed to kill Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) are abundant. Abul-Faraj and al-Mufid say that he killed him by poisoned pomegranate juice and poisoned grape juice. In his Al-Irshad, al-Mufid quotes Abdullah ibn Bashir saying: "Al-Ma'mun ordered me to let my nails grow as long as they could without letting anyone notice that; so I did, then he ordered to see me and he gave me something which looked like tamarind and said, 'Squeeze this with both your hands,' and I did. Then he stood up, left me and went to see ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and said to him, 'How are you?' He answered, 'I hope I am alright.' He said, 'I, too, by the Grace of God, am alright; did any well-wisher visit you today?' He answered in the negative, so al-Ma'mun became angry and called upon his servants to come, then he ordered one of them to immediately take the pomegranate juice to him, adding, '... for he cannot do without it.' Then he called me to him and said: 'Squeeze it with your own hands,' and so I did. Then al-Ma'mun handed the juice to ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in person, and that was the reason for his death for he stayed only two days before he (a.s.) died."

Abul-Salt al-Harawi is quoted saying, "I entered the house of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) after al-Ma'mun had already left and he said to me, 'O Abul-Salt! They have done it...!' and he kept unifying and praising God." Muhammad ibn al-Jahm is quoted saying, "Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) used to love grapes. Some grapes were said to be prepared for him; needles were pierced inside them at their very tips and were kept like that for several days. Then the needles were taken out, and they were brought to him and he ate some of them and fell into the sickness we have mentioned about him. The grapes killed him, and it was said that that was one of the most effective methods of poisoning."⁵

Regardless of the method of assassination, what seems to be acceptable, having examined all texts and the historical background of the political circumstances at that time, al-Ma'mun was indeed the one who killed Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and we do not have the slightest doubt or hesitation about that.

"His death occurred at Toos in a village called Sanabad, of the Nooqan area, and he was buried at the house of Hameed ibn Tahtaba under the dome where Haroun al-Rashid had been buried, and he was buried beside him facing the qibla."⁶

"When ar-Ridha' (a.s.) died, al-Ma'mun did not disclose it when it happened, leaving him dead for one day and one night, then he called for Muhammad ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad and a group of descendants of Abu Talib. When they were present, he showed him to them; his corpse looked alright; then he started weeping and addressed the corpse saying, 'O Brother! It is indeed very hard for me to see you in such a condition, and I was hoping to go before you, but God insisted on carrying out His decree,' and he showed a great deal of agony and grief and went out carrying the coffin with others till he reached the place where it is now buried..."⁷

"... So al-Ma'mun was present there before the grave was dug, and he ordered his grave to be dug beside that of his father, then he approached us and said, 'The person inside this coffin told me that when his grave is dug, water and fish will appear underneath; so, dig...' They dug. When they finished digging, a spring of water appeared, and fish appeared in it, then the water dissipated, and ar-Ridha' (a.s.), peace be upon him, was then buried."⁸

Imam is Eulogized

When ar-Ridha' (a.s.) died, poets composed eulogies and mourned in him the hope that entertained the conscience of the nation that one day he would be the caliph so that equity might restore its shining light after being put out by the caliphs who employed cheating and deception as their methods to mislead and confuse the nation. When they set the limits of conduct for others, they themselves at the same time trampled upon them by committing every act prohibited by God in His Book and by His Prophet (S), far from the eyes of the people, and maybe even in public. Among those who eulogized him was Da'bal ibn Ali al-Khuza'i, the renown poet of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and their advocate. He composed many eulogies about Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.). Among them is what Abul-Faraj quotes:

"Ali ibn Sulayman al-Akhfash recited verses for me by Da'bal ibn Ali al-Khuza'i in which he mentioned ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and the poison he was given and mourning one of his sons and chastising the Abbaside caliphs:

*Unwillingly did you part with Ahmed, and the earth
Engulfed a building, sublime and dignified,
You housed him in a place mean in wares
And I against my wish compromised,
A fugitive just for loving him...
Had I not been consoled by the Prophet
And by his near in kin, I would have
Poured my tears for him abundantly;
I loved myself, but I loved even more
The family of Muhammad whose love resides
In my heart, living with me, being in me.
The Prophet's legacy availed them naught,
For Death in it with them has a share,
And a share for the hope for death...
Hunted and pursued for many a year
By foxes from Umayya, time and again.
Banu Abbas played havoc with the creed,
Reaping oppression, miserliness and greed.*

*Named `Rashid' who was never to wisdom keen,
Named this `Ma'mun' and named that `Amin'!
Never did I accept them to be for
Wisdom a name, but for guidance a shame.
Nor to their trusts were they ever true,
Their `Rashid' is misguided and his sons
One with sins more than the other's impudence.
O grave in the foreign land of Toos!
Mourned are you by caravans shunning daylight...
I am in doubt... Should I offer a drink
Of water to one, so I remember you and cry?
Or is in the cup my remedy so I die?
Either I meant, when I say a drink,
If it is death, then let it be swift.
How marvelous they call you Pleased!
For they never made your life eased.
Is it odd when rogues distort the light
Of God's Creed, though it is bright?
Your favors miracles made for them and me,
But who is among them that can ever see?"*

Thus does Da'bal expose in these verses the memories of horrible tragedies to which Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) were exposed, and the woes they suffered from at the hands of the governments of both Umayyads and Abbasides, chastising al-Rashid and both his sons, then going after that to eulogize Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in a style which shows genuine distress and agony, including the same accusation that al-Ma'mun had murdered him.

Among others who eulogized him was Amr al-Salami who says in his eulogy:

*O you, caravan singer, singing at the reins!
Listen, and let others tomorrow listen to thee...
Recite Salam on a grave at Toos and do not
Recite Salam or wish well the people of Toos,
Terror did the hearts of Muslims fill,
And fear of Iblis now has hatched at will,
For silence now is the best man that lived
So, what a loss, and what a loser!
Should Death come to rule the throne,
He will face men with faces of stone.
Away with Toos for never were its homes
Telling of misery to come and to be
A wedding for the dead, not a life for the doer.
How long the flute, how merry the wedding!
Fates reached him with the claws,
While troops throng and hard to count
Death found the most gentle cub in his den,
And death meets the father of cubs in the den.
Still deriving light from his father,
Reaching the Prophet, light without fire.*

*In soil their branches stood tall and high
Of lofty trunk, in the King's land thrives.
Branches stand when roots are firm
And the world by sure faith lives.
No day is more fit for grief
For beating, for tearing the sleeve
For wounding cheeks, for cutting the nose
More than the day of Toos
When mourners mourned, scribes cried,
'Is it really true ar-Ridha' died?'
Death takes only the envied away.
That who lived for two minutes or a day
Is lying like one who will join and stay
Maybe in two days..., who can say?
When the sun shone, his own did set,
The day had come when he was to rest.
Why? Give the garb of death please to me,
Why take him into a grave, woe unto me?
Victim of a day that couldn't dare to be
Victimized. Wrapped him in the garb of death,
Let me be the wearer, please, not he,
Of a garb never sewn or worn before.
Greets you the One you did worship and adore,
On days of heat, nights of chill, in the plains,
Had things in life not stood in contrast
In virtues, none would have ever passed
A judgment in it that could endure.
The Almighty has welcomed thee to a place
That is everlasting with bliss and grace
To His Messenger you are now near,
A place so lovely, a place so dear.*

In his Maqatil, Abul-Faraj indicated that when this poem won publicity and became well known, Ashja' altered it and made it in praise of al-Rashid!⁹

Da'bal al-Khuza'i said: "When the news of the death of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) reached me, I was at Qum and I recited one my poems; some of its verses were:

*I see the Umayyads excused if they were to kill,
But I see no reason why the Abbasides should at will;
Sons of Harb, Marwan and their breed
Banu Ma'eet, grudge and hate is their creed.
People whom you had to fight in early days
Of Islam to bring them to His ways.
When they became in charge and did rule,
They reverted to Kufr and left the usool.
Head towards Toos, to the grave site
Of the pure one, of the faith that is right,
If you ever wish to remember Islam like me,*

*Pristine, Islam of Muhammad and Ali.
Two graves in Toos: one for the best of all,
And the worst man people will ever recall.
No good will reach the villain who is lying nigh
In grave to one whose virtues reach the sky,
Nor will the pure suffer any harm
When near the soul that will never calm.
No indeed! Every soul shall reap what it did earn
So take what you will, or leave it to burn!"*

Da'bal composed many eulogies about Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), using his poetry as a vehicle to disseminate the mission in whose principles he strongly believed which were: to attract the nation's attention to the injustice done to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and to the transgression upon their rights, to the corruption of self-imposed government systems which went beyond all reasonable limits in their iniquity and despotism. Da'bal is considered the greatest poet of that time and the most articulate in defending his beliefs and the principles in which he believed. In his poetry, he provides us with an honest picture of the reality of the oppressive government system which was followed by the Abbaside dynasty then, and of the tragedies the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) underwent because of their oppression.

Among others who eulogized the Imam (a.s.) was Ali ibn Abu Abdullah al-Khawwafi who said:

*May God's Grace water thee, O land of Toos!
What treasures has your land down deep?!
In the world your lands are called good
Made good by one in Sanabad asleep,
A man whose murder was hard on Islam
A man wrapped and drenched in God's mercy.
O the grave of his! In thee are clemency,
Knowledge, purity, and glory abound.
O envied grave! Angels do thee guard!
Abu Firas al-Hamadani said:
Sinned and killed ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and were not kind,
Men whose hatred of him made them blind.
First pleased then distressed for eternity
A band that perished after its safety.
No allegiance, kinship, or mercy did indeed
Stop the rogues from committing the foul deed.*

What the poet mentions here is nothing but the bitter truth about the tragedy which was represented in the regency and the stance taken by the same ones who arranged it, for they were happy with it when they first nominated him as the successor to the caliph, the last step towards caliphate which, according to the Divine Will, was the natural right of Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), but they became distressed when the rogues deliberately assassinated the Imam (a.s.) despite their oath of allegiance to him and despite the assurances, the promises, and the sacred oaths they had sworn...

There are many eulogies in which the poets mentioned the tragedy the Imam (a.s.) lived due to the oppression of the caliphs of his time suffices us

what we have quoted of them because to elaborate means to unnecessarily prolong the discussion.

Notes

1. Tabari, Vol. 8, p. 558, "Events of the Year 203 A.H."
2. Ibn Khaldun, Vol. 3, p. 250
3. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 242
4. Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 380
5. Al-Irshad, p. 297. A similar narrative is mentioned in Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, pp. 377-378
6. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 1, p. 18
7. Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 378
8. Ibid., p. 380
9. Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, pp. 378-380

Imam and Alawide Revolts

We have already indicated that one of the reasons which prompted al-Ma'mun to bring Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) to Khurasan and nominate him as his successor was to avoid a direct collision with the Alawides who were of the view that the Abbasides had monopolized authority and robbed them of their right to rule the Muslims. Al-Ma'mun tried to deal with this problem which always used to push the Alawides to assault the government from time to time. Rebels were always inviting all fellow Alawides to join them in their rebellions, as was the case regarding the Abbasides when they moved against the Umayyad rule.

Al-Ma'mun suffered the agonies of the most serious Alawide rebellion against his government, namely the rebellion of Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Hasani. He was well known as Ibn Tabataba the Alawide; his chief executive was Abul-Saraya al-Sari ibn Mansour, and his call was in the name of ar-Ridha' (a.s.) from the Progeny of Muhammad (S). Several Alawide uprisings branched out of that revolution. After the rebellion of Abul-Saraya, his Alawide governors declared autonomy in the areas under their control.

Alawide Uprisings

In Yemen, Ibrahim ibn Musa ibn Ja'far rose and took control of the government after banishing al-Ma'mun's governor. In Mecca, al-Husayn ibn al-Hasan al-Aftas rose, and Muhammad ibn Ja'far was named caliph. In Basrah, Zayd ibn Musa ibn Ja'far rose in rebellion. He was nicknamed "Zayd of the fire" due to the number of the homes of the Abbasides and their followers which he had burnt. Whenever he came across a man draped in black, he would burn him, and he confiscated a great deal of money from the merchants except Abbaside money.

Ali ibn Sa'id marched towards him. Zayd requested him to give him an assurance to safeguard his life should he give up, and Ali did so. But he nevertheless arrested him ¹ and sent him to al-Hasan ibn Sahl who ordered to have him executed while al-*Hajjaj* ibn Khaythama was present, so he said, "Prince! Do not rush, for I have a piece of advice for you." He stopped the executioner and came close to him. He said, "Prince! Did you receive instructions from the commander of the faithful to do what you are about to?" He answered in the negative, so he asked again, "then why are you executing the cousin of the commander of the faithful without his knowledge or consultation?" Then he narrated for him the story of Abu Abdullah al-Aftas whom al-Rashid put in jail under the watchful eyes of Ja'far ibn Yahya.

Ja'far killed him without his knowledge and sent his head on a platter to him together with other Nawrooz presents. When al-Rashid ordered Masrou to kill Ja'far, he said to him, "If Ja'far asked you about his crime for which you are killing him, tell him that you are killing him for his own killing of my cousin Ibn al-Aftas whom he killed without my knowledge." Then al-*Hajjaj* ibn Khaythama said to al-Hasan ibn Sahl, "O Prince! Do you feel secure should anything happen between you and the commander of the faithful if you kill this man and use it as an excuse just as al-Rashid used

against Ja'far ibn Yahya?" Al-Hasan said to al-*Hajjaj*, "May God reward you!" Then he ordered Zayd to be returned to his prison where he was kept till he was transported to al-Ma'mun. When he was there, he sent him to his brother ar-Ridha' (a.s.) who set him free.²

Zayd and al-Ma'mun

One of the interesting anecdotes narrated about him is the following: When he was brought to al-Ma'mun, the latter said to him, "O Zayd! You led the uprising in Basrah, and instead of starting with the homes of our common enemies the Umayyads, Banu Thaqeef, Uday, Bahila and Aal Ziyad, you targeted the homes of your own cousins." Zayd, who had a humorous temper, said, "I indeed erred from each direction, O commander of the faithful! If I go back, I will start with our enemies!" Al-Ma'mun laughed and sent him to his brother ar-Ridha' (a.s.), saying, "I have pardoned him to please you." When he was brought to the Imam (a.s.), he rebuked him and released him.³

Imam Rebukes His Brother Zayd

Yasir the servant narrates that when Zayd entered the Imam's house, Abul-Hasan (a.s.) said, "O Zayd! Were you duped by the speech of some lowly people in Kufa who said that Fatima safeguarded her modesty, therefore God shunned Hell-fire from her progeny? Those were only al-Hasan and al-Husayn in particular. If you think that you could go against God's Will and still enter Paradise, while Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) obeyed God and entered Paradise, do you think you are more worthy in the eyes of God Almighty than Musa ibn Ja'far? By God! Nobody achieves the rewards with God except after obeying Him, while you claim that you will achieve it by your disobedience..." Zayd said to him, "But I am your brother and the son of your father!" Abul-Hasan (a.s.) said to him, "You are my brother as long as you obey the Dear and Glorified God. Noah had said, 'Lord! My son is of my family, and your promise is true, and you are the best of judges,' and God Almighty said to him, 'O Noah! He is not of your family! It is indeed a wrongful deed,' thus God excluded him from his family due to his disobedience..."⁴

Imam's View of the Alawide Revolutionary Method

What we try to get acquainted with by examining the Imam's stance towards his brother Zayd of the fire was the reality regarding the Imam's viewpoint of the revolutionary method employed by the Alawides in their revolutions against the Abbasides. We find the Imam (a.s.) taking a strictly negative stance towards his brother Zayd. Yet he did not rebuke him and blame him simply because he had revolted against the government, but rather because he had committed several unlawful acts according to Islamic *Shari'a* such as looting, confiscating, burning, in which acts he did not distinguish between the innocent and the guilty. Other than that, the sincere Alawide revolutions which aimed at standing in the face of injustice and oppression used to enjoy the support of the Imams who considered them the only way which could disclose to the nation how corrupt the government was and make them become aware of its mistakes and transgressions.

From here we find Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in his stance with his brother not expressing his displeasure against his brother for the principle of the revolution and the movement against the government, but his rebuking was due to committing some Islamically unlawful transgressions which did not please God. Al-Ma'mun's tolerance towards those who rebelled against him was not in contradiction with his general conduct. On one hand, he wanted to compete with the Alawides in winning the public opinion to his side. On the other hand, he was trying to stay away from getting involved in shedding their blood and seeking revenge against them which did not agree with his theoretical inclination towards the Alawides.

Imam's Stance Towards Abul-Saraya's Revolution

There is a previous stance in which the Imam (a.s.) had sided with the Alawide revolution of Ibn Tabataba under the command of Abul-Saraya. Muhammad ibn al-Athram, chief of the police force of Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Alawi at Medina during the days of Abul-Saraya, is quoted saying, "His near in kin and some people from Quraish gathered around him and swore allegiance to him saying, 'If you send word to Abul-Hasan (a.s.), he would surely support us and we will be united.'

Sulayman said to me, 'Go to him and convey my greetings to him and tell him that his kinfolk have gathered and desired that he should join them; so, if you wish, please do so.' So I met him at al-Hamra and I conveyed the message to him. He said, 'Convey my greeting to him and tell him I will join him after twenty days.' So I conveyed to him the message with which I was sent, and we stayed for a few days. On the 18th day, Warqa, al-Jalloudi's commander, marched towards us, whereupon I ran in the direction of the two Soors. When I heard someone calling me, 'O Abu Athram!' I turned back, and it was Abul-Hasan (a.s.) asking me, 'Did the twenty days pass already?!"⁵

Why Did the Imam Refuse to Participate in the Revolution?

The Imam (a.s.) was not objecting to the revolution but he simply wanted to assure those persons that the revolution whose success he could not secure was one he would not join. According to his serious foresight into events, it seemed to him that the revolution whose movement was arbitrary would end up with elimination and failure. For this reason, he was hinging his participation in the revolution on the passage of twenty days, for he calculated that the opposite move from the Abbasides would show during such a period of time and would gauge the extent of success achieved so far by the revolution.

This cautious stance of the Imam (a.s.) was not due to evading his participation in the revolutionary movement but was the result of a realistic calculation of the development of events in the sphere of the movement of revolutions along the Abbaside rule and before them the Umayyad. For this reason, we cannot conclude that the Imam's lack of participation in a rebellion meant that he was not convinced of the principle of its necessity.

Why Did the Imam Decline From Demanding Caliphate?

It is worth our research time to dispel the ambiguity which clouds the motives which prompted the Imams (a.s.) not to claim authority by force and thus upset the oppressive governments which were controlling the sustenance of the Muslim nation and its general conditions. These are as follows:

Lack of a Popular Front of Confrontation

To move within the framework of the revolution needs the existence of an alert public base of confrontation which responds immediately to the plans put by its leader no matter what the outcome might be. The Imams always complained that it simply was not there. As regarding the fragile public support base, which is not united by a unifying belief in the means and objectives, this cannot be made the base from which a revolution can start because it is doomed with failure in advance. Suffices us for proof on that the shaky circumstance which surrounded the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) whose government took full control over all Islamic lands with the exception of Syria which was under the control of Mu'awiya ibn Abu Sufyan.

The reason why Mu'awiya was able to stand firm and score a victory in some of his battles against the Imam (a.s.) was due to the fact that he had that public base which was united in concept and in objective. As regarding the Imam (a.s.), his public base was fragmented and it lacked harmony in its elements whose ideas and goals differed, and probably what happened to the Imam's army during the masquerade of arbitration is sufficient proof for that.

Suffices us also the revolutionary movement led by Imam al-Hasan (a.s.) to confront Mu'awiya after his father had died, leading in the end to a peace treaty with Mu'awiya. The reason for the failure was none other than the lack of that base which would enable him through its cementation to steer the situation to his own advantage, and we have already explained that clearly in our book Sulh al Imam al-Hasan.

Imam's Main Responsibility was Disseminating Awareness

With a situation like that, we cannot blame the Imams for keeping silent about revolutions, or for their reluctance to prepare for them, or permit ourselves to pass a judgment about their own lack of necessary qualifications to assume government responsibilities, or even tell them that the role which was assigned to them was only to be leaders of the spiritual authority alone, and that they simply do not have the qualities required for temporal authority. Rather, their responsibility is confined to create a public base that is alert and with the sense of direction, and this cannot be achieved except when they are free to direct others and disseminate awareness among the various segments of the nation.

Governments' Persecution of Imams

Their contemporary caliphs, Umayyad or Abbaside, made sure to rob them of that freedom and besiege them with a siege of strict surveillance which counted their movements and monitored their breath, so much so that to belong to their school of thought was considered a crime punishable by

the ruling authority with execution or banishment. The matter became so difficult and so straitened that their sincere followers tried to hide their creed fearing for their lives should they otherwise disclose it and even demanding that their Imams, too, should hide it if any among them was destined to declare his Imamate.

All of that was out of their concern about the lives of those Imams lest they should be endangered as actually happened to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) when he declared that he was, indeed, the Imam (a.s.) succeeding his father. Moreover, the Imams were contemporary to the revolutionary experiences of the Alawides who rebelled against both Umayyad and Abbaside dynasties and which ended in their utter defeat despite the fact that some rebels such as Muhammad and Ibrahim sons of Abdullah ibn al-Husayn were able to subject large tracts of Islamic territories to their control.

Imams' Support of Alawide Revolutions

The Imams did, indeed privately support those successive revolutions without publicly announcing their support. They viewed them as means of public awareness against oppressive government systems.

For example, Imam al-Kazim (a.s.) is quoted saying to his cousin al-Husayn, who was murdered in an ambush, upon saying farewell to him, "O cousin! You are certainly going to be killed; so, fight very well, for these folks are corrupt. They feign belief and hide atheism... We are God's and unto Him is our return... I plead the Almighty on your behalf to grant you the strength of unity."⁶

Having said all of this, we see no reason to oppose and criticize the negative stance of the Imams towards the rebellions which took place against their contemporary governments, for they evaluated their political circumstances and they knew that the end result of each revolution against the government would be defeat..., and nothing but defeat.

Notes

1. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 5, pp. 175-177
2. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 233
3. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 233
4. Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 234
5. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 208
6. Maqatil al-Talibiyyin, p. 443

Intellectual aspects of the Imam's life

His Works

Altercations

Basic Beliefs

The Approach Adopted by Ahl al-Bayt

Exegesis

***Shari'a* (Islamic Legislative System)**

His Works

I do not think that I will be able in this research to do justice in recording all the rich aspects of the intellectual life of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), but I will try my best to provide a quick and clear idea about the intellectual output presented by the Imam for mankind in various fields of knowledge. Thus, we would be able from a distance to conduct a complete definition of the aspects of the portrait in which we can view the life style of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), having finished researching its historical side.

Ibn Khaldun Doubts Imams' Knowledge

Some historians doubted the scholarship of the Imams, let alone their scholarly superiority, basing their doubts on the claim that had they been truly scholars, their books would have been made available to the public as is the case with all other scholars.

Anyone who considers the revolution of Imam Husain (a.s.) against Yazid as a mistake committed by the Imam (a.s.) and a gross miscalculation cannot be expected to refrain from making such a statement which we cannot attribute to ignorance or lack of the ability to know, but it is nothing other than the cloud of sectarian prejudice which stood as a curtain between him and seeing the events, issues, and their reflections as they really were. The "fair-minded" historian is asked to tell us about the books authored by the sahaba and their works from whom he derived the principles and precepts of the creed of the Prophet (S), or even the works of the *tabi'in* whom he regards as the second class that is knowledgeable of the issues of the *shari'a*, custodians of its structure.

He may seek his excuse by saying that the narratives of *hadith* and news of events narrated through them are suitable as a criterion for judging the extent of their knowledge. This is actually how we, too, defend our Imams, for the legacy they have left us in various fields of knowledge and which is narrated about them is sufficient to acquaint us with the extent of their knowledge and even superiority over others. Is it really possible that Ibn Khaldun did not review such legacy of *ahadith* which reached us through them and recorded by scholars and thinkers and upon which the structure of their school of thought, in which a large section of the nation believes, stood? We doubt it; nay, we may even be positively sure about the unrealistic nature of such an odd question especially since Ibn Khaldun is one of the most knowledgeable, most highly intellectual, and most mature writers.

Imams and the Persecution of Rulers

The Imams were tested during various periods of their lives by pressing crises due to the trespassing of oppressive rulers on their civil liberties. They pursued their followers and sincere adherents, straitening on them in various aspects of their everyday life, so much so that the word *rafidi* came to represent in the eyes of the rulers the final indictment of anyone proven to be "guilty" of its context, a believer in its background.

Because of that, the chance was lost for many of those who sought knowledge to derive from that leading fountainhead, and the chance to find the scholarly solutions for the intellectual problems because of which they

were disturbing their minds. Despite all these pressures and violent trespassing, mankind is not intellectually deprived of a great deal of intellectual masterpieces which the Imams (a.s.) dictated to their students and disciples in various aspects of scholarship.

Some of those students used to give jailers whatever they demanded so that they might agree to carry written questions to the jailed Imam (a.s.) and bring them back his answers thereto, out of their desire to benefit from the presence of the Imam (a.s.), and due to their desire to be faithful to the trust of scholarship, and in order to protect it from the labyrinths of doubt.

The biography of the jailed Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) bears witness to that according to those who quoted him. Historians and biographers of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) do in fact mention some books authored by the Imam (a.s.) besides his narration of *hadith* and issues which he dictated to those who asked him and to his close companions who used to frequently question him about the types of knowledge which they could not understand. To positively identify these books as authored by the Imam (a.s.) may require a convincing evidence which we may not sometimes have.

Al-Fiqh al-Radawi

Among those books is *Al-Fiqh al-Radawi* which was for quite some time the subject of debate among scholars, for there are among them those who considered it to be authored by the Imam (a.s.), relied on it, and established their arguments on such a basis, such as the Majlisis, Sayyid Bahr al-Uloom, the author of *Al-Hadaïq*, Shaikh al-Nawari, and others. But the large number of scholars of verification conceded that it could not have been said for sure that it was authored by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) because of the lack of sufficient evidence in addition to their doubt, or the lack of conviction, of the arguments brought forth by those who considered it one of the Imam's works.

The fact that it was not at all common knowledge that that book was authored by the Imam (a.s.) prior to the late time of the Majlisis, in addition to the lack of knowledge of scholars before their time of any information about such an authorship, all of that negates the belief that it was attributed to or personally authored by the Imam (a.s.). There was no reason why that book would not have been famous during the life-time of the Imam (a.s.) especially since the knowledge of the Imam (a.s.) was very well known to everyone, so much so that when he narrated *hadith* to the scholars of Nishapur, more than twenty thousand scribes wrote it down there and then, besides others, as scholars of *hadith* tell us.

How the Book Appeared

The story how this book appeared says that a group of the residents of Qum brought a copy with them to Mecca where the ruler-judge (qadi-amir) Sayyid Husain al-Isfahani saw it and testified to its being authored by ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and made a copy of it for himself which he brought to Isfahan. There he showed it to the first (senior) Majlisi who likewise was sure it was authored by the Imam (a.s.) and so was his son the second (junior) Majlisi, and he quoted the *ahadith* it contained in the volumes of his book *Bihar al-*

Anwar, making the book one of his own book's references, and this is how its fame spread.

In his Introduction to *Bihar al-Anwar*, al-Majlisi writes, "I was told about the book *Fiqh ar-Ridha'* by the virtuous traditionist the ruler-judge Husayn, may God be Gracious unto his soul, after coming to Isfahan. He said to me, 'It happened that during the time when I was neighboring the House of God, a group of the residents of Qum visited me while performing their *hajj* and they had with them an old book the date of its writing agreed with the date during which ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was alive.'" Then al-Majlisi continues to say, "I heard my father saying that it was in the handwriting of ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and a large number of dignitaries testified to the same."

Sayyid Husayn al-Isfahani said: "Through those evidences, I came to know that it was indeed authored by the Imam (a.s.); therefore, I too the book and made a copy of it and corrected my copy by comparing it with the original, then my father took my copy and made yet another copy of it and compared the copy with the original, and most of its statements agree with what is mentioned by al-Saduq Abu Ja'far ibn Babawayh in his book *Man la Yahdaruhu al Faqih* without giving credit to the book, and in agreement with what his father states in his letter to him. A large number of *ahkam* which our fellows have mentioned and whose source is unknown are mentioned in it."

Doubting the Accuracy of Rendering it to the Imam

What makes us doubt the attribution is that Shaikh al-Saduq, who took pains in documenting all the legacies of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and who researched him in his book *'Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha'*, and in others, did not mention that he had authored such a book. Also, other scholars who came after him, be it residents of Qum or others, did not mention anything about it, and Sayyid al-Isfahani did not say anything about those pilgrims from Qum who showed him the book as to how they acquired the book, and who the person who was telling its story was.

It is also unusual that the book should remain obscure for such a long period of time in the hands of some residents of Qum without any of the city's scholars or traditionists getting to have a look at it, although those scholars were known not to leave anything small or big without writing it down in order to safeguard it against loss.

There are three possibilities regarding the book:

1. That it is authored by the Imam (a.s.) on the account of evidences in it which give that impression such as his statement at its beginning, "Abdullah Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' says...", and "... one of our own customs, we people of the Ahl al-Bayt." In its chapter on zakat, it states, "It is narrated about my father the scholar..." In its chapter on usury, it states, "My father ordered me and I obeyed." In the chapter on *hajj*, it states: "My father said that Asma daughter of Anees..." It also says, "... my father from my grandfather from his father said: 'I saw Ali ibn al-Husayn walking without running.'" It also contains: "I heard the scholar. I heard him say..." "Scholar" is the title of Imam al-Kazim (a.s.), up to the end of such statements which give the impression that the book was his, that he was its author, and they may be the

evidences which encouraged many scholars to be positively sure that the book was written by the Imam (a.s.), and to act accordingly.

2. That it was authored by the man's father, whose name happens to be Ali ibn Musa. He authored it for his son al-Saduq, and it is a compilation of narratives which came through Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.). This view was tolerated by some scholars, but the word "ar-Ridha' (a.s.)" in the title of the book negates the possibility of its being authored by him except this may be the fault of those who made copies of the book and of the scribes since the complete name of the Imam (a.s.) comes to mind.

3. That it was compiled by Ibn Babawayh, or someone else, which he compiled on behalf of the Imam (a.s.) and in which he recorded the traditions which were narrated about Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and classified them in a way which gives the impression that he was an author for the Imam (a.s.) since the traditions about him are actually his own with only one difference: references of those traditions were eliminated. This may be the best possibility since other possibilities do not say anything about why the book's subject-matters were classified the way they are.

Views of Some Scholars About the Book

Our master mentor Imam al-Khoi has stated that, "It is not proven that it is ar-Ridha's *fiqh* by narration, but it contains evidences which point out to its being a collection of fatawa of some ulema, and due to the agreement of most of its contents to the letter Ibn Babawayh wrote to his son¹; had it been otherwise, al-Saduq would have had to acquaint us with it."

The verifier (muhaqqiq) Mirza Abdullah al-Afandi, in his book *Riyad al-Ulema*, is positive about the book being the same letter referred to above, adding that the reason for the occurrence of the Imam's name in it is due to the fact that both men share the same first and second names, and this is why it is attributed to the Imam (a.s.).

Sayyid Hasan al-Sadr wrote a dissertation about the lack of evidence (that it was the Imam's), saying in his authorization to Shaikh Agha Bazrag of Tehran that it is the same book authored by Ibn Abu 'Azaqir better known as al-Shalmaghani. Anyhow, attributing the book to the Imam (a.s.) is doubtful enough to almost a firm belief that the book was not authored by him. But the book, although we disagree with our master mentor, may God prolong his shade, in his description of it as a collection of fatawa of some ulema, is no less than a narration whose narrator is anonymous; therefore, we cannot attribute it to the Imam (a.s.) and accept it as a reference to rely upon for issuing religious verdicts or to know what is Islamically unlawful.

Al-Risala al-Dahabiyya fil Tibb

Among such books is *Al-Risala al-Dahabiyya fil Tibb* (the gold medical dissertation) for which sources are counted reaching sometimes to Muhammad ibn Jumhoor, and sometimes to al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Nawfali who was accepted as trustworthy by al-Najjashi who described him as "highly esteemed and trustworthy; he narrated one text about ar-Ridha' (a.s.)," which could be "the gold medical dissertation."

It is possible that the dissertation's fame among scholars, and their consensus in various centuries that the Imam (a.s.) was its author, and that

nobody doubted such an authorship, are enough proofs leading the researcher to comfortably and almost positively conclude that it was indeed from the intellectual output of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) himself.

Dissertation Was Authored by the Imam

Despite all of this, we see no reason to doubt that it was authored by the Imam if we apply the criterion generally applied to derive legislative verdicts (*ahkam*), or to be familiar with the principles of the creed (*usool*), for in that case there are conditions which are not required here; otherwise, doubt would have necessitated the attribution of authorship to a large number of books due to the lack of a method which would assure us of the reliability of such an attribution. Yet the fame which many verifiers consider as a means towards confirmation can by itself prove to us the accuracy of attributing this dissertation to the Imam (a.s.).

If it is proven for us that al-Najjashi meant this same gold dissertation when he was quoting al-Nawfali saying that he narrated one text from ar-Ridha' (a.s.), the knot would surely be untied. What supports this assumption about al-Najjashi is that some scholars have said that the library of allama al-'Askari in Samarra (Iraq) contains a copy of a manuscript dealing with the medical knowledge of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) narrated by Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Nawfali ², provided there is no other copy by al-Nawfali in which he quotes the Imam (a.s.) other than this dissertation; otherwise, we would be confused and we would not be able to reasonably understand why al-Najjashi did not provide sufficient details about the books which he attributed to their respective authors or narrators, or at least indicate their titles!

This dissertation is one of the most precious pieces of Islamic legacy dealing with the science of medicine. This inclusive, scientific and invaluable dissertation is a summary of a number of medical sciences such as anatomy, biology, physiology, pathology and the science of health care. It provided most of the knowledge related to the science of protective medicine, nutrition, chemistry, and a large portion of other sciences as well.

The Imam (a.s.) sent this dissertation to the caliph al-Ma'mun around the year 201 A.H. when medicine was a primitive science and its research was not conducted scientifically but based on practice alone rather than on scientific discoveries, and when the science of bacteriology was not discovered yet, nor was there any significant knowledge of nutritional supplements such as vitamins, or other significant medical discoveries for fighting microbes such as penicillin, streptomycin, oromycin, etc.

On the surface, the dissertation seemed to be very simple in order to be in line with the mentality of that time, but it is quite deep and complicated in its implications and it needs a scientific study and lengthy researches to unveil its secrets and uncover its treasures, and it should be compared with modern scientific facts. ³

Al-Ma'mun Evaluated Dissertation

Al-Ma'mun was very pleased to receive that dissertation and he expressed how much he cherished it by ordering to have it written down in

gold and to be deposited at his "depository of wisdom," thus its name "the gold dissertation."

In praising it, al-Ma'mun said, "I have reviewed the dissertation of my learned cousin, the loved and virtuous one, the logical physician, which deals with the betterment of the body, the conduct of bathing, the balance of nutrition, and I found it very well organized and one of the best blessings. I carefully studied it, reviewed and contemplated upon it, till its wisdom manifested itself to me, and its benefits became obvious, and it found its place in my heart, so I learned it by heart and I understood it by my mind, for I found it to be a most precious item to post, a great treasure, and a most useful item, so I ordered it to be written in gold due to its being precious, and I deposited it at the depository of wisdom after I had it copied down by the descendants of Hashim, the youths of the nation. Bodies become healthy by balanced diets, and life becomes possible by overcoming disease, and through life wisdom is achieved, and through wisdom Paradise is won, and it is worthy of being safeguarded and treasured, and an object of value and esteem and a reliable physician and a counselor to refer to and a substance of knowledge in its injunctions and prohibitions.

"Because it came out of the house of those who derive their knowledge from the knowledge of the Chosen One (S), the missive of the prophets, the proofs of successors to the prophets, the manners of scholars, the cure to the hearts and the sick from among the people of ignorance and blindness..., may God be pleased with them, bless and be merciful to them, the first of them and the last, the young and the old, I showed it to the elite among my closest train who are known for their wisdom, knowledge of medicine, authors of books, those who are counted among the people of knowledge and described with wisdom, and each one of them lauded it and thought highly of it, elevated it with esteem and appreciated it in order to be fair to its author, submitting to him, believing in the wisdom he included therein."⁴

Al-Ma'mun Asked the Imam to Write It

The story of this dissertation is that al-Ma'mun had a very inquisitive mind eager for knowledge, fond of obtaining more of it. During one of his scientific debates, a group of physicians and philosophers in Nishapur, including Yohanna (John) ibn Masawayh the physician, Jibraeel (Gabriel) ibn Bakhtishoo' the physician, Salih ibn Salhama the Indian philosopher, in addition to others, had gathered. Discussion turned to medicine and how in it the bodies are improved.

Al-Ma'mun and his attendants were involved in a very lengthy discussion of the subject, and how God created the human body and the contradictory things in it, the four elements, the harms and benefits of various types of food, while the Imam (a.s.) kept silent and did not take part in any of that. Al-Ma'mun, therefore, said to him, "What do you have to say, O father of al-Hasan, in today's subject of our discussion?" Abul-Hasan (a.s.) said, "I have of this the knowledge of what I have personally tested and came to know about its accuracy by experience and by the passage of time in addition to what I was told by my ancestors of what nobody can afford to be ignorant of nor excused for leaving out. I shall compile that with an equal share of what everyone need know."

Al-Ma'mun then rushed to Balkh and Abul-Hasan (a.s.) did not accompany him; therefore, al-Ma'mun sent him from there a letter asking him to fulfill his promise and make that compilation, so ar-Ridha' (a.s.) wrote him saying:

"In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful; My reliance is upon Allah

I have received the letter of the commander of the faithful regarding what he ordered me about acquainting him with what is needed of matters I have tested and heard about foods and drinks, medicines, venesection, blood letting, bathing, poisons, what should be avoided, and other things which manage the health of the body, and I explained what is needed to be done regarding one's own body, and God is the One Who gives success."

After that he initiates the dissertation.

Commentaries on the Dissertation

A good number of scholars attempted to write commentaries on the dissertation; here is a partial listing of some of them:

1. *Tarjamat al-Alawi lil Tibb al-Radawi* by Sayyid Diaud-Din Abul-Rida Fadlallah ibn Ali al-Rawandi (d. 548 A.H.).

2. *Tarjamat al-Dhahabiyya* by mawla Faydallah 'Usarah al-Tasatturi who was an authority on medicine and astrology during the regime of Fath-Ali Khan. This book was written under the cover of secrecy in about 107 A.H. A handwritten copy of the manuscript dated 1133 A.H. is available at Mishkat Library of the Tehran University.

3. *Tarjamat al-Dhahabiyya* by Muhammad Baqir al-Majlisi. It is available at the private library of the late Sayyid Hasan al-Sadr in Kazimiyya (Iraq).

4. *'Afiyat al-Bariyya fi Sharh al-Dhahabiyya* by Mirza Muhammad Hadi son of Mirza Muhammad Salih al-Shirazi. It was authored during the regime of Sultan Husayn al-Safawi. It is in handwritten manuscript form and it is available at the Sayyid Husayn al-Hamadani Library, Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

5. *Sharh Tibb ar-Ridha'* by mawla Muhammad Sharif al-Khattoonabadi. He authored it around 1120 A.H.

6. *Tarjamat al-Dhahabiyya* by Sayyid Shamsud-Din Muhammad ibn Muhammad Badi' al-Radawi al-Mashhadi. It was finished in 1155 A.H., and it is available at the Shaikh Muhammad Ali Akbar al-Nahawandi library in Khurasan (Iran).

7. *Sharh Tibb ar-Ridha'* by Sayyid Abdallah al-Shubbar who died in 1242 A.H. Shaikh al-Nawari mentioned that he saw that copy himself.

8. *Sharh Tibb ar-Ridha'* by mawla Muhammad ibn al-Hajj Muhammad Hasan al-Mashhadi who taught at Mashhad and died in 1257 A.H.

9. *Sharh Tibb ar-Ridha'* by mawla Nawrooz Ali al-Bastami.

10. *Al-Mahmoodiyya* by al-Hajj Kazim al-Moosawi al-Zanjani who died in 1292 A.H. It is in manuscript form and it is available with the author's grandsons.

There are others besides these scholars who explained and commented on it, revealing what is hidden of its secrets and obscure treasures. Probably the latest person who explained it and conducted a comparative study between

its theory and the latest modern scientific discoveries is Dr. Abdul-Sahib Zaini in the "*Multaqa al-'Asrayn*" series.

Sahifat ar-Ridha'

Among those works is *Sahifat ar-Ridha'* which deals with *fiqh*. Apparently, it is not confirmed by our famous scholars although the author of *Mustadrak al-Wasail* described it as "among the well-known books which is relied upon and which no other book, before it or after it, is more esteemed or reliable," and we do not know how realistic some of the judgment issued by the author of this *Mustadrak* about such an evaluation are. What is unusual is that al-Majlisi, in his *Muqaddimat al-Bihar*, stated that despite its fame, it is on the level of a lecture rather than a *musnad*.

Al-Saheefa's Musnads

But Sayyid al-Amin, in his *A'yan* mentions an *isnad* (ascription) related to it alone from Shaikh Abdul-Wasi' al-Yamani al-Zaydi for the copy brought by the said Shaikh from Yemen and published in Damascus. Also, some of its copies contain its ascription to Abu Ali al-Tibrisi, but Shaikh al-Majlisi says that he does not know anything about that.

Al-Mustadrak states: "The esteemed Mirza Abdallah al-Afandi, in his *Riyad al-'Ulema*, has compiled all its sources and said, 'Among that is a copy of this Saheefa which I saw at the town of Ardabil, and its sanad was...,' and he goes on to indicate its sanad after that. But the ascription he mentioned is debatable in as far as his narrators are concerned, and what we opt for regarding the dissertation is that its authenticity is not verified and is not suitable in its context for deciding about *ahkam*. Suffices us the fact that great scholars and verifiers of past centuries refused to acknowledge its authenticity, refusing also to believe it was authored by the Imam (a.s.); therefore, we have no excuse if we include it among the works of the Imam (a.s.) and his scholarly production.

Mahd al-Islam

Among other works attributed to the Imam (a.s.) is the book titled *Mahd al-Islam wa Shara'i ad-Din* which is referred to by al-Saduq in his *Uyoon* from al-Fadl ibn Shathan, but he did not indicate that it was written in response to al-Ma'mun's request.⁵

Doubting Its Attribution To The Imam

What appears to us after scrutinizing the list of its ascription is that we cannot rely on its attribution to the Imam simply because some of its narrators are not held reliable. Yet even the style of this dissertation is shaky, with disturbed expressions intermingled in it. This gives us the impression that it is highly unlikely that the Imam (a.s.) dictated it despite its inclusion of some *ahkam* the upholding to which is not considered obligatory in our school of thought such as making obligatory the *qunoot* in all five daily prayers, the obligation of sending blessings unto the Prophet (S), i.e. *salawat*, at all places, at sneezing, sacrificial animals, etc., and the obligation of *takbir* during the Eid al-Fitr prayers after five *salawat*, during the Eid al-Adha after ten *salawat*, and at Mina after fifteen *salawat*, that a woman whose menstrual period continues for eighteen days must not say

the daily prayers, but if she became clean before then, she could say them, and if she is not clean till after eighteen days, she would bathe and say her daily prayers and does whatever a woman does during her period.

In his second narrative, he adds to the first one saying, "And he stated in it that the small sins of prophets are forgiven," which is contradictory with the Imam (a.s.) declaring that they are infallible and do not commit small or big sins.

All of this strengthens our belief that the dissertation was not authored or dictated by the Imam (a.s.), but it contains a nullification of the caliphate of al-Ma'mun and other preceding caliphs, calling them misguided and ones who forsook righteousness and guidance, clearly confining the true Imamate to the Twelve Imams (a.s.).

The dissertation also contains a violation of the principle of taqiyya and of its curtain which was upheld by the Imams during their lengthy history. This adds more doubt in the accuracy of the attribution of the dissertation to the Imam (a.s.). What we think to be quite possible is that the dissertation may have been a collection of fatawa (verdicts) of one scholar and his views regarding doctrinal and legislative issues. The lack of order of the dissertation's style and organization in listing subject-matters and their sequence, in addition to the fact that some of its *ahkam* are simply in disagreement with the established ones, all this leads us to and confirms this possibility.

Ajwibat Masail Ibn Sinan

(Or "Answers to ibn Sinan's Queries") What may be described as works by the Imam (a.s.) are his answers to questions put forth to him by Ibn Sinan. But this cannot be described as a book authored by the Imam (a.s.); otherwise, the collection of his answers to the questions of many others, which deal with various fields of knowledge and scholarship, must be described likewise.

'Ial Ibn Shathan

Also, the (Imam's answers to) ailments about which Ibn Shathan had asked him cannot be considered as a book he authored, as some scholars concluded, since they were organized by Ibn Shathan himself though they were derived from the knowledge of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and his answers to the questions about ailments.

For this reason, we find Ibn Shathan presenting those ailments in a problem and a solution format, and we do not know whether the texts he mentioned were the exact answers of the Imam (a.s.) verbatim or not, for it is quite possible that he presented them in his own personal style while maintaining the essence of the idea which the Imam (a.s.) presented in his answer, which we think was the case.

Summary

From what we have discussed honestly and frankly regarding the authenticity of the books which were attributed to have been authored by the Imam (a.s.), it becomes clear that the only book which we dare to describe

as authored by the Imam (a.s.) is *Al-Risala al-Dhahabiyya fil Tibb* which he wrote in response to caliph al-Ma'mun's request.

This does not mean at all that the other books attributed to him did not carry views and theories which he had dictated to those who questioned him about this and that, or to those who were seeking his supreme fountainhead of knowledge, and our discussion is only in form, not in context and substance.

Notes

1. Al-Muhadarat fi al-Fiqh al-Ja'fari by al-Sayyid al-Shahroodi, "Report on Imam al-Khoi's Lecture," Vol. 1, p. 7
2. Tibb ar-Ridha' ("Medicine of ar-Ridha'"), "Multaqā al-'Asrayn" series, issue number 2, p. 130
3. Ibid., pp. 19-20
4. A'yan al-Shi'a, Vol. 4, pp. 2, 143 and 144
5. Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha', Vol. 2, p. 121

Altercations

On various occasions, al-Ma'mun tried to force Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) into the arena of complex debates with various groups and creeds. He used to conduct scientific and intellectual sessions to which he invited giant thinkers, leading scientists, the atheists of the century, and debaters whose scientific might was feared and before the stubbornness of whose complex arguments the evidence was muted and due to the fierceness of whose doubt the proof was weakened.

In all such debates, the Imam would come out victorious over his opponents due to the tremendous power of knowledge he possessed without forcing himself into the sophistry of arguments to which some might have resorted in order to demolish the structure of his opponent's argument and weaken his ability to provide evidence. Rather, he depended in his debate upon honest arguments in order to prove right to be right, his miraculous ability of conviction, and his calm stylistic method.

Al-Nawfali Warns the Imam

Al-Nawfali tried to warn the Imam against attempting to deal with the debates of such people when the Imam asked him why al-Ma'mun had invited him to debate them, for al-Ma'mun had asked the Catholic archbishop, the High Rabbi, leading Sabians, the Hindu high priest, followers of Zoroaster, Nestus the Roman medical scientist, and a group of orators, to enter into a scientific debate with Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.). He sent Yasir the servant to the Imam to tell him about the time when the debate would start, requesting him to attend. When Yasir went out and al-Nawfali was alone with the Imam, the Imam (a.s.) turned to him and asked him in the form of a dialogue, "O Nawfali! You are an Iraqi, and the heart of an Iraqi is not severe; so, what can you gain from causing your cousin to require us to meet with disbelievers and rhetoricians?"

Al-Nawfali answered, "May my life be sacrificed for yours! He wants to put you to test, and he loves to know how much knowledge you possess. He has, indeed, built his assumption on a shaky foundation, and doomed, by God, what he has built." He asked, "And what has he built?" He answered, "Scholars of *kalam* and innovators are opposite of the scholars. A scholar does not deny the undeniable, whereas rhetoricians and polytheists are people who deny and try to prove what is not true. If you argue with them and tell them that God is One, they would say, 'Prove His Oneness,' and if you say that Muhammad (S) is the Messenger of God, they would say, 'Confirm his Message,' then they would press their lies on a person while he tries to disprove their lies, and they would continue to prove that he is mistaken till he abandons his argument; so, beware of them, may my life be sacrificed for you."

He smiled and asked, "O Nawfali! Do you fear that they will disprove my argument?" He answered, "No, by God! I have never worried about you, and I hope God will enable you to have the upper hand over them." The Imam asked again, "O Nawfali! Would you like to know when al-Ma'mun will feel regretful?"

He answered, "Yes." He said, "When he hears me argue with the people of the Torah quoting their own Torah, with the people of the Gospel (Bible) quoting their own Gospel, with the people of the Psalms quoting their own Psalms, with Zoroastrians arguing in their Persian language, with the Romans in their own Latin, and with rhetoricians using their very rhetoric. So, if I closed all the avenues of argument in the face of each arguing party and disproved his claim, making him renounce his statement from its onset and referring to my own statement, then al-Ma'mun would know that he would not achieve what he aspires. It is then that he will feel regretful; *We are God's, and Unto Him is our return.*"

Thus does the Imam show that he was taking lightly and was not concerned about such persons whom al-Ma'mun wished to gather together against him trying to embarrass him with their falsification and arguments which he hoped might close for the Imam (a.s.) all the avenues of argument. When the session starts and the Imam (a.s.) is invited to join it, discussion starts and the Imam (a.s.) starts his debate with the Catholics, making the Bible his reference to prove his own defense of the Unity of God and disprove the Godhead of Christ (a.s.) by those who regarded him as a god besides God.

Then he follows with a magnificent discussion proving that the Bible in circulation today is not the same which God had revealed to Christ (a.s.) and that it is authored by some of the disciples of Jesus (a.s.) who are the authors of the four gospels, depending in his argument on the fact that the details presented by each one of them stand in flagrant contradiction with those of the other. The Catholic archbishop slipped into an obvious self-contradiction; for he on one hand sanctified the authors of the four gospels and held them above lying while, on the other hand, he admitted to the Imam that they did tell lies about Christ (a.s.).

Then the Imam (a.s.) goes to debate the High Rabbi, scholar of the Jews, to prove the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (S) from the previously revealed divine testaments, after which he follows with a very logical debate. Having argued with him that one of the requirements of a Prophet was to perform something all other creation are unable to perform, he asked him about the reason why they, the Jews, refrained from believing into the miracles of all prophets other than Moses (a.s.) son of Imran (Amram), and the High Rabbi answered him saying, "We cannot admit the prophethood of any who professes prophethood except after bringing us knowledge similar to that brought by Moses." Ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said to him, "Then how come you admitted the prophethood of other prophets who preceded Moses (a.s.) who did not split the sea, nor cleave the stones so that twelve springs would gush forth from it, nor took their hands out shining white as Moses did, nor did they turn a cane into a snake?!" It was then that the High Rabbi overcame his stubbornness, submitted to the argument, and admitted that any supernatural act beyond human capacity was indeed a proof of prophethood.

The Imam (a.s.) asked him then about the reason why they did not believe in the prophethood of Jesus (a.s.) despite the fact that he brought forth miracles beyond human capacity such as bringing the dead back to

life, healing those who were born blind and the lepers, and about the reason why they did not believe in the prophethood of Muhammad (S) despite his bringing an extra-ordinary miracle, that is, the Holy Qur'an while he was neither a scholar nor a writer. The High Rabbi had no answer at all.

Then came the turn of the Zoroastrian high priest whom the Imam debated depending on the priest's belief in the prophethood of Zoroaster. The Zoroastrian tells the Imam that Zoroaster brought them what no other man had ever brought them before. "We did not see him," he continues, "but the stories of our ancestors told us that he legalized for us what no other person before made legal; so, we followed him." The Imam asked, "You believed in the stories which came to you about him, so you followed him, didn't you?" "Yes," he answered. The Imam (a.s.) said, "This is the case with all other nations. Stories came to them about what the prophets had accomplished, what Moses (a.s.), Jesus (a.s.), and Muhammad (S) had all brought them, so why did you not believe in any of these prophets, having believed in Zoroaster through the stories that came to you about him saying that he brought forth what others did not?"

Imam's Debate With the Sabian

The Zoroastrian high priest had no more to say. The Imam then turned to the debate's witnesses, having finished debating with the chief representatives of those creeds, asking anyone else to go ahead and put forth any question he had, everyone abstained from doing so. It was then that Imran the Sabian, who was one of the most distinguished scholars of the science of *kalam* of his time, approached the Imam (a.s.) and asked him how he could prove the existence of the Creator, and the discussion between them delved into the deepest depths of this complex question, while the Imam answered the man's questions through obvious scientific facts in a gloriously simple way.

Among the questions Imran asked was: "Master! Was the Being known to Himself by His Own Self?" The Imam said, "Knowledge is acquired by something which would negate its opposite, and so that the thing itself would be existing through what it is negated about it, without the existence of anything which contradicts its existence so that a need arises to negate that thing about itself by defining what is known about it. Do you understand, O Imran?" He said, "Yes, by God, master! Tell me, then, by what means did He come to know what He knew, by a pronoun or by something else?"

The Imam (a.s.) said, "If it had been by a pronoun, would He then find anyway not to establish for that pronoun a limit where knowledge ends?" Imran answered, "Yes, He will have to find such way." The Imam then asked him, "Then what is that pronoun?" Imran could not provide any answer. The Imam (a.s.) said, "Is it alright if I ask you about the pronoun and you define it by another pronoun? If you answer in the affirmative, then you would make both your claim and statement void. O Imran! Ought you not come to know that the One cannot be described by a pronoun, and would not be described except by a verb, by deed, by action, and He cannot be expected to be parts and kinds like human beings?"

Then Imran asked him, "Master! The knowledge I have says that the being is changed in his essence by his action of creating..." The Imam (a.s.) said, "Does your statement, O Imran, mean that the being does not in any way change its essence except when it affects its own essence in a way which changes it? O Imran! Can you say that the fire changes its own self, or that the heat burns itself, or have you seen anyone seeing his own vision?" Imran said, "No, I have not seen that; could you please tell me, master, is it in that in the creation, or is it the nature of creation in it?"

The Imam (a.s.) said, "Yes, O Imran, He is above all of that; He is not in the creation, nor is the creation in Him; He is elevated above that, and bad indeed is your knowledge about Him, and no might except in God. Tell me about the mirror: are you in it or is it in you? If neither one of you is in the other, then how did you come to see your own self's reflection in it?" Imran said, "Through the light between myself and itself." The Imam (a.s.) said, "Can you see of that light more than what you can see with your own eyes?"

He answered, "Yes." The Imam (a.s.) said to him, "Then show it to us..." It was then that the man was too baffled to say a word. The Imam (a.s.) said, "I do not see the light except leading you and the mirror to come to know each without being in either one of you. There are many such examples which the ignorant simply cannot observe, and God Has the greatest example."

Thus did the Imam face the challenge of Imran the Sabian's doubting method, demolishing its structure and dispelling the ambiguity of the complex doubts which he could not understand till vision became clear to him. The Imam (a.s.) did not determine an evidence except after building it with simple easy to understand proofs out of the everyday life of man in order not to leave any way for the opponent to doubt after transforming a most complex theory into an easy and commonsense idea, all of that by employing a very beautiful and miraculous style.

Debating al-Maroozi

In another session, al-Ma'mun invited him to debate Sulayman al-Maroozi, Khurasan's scientist in *kalam*, and the debate between them dealt with some significant topics which were being debated then by scholars of the science of *kalam*, and the starting-point of the discussion was the issue of *badaa*. The Imam (a.s.) explained its sound meaning, indicating that the Sublime and Dear God had innermost knowledge which nobody but He knew, and that was the source of *badaa* and knowledge which He taught His angels and Prophets.

To explain it in a way which would remove all confusion and ambiguity, we can say about *badaa* is that God makes manifest that His Will is linked to an advantage which necessitates it, and the apparent reality is that His Will is hinging on what is opposite to it. Then He after that makes manifest His actual Will when the advantage is satisfied from all aspects and the reasons for which it was not previously manifested are removed, and it appears to the creation as if God willed to abandon His first Will, hence it is in the view of creation, not in the reality of Will, *badaa*.

This is the theory of *badaa* in its simple logical context which Imamis (Shi'as) uphold and which some people misunderstood and misinterpreted,

giving it a wrong meaning which necessitated attributing ignorance (!!!) to the Almighty God and an excuse to wage an unfair campaign of defamation against Imami Shi'as by their opponents from among the followers of other sects.

Imam Proves Badaa

The Imam (a.s.) has proven the accuracy of *badaa* in which Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) believe by first quoting the Holy Qur'an, for God Almighty said, "So leave them alone, for you shall not be blamed for that,"¹ meaning thereby that He intends to annihilate them, then the Almighty, according to the *badaa* theory, He has said, "So remind, for reminding may avail the believers,"² which indicates a shift from the first decision as observed from studying the context of both verses.

Second, he tries to prove it by traditions narrated from his forefathers from the Messenger of God (S) who said: "God sent his *wahi* to one of His prophets to inform him that he would die on a particular day, and when that prophet was told so, he pleaded God, the King, while on his bed, saying, 'Lord! Postpone my demise till I see my son growing up to carry out my will,' till he fell from his bed, whereupon God sent his *wahi* again to the same prophet to inform him that He decided to postpone it."

It is apparent that *badaa* in the meaning which we indicated requires no alarm whatsoever and it does not justify waging a campaign of defamation to those who believe in it.

Eternity Versus Transience of the Will

The same discussion led to discussing the will's eternity and transience, and the Imam (a.s.) stood to disprove the theory which called for the eternity of the will, proving its being transient by revealing its own self-contradiction, removing the confusion which may occupy anyone's mind in its regard.

Will, as the Imam (a.s.) says, is one of the actions of the Almighty. It is not one of His attributes; therefore, it is transient, not perpetual, since an action is a form of event, and the deed cannot be identical to the doer, so the will cannot be identical to the willing person. Will is not like hearing or seeing or knowing as al-Maroozi tried to prove, because it does not make sense, the Imam says, to say that He wanted Himself. Does He want to be "something," or does He want to be Alive, Seeing, Hearing, or Able? If this is according to His Will, it would require the impossible which is the change occurring to the self, for the meaning then would be that He wanted Himself to be something which was not... Sublime is God greatly above all of this.

Thus did the debates between the Imam and al-Maroozi occur frequently about the eternity of the will versus its transience about relevant matters.

Al-Maroozi's Argumentativeness

In his debates with the Imam, al-Maroozi kept arguing and coming back to the same point from which he had started his argument in an inflexible argumentative manner. While accepting that to desire something (to "will", to wish) is a verb, he goes back to deny that and claim that it is an adjective, and he may admit something and say something else.

The Imam asks him, "O Abu Sulayman! Can you tell me if the will is a verb or not?" He says, "Yes, it is a verb." He asks, "Is it causative, since verbs are?" "It is not a verb," comes the answer. The Imam (a.s.) asks, "Is there any with Him who is eternal?" Sulayman answers, "Willing is doing." He says, "O Sulayman! This is the same which you criticized Dirar and his followers about for saying that everything God Almighty has created in His heavens and earth, ocean or land, dog or pig, monkey, human, or an animal, is God's will, and that God's will gives life and takes life away, and it goes here or drinks from there, marries, enjoys food, commits immoral acts, disbelieves and commits *shirk*..."

Sulayman said, "It is like hearing, seeing, or knowing; that is, it is an adjective, an attribute." Having abstained from providing an answer to the Imam's question, Sulayman goes back to the beginning of the argument regarding whether the will is an adjective, an attribute, or a verb, but the Imam nevertheless repeats his argument with him by following another route different from the one he took first, which indicates how commonsense the idea seems to him and his ability to prove it however he willed.

Imam's Style in Debating

The debate continues between them in the same calm manner in which the Imam (a.s.) coins his questions, which is the most magnificent method of debate. In his way of providing answers, the Imam never blocks the way before his opponent to continue the debate; rather, he leaves him completely free to debate in whatever manner he wishes through his questions till he brings him to a dead-end where he cannot proceed anymore just to go back seeking another route which the Imam himself wants him to seek out of his own will and after his own conviction.

Al-Ma'mun Rebukes al-Maroozi for Fumbling About

But Sulayman kept fumbling about in his answers to the Imam's questions after the Imam had closed before him all avenues of his argument, and al-Ma'mun was quick to notice his fumbling about which indicated Sulayman's loss, so he rebuked him and criticized him. It is reported that during the debate, when ar-Ridha' (a.s.) asked him to continue his questions, he said, "Will is one of His attributes." The Imam said, "How many times has it been said that it is one of His attributes, so is it a new attribute, or has it always been so?" Sulayman said, "New." The Imam (a.s.) said, "*Allahu Akbar!* You are telling me that His attribute is new! Had it been one of His attributes, and an eternal one, then He willed and He created as long as His will and His creation are eternal...! This means it is an attribute of someone who did not know what he did! God is Elevated above this..."

Sulayman said, "Things are not a will, and He did not will anything." Here the Imam said, "You have hissed, O Sulayman! He did and He created as long as His will and His creation are eternal...?! This is the attribute of someone who does not know what he did! Elevated is God above all of that." Sulayman, turning to al-Ma'mun, then said, "Master! I have already informed him that it is like hearing and seeing and knowing." Al-Ma'mun said, "Woe unto you, Sulayman! How you have erred and how often you

have repeated yourself! Stop it and take another route, for you seem to be unable to provide any answer better than that."

The debate continues after that till Sulayman's tongue is tied, whereupon al-Ma'mun says, "O Sulayman! This is the most learned descendant of Hashim," and the session disperses.

Imam Debates Ali ibn al-Jahm

The Imam (a.s.) conducted a very magnificent debate with Ali al-Jahm dealing with the infallibility of prophets in which he explained in a very beautiful way the actual meaning of some verses which may on the surface give the impression to the contrary.

Interpreting the Holy Qur'an According to One's Opinion

The Imam (a.s.) started his discussion with Ali ibn al-Jahm by criticizing him and those who interpreted the Book of God according to their own viewpoint, stating that he and those have to refer to those whom God endowed with the faculty of knowledge and understanding in order to learn the actual and accurate interpretation of its verses according to the sacred verse which says, "And none knows its interpretation except God and those deeply grounded in knowledge."³

Interpreting Verses Whose Superficial Meaning Suggests Prophet's Fallibility

Then the Imam (a.s.) started explaining the verses whose superficial meaning indicates the fallibility of and possibility of sinning by prophets. He indicated that Adam's transgression took place while he was in Paradise, not on earth, and the infallibility in question is earthly, and that he did not commit any act as long as he lived on earth which contradicted his infallibility as proven by the sacred verse: "God did indeed choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Imran above all people."⁴

As regarding the verse which states: "And remember Zun-nun when he departed in wrath; he imagined that We had no power over him, but he cried through the depths of darkness, `There is no god but Thou! Glory to Thee; I was indeed wrong,'"⁵ what is meant by "he imagined that We had no power over him" is that he realized that God was not going to sustain him." Had he thought that God was unable to overpower him, he would have then committed *kufir* (disbelief) and he would have also committed 'isyan, transgression.

As regarding the verse "And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her,"⁶ the case regarding what the wife of al-'Aziz wanted, and what Yousuf (a.s.) desired to do, are two different things, for she wanted to commit a sin while he desired to kill her if she forced him; therefore, God saved him from the deed of killing her and its terrible consequences, and saved her from her own wishful desire to commit a sin.

As regarding David, his statement that the defendant had committed injustice by asking for the goat, it was an error only within the framework of the case, and it took place before he had asked the defendant about his defense against the plaintiff's claim, and it is not a transgression, for God

corrected for him his decision by bringing him the example of the two kings. As regarding his marriage with the widow of Oorya, which was regarded by people at that time as a sin and criticized him for it, it was done for the sake of effecting a legislative interest whereby David wanted to shatter the then prevalent custom of a widow not getting married after the death of her husband.

It is similar to what happened to the Prophet with Zainab daughter of Jahsh, wife of Zayd ibn Haritha who had been adopted by the Prophet (S), for the Prophet, by marrying Zainab after granting her divorce from Zayd, wanted to shatter the pre-Islamic custom whereby a man would not be permitted to marry the former wife of someone he had adopted as is clear in the text of the Holy Qur'an. The Prophet (S) was apprehensive of the criticism of the hypocrites of his action, so the Almighty addressed him by saying, "Do not fear people; it is more fitting that you should fear God,"⁷ since it was God Who ordered him to marry her as we understand from the verse, "Then when Zayd had dissolved (his marriage) with her, with the necessary (formality), We joined her in marriage to thee in order that (henceforth) there may be no difficulty to the believers in (the matter of) marrying the wives of their adopted sons, when the latter have dissolved with the necessary (formality, their marriage) with them, and God's command must be fulfilled."⁸

By providing such glorious knowledge of the exegesis of sacred Qur'anic verses, and by giving such honest interpretations which safeguard the integrity of the context, the Imam (a.s.) used to dispel the unusual confusion of those who did not have a deep actual understanding of the Glorious Book of God.

An Artificial Argument

In his book Al-'Iqd al-Farid, Ibn Abd Rabbih al-Andalusi recorded a debate on the subject of Imamate between the Imam and the caliph al-Ma'mun which seems to be stamped with artificiality, and we think it is possible that some fanatics among those who deviated from the line of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) had fabricated it, for he stated the following in his book:

"Al-Ma'mun said to Ali ibn Musa, 'Why do you claim it (Imamate) for your own selves?' He answered, 'Due to Ali and Fatima (a.s.) being near in kin to the Messenger of God (S).' Al-Ma'mun said, 'If it is only a matter of kinship, then the Messenger of God (S) had left behind him those who were closer in kinship to him than Ali or any of his relatives, and if you mean the kinship of Fatima (a.s.) to the Messenger of God (S), then the matter (Imamate) after her should have belonged to al-Hasan and al-Husayn (a.s.) whose right was confiscated by Ali even while they were still alive, taking control of what was not his.' Ali ibn Musa could not provide an answer."⁹

Let us record the following regarding this quotation:

The Imam did not claim his right to caliphate only on account of his kinship to the Prophet (S) but rather on account of the clear statements made by the Prophet (S) emphasizing that he was to be the caliph after him, in addition to the personal qualifications Imam Ali (a.s.) had had which distinguished him above the rest of sahaba.

The concept of caliphate according to Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) is that it is decreed according to a divine text, not dictated due to factors of kinship, politics, etc. God is the One Who chooses, and His choice is voiced by His Prophet, whoever He sees to be most fit to safeguard the Message and the interest of the nation, as we explained when we quoted Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) discussing the subject of Imamate. The claim of those who said that they deserved caliphate due to their kinship to the Prophet (S) is similar to the claim of those who said that the muhajirun (immigrants) were more qualified than the ansar (supporters of Medina) due to the nearness of the first party to the Messenger of God (S).

The Imam, if this story is true at all, would not have been unable, as the story suggests, to answer al-Ma'mun's objection that there are among the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) those who have more priority than Ali (a.s.) or any of his relative, an apparent reference to his grandfather al-Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib, to it.

It was al-Abbas himself who approached the Imam requesting him to stretch his hand to him so that he would swear the oath of allegiance to him when he felt that the fate looked ominous and that the environment was threatening of a revolt, but the Imam refused to accept such an oath privately; rather, he preferred that such an oath be sworn to him in public and before eye witnesses after finishing the funeral rites of the corpse of the Messenger of God (S) which was still lying in state waiting to be bathed. If you suppose that al-Abbas had any right to caliphate, he would then have relinquished it.

As regarding al-Hasan and al-Husayn, they were then very young, and neither wilayat nor wisayat can be enforced on caliphate till they were old enough, for caliphate is a post which permits no wisayat at all; therefore, the issue of caliphate was confined to Ali (a.s.) alone.

This is our argument if we suppose that caliphate is a matter decided due to kinship to the Prophet (S).

But if we say that it is decreed by a divine decree, these proofs will not be relevant.

But the fact that al-Ma'mun's way of thinking regarding the issue of caliphate, and his views with which he confronted the faqihs in his debates with them, as the author of Al-Iqd al-Farid himself mentions, proving that caliphate was the legitimate right of only Ali rather than anyone else among the sahaba, this fact itself convinces us that this fabricated dialogue quoted above was written by some fanatic followers of other sects.

These are some debates and discussions of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) which were narrated about him in which he debated some scholars of *kalam* of his time which we wanted to indicate here briefly in order to give the reader a general idea about the style employed by the Imams among the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) in their debates and discussions with others, so that the reader may live the free democratic environment which dominated that period of time in its intellectual and scientific spheres.

Notes

1. Al-Thariya:54
2. Al Thariyat:55
3. Aali Imran:7
4. Aali Imran:33
5. Al Anbiyaa:87
6. Yousuf:24
7. Al Ahzab:37
8. Al Ahzab:37
9. Al-'Iqd al-Farid, Vol. 2, p. 285 and also Vol. 5, p. 103

Basic Beliefs

Islam is the religion which preaches *tawhid*, the Unity of God. *Tawhid*, then, is the starting point from which a Muslim sets out to build his creed deep inside his inner self; otherwise, he cannot be called a Muslim, nor can the light of faith shine in his soul. The sound definition of *tawhid* is what has been endorsed by the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) through their teachings and statements; anything other than that is but falsification and adulteration and insinuations which may have been necessitated by erroneous philosophical ideologies the inventors of which tried to reach the furthestmost depth of the essence of the Divine, but the results they reached caused them to deviate from reaching even the beginning of belief, so they indulged themselves into the labyrinths of atheism and loss.

In researching such an extremely complex issue, we have to follow into the footsteps of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.). If we accept them as our guides, we shall have no fear about falling into destruction or departing from the Straight Path according to what is already reported about the Prophet (S) who said: "My Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) among you are like the ark of Noah: whoever boards it is saved, and whoever lags behind it is drowned and ruined."

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) did not have a system of his own regarding the philosophy of *tawhid*; rather, his was the very same pristine system about which all Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) unanimously agreed and to whose safeguarding they dedicated their lives in the face of all other sects which may have deviated from the achievement of the noble objective.

We are not going here to make a comparison between these sects in as far as the belief in *tawhid* is concerned, for this may require a very lengthy research whose discussion will require us to go beyond the limits we have set for our study here; rather, what is important for us here is to present the limits of the concept of *tawhid* from the stories we have already narrated about Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

Misconception of the Similitude of God to His Creation

The first to come across in researching the *hadith* narrated by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in the subject of *tawhid* is this one: "Anyone who makes a similitude of God with His creation is a *mushrik* (polytheist), and anyone who attributes to Him what He has prohibited is *kafir* (disbeliever)" which is, as reported about the Prophet (S), a clear answer to those who claim that "God created Adam in His Own Image."

In another text, the Imam (a.s.) explains to us the misconception in whose pitfall others have fallen; al-Husayn ibn Khalid reported saying, "I said to ar-Ridha' (a.s.), 'O son of the Messenger of God! People say that the Messenger of God (S) said that the Almighty and Exalted God created Adam in His Own image.' He said, 'May God fight them! They distorted the beginning of this *hadith*. The Messenger of God (S) passed by two men exchanging insults and abusive language, and he heard one of them saying to the other, 'God made your face ugly and ugly is anyone who is like you,' whereupon he (S) said, 'O servant of God! Do not say so to your brother, for the Almighty and Exalted God created Adam's image like his.'"

The Messenger (S) here is forbidding the man from articulating such an abusive language which abuses Adam, father of all men. The pronoun in the original text (i.e., "image like his") belongs to the man being abused, not to God; therefore, it is erroneous to say that the meaning here is that God created Adam in His Own Image. The Imam emphasizes this by narrating one qudsi *hadith* in which the Almighty tells the Messenger of God (S), "The one who makes a similitude of Myself to My creation is indeed ignorant of Who I am."

The *hadith* regarding the Divine is entangled and complex, but if you read it in the *hadith* narrated by the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), you will find it in full harmony with the human nature, lucidly interpreting the obscure concept in brief expressions with a full vision despite their inclusion of a spacious philosophical context.

God's Attributes are His Own Essence

While researching the *hadith* of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in this regard, we come across his treatment of the issue of His Attributes which are none other than a description of His Own Essence, and that it is impossible that they should be anything else.

For example, al-Husayn ibn Khalid said, "I heard ar-Ridha' (a.s.) saying, 'God has always been Knowing, omni-Potent, Living, Eternal, Hearing, Seeing,' so I said to him, 'O son of the Messenger of God (S)! People have been saying that God knows through His faculty of knowledge, omni-Potent through His faculty of power, Eternal through His ability to withstand time, Hearing through His faculty of hearing, and Seeing through His faculty of vision.' He (a.s.) said, 'Anyone who says so and believes in it has indeed accepted other gods besides God, and he has nothing to do with our religion.'

Then he added, 'God has always been Knowing, omni-Potent, Eternal, Hearing, and Seeing in His Own Essence; Exalted is God above the claims of the polytheists and those who make such similitudes a great deal of exaltation.'

Knowledge, might, and other attributes of God are not actually different from His Essence; rather, they are the same like the Essence in their existence and reality; otherwise, they would have been partners with God in His eternity which contradicts the very concept of *tawhid* which agrees with the nature of His being, that is, the eternity of the Self on its own, without having anything else as partner therewith.

Belief in Plurality of the Essence and Attributes is Shirk

In another *hadith* reported by Muhammad ibn Arafa, the Imam (a.s.) explains to us how one will be committing *shirk* if he considers the Essence of the Almighty and His Attributes as separate from each other. Muhammad said, "I asked ar-Ridha' (a.s.), 'Did God create things by some sort of power or not?'

He answered, 'It is not possible that He must have used some sort of power to do so because if you say that He created things by a power, you would be saying that you imagined a tool whereby He created things, which is *shirk*. And if you say that He created things which He subjected to His

power, you would be saying that He made sure He would be able to overpower them, while He is not weak or incapable or in need of anyone else; rather, He, Glory be to Him, is Almighty due to the fact that His own Essence is Mighty."

The Difference Between God's Will and People's

In another part of the discussion, the Imam (a.s.) tells us about the difference between the Will of God and the will of humans. Safwan ibn Yahya said, "I asked Abul-Hasan (a.s.), 'Tell me about God's Will and the will of His creation.' He said, 'The will of a person is something he possesses, hence it is a possessive pronoun; as regarding God, His Will is His Action, nothing other than that, because He does not contemplate upon doing something, nor does He decide to do something, nor does he sets His mind to do something, and all these verbs have nothing to do with His Essence; they are among the faculties of humans, and they are among the characteristics of the creation. God's Will is His Action, nothing other than that. He says 'Be!' and it is without articulating something, or using a tongue, or sets his mind upon something or contemplates upon doing something, nor does He think about the means to do so, nor does He think about how.'"

The previous chapter contained a discussion of the issue of eternity of God's Will in a debate between the Imam (a.s.) and Sulayman al-Maroozi, the Khurasani scientist of *kalam* who was invited by al-Ma'mun to debate the Imam.

Queries

There may be some innocent questions which come to the mind of anyone which the Imam may have tried to answer in a very simple way relying on clear Qur'anic verses whereby we may pass without being aware of their precise meaning and the depth of their context. For example, regarding the Knowledge of God, he was asked by al-Husayn ibn Bashshar, "Does God know about the thing which never was how it would look like when it is?" He answered, "God Almighty knows of things before their existence; He has said: 'We were wont to write down all that ye did,'¹ and He said to the inmates of Hell, 'If they were returned (back to earth), they would certainly relapse to the things they were forbidden, for they are indeed liars.'²

The Exalted and the Almighty God knows that if those inmates were to be returned to earth, they would go back to their old ways and commit what they were prohibited from committing. When the angels said, 'Wilt Thou place therein one who makes mischief therein and shed blood while we celebrate Thy praises and glorify Thy holy Name?' He said, 'I know what ye know not.'³ So God always knows since eternity about things before He creates them."

We may find in some Qur'anic verses that God is describing Himself with attributes which do not fit His Exalted Status such as mocking and ridiculing as in the verse, "God will throw back their mockery on them"⁴ and "God will throw back their ridicule on them"⁵ and "(the unbelievers) plotted and schemed, and God too plotted"⁶ and "They strive to deceive God while He is deceiving them."⁷

But the Imam (a.s.) answers by saying that God Almighty does not ridicule, mock, cheat, or anything like that, but He rewards those who commit these sins with the reward they deserve for their ridicule, mockery, cheating, etc.

The Imam's answer is derived from the meaning of the Qur'anic verse which states, "The plotting of evil will hem only the author thereof."⁸ When these individuals ridicule, mock, plot, or cheat, they do not sense the destined consequences for such a behavior when the tables are turned and they have to suffer perpetual pain and torture. This is proven by the verses, "They plotted and planned, but We too planned, even while they perceived it not. Then see what the end of their plot was! We destroyed them and their people, all of them."⁹

There are Qur'anic verses which deserve a serious look into them when their superficial meaning gives the impression that they invite one to uphold what must not Islamically be upheld, departing from the concept of the Divine Perfection. For example, the Almighty has said, "They have forgotten God, so He has forgotten them,"¹⁰ and "We shall that day forget them as they forgot the meeting of this day of theirs."¹¹

To attribute forgetfulness to God is erroneous because it is an attribute of His creation; besides, such a superficial meaning contradicts another verse which says, "... and thy Lord never forgets."¹² But the Imam interprets "forgetfulness" in these texts to mean abandonment, and that God abandons them by not allocating for them the rewards He allocates to those who yearn for such meeting. Since they forgot about God and did not do good deeds prior to such meeting, God will make His good rewards distant from them and will reward them with torture and eternal Hellfire.

What is meant by "forgetfulness" in these texts is not overlooking or bypassing, nor does the meaning of abandonment is negligence. The Imam pointed this out when he answered someone who asked him about the meaning of the verse "... and God left them in utter darkness so they could not see"¹³ by saying, "God, the Sublime and Praised One, cannot be described as abandoning as can His creation, but when He knows that they would never leave disbelief and straying, He would stop His support for them and His kindness, leaving them to have their own way."

Seeing God

The discussion of "seeing" God is one of the subjects of the science of *kalam* in which views of Islamic schools of thought differed since the battle and argument on *kalam* started, shattering the unity of the Creed's interpretation of many doctrinal bases upon which the structure of the Islamic Message was established. The Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) took a stance towards the subject of "seeing" God which was in harmony with the pristine concept of *tawhid* as Islam intends it to be, regarding Him above being physically seen simply because that would be possible only for an object of limited dimensions.

As regarding the verses which give the impression that "seeing" God is possible, such as "Some faces on that Day shall be bright, looking towards their Lord,"¹⁴ and "Verily, from (the Light of) their Lord, that Day, will they be veiled,"¹⁵ and "Thy Lord comes, and His angels, rank upon rank,"¹⁶ as

well as other such verses, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) interpreted them in a way which kept them in the context in which they were revealed. For example, the meaning of "... looking to their Lord" is that they were bright with hope and anticipation waiting to be awarded with their Lord's rewards, that is, anticipating His generosity and prizes.

The meaning of the second verse is that they are veiled from receiving the rewards of their Lord, for God Almighty cannot be said to occupy a physical space, a place, in which He would settle, veiling Himself from His servants. In the third verse, what is coming is God's Decree, that is, your Lord's Decree is coming to pass; otherwise, God Almighty cannot be said to come and go, for these movements are characteristic of His creatures, and it is impossible that He should have their attributes, for this would mean that there would be a place where He is not there! God is highly elevated above this degradation.

Thus are the Qur'anic verses interpreted according to the occasion upon which they were revealed. Moreover, such an interpretation which takes into consideration both context and occasion (or reason for revelation) does not depart even a little bit from the particular appearance of such verses simply because such an understood appearance is not derived from the verbal text alone; rather, other aspects which encompass the subject's angles, and for whose explanation the text was revealed, have also to be taken into consideration.

Compulsion and Empowerment

While researching the way Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) employed to explain the subject and relevant topics related to the unity of God, we are faced by others with many questions inquiring about the theory of compulsion and empowerment which occupied the minds of Muslims for a long period of time and caused a great deal of more division among them due to the debates among the scholars of the science of *kalam* of various sects at that time. Some endorsed compulsion, others endorsed empowerment, while still others preached taking an in-between approach.

Notes

1. Al Jathiya:29
2. Al An'aam:28
3. Al Baqara:30
4. Al Baqara:15
5. Al Tawba:79
6. Aali 'Imran:54
7. Al Nisaa:142
8. Fatir:43
9. Al Naml:50-51
10. Al Tawba:67
11. Al A'raaf:51
12. Maryam:64
13. Al Baqara:17
14. Al Qiyama:22-23
15. Al Mutaffifin (or Tatfif):15
16. Al Fajr:22

The Approach Adopted by Ahl al-Bayt

The school of thought preached by Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) regards the latter concept as the basis of Divine Justice whereby God rewards good doers for their good deeds and punishes the evil doers for their evil. Compulsion is akin to oppression and is a negation of justice, while empowerment is a postponement of effecting justice, disabling it from getting the upper-hand and the power it rightfully deserves. Both contradict the concept of the absolute perfection of the Divine.

A man visited Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and asked him, "O son of the Messenger of God (S)! It has been reported to us that the truthful (As-Sadiq) Ja'far ibn Muhammad (a.s.) said, 'There is neither compulsion nor empowerment but a way to choose one of two.' What does he exactly mean?" He answered, "Whoever claims that God does our deeds and then penalizes us for doing them has in fact accepted the concept of compulsion, and whoever claims that God Almighty empowers His Proofs to distribute His sustenance has in fact adopts the belief of empowerment.

One who believes in compulsion is a *kafir* (disbeliever), and one who believes in empowerment is a *mushrik* (polytheist)." So I asked him, 'O son of the Messenger of God! Then what is this way to choose one of two means?' He answered, 'It is finding a way to do what they are enjoined to do and forsake what they are enjoined to forsake.' I asked him, 'Does God Almighty have a Way and a Will in this regard?' He said, 'As regarding deeds done in obedience to His commandments, His Will in their regard is His approval of and assistance in their performance. As regarding His Will about sins, it is His order that they should be shunned, that He condemns them, and that He forsakes those who commit them.'"

Empowerment

Yasir the servant said, "I asked ar-Ridha' (a.s.), 'What do you say about empowerment?' He said, 'God Almighty entrusted His Creed to His Prophets to convey to people, saying, 'Whatever the Messenger permitted for you, take it with approval, and whatever he ordered you not to do, do not do it.' As regarding creation and sustenance; no, He did not empower anyone in their regard.' Then he said, 'God Almighty says: 'God is the Creator of all things,'¹ and He also says, 'It is God Who has created you: further, He has provided for your sustenance; then He will cause you to die; and again He will give you life. Are there any of your (false) partners who can do any single one of these things? Glory to Him! And High is He above the partners they attribute (to Him)!'"²

Imam Warns

In another narrative, the Imam discloses for us the conduct which a believer has to undertake with those who believe in empowerment in order to create a psychological barrier between them and others which would paralyze their action and deprive them of the element whereby they influence others by the misleading and false creed they preach.

Abu Hashim al-Ja'fari says: "I asked Abul-Hasan (a.s.) about the *ghulat* and about those who believed in empowerment, and he said, 'The *ghulat* are *kafirs* (disbelievers), while those who believe in empowerment are *mushriks*

(polytheists). Those who sit with them, mix with them, eat or drink with them, visit them, marry their daughters to them or marry their daughters, accept their trusts or entrust them to keep theirs, believe in them, support them even by a fraction of a word, have abandoned the nearness to God, to the Messenger of God, and to us Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.)."

In another narrative, when someone mentioned compulsion and empowerment, the Imam (a.s.) said to the attendants, "Shall I provide you with an original view in which you shall not dispute with each other, and through which you will win the argument over those who argued with you in its regard?' We requested him to do so, whereupon he said, 'God Almighty was not obeyed by compulsion, nor was He disobeyed by being over-powered. He did not neglect His servants living in His domain; He is the King above their kings, the Powerful One above those who have power among them.

When His servants opt to obey Him, He would not stop them nor forbid them, and if they opt to disobey Him, He may interfere and foil their attempt, or He may not and they will do just that; therefore, He is not the One who caused them to disobey Him.' Then he said, 'Anyone who masters this will have the winning argument over his opponent.'"

Imams Did Not Endorse Making Similitudes With God

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), in a dialogue with al-Husayn ibn Khalid, denied what some people attributed to his forefathers when they claimed that they made similitudes to God and believed in compulsion, describing those people as *ghulat* who underestimated the Greatness of God Almighty, and that their fabrication about his forefathers and their attributing to them what they did not say was similar to the fabrication of others about the Messenger of God (S) by their narration of allegations endorsing making such similitudes and also endorsing compulsion.

Regarding the subject of *tawhid* and its relevant topics, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) has a long discussion which requires an independent and sufficient research, and suffices us this brief presentation of what was reported about him in this regard. Those who wish to pursue their research of this subject are referred to '*Uyoon Akhbar ar-Ridha'* (a.s.) by Shaikh al-Saduq in which he compiled what was narrated about the Imam in this regard.

Transmigration of Souls

Al-Tanasukh kufr, that is, "To believe in the transmigration of the souls is to disbelieve in God," says the Imam in an answer to the question "What is your view regarding the transmigration of the souls?" put to him by someone. He answered saying, "Anyone who believes in *tanasukh* is *kafir* (disbeliever) in God the Great, a disbeliever in Heavens and in Hell." The reason for this is that the belief in the transmigration of the souls means that the human soul, after its departure from the body at the time of death, goes to the body of an animal to live in it. In other words, it is like a bird that as soon as it is set free from its cage will seek another cage. This implies a negation of the Judgment which is one of the basic principles of the Islamic creed, hence it is a negation of Paradise and Hell.

Those who believe in the transmigration of the souls interpret Paradise and Hell by saying that if the soul that was set free from the body settles inside a good animal, then it is Paradise, and if it settles inside a bad animal, then it is Hell, which is nothing but a hallucination which the Holy Qur'an clearly refutes, for both Paradise and Hell are realities rather than symbols as these persons would like to think.

Imamate

Imamate is one of the basic beliefs (*usool*) which was the starting point for all the deep differences since the early period of Islam and immediately after the demise of the Prophet (S). The Muslim *ummah*, therefore, split into contradictory and contrasting sects due to the deepening of the gaps either due to the actions of the ruling authorities, or to personal ambitions aspired by some of those who coveted to be Imams.

There are two major schools of thought in Islam which are regarded as the stems from which those sects branch. They are the Sunni school of thought, which preaches that Imamate after the Prophet (S) was the right of Abu Bakr then to the three caliphs who succeeded him, and the Imami Shi'a school of thought which preaches that Imamate after the Prophet (S) was the right of Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) and to his eleven descendants after him. Each of these schools has its own arguments regarding proving its authenticity and the lack thereof of the other.

The Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) derive their arguments from clear and obvious statement in their regard said by the Prophet (S) and also due to their merits and qualifications which raised them above both common and elite individuals. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) explained to us the actual program to identify an Imam which agrees with the human nature in considering the distinctive merits and the sufficient qualifications present in a person to qualify for such a very important status.

Imam's Qualifications

In defining the qualifications of the Imam, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) tells us that he has to be the most knowledgeable among people, the most wise, the most pious, the most courageous, the most generous, and the best in worshipping God. These qualifications have to be present in the imam since he is the one charged with safeguarding the Islamic Message after the Prophet (S) and the one who clarifies its precise details and hidden meanings to people.

Selection of the Imam is Done by God

The Imam (a.s.) assured the person who inquired about these qualifications that the nation cannot be left to choose its imam without statements in this regard made by the Prophet (S) who in turn conveys God's commandments related to this issue, for nobody other than God knows the secrets of the individuals and what they hide inside their hearts.

The Imam (a.s.) said: "Do they really realize the significance of Imamate so that they permit themselves to make a choice in its regard? Imamate is greater in prestige, more significant, higher in status, more difficult to attain, harder to achieve, than can people conceive in their minds or define

according to their views, or select an Imam as they please, for Imamate became the sole prerogative of Prophet Ibrahim (a.s.), the Friend of God, second in significance only to Prophethood, whereby He honored him, saying, 'He (God) said, 'I will make thee an Imam to the nations.' He pleaded: 'And also (Imams) from my offspring?!' He answered: 'But My Promise is not within the reach of evil-doers.'³

This verse, therefore, has nullified the imamate of any oppressor till the Day of Resurrection and became the prerogative solely of those elite persons. God, thus, honored Ibrahim (Abraham) by allotting Imamate to those of his progeny who are the elite and who are the Purified, saying, 'And We bestowed upon him Isaac and, as an additional boon, (a grandson), Jacob, and We made righteous men of everyone (of them). And We made them Imams guiding (men) by Our Command.'⁴

Imamate, then remained among the descendants of Ibrahim (a.s.), son inherited it from father, one century after another, till the Prophet (S) inherited it. It was then when the Almighty God said to him, 'Without doubt, among men, the nearest of kin to Abraham are those who follow him as are also this Prophet and those who believe, and God is the Protector of those who have faith.'⁵ Thus, Imamate became the right of the Prophet (S) who, according to the commands of the Almighty God, and in the manner He deemed, vested it upon Ali (a.s.) and it settled among the elite of his descendants whom God gifted with the gift of knowledge and true belief."

The Imam (a.s.) continues to say: "Imamate is the status of the Prophets, the legacy of the wasis (successors of Prophets); Imamate is the caliphate of God Almighty and of His Messenger (S)."

"The caliphate of God Almighty" has to be the prerogative of the best of people after the Prophet (S) simply because he, the successor of the Prophet (S), is God's caliph on earth after the demise of the Prophet (S). His selection, therefore, has to be done by God for how can anyone judge anyone else to be eligible for it if he does not know that person's true inner self? We simply do not understand at all the wisdom of leaving the selection of the Imam to the nation without a final judgment in this regard coming from the Almighty...

An Imam's Attributes

Having defined the attributes an Imam has to have which represent his day-to-day conduct needed by people, Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) says: "An Imam is a scholar who is not ignorant, someone who looks after others untiringly, the substance of sanctity and purity, asceticism and renunciation of the world, of knowledge and adoration. His knowledge grows, his clemency is perfect; he is aware of the responsibilities of Imamate, knowledgeable regarding politics, commanding obedience, executing the Commandments of God, advising the servants of God, protecting the creed of God. Prophets and Imams are assisted by God Who bestows upon them from the treasures of His knowledge and sovereignty in a way He does not endow anyone else, making their knowledge superior to that of anyone contemporary to them, for He, the Exalted and the Sublime, has said, regarding Talut (Samuel), 'God has chosen him above you and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess; God grants His

authority to whomsoever He pleases. God cares for all, and He knows all things.⁶

Regarding the Imams from the Household, progeny and elite descendants of His Prophet (S), the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), the Dear and Sublime One has said, `Or do they envy mankind for what God has given them of His bounty? But We had already given the people of Abraham the Book and Wisdom and conferred upon them a great kingdom,⁷ and when God selects one of His servants to deal with the servants of God, He broadens his heart for such responsibility, depositing in it springs of wisdom, inspiring knowledge to him."

Indications of Imamate

As regarding how an Imam can be identified, and what the indications are, this is explained by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in his answer to the question someone put to him which was: "By what indication can Imamate be regarded authentic for one who claims it to himself?" He said: "By text and evidence." The man asked: "What is the characteristic of an Imam?" He answered: "Knowledge, and God's answer to his plea." The man asked, "By what can you yourselves prove your Imamate?"

He answered: "By a Promise made to us by the Messenger of God (S)." The man asked: "What is the evidence that you can tell what is on the mind of people?" He answered: "Have you not come to know that the Messenger (S) said, `Beware of the discretion of a mumin for he looks through the light of God'?" The man answered in the affirmative, so the Imam (a.s.) continued saying, "Every believer has a share of discretion, looking through the light of God according to the amount of his belief and the extent of his foresight and knowledge. God has combined in us what He has distributed to all the believers combined and said in His Book, `Behold! In this are signs for those who by tokens do understand.'⁸

The first of these mutawassimeen is the Messenger of God (S), then the Commander of the Faithful (a.s.) after him, then al-Hasan then al-Husayn, then the Imams from among the descendants of al-Husayn till the Day of Judgment."

By all of these statements does Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) define for us the qualifications of an Imam and the group that chooses him in statements which agree with the human nature and the balances of reason which are the final judge on such issues.

Notes

1. Al Zumar:62
2. Al Rum:40
3. Al Baqara:124
4. Al Anbiyaa:72-73
5. Aaali 'Imran:68
6. Al Baqara:247
7. Al Nisaa:54
8. Al Hijr:75

Exegesis

Exegesis (Tafsir) According to the Ahl al-Bayt

When we examine the method employed by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) and the other Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) in interpreting the text of the Holy Qur'an, we find out that it depends on the general overall meaning in interpreting one particular verse, distancing itself from interpretations which do not suit its own general or particular meaning.

This does not mean that the Holy Qur'an can be interpreted by anyone according to what he understands of its apparent meaning; rather, its interpretation is not limited to the verbatim understanding of the text. Instead, some matters have to also be taken into consideration which may be hidden in a way which requires seeking assistance from those whom God endowed with the faculty of knowledge and understanding, namely the Prophet (S) and his Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) who are the actual testimony to the verse which says: "Nobody knows its interpretation except God and those deeply grounded in knowledge."

An Exegesis Phenomenon Regarding Ahl al-Bayt

One who studies *tafsir* according to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) will clearly notice the phenomenon that they may interpret some verses on their own, while others may be a reference to obeying and loving them. Some people try to use this phenomenon to make notorious remarks, to deliberately distort, and openly condemn the Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), trying to attribute to them their attempt to make the Holy Qur'an a book regarding their own sect and nobody else's.

There is nothing further from the truth. The interpretation provided by the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) of certain verses to be a direct or indirect reference to them is due to one's perfect practical implementation of *tafsir*, and the fact that they themselves are living witnesses to the truth in such verses, or that should such verses make a reference to them, they are all proofs of the truth contained in the Holy Qur'an and it does not take the verse out of its intended general meaning. For example, when Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) interprets the *ummah* (nation) in the text of the Holy Qur'an to mean the *a'immah* (Imams), he gives it the meaning that they are the most distinguished practical manifestation of its Qur'anic meaning.

To use the word "interpretation" in such context may imply a metaphoric meaning of the word, for what is intended by it is to provide the best possible practical meaning which agrees with the spirit of the text, which is something neither reason nor citation object to it.

Exegesis of Imam ar-Ridha'

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) did not author a book on exegesis, but he explained the meanings of the verses about which he was questioned by others who wanted to know his views in their regard, and we will indicate here some such explanations in order to acquaint you with the magnificent method and innovative style of the Imam (a.s.) in this regard.

It is reported that al-Ma'mun asked him once to explain some Qur'anic verses out of his curiosity about the knowledge God bestowed upon the

Imam regarding their meanings. Among such verses was: "He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was over the waters, that He might try you which of you is best in conduct."¹ He said, "The Praised and Exalted God created the Throne, the water, and the angels before the creation of heavens and earth, and the angels used to know God through their own creation, through the Throne and the water.

Then He made His Throne over the water in order to manifest His might to the angels so that they might know that He is capable of doing whatever He pleased. Then He raised the Throne through His might, moved it and made it above the seven heavens. Then He created the heavens and the earth in six days while He was omni-Potent on His Throne.

He was capable of creating them in a twinkle of the eye, but the Exalted One created them in six days in order to show the angels what He was creating one after the other so that they would know time and again that God was the Originator of each and every thing. God did not create the Throne because He was in need for it since He is independent of the Throne and of everything He created; He cannot be described by anything in the cosmos simply because He has no physical body; Exalted He is above the characteristics of what He created a great deal of Exaltation.

"As regarding His saying, `...that He might try you which one of you is best in conduct,' He has created them in order to test them through the responsibility of obeying and worshipping Him, not out of His desire to test or try them, since He already knows all things."

This glorious explanation of the Imam (a.s.) for the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days is considered, we think, among the best explanations because gradual creation and perfection deepens the feeling of awe regarding the greatness of the Creator and Originator more than had it been at once.

Al-Ma'mun also asked him about the meaning of the verse: "Had it been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe?! No soul can believe except by the Will of God."² Quoting his forefathers, ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said: "Muslims said to the Messenger of God (S), `We wish you forced those whom you have conquered, O Messenger of God, to accept Islam, so that our number would increase, and we would become stronger in the face of our enemies.'

The Messenger of God (S) said: `I am not going to meet God, the Almighty and the Exalted, having invented an innovation which He did not command me to do, nor am I the type of person who forces others to do anything at all.' It was then that this verse was revealed: `Had it been thy Lord's Will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth,' by means of forcing them, or when they find no other choice while in this world just as those who believed only after seeing God's might and retribution in the life after death. `If I do such a thing to them, they would not deserve any reward, but I wish they accept it out of their own choice rather than being forced to do so in order that they will deserve to be close to me and blessed through me, and they would remain in Paradise forever.'

"As regarding the meaning of 'No soul can believe except by the Will of God,' it does not mean that it is prohibited from believing (without a prior consent of God); it simply means that God invites it to believe without forcing it to do so."

The Imam (a.s.) said the following in his explanation of the verse which says: "[God is He] Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy":³

"He made the earth suitable to the creation of your nature, agreeable to your bodies; He did not make it too hot to burn you, nor too cold to freeze you, nor too windy to cause you dizziness, nor too stinky to damage your heads, nor as liquid as water to cause you to drown, nor too solid to enable you to build houses and graves for your dead; rather, the Exalted and Sublime made it strong enough to be useful for you, for your bodies, and for your buildings, making it usable in your homes and graves and a great deal of other advantages as well; thus, He made the earth a couch for you.

"As for the heavens, He made them like a protective ceiling above your heads in which He let the sun and its moon and the stars orbit for your own good. He '... sent down water from the heavens, and brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance,' meaning thereby water which He caused to descend from a high altitude in order to reach the summits of your mountains and hills, valleys and plains, which He caused to descend as showers and as moisture which soil inhales, and He did not cause it to pour down at once to ruin your lands, trees and other vegetation and fruits. 'And brought forth therewith fruits for your sustenance'⁴ means whatever grows on earth for your sustenance, so 'Do not set up rivals unto God when ye know (the truth),'⁵ that is, 'rivals' such as similitudes and such things like idols which have no comprehension, hearing, sight, or are able to do anything at all, while you know that they cannot create any of these great blessings with which He, your Lord, the Exalted, the Most High, has blessed you."

This simple explanation provided by the Imam (a.s.) gives the meaning of the verse clarity and ease which can be comprehended by anyone, even one whose share of intelligence is most modest, enabling him to appreciate the magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the creation. He may even explain the important points in a verse which may cause the wisdom of their making as we find him doing with the last verse in order to point out the depth of miraculous aspect of the verses of the Holy Qur'an.

The Holy Qur'an and the Infallibility of the Prophets

In the subject of the infallibility of Prophets, the Imam (a.s.) was asked to explain the meanings of some verses whose superficial meanings suggested that Prophets were not infallible at all, that they were liable to commit sins. In our discussion of queries above, we dealt with this subject when we discussed the dialogue between the Imam (a.s.) and Ali ibn al-Jahm, while here we would like to mention more of the same regarding questions al-Ma'mun put forth to the Imam (a.s.) inquiring about such verses:

Adam

At one of the meetings arranged by al-Ma'mun, the latter asked the Imam (a.s.): "O Son of the Messenger of God (S)! Don't you claim that Prophets are infallible?" The Imam (a.s.) answered in the affirmative. Al-Ma'mun then asked, "Then what is the meaning of the verse, 'Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and allow himself to be seduced'?" The Imam answered this question by explaining that God had forbidden Adam and Eve from coming close to a particular tree without forbidding them from eating its fruit or the fruit of similar trees.

They obeyed God by not coming near that tree, but Iblis (Eblis) confused them in this regard and suggested that they should eat not from that tree but from other similar trees, swearing to them by God that he was only providing them with an advice. So they believed in his oath and they ate the fruit of a similar tree, and that was before Adam was considered as a Prophet and before his descent to earth, and what he did was not a sin for which the penalty is Hellfire, but it was a minor disobedience which could be forgiven and could be committed by Prophets before *wahi* (revelation) reaches them.

When God chose him and made him a Prophet, he became infallible and was not permitted to commit a sin, minor or major, telling him, "Thus did Adam disobey his Lord and allow himself to be seduced. But his Lord chose him (for His Grace); He turned to him, and gave him guidance.

Ibrahim, the Friend of God

Then he asked him about Ibrahim (Abraham) al-Khalil (a.s.), the Friend of God, and about the stage of doubt through which he passed as appears superficially in the Holy Qur'an when he is mentioned, till truth became manifest to him and he believed therein. The Almighty says: "When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said: 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said, 'I do not love those that set.' When he saw the moon rising in splendor, he said, 'This is my Lord.'

But the moon set, so he said, 'Unless my Lord guides me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.' When he saw the sun rising in splendor, he said, 'This is my Lord; this is the greatest (of all).' But when the sun set, he said, 'O my people! I am indeed free from your (guilt) of giving partners to God. For me, I have set my face firmly and truly towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth, and never shall I give partners to God.'"⁶ About this, the Imam comments thus:

"Ibrahim (a.s.) did not pass by a stage of doubt in God; rather, his story may be summarized thus: He lived in a society where three types of worship dominated: the worship of Venus, the worship of the moon, and the worship of the sun. The outward pretense of Ibrahim (a.s.) to follow these religions before declaring his belief in God was only to deny the validity of each one of them and to prove to others the fact that they were invalid, not due to his temporary belief in them. He simply wanted to prove to their followers, through the method of argument which he employed in a spirit filled with belief in Him, that their type of creed and their norm of worship of Venus, the moon, and the sun, were not appropriate due to the variation which occurred to them and which is one of the attributes of the creature, not the Creator."

Then the Imam (a.s.) adds saying, "What Ibrahim al-Khalil (a.s.) did was actually according to the inspiration he had received from God by the token of the verse that says, `That was the reasoning about Us which We gave to Abraham (to use) against his people.'"⁷ What he did, therefore, was merely a method to win the argument against his people regarding the invalidity of their norms of worship and in their belief in gods other than God, which is a unique method among Qur'anic methods to invite others to believe.

Messengers and Despair

Al-Ma'mun then asked him about the meaning of the verse which says, "... till the apostles give up hope (of their people) and (their people come to) think that they proved them to be liars, Our help will then come to them."⁸ What may be a cause for questioning in this verse is to attribute despair to God's Messengers after being promised help from God. Despair and despondency are forms of *kufir* (disbelief), for the Almighty has said, "Never give up hope of God's soothing mercy; truly none despairs of God's soothing mercy except those who have no faith."⁹ So, how can despair find its way to the heart of a messenger of God or a prophet, knowing that, according to this verse, only *kafirs* can do so, and what is a greater sin than committing *kufir*?!

What is superficially obvious from the text of this verse is that the time when they despaired was after receiving the Message and inspiration. To this, the Imam (a.s.) answers by saying that the subject of despair in this verse is not God's help promised to His messengers, but rather losing hope of their people ever believing in them and accepting their message; i.e. to believe in Him and renounce their previous disbelief and disobedience by their worship of gods other than God. The meaning of this verse, then, will be something like this: When the messengers lost hope that their people would ever believe in them, and when those people thought that they succeeded in proving those messengers as liars, it is then that Our help came to them.

Thus is the outward ambiguity of the verse removed, and thus does the Imam (a.s.), through providing such glorious meanings to the sacred verses of the Holy Qur'an whose outward meaning is actually the opposite of that of their context, dispel the cloud of doubt which may come to one's mind regarding the infallibility of Prophets. They are not mere justifications or one's own personal opinions but actual facts the upholding to whose contrary is not possible.

God's "Hand" is His Might

There are other verses the superficial meaning of which gives the impression that God has limbs just as humans do which He uses to achieve His purpose, such as His statement addressing Iblis when the latter refused to prostrate to Adam as commanded by God: "What prohibited you from prostrating to what I have created in My own hands?" and also like the verse saying, "When a leg will be uncovered and they are invited to prostrate..."

The Imam (a.s.) explains the meaning of God's hand to be His might. The meaning of the previous verse would be, "What prohibited you from prostrating to what I have created by My might and potency?" God does not

have eyes, legs, hands, or any such things as we may imagine which would put limits to God like those to man, and the revealed texts containing a reference to such things are given meanings which agree with conceiving God to be Exalted above having physical dimensions a great deal of Exaltation.

The "leg" is interpreted by the Imam as a barrier of light which, when removed, will cause the believers to fall prostrating, while the legs of the hypocrites become too stiffened to prostrate.

Thus does Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) portray for us an accurate portrait which is honest in interpreting the meanings embedded in the Glorious Book if we wish to honestly and wisely interpret its verses.

One more thing remains to be indicated here. There are some narratives which contain some interpretations of Qur'anic verses attributed to Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) the authenticity of which is questioned simply because some of those who reported them are not free of the practice of distortion or fabrication. What we feel comfortable about is that the fact that if such narrations do not contain anything which disagrees with the beliefs of followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) regarding the interpretation of Qur'anic verses, they testify to their authentic reporting. Add to this the fact that we think it is quite unlikely that some narrators would deliberately tell lies about the Imam (a.s.) in cases where telling lies does not benefit the narrator a bit, particularly in the interpretations of the verses we have quoted above.

This is why we find scholars of exegesis rely on such narratives and their likes in explaining the Holy Qur'an, and if they contradict one another, they accept the one which seems to have the most sound meaning, or to the ones which agree with the basic principles of the school of thought.

In the case where the interpretation of certain verses becomes the basis of a legislative rule, or in the process of deriving one, then the authenticity of narration or interpretation has to be verified first as one provided by the Prophet (S) or by members of his Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them, and attempts should be made to make sure that the integrity of their narrators is not questioned.

Notes

1. Hud:7
2. Yunus:99-100
3. Al Baqara:22
4. Al Baqara:22
5. Ibid
6. Al An'aam:76-79
7. Al An'aam:83
8. Yousuf:110
9. Yousuf:87

Shari'a (Islamic Legislative System)

We do not attempt here to present the legislative heritage left us by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) or trace the *ahadith* which were reported about him in this regard, for this is the job of authors of books of *hadith* and *fiqh*. What we would like to deal with here, rather, is to evaluate the knowledge which reached us from him and from other Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) in the area of legislation, and the safe route they took in providing us with a basis for deriving such legislative rules from their accurate source.

As we stated in the Introduction, what caused us to follow the creed of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and use their *hadith* as a source for legislation is due to the clear and unequivocal statements of the Prophet (S) regarding the necessity of upholding their way and following their guidance such as the tradition of the two weighty things (*hadith al-thaqalayn*) and of the ark of Noah (a.s.), and other *ahadith* which cannot be doubted in their authenticity, structure, or objective. This is why any *hadith* reported by Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) or by any other Imam is regarded as though it had been said by the Prophet (S) not because these Imams have the authority to initiate legislation, or be independent in enjoying the responsibility of inventing a legislative rule, but by considering it an extension of the pristine legislation brought forth by the Prophet (S) from his Lord, due to what they learned of the secrets of legislation and its fruits left for them as a legacy by the Prophet (S), after being made by the Almighty as custodians of the Message after the Prophet (S).

Their Hadith is Muhkam and Mutashabih

The *hadith* narrated about them is, as is the case with the Holy Qur'an, both *muhkam* and *mutashabih*. The *muhkam*, as its name suggests, does not accept but one single meaning, while the *mutashabih* is on the contrary permitting many facets of interpretation, and its actual meaning is not known exactly. This is the meaning we accept for these two terms.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) is quoted in a narration as having said, "Among our narratives are *mutashabih* like the Qur'an's, and also *muhkam* like the Qur'an's; so, seek help from the *muhkam* to understand the *mutashabih*, and do not follow the *mutashabih* without the *muhkam* else you should stray."

Justifying the Mutashabih in the Qur'an

The Commander of the Faithful (a.s.) justifies the existence of Qur'anic verses which can be interpreted in more than one way by saying: "The Almighty has done so in order to foil the attempt of wrong-doers from among those who would take control over the legacy of the knowledge of the Book left by the Messenger of God (S), which he did not intend them to acquire, rendering them unable to explain the various possible meanings thereof." It is as if God willed that the Prophet (S) and those who would bear the Message after him would have a special distinction which is the understanding of what others are not able to understand so that people would resort to them when they are unable to understand certain verses of the Holy Qur'an which they need to understand for the betterment of their life and the comprehension of their creed.

Justifying the Mutashabih in the Hadith

As regarding the existence of the *mutashabih* in the *hadith* reported about the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), as the Imam pointed out in his tradition cited above, this can be justified in the following manner:

These Imams (a.s.) used to suffer a great deal of persecution at the hands of their contemporary rulers who incessantly pursued them and their followers, forcing upon them a very strict surveillance, counting their breath. In many cases, in the face of such an intolerable treatment at the hands of those rulers, the Imams had to resort to the *taqiyya* in many of their deeds and sayings. They might have been asked, for example, about their judgment of a particular incident, or about something related to the creed and school of thought, and they would answer in a way which permitted more than one way of understanding the answer due to their own apprehension of the ruler's watchdogs and informers.

The meaning may be derived at the time the question is put forth when a related matter is at hand. It will be built according to one of the possibilities inspired by the text which would provide the inquirer with the desired satisfaction of the answer while, at the same time, such possibilities are hidden from others who will be confused about them and about the actual meaning the Imam (a.s.) meant thereby. It is then that it must be compared with other *ahadith* said on similar occasions, or with the context of bases which agree with it and which were set by them, peace be upon them. The meaning of the *mutashabih* may be similar to the general and the particular, the unrestricted and the absolute, while the general and the absolute would then be similar to the *mutashabih*, the special and the restricted would be similar to the *muhkam*.

Genuineness of the Creed of Ahl al-Bayt

We cannot find in any other sect the genuineness which characterizes the creed of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) in the area of legislation, for it relies on a deep understanding of the Holy Qur'an and the pristine Prophetic Sunnah which derives from its original leading fountainhead a source of its legislation and such rules.

For example, according to a narrative, a man asked Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) about another man who said at the time of his death, "Any old slave I have is now emancipated for the sake of pleasing God." The Imam said, "Yes, there is a way to determine who is 'old' according to the Almighty and Praised God Who says in His Book, '... till it became like an old date cluster;' therefore, anyone among his slaves who has been with him for at least six months must now be freed."

The date cluster becomes old and dry during the period of six months. In this example, the Imam (a.s.) did not contend himself by just providing a legislative rule; he also derives its rule from the text of the Holy Qur'an.

Independence of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) From Qiyas and Others

The Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) did not sense the need to seek avenues which were distant from the legislative realities in the conclusions they reached such as *qiyas* (comparison), *istihsan* (preference), etc., which were regarded by

others as indicative of the legislative rule when they lack a concrete text, due to the fact that, because of the knowledge and the secrets of the Message which they inherited from their grandfather the Messenger of God (S) as well as their own level of *iman* (firm belief), they were self sufficient, independent, and due to what God had endowed them with of the faculty of knowledge in order they might be His Proofs over people.

The Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) strongly condemned the use of qiyas and other such methods invented by others as means whereby they would justify their derivations when they lacked concrete evidence. Because of this, many strong confrontations happened between them and these people, and we may discuss this subject in detail in our forthcoming book about Imam As-Sadiq (a.s.) because the most violent of such confrontations took place during his time when promoters of various sects were free to express their views.

Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.)'s Hadith Regarding Legislation

There have been many *ahadith* reported about Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) dealing in various aspects of *fiqh* which are used as final arguments in determining obligation when they meet all necessary conditions such as the authenticity of the avenue of its reporting and its lack of ignorance or weakness and the absence of ambiguity in its indication and connotation.

His Hadith Regarding Causations

There is also a great deal of 'ilal (causes or foundations) for the legislation of many *ahkam* (legislative rules) in his answers to questions raised by Muhammad ibn Sinan, and also in his answers to Ibn Shathan at the end of which the narrator mentioned that he learned them one after the other from Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.).

Our View Regarding Causes

But we cannot determine that they are the actual bases for the derivation of the legislative rules; rather, they are other facets of the wisdom of which the legislative system is full, and it is quite possible that the Imam may mention one cause and adds saying that it is one cause among others.

Questioning the Causes is Human Nature

The human nature by instinct is eager to know the underlying motives which lie behind the existence of things, ascertaining such motives, looking for the reasons behind what necessitated the causes, be it in the area of their genesis, i.e., the process of their creation, or their legislation, out of the principle that there is a motive for everything in existence especially when the creation is that of the Wise One Who does not do thing for self-amusement. This is why we find those who asked Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) about the causes behind the legislation of some rules (*ahkam*) in accordance with man's questioning nature.

Imam's Answers are Harmonious With the Nature of Legislation

The Imam's answers were all in harmony with the environment of the occasion surrounding their legislation. Causes may be to achieve a social benefit, when the social aspect of legislation is more apparent than any other, or for a health, spiritual or psychological benefit, each according to whatever the nature of legislation inspires.

For example, when he explains the causes for the prohibition of adultery, the Imam (a.s.) says: "Adultery is prohibited due to the corruption it causes such as murders, loss of lineage, child desertion, chaos regarding inheritance, and other such aspects of corruption." Here he determines the social causes behind the prohibition of adultery since the social aspect is more apparent in this case of legislation than any other.

From the same standpoint, the Imam (a.s.) explains to us why usury (*riba*) is prohibited by saying: "The reason for prohibiting usury is because it eliminates favors, ruins funds, causes greed for profit, causes people to abandon their dealing with loans to each other or in paying cash, or do each

other favors, and due to all the bad consequences of corruption and oppression and the exhaustion of funds."

As regarding the prohibition of eating the meat of pigs, rabbits, dead animals, spleens, the Imam (a.s.) says: "As regarding pigs, their creation was distorted by God in order to provide a moral lesson to man and in order to remind man to fear God and as an evidence of God's might to distort what He creates at will, and because the food they eat is the filthiest of filth, in addition to many other reasons. As regarding the rabbits, they are like cats: their claws are like those of the cats and like wild animals, so their behavior is equally wild, in addition to their own inner dirtiness and due to their bleeding which is similar to the bleeding of women during their menstrual period because they are miscreants. As regarding dead animals, the prohibition of eating their meat is due to the damage such meat will cause to the body, and due to the fact that God has made lawful the meat of animals slaughtered in His name so that that would be a distinction between what is lawful and what is not. As regarding the spleen, it is prohibited because of the bad blood it contains, and the cause of its prohibition is similar to that of dead animals because it is equally bad in its consequences."

These causes, as a whole, justify for us the health aspect necessitated by the legislative interest, its wisdom in safeguarding man against falling a victim to disease and as a preventive measure against ailments.

The Imam (a.s.) has said the following regarding the legislation of the pilgrimage (*hajj*): "The reason for the *hajj* is to seek to be the guest of God, to request more blessings, to abandon past sins, to feel repentant about the past, and look forward to the future. It is due to spending on the trip seeking nearness to God, tiring the body, abstaining from pleasures and desires, seeking nearness to God by worshipping Him, yielding and submitting to Him, looking up towards Him in cases of hot weather and chilling cold, during security and fear, incessantly doing so, and due to all the benefits in it of desiring the rewards and fearing the wrath of God, the Dear One, the Exalted."

The causes here define for us the spiritual benefits of the legislation of the pilgrimage, for man needs in his life moments to leave materialistic ambition behind him in order to be in harmony with his Lord through his deep belief in God, his purely spiritual aspirations, so that the voice of belief may remain within his inner self strong and indefatigable. Thus, the legislation of the rite of *hajj* came as a destined obligation performed by man when he satisfies the legislative conditions of being able to perform it. When he achieves his materialistic needs, one may think of himself as being superior to others, and he becomes arrogant due to the transient wealth he has had; therefore, he has no choice except to expose himself to a situation which strips him of the artificiality which overwhelms him and brings him back to the pristine spiritual reality, hence the legislation of the *hajj* which causes man to feel humble before the greatness of God, and that he and the others are equal before God when they are all stripped of any materialistic distinctions.

As regarding marital relations between man and woman, the Imam (a.s.) justifies for us some legislative rules in this regard. For example, the reason

why a man may marry up to four women, while a woman is prohibited from marrying more than one man, is that when a man marries four women, his children will all be related to him; had a woman married two husbands or more simultaneously, nobody would know for sure who fathered the sons she gave birth to, since they all were participating in cohabiting with her, and this causes a complete disorder for relating one to his father, and who should inherit who, and who is the kin of who.

The reason for repeating the divorce statement thrice is due to the time interval between each, and due to a possible desire for reconciliation or the calming of anger, if any, and to teach women to fear their husbands and deter them from disobeying them.

The reason why a husband can never remarry his wife whom he divorced thrice (articulating, in the process, the divorce statement nine times all in all), is that it is his right penalty so that men do not take divorce lightly or take advantage of women and think of them as weak, and so that the man would be considering his affairs, remaining awake and aware, so that he would lose all hope of a reunion after the ninth pronouncement of the divorce statement. The reason why a wife during her waiting period (*'iddat*) cannot remarry her previous husband who had divorced her twice before till she marries someone else, is due to the fact that God had permitted divorce twice, saying, "A divorce is only permissible twice: after that, the parties should either hold together on equitable terms, or separate with kindness,"¹ that is, after he had already divorced her for the third time, due to his committing something God Almighty hates for him to do; therefore, He prohibited him from marrying her again except after she marries someone else in order to prohibit people from taking divorce lightly and in order to protect women's rights.

These explanations which clarify the wisdom of some legislation related to the marriage relationship give us the impression regarding the great degree of concern Islam pays such relations, organizing them and safeguarding them and protecting their sanctity, emphasizing on giving them the dignified humane attitude which safeguards the rights of both parties.

Regarding the monetary distribution of inheritance by allotting the male heir twice the share of the female, the Imam (a.s.) says the following in order to explain the wisdom in it: "The reason for giving women half what men get of inheritance is that when the woman marries, she receives, while the man gives; therefore, God decided to assist the males to be able to give."

He gives another reason why the man is given twice as much as the woman: The woman is considered dependent on the man when she needs, and he has to take care of her living expenses and to spend on her, while the woman is not required to take care of the expenses of the man, nor can she be required to pay his expenses if he was in need; therefore, God decreed to give the man more according to the Qur'anic verse, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because God has given the one more than the other, and because they support them from their means."²

Through these two causes, the Imam (a.s.) defines for us the principle of balance in the distribution of the inherited wealth according to the Islamic

legislative system and the justice of such distribution. Having burdened the man with the responsibility of spending and giving and exempting the woman from it, Islam had to compensate the man for that in order to avoid any unfairness he might suffer; otherwise, to distribute the inheritance between them equally is an unfair legislation which contradicts the principle of justice of the Islamic Message.

Thus, Islam's precision in safeguarding justice in the legislative system becomes clear to us. At the same time, the superficiality of the thinking of those who call for equality between man and woman in the distribution of inheritance unveils itself to us, and that such a call is no more than a cheap noise without a scientific or realistic basis.

Having favored the man in the distribution of inheritance by giving him twice the woman's share, Islam on the other hand provides the woman with the right to be provided for by the man who must give her dower, in addition to the share of inheritance she has already received, without requiring her to shoulder any financial responsibility whatsoever...; so, how can anyone say that such a legislation is unfair?

Regarding the common custom of defining the value of the dower to be equivalent to the value of five hundred dirhams, the Imam (a.s.) says in a narrative: "God the Almighty and the Exalted has promised that if one believer pronounced *Allahu Akbar!* one hundred times, and *Subhana-Allah* one hundred times, and *Alhamdu-Lillah* one hundred times, and *La Ilaha Ila-Allah* one hundred more times, and send blessings unto His Prophet (S) yet a hundred more, then he pleads Him to marry him to the hurin 'iin (huris of Paradise with large lovely eyes), He would surely marry him to one, then He determined women's dowers to be five hundred dirhams. If any believer asks the hand of a woman from another Muslim brother, pays him the five hundred dirhams, and the brother does not marry him to that woman, he would have committed *'uqooq* towards him, and God will not marry him to a huri."

This is a beautiful way of explaining the reason for the custom which is meant to provide a solution for the marriage problem of the needy who cannot afford to pay large sums of money as dowers and which may cause them to postpone getting married or cause them an unnecessary financial strain. The *hadith* has considered the requirement of *iman* (deep belief) as the most important reason to consider marriage in such situations.

This *hadith* defines for us the crime of one who does not marry a woman to one who has asked for her hand and paid the five hundred dirhams, calling it *'uqooq* which is the renunciation of the feeling of compassion and kindness towards another Muslim, and to look down upon him which are attributes above which a good Muslim must rise in his conduct and dealing with his Muslim brother. The lack of compassion, kindness and respect between two Muslim brothers is something God hates most of all things.

Thus does the Imam (a.s.) explain to us some injunctions of the legislative system wherein there is a great deal of wisdom and the safeguarding of vital interests in a very beautiful and interesting style perfectly harmonious with the spirit of the eternal Islamic message which came for the happiness and goodness of man.

Select Hadith of the Imam

It is not possible here to recount all the *ahadith* dealing with various fields of knowledge, the intellect, and history, that have reached us through Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), but this does not stop us from quoting some *ahadith* which contain some objective wisdom in the areas of the creed, the legislative system, and history.

The *hadith* of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) contains precious jewels and invaluable treasures in which man senses the depth of the idea, the magnificence of *tafsir*, the beauty of performance, without an artificial manner of expression, nor the ambiguity of meaning nor stubbornness in instruction. When he is asked about the reasonable comprehension of some *ahadith* of the Prophet (S) in which a cloud of ambiguity hovers above their narration, he defines their actual objective with flexibility and ease, as if *hadith* has no other connotation except the one he provides.

Some asked him about the meaning of this tradition: "My companions are like the stars: If you follow any of them, you shall receive guidance," and another one saying, "Leave my companions to me." Both of these traditions are considered by Sunnis as the foundation of their generalization of their judgment regarding all companions of the Prophet (S), thus justifying even their acts which contradicted Islamic justice, calling what they could not justify as "an error in *ijtihad*." But the Imam (a.s.) provides us with the actual explanation of these and other such *ahadith* with honesty and integrity, outlining in an easy manner their exact meaning. In his answer regarding the first tradition, he said, "Yes; he did say this *hadith*, meaning thereby the companions who did not make any alteration after him or any change." He was asked, "How can you tell that they altered and changed?" He said, "This is due to what is reported about him (S) that he said, 'Certain individuals among my companions will be forcibly pushed away from my Pool (of Kawthar) on the Day of Judgment just as strange camels are pushed away from the watering place, and I shall cry, 'O Lord! My companions! My companions!' and it shall be said to me, 'You do not know what innovations they invented after you,' so they will be pushed away towards the left side (where Hell is), and I shall say, 'Away with them; ruined they shall be.'" The Imam continued to say, "Such will be the penalty of those who alter and change (*hadith*)."

This *hadith* is narrated, with a minor variation in its wording, by al-Bukhari who quotes Abdullah ibn Mas'ood citing the Prophet (S) saying, "I shall be the first to reach the Pool, then the souls of some men among you will be raised and they shall be prohibited from coming near me, and I shall say, 'Lord! These are my companions!' And it shall be said to me, 'You do not know what they did after you...'"³ A number of *huffaz* and narrators of *hadith* reported this tradition in various wordings which maintained the same contextual meaning, proving thus that it is consecutive according to them.

The Imam (a.s.), through his frank and proven answer, saved us the effort to look for lame excuses for the flagrant transgressions in which a number of the sahaba fell, and from far-fetched artificialities to justify the errors of conduct which they deliberately committed with determination and which

the same *huffaz* could not justify except by saying that they were cases of "mistaken *ijtihad*" which, according to them, did not contradict the justice expected of them, having been pressed by their attempt to attribute absolute justice to the *sahabi* no matter what he did.

A companion (*sahabi*) of the Prophet (S) who was distinguished with the honor of being so close to the Prophet (S) is one who is the custodian over the fruits of the Message and a protector of its structure through his faith and deeds. He is a man who ought to be taken as a model of conduct. He is a man, as the Imam (a.s.) used to say, who does not alter or change any of the statements of the Prophet (S). As regarding those who altered and changed, these cannot be awarded a unique distinction, just because they were companions of the Prophet (S), which raised them above other Muslims simply because they were not up to par with the level of responsibility of being honest, which is expected of them, to carry out after the demise of the Prophet (S) and the cessation of *wahi* from coming to this world.

The *hadith* which the Imam (a.s.) narrated about Ibn Mas'ood, and which is recorded by a number of those who learned the Holy Qur'an and *hadith* by heart in their books is considered as an explanation of this *hadith* and an explanation of its connotation. Moreover, it puts the *sahaba* on equal footing with the others in subjecting their behavior to criticism and discussion, and it shatters the self-immunity which was granted to them in accordance to Prophetic statements manufactured by a number of *huffaz* and traditionists without permitting themselves or others to discuss but take for granted.

In another *hadith*, the Imam (a.s.) proves to us, through a clear statement by the Prophet (S), that some individuals who were regarded as *sahaba* were not actually so, which shatters all the excuses used only to justify the mistakes and transgression committed by them. For example, Muhammad ibn Ishaq al-Taliqani reported that a man in Khurasan swore by divorce that Mu'awiya was not among the true companions of the Messenger of God (S), and this happened when Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was present there.

The jurists there issued their verdict that the man had actually divorced his wife, and the Imam (a.s.) was asked to provide his own opinion in this regard. He decided that that man's wife was not divorced; therefore, those jurists wrote a statement and sent it to him. In it, they asked him, "How did you come to say, O son of the Messenger of God (S), that the woman was not to be divorced?" He wrote down on the same sheet saying, "It is so because of what you yourselves narrate from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri quoting the Messenger of God (S) saying about those who accepted Islam on the day of opening Mecca, when he was surrounded by a large number of people, 'You are good; my companions are good; and there shall be no migration after this Fath,' without including these (meaning Mu'awiya) among his companions." The jurists had to adopt the decision of the Imam (a.s.).

Thus did the Imam (a.s.) deny that Mu'awiya was a companion of the Prophet (S), which claim used to surround the man with a halo of sanctity of his personality and which used to be used to justify the very serious transgressions he committed which left their terrible marks on the structure of the Islamic government since then, and to justify such transgressions by saying that he was a *sahabi*, and that as such whatever he did or said could

not possibly cast a doubt about his justice, adding, "If we see the good aspect of his action missing, we may say that he attempted *ijtihad*, and he erred," even if such error was at the expense of the Prophetic Message itself...

If we accept this argument, we would be justifying all the transgressions and erroneous behavior of some companions of the Prophet (S) regardless of their motives or horrible consequences. The transgressions of Mu'awiya and his norms of conduct, in which he departed from the line of the Islamic Message, and which agreed with the attitude of animosity towards Islam, and whose motives and impulses were reasons to cast doubts and suspicions, nobody is really obligated to defend and describe as within the Islamic *Shari'a* simply because they were the result of an erroneous *ijtihad* wherein the *mujtahid* is rewarded with one reward, due to his "immunity" which does not include Mu'awiya simply because the latter was not a companion of the Prophet (S) but was just like any other Muslim whose conduct was subject to accountability and criticism, and the verdict in his regard is based on the anticipated results of his deeds.

The directive the Imam (a.s.) intended by denying that those who accepted Islam, including Mu'awiya, were not companions of the Prophet on the day when Mecca was conquered is one of the strongest and deepest of his directives, for he drew a line between the Prophet (S) and his true companions on one side, and those who accepted Islam after the conquest of Mecca and under the pressure of a superior power and authority on the other hand. Had it not been for their feeling of their precarious situation versus the might of their opponent, realizing that they had no choice except to make asylum and submit to the word of Islam, they would have otherwise dealt with Islam in a quite different manner.

Al-Ma'mun once asked him why the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) is called the divider of Paradise and of Hell, and how that attribute came to be applied to him. The Imam (a.s.) in turn asked him, "O commander of the faithful! Have you not narrated from your father from his forefathers quoting Abdullah ibn Abbas saying that he had heard the Messenger of God (S) saying, `Loving Ali (a.s.) is *iman*, and hating him is *kufir*?'" Al-Ma'mun answered in the affirmative, so the Imam (a.s.) said, "If the distribution of Paradise and of Hell is done according to loving or hating him, then he is the distributor of Paradise and of Hell." Al-Ma'mun then said, "May God never permit me to live after your demise, O father of al-Hasan! I testify that you are the heir of the knowledge of the Messenger of God (S)."

Abul-Salt al-Harawi said, "After the Imam (a.s.) had gone back home, I came to visit him, and I said to him, `O son of the Messenger of God! What an excellent answer you have given the commander of the faithful!" He said, `O Abul-Salt! I spoke to him in the way he understood best, and I have heard my father telling *hadith* from his forefathers about Ali (a.s.) saying, `The Messenger of God (S) said: `O Ali! You are the distributor of Paradise and Hell on the Day of Judgment; you say to Hell: `This is mine, and that is yours...'"

Al-Ma'mun was probably unable to absorb the idea that the Imam (a.s.) was a direct distributor of Paradise and Hell, as his question to the Imam (a.s.) suggested; this is why he asked him, "O Abul-Hasan! Tell me about your grandfather the Commander of the Faithful (a.s.); in which way and in which sense is he distributor of Paradise and Hell, for I have been contemplating a lot about that...?" The answer of the Imam (a.s.) was realistic on its own grounds, and it does not contradict the statement he made to Abul-Salt in which he indicated that his distribution is direct, not just in meaning, and the Imam (a.s.) did not openly tell al-Ma'mun that the distribution was not direct, but his wise statement was regarding the origin of being called as such.

In another narrative, he asked the Imam (a.s.) about the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) as to why he did not restore Fadak to its rightful owners after becoming the caliph. He answered saying, "We are members of a family who, upon becoming rulers, do not take their rights from those who confiscated them. Should we become in charge of the Muslims, we shall rule them and restore their confiscated rights to them, but we do not do so for our own selves."

It is possible that the Imam (a.s.) did not openly wish to tell the inquirer that it was not realistic that al-Zahra (a.s.) should demand Fadak and that Fadak by itself did not represent something that valuable for the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), and that they were not less generous than others in spending everything they had to look after the interests of the Muslims and safeguard their strength and unity in the face of the enemy from within or without. Demanding Fadak, then, was the starting point for proving that government rightfully belonged to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) and it was the beginning of a reawakening campaign with an objective. Had it been successful, it would have caused very significant changes to the Islamic government and, accordingly, history would have been quite different.

When the role Fadak was expected to play in shaping the fate of the Islamic world, and there was no longer any further function for it, and the big motives for demanding it having ceased to exist, the stance of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) in its regard was now overturned after it became no more than the materialistic value it represented. But Fadak remained the symbol of the lost justice according to the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.); for al-Zamakhshari says in his Rabi' al-Abrar,

"Harun al-Rashid kept pressing Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) to take Fadak back, and he kept refusing. When he insisted that he should, he said, 'I shall not take it back except in its boundaries.' He asked him, 'And what are its boundaries?' He said, 'The first is Aden;' al-Rashid's face changed color and he asked him, 'And what is the second boundary?' He said, 'Samarkand;' now his face started shaking in outrage. He asked him, 'And what is the third boundary?' He said, 'Africa;' and the caliph's face now turned black in anger, yet he asked him, 'And what is the fourth boundary?' He said, 'The ocean, and whatever is beyond the Caspian Sea and Armenia.' Harun al-Rashid then said, 'There is nothing left for us; so, come and take my throne as well!' The Imam (a.s.) said, 'I had told you before that if I defined its boundaries, you would refuse to give it back to me.'"

From this dialogue between Imam Musa ibn Ja'far (a.s.) and Harun al-Rashid, we can comprehend the vast dimension of the significance of Fadak to Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.), and that it did not represent simply a piece of land and a few palm trees but a big missionary objective whose significance was linked to the significance of the Message itself in its connotation and depth.

Another person asked him about the Commander of the Faithful Imam Ali (a.s.) as to why people deserted him after knowing his distinction, his past feats, and the status he enjoyed in the eyes of the Messenger of God (S). He answered, "They deserted him and favored others to him after having come to know of his merits simply because he had killed a great number of their fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, and other relatives who defied God and His Messenger (S); therefore, they kept their grudge against him inside their hearts and they did not like it when he became their ruler. They did not have grudge against anyone else as much as they had against him, for nobody else was so forceful in making *jihad* in the defense of the Messenger of God (S) as much as he was; so, they deserted him for someone else."

In his answer, the Imam (a.s.) was making the point that the nation deep down was still suffering from deviations the causes of which rested in the period of the foolish days of ignorance; otherwise, the removal of Imam Ali (a.s.) from the responsibility of government, despite the qualifications and merits he enjoyed, which raised him above anyone else in the nation, was not a natural matter necessitated by an innocent political mistake. It was the result of a move which knew its direction and whose indications became apparent during the moments when Ali's sword was dripping with the blood of the enemies of God, so much so that there was hardly a house in Arabia where Ali's sword did not cause a mourning.

The Prophet (S) realized the seriousness of Ali's stance, the difficulty of the situation after his demise, and the dire consequences awaiting him due to his firm *jihad* in the Cause of God. The statements he (S) made regarding Ali (a.s.), therefore, were meant to deter those who were waiting for a chance to get even with him. Had they not been veiled by grudges, and by his own glorious past, they would have been described as the beginning of the tragedy of justice and righteousness.

We cannot find a better explanation for the change in public opinion regarding Ali's stance after the death of the Prophet (S) better than what Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) provided. If we set aside the clear *ahadith* which named the Imam (a.s.) as the caliph succeeding the Prophet (S) without any question, and we consulted the faculty of reason in all the criteria and logical orders it has to define for us the person who should succeed the Prophet (S) as the caliph, the unavoidable outcome would certainly be none other than Ali (a.s.). Besides, had the grudges and the past not been the cause of the removal of Ali from the post of ruler, the question would have remained unanswered by any honest and equitable person.

Another person asked him, "Tell me, O son of the Messenger of God! Why didn't Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.) fight his enemies during the twenty-five years after the demise of the Messenger of God (S) as he did during the days of his caliphate?" He answered, "It is due to his following the example of

the Messenger of God (S) who did not fight the polytheists of Mecca during the thirteen years after his Prophethood, or the ones in Medina during the nineteen months period of his stay; it is due to the number of his supporters being too small.

Likewise, Ali (a.s.) did not engage himself in fighting his enemies because his own supporters were too few. Since the Prophethood of the Messenger of God (S) was not nullified by the fact that he did not make *jihad* during the period of thirteen years (in Mecca) and nineteen months (in Medina), the Imamate of Ali (a.s.) was not nullified because he did not perform *jihad* for twenty-five years, for the deterring factor in both examples was one and the same."

What the Imam (a.s.) has indicated here can be used as an answer to those who regarded the peaceful stance taken by the Imam (a.s.) towards his opponents for twenty-five years as an evidence to the Imam's satisfaction with the legitimacy of the then government, or to his relinquishing of his own right to be the caliph.

What is most beautiful in this narrative is the comparison between the peaceful stance of Imam Ali (a.s.) towards his opponents before assuming the caliphate and the stance of the Prophet (S) prior to the *hijra* (migration to Medina) and thereafter, giving the explanation that the reason in both instances is the small number of supporters and the scarcity of followers, and that had the Imam's reluctance to wage a holy war in order to achieve his objective been the reason for the invalidation of his Imamate, the reluctance of the Prophet (S), likewise, to wage a holy war during that period of time would have been a reason for the invalidation of his Prophethood, for the Prophet (S) had set the example, and the Imam (a.s.) and all other Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) followed suit.

Among the *ahadith* of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) is one narrated by Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Hamadani; he said, "I asked Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.), 'What is the reason for which the Almighty and Exalted God drowned Pharaoh even after Pharaoh had believed in Him and admitted His unity?' He answered, 'Because he believed only when he saw God's retribution, and belief to avoid danger is not accepted. This is God's judgment regarding past and future generations. The Exalted and the Almighty God has said: 'When they saw Our Punishment, they said, 'We believe in God, the One God, and we reject the partners we used to join with Him,' but their professing the faith when they (actually) saw Our Punishment was not going to profit them.'⁴

The Exalted and Almighty has also said, 'The day that certain of the Signs of thy Lord do come, no good will it do to a soul to believe in them then, if it believed not before nor earned righteousness through its faith.'⁵ So when Pharaoh was about to be drowned, he said, "I believe that there is no god except Him Whom the children of Israel believe in, and I am of those who submit (to God in Islam).' (It was then said to him), 'Ah now! But a little while before wast thou in rebellion! And thou didst mischief (and violence)! This day shall We save thee in thy body, that thou mayest be a Sign to those who come after thee!'"⁶

This narrative has a moral for those who wish to learn, for *iman* is not that one believes and returns to his Lord only when he sees no avenue of salvation before him and despair overcomes him; rather, *iman* is belief in God and going towards Him voluntarily in both cases of despair and of hope.

Another *hadith* Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) narrated stated, "Anyone who meets a poor Muslim and greets him in a greeting different from the one whereby he greets the rich, he would meet the Exalted and the Almighty God on the Day of Judgment and He is angry with him." In this tradition, the Imam (a.s.) provides us with a very beautiful example of humanity enjoined by genuine Islamic conduct governing the Muslim's conduct with his Muslim brother, for Islam united all members of the nation in its law of personal conduct; there is no distinction for the wealthy man over the deprived poor man, and all people are equal under the judgment of Islam.

Another *hadith* of the Imam (a.s.) is one in which he was asked by Ibn al-Sakit, "Why did the Almighty and Exalted God send Musa (Moses) ibn Imran (a.s.) with a miraculous cane and white hand and the tool of sorcery, Isa (Jesus, AS) with miraculous medicine, and Muhammad (a.s.) with miraculous speech and oratory?" The Imam (a.s.) said, "When the Almighty and the Exalted God sent Moses (a.s.), sorcery dominated the minds of people of his time, so he brought them from the Almighty and the Exalted something which they never had, nor could they bring about anything like it, thus rendering their sorcery void and proving his argument against them. When the Almighty and the Exalted God sent Jesus during a period when chronic diseases became widespread and people were in dire need of a cure. Jesus (a.s.) brought them from God the Almighty and the Exalted something they never had, bringing the dead back to life, curing those born blind and the lepers by the Will of God, proving his argument against them. And when the Almighty and Exalted God sent Muhammad (S) during the time when speeches and oratory (and I think he said with poetry, too), he brought them the Book of the Almighty and the Exalted God and with pieces of wisdom and counsel thereby he voided their arguments." Ibn al-Sakit said, "By God I have never seen anyone like you! What is the argument against people these days, then?" He answered, "Reason. Through it can you come to know who tells the truth about God and you believe in him, and who tells lies about God and you disbelieve in him." Ibn al-Sakit said, "This, by God, is the right answer..."

A miracle is a super-natural thing which the ordinary individual is unable to perform due to his limited energies and motivational powers. Miracles are different from sorcery. Sorcery is not an actual super-natural act but a swift movement which causes the viewer to see the realities turned upside down, or changes the visible picture into its contrary. This may take place by subjecting the viewer to obscure effects which veil from his sight a certain color or a certain picture. What leads us to that conclusion is the statement of the Almighty in the context of narrating how Moses (a.s.) fared with the wizards from the descendants of Israel, saying, "So their ropes and their canes seemed to him, because of their sorcery, as though they were crawling."⁷

Sorcery, then, is nothing more than stimulating the imagination, making things look different than they are, and causing one to fall under a magical spell. As regarding what a miracle is, it is an actual result of a super-natural deed intended to win the argument against people in the process of proving one's true prophethood and mission, and it is an act which God causes to happen. It is different from sorcery because it is not subjected to psychological effects, or complications in the movement, but a broadening of the energy which affects matters viewed by man due to the effect of the Might of God.

In narrating the story of Moses (a.s.), the Almighty stated, "And (appoint him) an apostle to the children of Israel, (with this message): `I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and I breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by God's leave; and I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I bring the dead back to life by God's leave.'"⁸ And the Almighty has also said, "And it was never the part of an apostle to bring a Sign except as God permitted. For each period is a Book (revealed)."⁹

Every one of the Prophets had a miracle which distinguished him from other prophets and messengers and which was in harmony, in its own particular way, with the common phenomena which prevailed upon the social condition of the time so that the psychological effect caused by its miraculous effect would become a reality, as the Imam (a.s.) meant in the tradition above. The miracles of prophets, according to the contexts of the verses and narratives, were not the result of the effect of a natural human energy; rather, they were the results of a creative energy whereby God distinguished His Prophets for the purpose of establishing the superiority of their argument when such a miracle was necessitated by the mission.

As regarding the miracles of the Imams which are reported in order to testify to their Imamate and to their being the most rightful for the post of caliphate, this is not something unusual about them since they were selected by God to be His vicegerents on earth, entrusting them with the message after His Prophet (S), but what must be researched is that many such miracles were proven to have been performed by them and were attested to by an acceptable medium.

But the Imams never needed a miracle beyond the qualifications of knowledge and conduct which distinguished them in order to prove the authenticity of their Imamate, for the qualifications which characterized them were by themselves the miracles proving their right.

We have said that the miracle is the super-natural phenomenon which in its own particular way agrees with the general phenomena which dominated the social reality of its time, and the common phenomenon which enjoyed a clear priority during the time of the Imams was knowledge; therefore, it is mandatory that their miracles proving their Imamate should be super-natural knowledge whereby they rise above all other levels of their contemporary folks. Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) was asked about the phenomenon whereby an Imam could be identified as an Imam when his time comes as an accurate indication of his Imamate, and he answered by saying, "It is knowledge, and God's response to his plea."

In a tradition regarding the distinctions of an Imam, he said, "His indications are in two attributes: knowledge and God's answer to his plea, and all the events which he foretold before their occurrence, for that is according to a promise made to him by the Messenger of God (S) which he inherited from his forefathers, peace be upon them, which in turn would be among matters told to the Prophet (S) through Gabriel from God, the Knower of the Unseen and the Unknown, Glory be to Him."

This statement of the Imam (a.s.) leads us to realize that the miracle should be in harmony with the phenomenon of the time, thus proving the argument. Each of the two requirements mentioned by the Imam were actually satisfied in him and in all other Imams; through them, their supernatural miracle is completed, without the need to prove their Imamate, or to prove its authenticity by other miracles the truth about many of which we may not have a way to prove. It is also a clear answer to those who accused the Imams (a.s.) of claiming to know the unknown due to their foretelling of events which were yet to occur and which did take place after that. All this, according to the context of the statement of the Imam (a.s.), is the knowledge which they gained as a prerogative privilege they inherited from their grandfather the Messenger of God (S) according to the commandments of the Almighty and Exalted God so that their distinction might be evident to the public and they would be distinguished from all other segments of the nation.

Among the *ahadith* narrated by the Imam (a.s.) regarding al-Mahdi, may God hasten his reappearance, is one narrated by al-Husayn ibn Khalid who said, "I said to him, 'May my life be sacrificed for you, tell me about one *hadith* narrated by Abdullah ibn Bakkir from Ubayd ibn Zarara.' He asked, 'What is it?' I said, "Ubayd ibn Zarara said that he met Abu Abdullah (a.s.) during the year in which Ibrahim ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hasan came out for *jihad*, and he said to him, 'May my life be sacrificed for you! This person has caused people to talk, and people have rushed to his aid; so, what do you order us to do?' He said, 'Fear God, and stay calm as long as the heavens and the earth stay calm.' Then he added, 'Abdullah ibn Bakkir used to say, 'Had Ubayd ibn Zarara been truthful, nobody would have come out and no Qaaim (Mahdi) would there be.' Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) said, 'The *hadith* according to the narration of Ubayd is accurate, but not according to the way Abdullah ibn Bakkir understood it. What Abu Abdullah meant was as long as the heavens echo the calls of your fellow, and as long as the earth is firm under the feet of his marching army.'" This *hadith* may be counted among the *mutashabih ahadith* to which the Imam (a.s.) made reference above. Abdullah ibn Bakkir used to refer to their clear traditions regarding al-Mahdi (a.s.) in order to avoid falling into dangerous confusion and misunderstandings.

Among the *ahadith* of the Imam (a.s.) which deal with the Islamic legislative system is one narrated by Abdullah ibn Taoos who said: "I told Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) that I had a nephew whom I married to my daughter and who used to frequently pronounce the divorce statement. He said, 'If he is a descendant of one of your (Shi'a) brethren, there is nothing to worry about, but if he is from these (Sunni) brothers, then recall your

daughter for they shall be separated.' I said, `But, may my life be sacrificed for yours, did not Abu Abdullah (a.s.) use to say, `Beware of those divorced thrice at one time, for they shall marry more than once?' He said, `Yes, this is the case if the man is one of your brethren, not one of these; whoever follows the creed of certain people is bound to follow their [juristic] rules.'"

Jurists have relied on this and similar narratives to consider all the verdicts issued by followers of other schools of thought to be accurate in both areas of obligations and personal status except in the case of zakat about which they have decided that it will have to be taken out again if its believing recipients are not residents of the same area (where the payer resides) according to the beliefs of followers of the creed of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) who rely on certain texts in this matter which rule this issue in particular.

As regarding the issue of divorce, which is the subject-matter of this *hadith*, the school of thought of the Ahl al-Bayt (a.s.) determines that if the divorce statement contains "thrice" in it, rather than being repeated twice again, is not considered binding but it would be if the statement were repeated twice provided it meets the other conditions such as the presence of two just witnesses, the absence of the use of force, and the woman being tahir (clean), that is, she has not cohabited with her husband prior to his pronouncement and has not taken her ghusul (ceremonial bathing) yet, in addition to other conditions which validate divorce. This is what is commonly accepted, while others have decided that it will be null as the apparent understanding of this *hadith* suggests. But if the husband repeats his statement, "She is divorced!" three times, it is, according to Imami (Shi'a) Muslims considered as one-time divorce with rendering the repetition null if such repetition is to be doubtful. The rest of Muslim sects regard divorce in both instances as binding and the husband cannot go back to her before she marries another husband.

Another *hadith* narrated by the Imam (a.s.) says, "The Almighty and Exalted God has decreed three rites each depends on yet another one: He decreed the prayers and the payment of zakat; so, He does not accept the prayers of anyone who says his prayers but does not pay zakat; He decreed that one must thank Him and thank his parents too; so, He does not accept the thanks of one who thanks Him but is not grateful to his parents; and He decreed that one should fear Him and remain in constant contact with his kin; so, anyone who does not remain in close touch with his relatives does not in turn fear God, the Exalted, the Almighty."

Another one says, "A believer (*mu'min*) cannot be truly so except after acquiring three attributes: from his Lord, from his Prophet (S), and from his fellow humans. From his Lord, he must learn how to keep a secret; the Almighty and the Exalted said, `He (alone) knows the Unseen, nor does He make anyone acquainted with his Mysteries, except an apostle whom He has chosen.'¹⁰ From his Prophet, he must learn patience while dealing with people; the Exalted and the Almighty God ordered His Prophet to be patient with people, saying, `Uphold forgiveness; command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant (folks).'¹¹ From his fellows, he has to learn patience

during periods of poverty and adversity, for the Dear and the Almighty One says, `... And to be firm and patient in pain and in adversity.'¹²

Among his interesting and entertaining *hadith* is one narrated by Yasir who says, "I have heard Abul-Hasan ar-Ridha' (a.s.) saying, `Young man! *Aatinal ghadaa* [which permits two meanings],' and I looked somehow astonished at his request. He noticed the puzzlement on my face whereupon he recited the verse, `... Moses said to his attendant, `Bring us our early meal.'¹³ So I said, `The prince is the most knowledgeable of people and their very best."

The narrator of this incident interpreted the statement of the Imam (a.s.) to mean something like what the Almighty meant when He said, "... then produce a Sura like thereunto,"¹⁴ whereas he intended his servant simply to bring them their food [which does not require a miracle like producing a Qur'anic verse!].

This is just a specimen of beautiful traditions narrated by or about Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) which we hope we have been successful in selecting among the ones that over-flow with goodness in various fields.

His Morals and Counsels

The value of wisdom and moral is when it sets out of its leading springs to make its way in life to plant goodness, beauty, and love, and to uproot evil, corruption, and hatred. The individual who wishes to spiritually build his inner self wholly has to search for the wisdom whereby he discovers his shortcomings which distance him from virtuous humanity, and he has to look for the moral which brings him closer to his Lord and which deepens the roots of *iman* within him. This is the value of wisdom and of moral, and this is their plentiful product. It is the dividing line between the man of righteousness, and the man of evil. Good wisdom is the one which sows within the depths of the individual the seed of light in order to grow there from a plant blossoming with goodness, love, and beauty.

So let us read the pure wisdom and the magnificent moral in the words of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), then let us open up our souls in order to plant therein the seed of light. After that, let us look after that plant that will come out of that seed so that we may harvest from it the fruit of *iman*, the belief in God, the belief in the principles and morals which God has legislated for us in order to be able to build ourselves from within, and to be able to rise thereby above the level of wishes and desires to the level whereby the individual becomes a true human being in his pure link with his Lord, in his honest dealing with his brother man, and in his own emancipation from worshipping his own ego.

The first moral we meet as we read the words of the Imam (a.s.) is his statement: "It is not adoration to perform the fast or the prayers a great deal; adoration is to contemplate upon God a great deal." What the Imam (a.s.) meant from such a definition of what adoration in its deep context is all about is his correction of the general attitude towards a rite such as the fast or the daily prayers, saying that prayers are not merely the prescribed movements accompanying quotations relevant particularly to prayers, nor is the fast merely the abstention from eating and drinking and such things. These particular movements and this performance are nothing more than the

outer frame of the picture, while the adoration is the context which lies beyond the picture. What the Imam (a.s.) aims at by making this statement is making us aware of the reality from which we have to set out in performing the rite we are supposed to perform, and to distance us from the stagnation of the empty routine which causes us to lose the greatly spiritual meanings the rites we perform are intended to help us live. So, what is adoration, after all?

The Imam (a.s.) says that it is a great deal of contemplation upon the Almighty. It is not a great deal of fasting or prayers which do not go beyond the particular movements and timings as a routine action an individual has become accustomed to be doing during certain times away from the deep context of belief.

Such is not adoration, for how many are those who perform their prayers and uphold their fast and at the same time commit the greatest of sins and perform various kinds of immoralities, yielding to wishes and desires, without being able towards them to take control of themselves, without trying to give authority over them to the deterring power of *iman* in order to avoid slipping into the paths of misguidance? The prayers of such individuals and their fast are nothing more than movements and performances which have lost their sense of wisdom and spiritual integrity.

Abundant contemplation upon the Will of God is by itself a form of worship and, at the same time, a starting point of every adoration and ritual. When someone feels harmony while contemplating upon the cosmos and its Creator, and the particles of life and their secrets filling the general existence of the cosmos, he cannot avoid feeling how small he is before this great Power which created this system in such perfection, determined its rules with such precision and exactness; and when he, through his power of reason, feels that the Power of the Great Creator surrounds this cosmos, that everything in existence is overwhelmed by its Authority and Might, without any avenue through which one may escape from the center of the Power controlling it..., then he cannot help feeling a deep belief in the perfecting Creator, and a genuine awe before the manifestations of such Greatness.

When man considers the bounties God has bestowed upon him which can never be exhausted while satisfying his continuous needs, and His absolute ability to deprive him of them any moment He wishes, without the existence of any power that would forbid Him from doing so, he would surely then thank Him sincerely and be grateful to Him, distancing himself from the hated elements of disbelief.

When man realizes the wisdom behind his own creation and the end awaiting him that will take him to another life so that the doers of good will be rewarded for their good deeds and the doers of evil will be punished for their evil, he cannot help considering what secures his salvation while doing what he does, and feeling angry at whatever displeases God. The feeling one develops of all of this and the comprehension of all of this is by itself a form of adoration because this feeling is the conscientious path which takes man to knowledge, and knowledge is the foundation of belief. At the same time, such comprehension gives adoration the vast spiritual meaning for which it was decreed.

A man asked him once about the meaning of the verse, "Whoever relies on God, He suffices him." He said: "Reliance on God is in various degrees one of which is that you rely on Him in everything related to you, and when He does something to you which you know will not bring you anything good, you rely on His wisdom in doing it, so you nevertheless put your trust in Him willingly. Another is to believe in the Unseen regarding God of which you have no knowledge, so you relied on Him and on His custodians, trusting in Him in their regard, and in others."

He was asked once about the extent of such reliance. He said, "It is that you fear none save God." What the Imam here means is that you submit to the Will of God and accept His decree. Ahmed ibn Najm asked him about the pride which spoils one's deeds. He said: "Pride is degrees; among them is that one sees his bad deed as good, so he likes it and feels proud of it; another is that one believes in God and feels he is doing Him a favor by believing in Him, whereas He is the One who enabled that person to believe in Him." He, peace be upon him, said once, "If one lacks five attributes, do not expect to gain anything good out of him for your life in this world or in the life to come: if his lineage is known to be untrustworthy, if his nature lacks generosity, if his temper lacks balance, if he lacks a noble conduct, and if he lacks fear of his Lord."

He was asked once who a lowly person is. He said, "Anyone who has something to distract him from God."

Among his wise sayings are the following:

"God abhors hearsay, the loss of one's funds (through foolishness), and excessive questioning."

"To be courteous to people is to cross half the way to achieving wisdom."

"The mind of a Muslim is not complete except after he acquires ten merits: God accepts his good deeds, he is trustworthy, he sees as plentiful what little good others do for him, while seeing his own abundant good as little; he does not fret from being asked for favors, nor does he feel tired of constantly seeking knowledge; poverty reached in order to please God is better for him than wealth accumulated otherwise; to be subjected to power while trying to serve God is better in his regard than achieving power over his foe, and obscurity he prefers over fame." Then he said, "And the third one..., do you know what the third one is?" It was said to him, "What is it?" He said, "Whenever he meets someone, he says, 'He is better than me and more pious.' People are two types: a person better than him and more pious, and one who is more evil than him and more lowly.

If he meets the one who is more evil than him and more lowly, he would say to himself 'Maybe the goodness of this (statement) is implied, and it is better that he hears such a compliment, while my own goodness is apparent and it is detrimental to me.' And when he sees someone better than him and more pious, he would humble himself before him trying to raise himself to his level. So if he does that, his glory will be higher, his reputation will be better, and he will become distinguished above his contemporaries."

"Silence is one of the gates of wisdom. Silence wins the love of others. It is an indication of everything good."

"Everyone's friend is his reason; his enemy is his ignorance."

"Among the habits of Prophets is cleanliness."

"One who is blessed with plenty must spend generously on his family."

"If you mention someone who is present, use a kunya (surname) for him, and if he is absent, mention his full name."

"Time will come when one's safety lies in ten things nine of which are in staying aloof from people, and the tenth in staying silent."

"Whoever scrutinizes his behavior wins; whoever does not loses. Whoever fears consequences will live safely. Whoever learns a moral from others achieves insight, and whoever achieves insight achieves wisdom, and whoever achieves wisdom achieves knowledge."

One who befriends the ignorant will be worn out.

The best of wealth is that which safeguards one's honor.

The best of reason is one's knowledge of his own self.

If a true believer becomes angry, his anger does not cause him to abandon righteousness; when he is pleased, his pleasure will not tempt him into wrong-doing, and when he achieves power, he does not take more than what rightfully is his."

"If one's attributes become plentiful, they will relieve him from having to win praise by mentioning them."

"Do not pay attention to the view of someone who does not follow your advice for his own good. Whoever seeks guidance from the appropriate source will never slip, and if he slips, he will find a way to correct himself."

"People's hearts are sometimes coming towards you, sometimes keeping away from you; sometimes they are active, sometimes they are relaxed. If they come along, they will achieve wisdom and understanding, and if they stay away, they will be exhausted and worn out; so, take them when they come to you and when they are active, and shun them when they stay away or are relaxed."

"Accompany with caution the person who has authority over you; be humble when in the company of a friend; stay alert when facing an enemy, and mingle with the public with a smile on your face."

"Postponement is detrimental to the fulfillment of desires. Fulfillment is the gain of the strict. Wastefulness is the calamity of one who can afford it. Miserliness tears up honor. Passion invites trouble. The best and most honorable of virtues is to do others favors, to aid the one who calls for help, to bring the hope of the hopeful to reality, not to disappoint the optimist, to have an ever increase of the number of friends when you are alive, and the number of those who will cry when you die."

"The miser one is never restful. The envious is never pleased. The grumbling is never loyal. The liar has no conscience."

"One who struggles to satisfy the needs of his family shall have more rewards than those who make jihad in the Way of God."

He (a.s.) was asked once who the best of believers are; he said, *"They are the ones who are excited with expectation when they do a good deed, who pray for God's forgiveness when they commit a bad one, who show gratitude when they are granted something, who are patient when they are tried, who forgive those who anger them."*

He (a.s.) was asked once, "How did you start your day?" He answered, "With a shorter life-span, with our deeds being recorded, with death round our necks, with Fire behind our backs, and we do not know what will be done to us."

He (a.s.) said, "Wealth is not accumulated except by five means: extreme miserliness, a long-standing optimism, an overwhelming care, a boycott of the relatives, and a preference of this life over the life to come."

Ali ibn Shu'ayb said that he once visited Abul-Hasan Ali ar-Ridha' (a.s.) who asked him, "O Ali! Do you know whose subsistence is the best?" He answered, "You, master, know better than me." He said, "It is that of the one whose others' subsistence is improved through his own. Do you know who has the worst subsistence?" Ali answered, "You know better than me!" The Imam (a.s.) answered saying, "It is that of the one who does not include others in it." Then he added, "O Ali! Be thoughtful to the boons for they are wild: if they leave people, they never come back to them. O Ali! The worst of people is someone who stops his contributions to charity, eats by himself, and whips his slave."

He (a.s.) also said the following:

"Your assistance of the weak is better than your act of charity."

"No servant of God achieves true belief except when he acquires three attributes: He derives juristic deductions of the creed; he is wise regarding his livelihood, and he is patient when faced with calamities."

"Beware of one who wants to offer you advice by speaking behind others' backs; he does not realize how bad his own end shall be."

He (a.s.), upon the death of al-Hasan ibn Sahl, said, "To congratulate one for a reward in store for him is better than to console him on a quick calamity."

This is a magnificent bouquet of shining statements of Imam a-Rida (a.s.) which emanate with wisdom, overflow with *iman*, and over brim with good fruits. In them, the Imam (a.s.) defines glorious ethical and educational manners, the upright conduct of true belief, offering some glimpses of humanity for social cooperation and coexistence a Muslim is supposed to implement if he wants to be in harmony with the principles of Islam which are the turning point of social change from an oppressive ignorant society to an advanced civilized society built upon virtue and love, justice and equity.

We have to translate these statements and their peers into actions in our daily life and be in harmony with their ethical and humane practical implications if we wish to direct our individual and social conduct to the right direction which safeguards its principles and precepts in order to create a nation based on virtues and humanity, and build it from within in a firm spiritual structure. Such a structure is reflects its practical reality and affects its intellectual and social objectives so that it would be "the best nation that ever was."¹⁵

Finally, this has been, we believe, an honest and clear picture of the biography of Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) in both its historical and intellectual aspects in which we tried to go beyond the style of narrating the facts as the books of history and biography have recorded for us, which are not always free from contradictions, and to employ the scholarly critical method with

honesty and sincerity without having any objective in mind other than to arrive at the facts which are free of falsehood, and to define the realistic boundaries of the concept which lies behind the background of events.

We have also tried in it to provide a quick glimpse of the intellectual life of the Imam in its various aspects, and to provide the reader with a brief picture of the magnificent intellectual output presented by the Imam (a.s.) to mankind.

I do not claim that I have, in what I have written about the Imam (a.s.) here, covered all the aspects of the greatness of his personality; rather, it is a quick research necessitated by certain circumstances. The initial objective was to research his selection by al-Ma'mun, in response to transient political circumstances dictated by the nature of the then government, to be his heir to the throne. But the absence of an inclusive and independent study of this great Imam forced me to expand the scope of the research and present the various aspects of his personality in a research which I hope has proven to be a successful experience and a starting point for a more inclusive study and a more vast presentation.

I hope I have, with whatever effort and energy available to me, been faithful to this study in its presentation, research and style, and from God Alone do I derive aid and assistance; He suffices me, and what a Great Support He is!

Beirut, Jumada I 20, 1393

June 20, 1973

Muhammad Jawad Fadlallah

Notes

1. Al Baqarah:229
2. Al Nissa':34
3. Bukhari, Vol. 8, p. 119, Amiri edition
4. Al Mumin (or Ghafir):84-85
5. Al An'aam:158
6. Yunus:90-92
7. Taha:66
8. Aali 'Imran:49
9. Al Ra'd:38
10. Al Jinn:26-27
11. Al A'raf:199
12. Al Baqara:177
13. Al Kahaf:62
14. Al Baqara:23
15. Aali 'Imran:110

Supplement: Regency Document

Historians have often made reference to the regency declaration written for Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.) by al-Ma'mun. Al-Arbili in his *Kashf al-Ghumma fi Akhbar al-A'imma* may be considered the most reliable of all in his textual accuracy because he stated that he had examined the original copy of the declaration and quoted it word for word, and we would like to quote it here in its narrative. He mentioned in his book the following:

"In the year 670, one of his executives came from his (Imam's) sacred quarters with the document written in person by al-Ma'mun, and between its lines and on its back cover there were comments made in the handwriting of the Imam; so I kissed the places where he had written, and let my eyes glide on the gardens of his speech. I considered having come across it as one of the blessings and favors of God, and I copied it down verbatim, and it is handwritten by al-Ma'mun who stated:

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

*This is a document written by the commander of the faithful Abdullah son of Harun al-Rashid for Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far, his heir to the throne: Thereupon, God the Exalted and the Sublime has selected Islam as His religion, and chose from among His servants Messengers leading to Him, guiding others towards Him, the first of them tells the glad tidings about their last, the latest among them testifying to the former, till God's Prophethood ended with the Prophethood of Muhammad (S) after a long period during which no prophets were sent, while knowledge was obliterated, inspiration ceased, and the Hour drew nearer. So God sealed through him all other Prophets and made him a witness for them, an authority over them, and He revealed unto him His Dear Book which wrong cannot approach from front or from back, a Revelation from the Wise, the Praised One, of what He permitted and prohibited, promised of bliss and forewarned of retribution, warning and alerting, enjoining and prohibiting, so that He would have the clear proof against His creation, **... to annihilate whoever He annihilates with clear evidence, and keep whoever He kept with clear evidence, and God is Hearing, Knowing.**¹*

So he conveyed the Message on His behalf and invited others to His Path according to the Commandment he received, by wisdom, counsel, and by the most beautiful argument, then by jihad and ruthlessness till God took him away to Himself and He preferred for him what He had in store for him, peace of God be upon him and his progeny. So when Prophethood was terminated, and God, through Muhammad (S), sealed inspiration and the Message, He made the uprightness of the religion and the order of the Muslims' affairs the responsibility of caliphate and its commencement and dignity, and to uphold God's right by obeying it; through it do God's injunctions and limits are performed and so are the legislation and the Sunnah of Islam, fighting His enemy thereby.

The caliphs of God are obligated to obey Him regarding His religion and His servants whom He entrusted to them, and the Muslims are enjoined to obey and assist their caliphs to establish the right and justice of God, to maintain security, avoid bloodshed, join rifts, bring people together to love each other; otherwise, the Muslims will suffer chaos and confusion, their

religion will be altered, their creed will be overcome, their enemy will have the upper hand over them, they will be divided with dissensions, and they will lose this world and the world to come.

*It became, therefore, incumbent upon those whom God enabled to be caliphs on His earth, and whom He entrusted to fare with His servants, to exert themselves and prefer what pleases God and what brings about obedience to Him, and to hold tight to what God supports them about, for God the Dear and Sublime says to His prophet Dawood (David) (a.s.), **‘O David! We have made thee a caliph on earth; therefore, judge among people justly and do not follow your own inclination for that would surely cause you to stray from God's Path, and whoever strays from His Path shall have a painful chastisement due to what they forgot,’² and He also said, ‘By thy Lord! We shall ask all of them about what they used to do.’³***

It has reached us that Umer ibn al-Khattab said, ‘If a goat was lost on the bank of the river Euphrates, I would be afraid that God would ask me about it.’ By God! The person who is responsible particularly for his own conduct regarding his relationship with God is subjected to a great deal of danger and a great responsibility; so, how about the one who is responsible for looking after the entire nation?! In God do we trust; from Him do we seek security, help, protection against erring, support, guidance to prove the argument, and success in achieving His Pleasure and be worthy of His Mercy.

Indeed, the most wise of men, and the best in following God's creed regarding his religion, and God's servants from among those whom He established as His caliphs on His earth, is one who acts according to his obedience of God, following His Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet (S) during his lifetime and after his demise, and exerted his mind and insight regarding who he should choose as his heir to the throne and the Imam to the Muslims to look after them after him, installing him as a flag post for them and a refuge to gather them together round him, settle their disputes, protect their lives, guarantee their security by the Will of God against their dissensions, broken relations, disputes, and to purify them of the whispering of the devil and his scheming, for God the Dear and Sublime has made succession after caliphate a condition for complementing Islam, its perfection, dignity, and the goodness of its people, inspiring His caliphs to make certain that whoever they chose after them would be a great blessing, one who is blessed with perfect health, so that he would render null the scheming of those who sow the seeds of dissension and enmity and try to divide people and make plans for dissension.

Since caliphate was assigned to him, the commander of the faithful experienced the ugliness of its taste, the weight of its burdens, the hardship of its tasks, and the extent of obedience to God and fear of Him by the one who accepts to bear its responsibility; so he exhausted his body, remained awake and prolonged his contemplation upon whatever would bring about the dignity of the creed, the conquering of the polytheists, the good of the nation, the dissemination of justice, the upholding of the Book and the Sunnah, and all of this forbade him from relaxing or resting or enjoying life, knowing that God will hold him accountable for all of these matters, and out

of his own love to meet his Lord after having advised them regarding His religion and servants, selecting his heir for the best interest of the nation after him the best person he can choose due to his piety, soundness of belief and knowledge, the most suited among them to carry out God's commandments and His injunctions, pleading the Almighty to help him and inspire to him what brings about His Pleasure and Obedience to Him at night and at day, earnestly pleading and praying, from among his own household the descendants of Abdullah ibn al-Abbas and Ali ibn Abu Talib (a.s.), keenly discerning their condition, belief and knowledge, inquiring about what he did not know regarding them, till he came to know their conditions on a first-hand basis, observing them personally and examining their affairs, questioning them about what he did not know in their own regard.

Having prayed God for guidance in making his decision, exerting himself in carrying out His commandments regarding His servants and lands in both households, he selected Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali in Abu Talib (a.s.) due to his excellent distinction, radiant knowledge, apparent piety, pure asceticism, renunciation of the world, safety from people's criticism. And it became clear to him that narrations still testify to each other and the tongues agree with each other and the opinion regarding him is in consensus, and due to what he personally knows of his distinction as a child, as a young boy, as an adult, and as a grown-up man; therefore, he tied the knot of caliphate for him after himself, feeling confident regarding God's support to him in this regard, for He knows that he did so out of his own preference of Him and His Creed and out of his concern about the well-being of Islam and Muslims, seeking security for all and firmness of the truth and salvation on the Day when people rise up for the meeting of the Lord of the Worlds.

The commander of the faithful, therefore, invited his sons and members of his family, his close friends, commanders of his army and those in his service to swear the oath of allegiance which they did quickly and gladly, knowing that the commander of the faithful prefers obedience to God over his own inclination towards preferring his sons or others who are among his kin, and he called him ar-Ridha' (a.s.), for the commander of the faithful is pleased with him; so, the household of the commander of the faithful swore the oath of allegiance to him and so did his commanders and soldiers at Medina and the Muslim masses, to the commander of the faithful and to Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha' (a.s.) after him in the Name of God and by His blessings and decree for the good of His creed and His servants, an allegiance to which your hands are stretched and your hearts are pleased, knowing the objective of the commander of the faithful behind it: his preference of obeying God, his and your own interest, thanking God for the share of the commander of the faithful spent in discharging your responsibility and his concern about your guidance and good-will, hoping that its outcome will be your unity, protection, solidarity, the strengthening of your weak spots, the strength of your creed, and the uprightness of your affairs. Hurry, therefore, to the obedience of God and of the commander of the faithful, for the issue regarding which you hurry and because of which

you praise God will be for your own good as you will find out by the Will of God.

He wrote it in his own handwriting on Monday, the 23rd of Ramadan, 201 A.H.

The above is a reproduction of what al-Ma'mun had written for Imam ar-Ridha' (a.s.), and on the back of it the Imam (a.s.) wrote down the following:

In the Name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Praise be to God Who does whatever He pleases; there is none to revoke His judgment nor obstruct His Will; He sees what other eyes cannot, and He knows what people conceal in their hearts; His blessings unto His Prophet Muhammad (S), the seal of Prophets, and unto his good and Purified Progeny (a.s.).

I, Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far, state here that the commander of the faithful, may God grant him the strength of staying on the Right Path, has come to recognize of our right what others have neglected to know; so he joined wombs which were separated and brought security to frightened souls; nay, he gave them life after they were annihilated and provided them with wealth after being impoverished, seeking thereby to please the Lord of the World, not expecting a reward from anyone other than Him, and God will reward those who thank Him and will never suffer the toil of doers of good to be wasted.

He has chosen me as his successor, granting me the greatest responsibility if I live after him; therefore, anyone who unties a knot God enjoined to be tied, or removes a joint God enjoined to be kept, has indeed violated the honor and committed haram, for he will then be transgressing upon the Imam, violating the sanctity of Islam.

Such was the case in the past, so he remained patient while seeing mistakes committed and did not voice his objection when rights were discarded out of his fear of dissension in the religion and disunity among the Muslim masses, and due to the fact that the days of ignorance (jahiliyya) are not too far behind, and in order not to give opportunists a chance nor to let an innovation invented.

*I have prayed God to witness to what is on my mind should He place me in charge of dealing with the Muslims and grant me caliphate, that I will deal with them in general and on the descendants of al-Abbas ibn Abdul-Muttalib in particular according to the obedience due to Him and to His Messenger (S), and that I do not shed any blood unfairly nor permit honor nor wealth to be violated except the blood shed according to the permission allowed by the establishment of God's limits and obligations, and that I shall choose to the best of my ability officers who are most qualified for their jobs, making that a sure commitment and a promise about which God shall ask me for He, the Exalted and the Almighty, says, "**And fulfill the promise, for the promise shall be asked.**"⁴*

Should I bring an innovation, or alter anything, or replace anything, I would then deserve my penalty and expose myself to retribution; I seek refuge with God against His Wrath, and from Him I seek success in obeying His Commandments and not to enable me to disobey Him, all for the sake of

the safety of myself and of all the Muslims; "And I do not know what will be done with me or with you;"⁵ "The command rests solely with God; He decides in truth, and He is the best of judges."⁶

But I obeyed the will of the commander of the faithful and preferred his pleasure, and may God protect him and myself from erring, and I seek His witness over myself about this matter, and He suffices for Witness. I have written this in my own handwriting in the presence of the commander of the faithful, may God prolong his presence, and in the company of al-Fadl ibn Sahl, Sahl ibn al-Fadl, Yahya ibn al-Aktham, Abdullah ibn Tahir, Thumama ibn Ashras, Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamid, and Hammad ibn al-Nu'man, in the month of Ramadan, in the year two hundred and one.

On the right side of the document, the following witnesses have signed: Yahya ibn Aktham who testifies to both the front and the back of the document and he asks God to enable the commander of the faithful and all the Muslims to appreciate the blessing of this testimony and testament; Abdullah ibn Tahir ibn al-Husayn has written down his name and the same date; Hammad ibn Nu'man has written in his own handwriting and has testified to its front and back on that date; and Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamid has testified to the same.

On the left side of the document, the following writing is inscribed: "The commander of the faithful, may God prolong his presence, has handwritten this script which is the document of covenant whereby we anticipate goodness in both its front and back, (written) at the shrine of our master the Messenger of God (S), between the rawda (courtyard) and the minbar (pulpit), in the presence of all the witnesses, and while the dignitaries of Banu Hashim and all friends and members of the army who met the qualifications of making such a bay'a (allegiance), in order to nullify any doubt cast by the ignorant, for `God will not leave the believers in the state in which ye are now...'⁷ Al-Fadl ibn Sahl, in obedience to the orders of the commander of the faithful, has written this on the same date."

Notes

1. Al Anfal:42
2. Saad:26
3. Al Hjr (The Rocky Tract):92-93
4. Bani Israil:34
5. Al Ahqaf:9
6. Al An'am:57
7. Aali 'Imran:179