



Imam al-Reḍā [A.S]

امام الرضا (ع)

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

Imam al-Reḍā (as)

The eighth divinely chosen leader from the Household of the Holy Prophet is Imam ‘Ali ibn Mūsā al-Reḍā (as). Many lessons can be learnt by thoroughly examining his life, which was characterized by immense difficulties and oppression.



THE LIFE OF IMAM AL-REDĀ (AS)

When his father, Imam al-Kāḍim (as) was poisoned in prison in 183 A.H, Imam al-Reḍā (as) took over the great responsibility of Imamate at the age of 35. He carried out his duties in Medina peacefully and played a vital role in spreading the correct teachings of the Holy Prophet (saw) and the correct interpretation of the Holy Qur’an.

Hārūn, the Abbasid Caliph who had made life very difficult for the followers of the Imams (as) 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, and changed his approach, taking advantage of the position of Imam al-Reḍā (as) to strengthen his own position. He cunningly declared himself Shi’ah and ordered that the

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Briefly review the historical and political environment of the Imam (as)
- Discuss the legacy of the Imam (as)
- Focus on a few famous narrations as an example of the above
- Discuss the trait of the Imam (as)

descendants of Imam 'Ali (as) should not be harmed. He then offered Imam al-Reḍā (as) the position of being the heir of the king. The Imam, aware of the al-Ma'mūn's evil intentions, refused initially, but was forced to accept after his life was threatened.

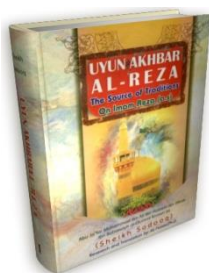
Imam al-Reḍā (as) made it clear to his true followers that he was not interested in position or power in itself, and that this issue was forced upon him. He took advantage of the opportunity to spread the teachings of Islam further. He taught the people valuable lessons from the sacrifice of Imam Ḥusayn (as) in Karbala and publicly debated leaders of other ideologies, dispelling their doubts and guiding them to the right path.

FAMOUS WORKS

A number of books and writings have been attributed to Imam al-Reḍā (as). A famous work is *al-Risalah al-Dhahabiyyah fil Ṭibb'* - The Golden Medical Dissertation. This dissertation is one of the most precious pieces of Islamic legacy dealing with the science of medicine, involving unprecedented details in anatomy, biology, physiology, pathology and the science of health care. al-Ma'mūn had a discussion about various sciences with the top scholars of the time. When the discussion moved on to medicine, he asked Imam al-Reḍā (as) to share what he knows. The Imam replied that he will make a compilation of his knowledge on this subject, and later sent it to al-Ma'mūn in the form of a letter. al-Ma'mūn was so impressed by the exact medical details in the letter that he ordered for it to be written in gold.

Another book that is often attributed to Imam Redha (as) is '*al-Fiqh al-Raḍawi*', which contains many jurisprudential instructions. However, there are doubts as to whether it was personally written by our blessed Imam or not.

A famous book which contains the narrations of Imam al-Reḍā (as) is called '*Uyūn Akhbār al-Reḍā (as)*'. It was compiled in the 10th Century by one of the greatest Shi'ah scholars, Sheikh al-Ṣadūq. Most of the narrations in this compilation are dependable.



The book also contains the full transcripts of the famous debates which Imam al-Reḍā (as) had in which he defeated the leaders of various beliefs.

NARRATIONS

HADITH OF THE GOLDEN CHAIN

Imam al-Reḍā (as) narrated through the golden chain of infallible narrators: from his father from his grandfather...from the Commander of the Faithful, from the Prophet (saw) that the angel Gabriel heard that Allah (SWT) said: " 'There is no God but Allah' (la ilāha illa Allah) is my fortress and whoever enters my fortress shall be safe from my punishment". Imam al-Reḍā (as) then commented himself, saying "There are a few conditions [to this] and I am one of its conditions".ⁱ

DEBATE WITH A CHRISTIAN

During a debate with a Christian leader, Imam al-Reḍā (as) told him: "By Allah, we believe in 'Īsā who believed in Muḥammad, may Allah bless him and his family. We have nothing against 'Īsā except his weakness and the paucity of his fasting and prayer."

When the Christian leader heard the last words of the Imam's statement, he shouted: "By Allah, you have corrupted your knowledge! Your affair has become weak! I thought that you were the most learned of the Muslims!" The Imam faced him calmly, asking: "Why?" "Because of your statement that 'Īsā was weak with little fasting and praying, (while) 'Īsā never broke fasting by day and never slept by night. He always fasted by day and prayed by night." The Imam got ready to disprove the Christian belief that Jesus is God. He asked the Catholic: "To whom then did Jesus fast and pray?"

The Catholic did not answer, not knowing what to say.ⁱⁱⁱ

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOD'S WILL AND PEOPLE'S WILL^{iv}

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."ⁱ

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-REḌĀ (AS)

Al-Reḍā (as) means being pleased with Allah (SWT). In our lives, we face a mixture of calamities and good fortunes. Allah (SWT) wills for us our fair share of trials, testifying that we are never given any burden which we cannot cope with. A major challenge for us all is to

remain pleased and satisfied with what Allah (SWT) has given us no matter what happens.

In times of good fortunes, being pleased with Allah (SWT) and thanking him for blessings causes Him to increase our blessings. In times of trials and hardships the benefit of remaining pleased with what Allah (SWT) is that we know that everything that is happening to us is due to the Will of Allah (SWT), meaning that there is great wisdom behind it and that He knows what is best for us. It will therefore prevent us from becoming disheartened and help us get through afflictions.

Imam al-Reḍā (as) displayed this quality throughout his life, especially towards the end of his life. When al-Ma'mūn was trying to assassinate the Imam, the Imam faced with the utmost calm and composure, giving himself up to the will of God.

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.

Review Questions

Q1. 'The Golden Medical Dissertation' was written by:

- A Greek Doctor
- Imam al-Reḍā (as)
- 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. Al-Reḍā means:

- Being pleased with Allah (SWT)
- Trusting in Allah (SWT)
- Believing in Allah (SWT)

ⁱ An introduction to tenth infallible Hazrat Imam Ali Reza (AS) - <http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/infallible10.asp>

ⁱⁱ Oyoun Akhbar Al-Ridha, al-Alami publicaton, p. 134

ⁱⁱⁱ The life of Imām 'Ali Bin Mūsā al-Ridā by: Bāqir Sharif al-Qarashi

^{iv} Imam al-Rida - Historical and Biographical Research - <http://www.al-islam.org/al-rida/>