



IMAM REDĀ [A.S.]

امام الرضا (ع)

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

## Imam al-Reḍā (as)

Imam ‘Ali ibn Mūsā al-Reḍā (as), is the eighth in the series of the Imams from the Household of the Prophet, whose character and personality reflect all the standards of virtue to make him an ideal role model.



His life was characterized by difficulties and oppression from the beginning till its painful end. At the start of his life, he witnessed the oppression which filled the life of his father Imam al-Kāḍim (as), and in the latter parts of his life he was forced to deal with al-Ma’mūn, another tyrant and cunning Caliph who had taken his position by usurping it from the Ahlul Bayt (as).

### THE LIFE OF IMAM AL-REDA (AS)

Imam al-Reḍā (as) was brought up under the care of his father Imam al-Kāḍim (as) for 35 years. When his father was poisoned in prison in 183 A.H., the Imam (as) took over the great responsibility of Imamate under very difficult circumstances. Hārūn, the Abbasid Caliph, made life very difficult for the followers of Imam (as).

In Medina, the Imam (as) carried out his duties in a peaceful manner in the face of a very difficult period for

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand the historical and political environment of the time of Imam al-Reḍā (as)
- Know some of the ideological threats that occurred among the Muslim during the time of Imam al-Reḍā and the Imam (as)'s role in defeating those threats
- The circumstances around the martyrdom of Imam al-Reḍā (as)

the Shi'ah and it was mostly due to his efforts that the teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) and the correct interpretation of the Holy Qur'an became widespread. Hārūn died in 193 A.H., leaving behind two sons who fought one another viciously for power. Eventually, al-Ma'mūn was victorious and took the position of Caliphate.

Al-Ma'mūn saw that the Shi'ah were increasing in number despite torture and oppression. He was aware of the position and power that al-Reḍā (as) held over the people and this made him worry about the influence of al-Reḍā (as).

He decided that the only way he could silence the Shi'ah and protect his own position, was by changing his approach. First, he cunningly declared himself Shi'ah and ordered that the descendants of Imam 'Ali (as) should not be harmed. He then took a very surprising and cunning step. He offered Imam al-Reḍā (as) the position of being the heir of the king. This caused outrage among the Abbasids. The Imam, aware of the al-Ma'mūn's evil intentions, refused. However, his life was threatened, and so eventually he accepted, and people came to pay their allegiance to him as the heir to the king.

Al-Ma'mūn had not given this position to Imam (as) due to any love for him. He had no intention of allowing the Imam (as) to become his successor but rather by taking such a political action, he intended only to retain a position of strength for the Abbasids. He also wanted to show the people that the descendants of Prophet Muḥammad (saw) were only after political and material wealth. However, the Imam made it clear to his true followers that he was not interested in position or power in itself, and that this issue was forced upon him.

When the Imam (as) took up his place in the court of al-Ma'mūn, he took the opportunity to spread the teachings of Islam further. He organised gatherings to remember the martyrs and sacrifice of Karbalā', and explained to the people the moral lessons to be learnt from that tragedy.

He also used the opportunity of being able to preach publicly to argue with people of other religions and beliefs, to dispel their doubts and to guide them to the right path.

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF IMAM AL-REḌĀ (AS)

There were several occasions on which al-Ma'mūn intended to humiliate and degrade Imam al-Reḍā (as) by inviting him to debate with different kinds of people,

from scholars in religion to scientists and also people from other faiths. However, on every occasion, Imam al-Reḍā (as) was not only successful in defeating his opponents, but in many cases also influenced them to convert their faith. This made al-Ma'mūn even more insecure in relation to Imam al-Reḍā (as).

## THE IDEOLOGICAL THREAT DURING THE TIME OF IMAM AL-REḌĀ (AS)

During the time of Imam al-Reḍā (as), there was a great ideological threat to Islam and the Muslims. This threat came mainly from the deliberate fabrication of false ideas and theories on faith that were produced by the government and which were threatening the minds of the Muslims.

Imam al-Reḍā (as) was instrumental in protecting, developing and securing the correct faith and ideology of Islam as per the original teachings of Prophet Muḥammad (saw). He was an excellent debater and successfully defeated, through wisdom and logic, all his opponents. A few examples of the questions being debated were as follows.

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD'S WILL AND PEOPLE'S WILL<sup>1</sup>

In one debate, the Imam (as) tells us about the difference between the Will of God and the will of humans. Ṣafwan ibn Yaḥyā said:

"I asked Abul Ḥasan (Imam al-Reḍā as): '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 setting his mind upon something or contemplating something, nor does He think about the means to do so, nor does He think about how."

## COMPULSION AND EMPOWERMENT

The debate about how much 'will power' we have as humans has been raging among Muslims for a very long time. Some Muslims claim we don't have real choice in

our actions, and that we are forced to perform the actions we think we are 'choosing'. Other Muslims believed that we have absolute free will, and that we can always choose to do whatever we want.

A man visited Imam al-Reḍā (as) and asked him:

"O son of the Messenger of God! It has been reported to us that the truthful Ja'far ibn Muḥammad (as) said, 'There is neither compulsion nor empowerment but a path in between'. What does he exactly mean?" The Imam (as) 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 kāfir (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 the path between the two?" 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 (as) 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."

## THE MARTYRDOM OF IMAM AL-REDĀ (AS)

As al-Ma'mūn felt more threatened by the presence and growing influence and popularity of Imam al-Reḍā (as), he decided upon the evil act of assassinating the Imam.

Abul Ṣalt, a close companion of the Imam (as) narrates:

"I entered the house of al-Reḍā (as) after al-Ma'mūn had already left and he said to me: "O Abul Ṣalt! They have done it...!" and he kept unifying and praising God." The Imam (as) had been given poisoned grapes by al-Ma'mūn. This poisoning led to his death within a few hours.

## **BRIEF SAYINGS OF THE IMAM (AS)<sup>ii</sup>**

- "A man who takes pain and labours to provide for himself and his family is like someone who fights a holy war (Jihād)".

- "Keep yourself clean, since cleanliness is the manner of Prophets."

- When asked about the Qur'anic āyah: "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 who a lowly person is. He said, "Anyone who has something to distract him from God."

## **Homework Activity**

Find examples of other debates that Imam al-Reḍā (as) had that helped protect the correct ideology of Islam.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Review Questions**

**Q1. Who was the Abbasid Caliph who murdered Imam al-Reḍā (as)?**

- Hārūn
- Amīn
- Al-Ma'mūn

**Q2. The Imam accepted the position of the heir to the Caliph because:**

- He was forced to
- He wanted to take power for himself
- He liked al-Ma'mūn

**Q3. The Imam (as) taught that:**

- God's Will is the same as people's will
- God's Will is His Action itself
- Neither a nor b

### **References:**

- <sup>i</sup> Imam al-Rida - Historical and Biographical Research - <http://www.al-islam.org/al-rida/>
- <sup>ii</sup> An introduction to tenth infallible Hazrat Imam Ali Reza (AS) - <http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/infallible10.asp>
- Imam Redha (as) – [www.madressa.net](http://www.madressa.net)
- The Life of Imam Redha (as) – [http://en.rafed.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=3562%3Aabout-imam-reza-as&catid=166&Itemid=967&limitstart=8](http://en.rafed.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3562%3Aabout-imam-reza-as&catid=166&Itemid=967&limitstart=8)
- The life of the Infallibles - <http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/infallible10.asp>