



Imam Al-Hādi [A.S]

امام الهادي (ع)

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Discuss the historical and political environment of the time of Imam al-Hādi
- Understand the attribute of 'the Guide'
- Discuss the role of Imams as guides from the Qur'an and Hadith
- Discuss the ways in which the Imams guide us

Imam al-Hādi (as)

Imam 'Ali al-Hādi (as), our 10th Imam, lived at the time of the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate. The caliphate at that time was increasingly becoming paranoid and were forced to move their capital from Medina to Samarrā', a garrison town, just north of Baghdad today. The Abbasid reign was becoming precarious due to infighting within the ruling elite, and for a few years, this meant that Imam al-Hādi (as) in Medina could preach and spread the true Islam freely. It was not until the Al-Mutawakkil came into power that things changed.

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 5

THE IMAM MOVES TO SAMARRÀ'

As we have discussed in level 4, Imam was forced to move to Samarrā', as al-Mutawakkil felt threatened by Imam's popularity within the scholars of the time. al-Mutawakkil was incredibly corrupt and openly flaunted the laws of Allah (SWT) to the extent that he imprisoned the Imam (as) and later held him under house arrest. Even In this time of hardship, the Imam always took the opportunity to guide the people to the right path. An incident that demonstrates this is illustrated below.

Ya'qūbi writes in his history of the time that once the raiding party of soldiers found the Imam on his prayer mat and took him away to the caliph in the same state. al-Mutawakkil was engaged in his nightly drinking and frolics and asked the Imam to join him. The Imam declined replying: "a liquor such as that was never yet combined with my flesh and blood".

The half-drunk caliph asked the Imam to read some poetry. The Imam said that he did not indulge in such habits. But when the caliph insisted, the Imam recited the following lines:

"Protected by valiant warriors they passed the night on the summit of their mountains, but these mountains did not protect them. After all their power and pomp they had to descend from their lofty fortresses to the custody of the tombs. O' what a dreadful change. Their graves had hardly received them when a voice heard exclaiming, "Where are the thrones and the crowns and the robes of State?"

Where are now the faces of the delicate, which were shaded by veils and protected by curtains. To this the tomb replied: the worms are now revelling upon these faces. Long were these men eating and drinking, but now they are eaten by the worms in their turn.”

Many wept listening to these words uttered by the Imam. The Caliph left the Imam alone for a while, but still kept him under house arrest. In the end al-Mutawakkil died in the hands of his protectors, the Turkish guards, and his son al-Muntaṣir became the next caliph.

Mutawakkil died in 250 AH and al-Muntaṣir assumed the caliphate. He ruled for only six months. After him al-Musta'in took power, but soon he was also beheaded and succeeded by al-Mu'tazz. This tremendous amount of infighting within the Abbasids eventually led them to the path of complete destruction.

True to the characteristics of the Ahlul Bayt, al-Hādi (as) used to guide people even by his mere behaviour and attitude. For instance, when al-Mutawakkil summoned him from Medina to his capital and put him into prison, he appointed a stonehearted person named Zarraqi as the warden who had no mercy for anyone. But he (Zarraqi) was also astounded by the Imam's excellent manners and his worship at all times.

Gradually he became the Imam's devotee and supporter. When al-Mutawakkil was informed about the condition of his spiritual inclinations he called him one day and said, *“I appointed you so that you behave with your prisoner in the utmost vicious and ill-behaved manner.”* He said, *“O Chief! This person seems to be higher than angels in spiritual accomplishments. Since he is in my charge, I have never seen him eat during the day or sleep at night. How do you expect me to deal harshly with one who is mostly busy in the worship of Allah, who fasts everyday, who does not demand anything, who never has a bad word for anyone, whose favourite activity is remembrance of Allah? How can I oppress him and destroy my Hereafter? O Chief! He laments so intensely due to the fear of Allah that his beard gets wet with his tears. He recites the Qur'an in such a melodious way that if one who hears it had a heart of stone, it would melt like wax. I think that you have put an angel under my charge. I have seen many worshippers but I haven't seen anyone like him.”*

WHY THE IMAM (AS) WAS CALLED AL-HĀDI (THE GUIDE)

As we have discussed previously, our Imams were the most pure representations of the Attributes of Allah (SWT) on this earth. Although the Imam (as) was the most knowledgeable, pious, etc. it is his characteristic of being a guide for the community at a very difficult time (intellectually) that earned him his title.

The word “Hādi” (The Guide) is derived from the Arabic word “Hada” (guided). Allah (SWT) attributes this action to Himself in many parts of the Qur'an, including the following:

“And Allah guides to the Home of Peace and guides whom He wills to the Straight Path.” (10: 25)

The straight path is a kind of way and God has given man the ability to make his own choices; and whosoever desires guidance; God guides him to a way that leads to the abode of peace for which man has been created. For that he has been given the ability to make his own choices. If he chooses the abode of peace (paradise) God guides him to the way that leads him to it. The Imam got this title because:

1. The Imam was always emphasising the role of the Qur'an as the Scale of Truth when people doubted the Qur'an and tried to use narrations to change the religion. In such a time, the Imam made sure everyone referred to the Qur'an as the main reference.
2. The Imam guided people to the right answer in one of the most difficult debates to take over the Muslim world- the debate about free will and determinism. We have learnt about this in previous lessons.
3. At the time, the Shi'ah were being accused of saying that God had a body, because of a mistake by one Shi'ah scholar. The Imam (as) made sure that this was refuted and did not let this accusation spread.
4. The Imam (as) guided us towards understanding the true status of the Ahlul Bayt (as). This was done mainly through an amazing visitation called: *al Ziyārah al-Jāmi'ah al-Kabirah*.

DO WE NEED A GUIDE?

It is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Shi'ah that they do not take any person to guide them or lead them. If we were to navigate through a forest we have never been to before, we could make our own way through but the likely chance of getting through to the other side would be slim. If we followed a foolish guide or one who is as clueless as ourselves, blindly, we would not have a better fate. But if we followed an expert guide, the chances of meeting success would be greatly improved. Just the same way, we have to navigate through this material world, full of temptations and dangers to reach our final destination, we are obliged to choose a guide who knows the dangers, has not been a victim to those dangers and knows the paths!

OUR IMAMS ARE OUR GUIDES

Our Imams (as) were the guides of the community after the Prophet. They ensured that the Prophet's message was clarified and not distorted. As human beings, it is in our nature to either follow or lead. If we choose to lead, the responsibilities, characteristics and requirements are very different (which we will discuss in later classes) but if we choose to follow, we have to make valid decisions on whom to follow.

Allah (SWT) in His infinite wisdom, gifted human kind with guides of the highest calibre. Those who had specific characteristicsⁱ and behavioursⁱⁱ to be a perfect guide for us to follow in *all* aspects of our life. Following our own whim and desire can certainly lead us to disaster, indeed, Allah (SWT) in the Holy Qur'an says:

“Who strays more than one who follows his lust without guidance from Allah (SWT)?” (28:50)

In the context of this verse we come across a tradition which says:

"Whoever adopts his religion according to his own inclination and opinion and does not follow a true Imam, according to this ayah this is a misguided person"ⁱⁱⁱ.

Another tradition says:

"One, who worships much, but does not follow a true Imam, is certainly a misguided person, and Allah does not accept his worship".^{iv}

It is a fact that mankind is faced with one type of problem or another every day, and if the Islamic society does not seek the help of Allah's (SWT) commandments, the revelations and the true Imam, people will lose their peace of mind and each one of them will follow his own course and the Islamic society will be in a state of chaos and confusion.

HOW CAN WE KNOW OUR IMAMS?

Imam al-Hādi (as) eloquently introduced us to our Imams through one of the most powerful and most authentic of visitations: *al Ziyārah al-Jāmi'ah al-Kabirah*. (The Great Comprehensive Visitation). This was introduced by the Imam (as) to one of his companions (Musa al-Nakhai) at his request to teach him a comprehensive way of paying homage to any of the infallible Imams when visiting their shrines or from far away. It is an excellent lesson on Imamah from the Imam himself.

Whoever offers this visitation with love and cognizance of the divinely appointed Imams is purified from diseases of soul and body and all worries. A visitor, who obeys the Imam, refrains from all sins, then his good deeds which lack in perfection are accepted by Allah (SWT).^v

The first part of this visitation is a detailed description of the characteristics of the Imams (as), where the Imam says for instance:

“...the treasures of knowledge, the ultimate in forbearance, the foundation of generosity, the leaders of all nations, You administer and distribute the bounties, You are the elements of virtues, the pillars of goodness, you direct and guide mankind, you protect and support lands...”

This is followed by an exposition of their status with Allah (SWT), for instance:

“... (You – Oh Imams are) the followers people of the remembrance the Holy Qur'an, those who are in authority, that good which Allah has left with people, His choicest and His group. The store of His Knowledge. His argument, His path, His light, His proof ...”

Then, having understood their status, we bear witness to this status.

HOW DO WE SEEK GUIDANCE?

We know that people who are more knowledgeable and more experienced than us are always in a better position to guide us. This is because they are able to see many of the consequences of our decisions better than we can. By seeking advice, we are actually getting more knowledge and with more knowledge we can obviously make better and more profitable decisions.

Seeking advice also demonstrates a person's intellectual and social development. Imam 'Ali (as) says:

"He who consults with men of understanding, shows his intelligence...."^{vi}

There are two fundamental parts of our life we need guidance in:

- 1- The Laws of Allah (e.g. how to fast, pray rules of transactions etc.)
- 2- Aspects of worldly life (such as buying a car which car to buy, what to study etc.)

In the first case, we all follow a Mujtahid as we have discussed, but often when it comes to the second scenario it becomes more difficult. What is our obligation then? The second aspect can also lead us to hell or heaven or could make our life difficult or easy!

We can follow a simple formula to ensure the best outcomes for other aspects of life.

- 1- **Check whether the decision is jurisprudentially correct or not-** Seek counsel from a sheikh for instance. E.g., if we want to choose a certain career, will this career force us to do something ḥarām.
- 2- **Seek guidance from one who**
 - a. Is knowledgeable in that field.
 - b. Is honest and sincere e.g. A good honest mechanic.

"Seeking advice from others is a virtue. If you do not do it, you will face a great loss. However, there are conditions. The first is that the person you seek advice from should have intellect (i.e. be an expert). Secondly, he should also be religious and impartial. Thirdly, he should also be a friend. Fourthly, you must divulge all the details to him, so that he knows our affairs as much as you do. The counsellor should then keep this a secret and not divulge it." Imam al-Ṣādiq (as)

- 3- **Seek guidance from you intellect** - Weigh out rationally and logically the best course of action for your personal circumstance (how much can I afford, what are the pros and cons of having this car etc.)
 - a. This can be done by making a little table and putting the pros and cons on either side
- 4- **Seek Guidance from God** -If despite all these steps one is confused then an istikhāra may be helpful. We have discussed this in other lessons.
- 5- **Do not regret/blame-** Once we make any decision, if it turns out to be bad but we had followed the processes above, then we must consider it to be a test from the Almighty (SWT), not to regret, ask 'what if' questions or blame one who gave us advise.

Class Exercise

Do this exercise as a class to help you make a decision

You wish to make a decision as to which course you should do at university, discuss:

- 1- **What jurisprudential issues are likely to be important**
- 2- **Whose guidance would you seek**
- 3- **What would the pros and cons be (personal)**

Questions/Homework

- 1- **From *al Ziyārah al-Jāmi'ah al-Kabirah*, outline 3 characteristics of any Imam**
- 2- **What other titles does Imam al-Hādi have?**

ⁱ i) **Imam Must be Infallible:** Infallibility does not mean that one does not commit any sin but it means that one should not even conceive of committing a sin.

(ii) **Large-heartedness:** Strong soul and large-heartedness are the means of rulership. Narrow-mindedness, irritable temperament and hastiness are not good for running the administration of a society or a State or for leading and guiding the people to progress and prosperity.

(iii) **Justice:** When all the people expect justice, Imam should be the emblem of justice. Let us go back to the life of Imam Ali for a while, and have a glimpse of his justice. We have already mentioned many interesting incidents in our discussions on social justice. However, we will simply mention one or two examples of the words and deeds of the Holy Imam:

iv) **Imam Should Subdue His Passions:** Imam Ali says: "What a bad thing it would be if my passions overcome me and distract me from the path of truthfulness and justice!" (Biharul Anwar, vol. XXV, p. 164)

v) **Imam Should be Brave:** Imam Ali says: "No battle has ever frightened me nor has it influenced me". (Peak of Eloquence)

vi) **The question of death and martyrdom should be quite apparent to the Imam.** Imam Ali says: "By Allah! I have such fondness for death as an infant has for its mother's breast".⁴⁴⁸

vii) **Imam Should be Perfect Par Excellence:** Imam Ali in his letter to Mu'awiya writes, "O Mu'awiya! Were you ever entrusted with the noble status of administering justice to, and ruling over mankind? Have you the necessary knowledge for that work? Do you really know the canons of equity and justice as laid down by Islam. May Allah protect and withhold me from behaving towards mankind the way you have behaved and from tyranny, exploitation, and murders that you commit". (Letter 10, Peak of Eloquence)

ⁱⁱ i) **Acts According to the Holy Qur'an:**

(ii) **Imams have to be kind:**

(iii) **Devotion:** One of the attributes of the Imam is his piety, and his indifference towards worldly things

(iv) **Imam Never Doubts:** Imam Ali says: "Since Truth dawned upon me I never entertained any doubt". (Letter 183, Peak of Eloquence, ISP 1984)

(v) **The Imam Remains Unaffected by Aspersions:** The Imam remains unaffected by aspersions or abuses. Imam Ali says, "I belong to that group on which aspersions and bad remarks have no effect at all". (Peak of Eloquence)

(vi) **Imam Should Take the Lead:** Anyone who considers himself to be the Imam of the people should before teaching the people and leading them should take the lead himself by educating his soul and before training others by speech should train himself by his deeds. (Peak of Eloquence)

(vii) **Imam should be Frank and Above Formalities:** Almighty Allah says to Prophet Muhammad: Tell then: 'I do not seek any reward for my preaching you for I am not a pre tender. It (the Qur'an) is nothing but a reminder to you from the Lord of the Universe. You will certainly know its truthfulness after a certain time. (Surah Sad, 38:86-88)

(viii) **The Imam is Tolerant But Not Sycophant:** A Divine leader should for the sake of educating the people be tolerant but should not placate them by overlooking their crimes because tolerance is for correcting the people's affairs and to ignore the importance of his own exalted position but placating will amount to ignoring the commands of religion and for safeguarding one's position or attaining some higher rank.

(ix) **Imam is Well-conversant with the Philosophical Approach of History.**

Imam Ali says to his son, Imam Hasan: "My dear son! Though the span of my life is not as large as that of some other people, who have passed away before me, yet I took great care to study their lives assiduously; I went through their activities I contemplated over their deliberations and; I studied their remains, relics and ruins; I pondered over their lives so deeply that I felt as if I have lived and worked with them from early ages of history down to our times, and I know what did them good and what brought harm to them". (Letter 31, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984)

(x) **Imam Does Not Take Undue Advantage of His Position:**

(xi) **Attending the Complaints:** Imam Ali used to arrange the complaints in written order and the person against whom the complaint was lodged was summoned to the court of law and was questioned about the complaint and his financial assets were put to scrutiny.

(xii) **Patience and Conviction:** One of the attributes of the Imam is his patience and conviction. The chief characteristics of Imam include his observation, conviction and faith.

(xiii) **Free from Prejudices:** The Imam should be free from all prejudices and attachments of worldly nature, as for instance consideration of tribal, racial and parochial affiliations and all such matters as leave a bad influence on man.

(xiv) **Sincerity of Purpose and Indifference to Worldly Gains:**

ⁱⁱⁱ (al-Mizan, vol. XVI, p. 56)

^{iv} (al-Kafi, vol. I.

^v For a more comprehensive study, teachers/student/parents are advised to listen to Sheikh Bahamanpour lectures on this Ziarat

<http://tafseer.islamix.com/base/avtree.php?action=page¶m=root/Sheikh%20Bahamanpour/Ziyarat-ul%20Jamia>

^{vi} [Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 75, p. 105]