

The Socio-Political Measures of Imam al-Jawad to Guide the Shi'a¹

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Abstract: Although the Shi'a Imams attained the rank of Imamate at different ages, they guided the Shi'a as best as their time requirements necessitated because their knowledge was God-given, and they were infallibles. This article offers a brief biography of the young and brilliant Imam al-Jawad and addresses his role in guiding the Shi'a community. It also touches upon the Imam's God-given knowledge, extraordinary acts, wise political measures taken against opposition, and educational training of scholars.

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Introduction

Every religion needs a guide for its continuity and progress of its adherents towards the truth. Islam considered such guides after the Prophet to be necessary and introduced them to the Islamic Community to guide people to the right path.

The 9th guide introduced by the Prophet was Imam Muhammad Taqi, who assumed the guidance of—and policy-making for—the Islamic community after his fathers, despite his young age. In spite of the doubts and criticisms from his enemies due to his age, by his God-given knowledge, he overcame the despotic Abbasid rulers, Ma'mun and Mu'tasim, and could guide his followers and save them from being trapped by the false claimants of the caliphate. In this article, the character of Imam Muhammad Taqi and his socio-political measures will be addressed.

The 9th Shi'a Imam, Imam al-Jawad, was born on the 9th of Rajab in 195 A.H. in Medina. His birth delighted his father, Imam al-Rida, and his followers, while disappointing the enemies of Imamate, particularly the Waqifiyyah.³

Regarding Imam al-Jawad's birth, Imam al-Rida said, "This is the baby more blessed than whom there is no new-born for the Shi'as."⁴

³ Waqifis are those who believed that Imamate stopped at Imam Kazim, and they did not believe in Imamate of Imam Rida and the rest of Imams.

⁴ *Osul Kafi*, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Kulaini, translated by: Mustafawi. Tehran, 14 Infallibles Mosque, no date, vol. 2, p. 106.

His epithet was 'Abu-Ja'far', and his most famous titles were al-Jawad and al-Taqi. His mother, Kheyzaran, came from the tribe of Prophet Muhammad's wife, Mariyah Qibtiyyah.⁵

The Shi'a who were concerned about the enemies found fault with the 8th Imam for not having any children. However, giving the glad tidings of Imam al-Jawad's birth, who would assume the Imamate after Imam al-Rida, eased their worries.

Before that, a Waqifi, ibn Qiyama Wasiti, had written a letter to Imam al-Rida and asked, "How is it that you are an Imam and you do not have any children?" In response, Imam al-Rida wrote, "How do you know I will not have any child? By God, very soon He will grant me a son by whom He will distinguish between truth and falsehood."⁶

Elsewhere Imam al-Rida told ibn Qiyama, "By God, He will grant me a child [a son] by whom He will prove the right and support its followers and eradicate the falsehood and its followers." One year later, Imam al-Jawad was born.⁷

The Waqifis plotted, raised doubts, and spoke out against the Imamate of Imam al-Rida and Imam al-Jawad.⁸ To consider that Imamate stopped at Imam al-Kazim undermined Shi'a beliefs. Imam al-Rida referred to Imam al-Jawad as a blessed new-born for the Shi'a because all enemies' plots would be foiled by his birth and his being a Shi'a leader after the 8th Imam.

⁵ Manaqib Ale Abi-Talib, ibn Shahr Ashub, Beirut, Dar-ul-Okhuwwah, 1412 A. H., vol.4, p. 410.

⁶ Usul Kafi, Muhammad ibn Ya'qub Kulayni, vol. 2, p. 104.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.105.

⁸ Waqifis considered the Imamate up until Imam al-Kazim.

Yahya San‘ani said, “In Mecca, I went to Imam al-Rida and saw him peeling a banana and giving it to his son. I asked him ‘Is this the very blessed new-born?’ He said, ‘In Islam, there is no more blessed baby for the Shi‘as than him.’”

Imam al-Jawad’s late birth rendered the enemies happy as some had doubted his birth, although it eventually disappointed the enemies and eased the worries of the Shi‘as. Thus, he was a blessed Imam for the Shi‘as because he would assume the Imamate of the Ummah after Imam al-Rida.

It is narrated that some people went to Imam al-Rida in Medina. Upon leaving, Imam al-Rida told them, “Go to Abu-Ja‘far; send your greetings to him,” and they said gave their greetings to Imam al-Jawad, who was a child then.⁹

As the Prophet and other Imams emphasised the Imamate of Imam al-Jawad, the eighth Imam also affirmed it on many occasions to introduce him to Shi‘a so that there would be no doubt about it. Safwan ibn Yahya said, “I told Imam al-Rida, ‘If something happens to you, who will assume Imamate?’ The Imam pointed to Imam al-Jawad besides him. I asked him, ‘This three-year-old son?’ He said, ‘Why not? Jesus Christ was also three years old when he became God’s Hujjat.’”¹⁰

Imam Muhammad al-Jawad’s measures to guide the Shi‘a

As it was the first time that a child became an Imam, naturally this unprecedented event was disputed, along with the doctrine of Imamate

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 109

¹⁰ *ibid.*

and the tyrannical caliphate taking opposing views. Hence, while profoundly comprehending the politico-cultural conditions of society and the plots of Ma'mun and other enemies of Imamate, Imam al-Jawad took the following politico-cultural measures in guiding the Shi'a and foiling the enemies' plots:

A. Emphasizing his Imamate

The question of the possibility of the Imam's Imamate before adolescence was one of the theological issues on Imamate in that era.

This theological issue worried, distressed, and disunited the followers of the Ahlul Bayt. To resolve their doubts, some approached Imam al-Rida's brother, Abdullah ibn Musa, although he was unable to answer their questions; others joined the Waqifis; and still some others considered Imam al-Rida's brother, Ahmad ibn Musa, as the Imam—their reasons being that Imam al-Jawad was too young. To them, maturity was a prerequisite for Imamate.¹¹

Some truth-seeking Shi'as went to Medina to find out for themselves. Upon meeting the Imam, their worries were relieved. Posing numerous questions to the Imam, they received correct answers from him, thus becoming certain about his Imamate.¹²

Imam al-Jawad introduced himself to the people—as well as to the opposition—as the leader of the Ummah and God's Hujjat on the earth. In the Prophet's shrine, Yahya ibn Aktham came across the Imam and

¹¹ See *Dala'l-ul-A'immah*, Muhammad ibn Jariri Tabari, Qum, Manshurat Sharif Radi, no date, p.205.

¹² See *the 14 Infallibles' Conduct*, Muhammad Muhammadi Eshtehardi, Tehran, Mutahhar Publications, 1383 solar, p. 774.

asked him some questions. At the end, he said, "I want to ask you something, but I feel ashamed to do so."

The Imam said, "Before you ask your question, I will inform you of it. You are going to ask me about the present Imam." He said, "Yes, by God." The Imam replied, "I am that Imam." Yahya said, "Show me a sign." Then the cane in the Imam's hand started to speak and said, "He is my master, [people's] leader and God's Hujjat right now."¹³

B. Revealing his God-given knowledge

One feature of Imamate is the Imam's knowledge. Considering Imam al-Jawad's young age, it was necessary that the Imam revealed a drop of vast sea of his divine knowledge for the people to determine his Imamate. After his father's martyrdom, he went up the pulpit in Masjid-al-Nabi and said:

I am Muhammad ibn Ali a-Rida al-Jawad. I am fully aware of every person's lineage. I know your overt and covert situations and your future. This is the knowledge God gave us before creation, and we will enjoy it even after the destruction of the heavens and the earth. If it were not for the followers of falsehood, the government of the misguided, and the sedition of the doubtful against us, I would mention [things] that would surprise both the people of the past and the future.

¹³ Bihar-ul-Anwar, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, Beirut, al-Wafa Institute, 1403 A.H., vol. 50, pp., 53, 68.

Then he put his hand on his mouth and said, “O’ Muhammad! Keep quiet like your forefathers.”¹⁴

The Imam was asked numerous questions – either because he was being tested or because he was simply teaching. And his answers in one session at the age of nine¹⁵ indicated his mastery of different sciences.

C. Performing extraordinary acts

One way the Imams guided society and removed any doubts was through extraordinary acts. There are many acts reported from Imam al-Jawad; most of them were to strengthen people’s beliefs as doing so was a sign of his Imamate and successorship to the Prophet. ‘Ammar ibn Zayd reported, “I asked Imam al-Jawad, ‘What’s the sign of the Imam?’ He said, ‘He should be able to do this’: he put his hand on the ironstone in such a way that there were his fingerprints on it. I saw him imprint his ring on the ironstone without melting it.”¹⁶

His extraordinary acts were mostly done to save his companions and followers from oppressors and setting them free from prison.¹⁷

D. Adopting a negative stance against the Caliphate

Although Imam al-Jawad was exiled to Baghdad—the capital of the caliphate—by Ma’mun after the martyrdom of Imam al-Rida, he always stated the truth, defined his Imamate, revealed his God-given knowledge specific to the Divine leaders, took negative stances against the

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 108.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 85, 100.

¹⁶ *Dala’l-ul-A’immah*, Muhammad ibn Jarir Tabari, p.211.

¹⁷ *The 14 Infallibles’ Conduct*, Muhammad Muhammadi Eshtehardi, pp. 794-796.

Caliphate, and expressed dissatisfaction with his presence in the Caliphate's court to reveal his political views to his followers.

The Imam's opposition to the tyrannical rule was revealed in his wise sayings and actions. Sometimes these stances were manifested in his delineating true Islamic jurisprudence and his falsifying the moneymaking jurists' ideas. This was especially seen in the debates between the Imam and Yahya ibn Aktham, a renowned scholar during that time.¹⁸

A companion of the Imam, Husayn Makkari, said, "While Imam al-Jawad was living in Baghdad wealthily, I went there, thinking now that he lived prosperously, he would not return to Medina. The Imam raised his head while he turned yellow with sorrow, and said, "O Husayn! I prefer barley bread with half-ground salt in the city of Prophet Muhammad to this situation."¹⁹ The Imam was greatly upset with his exile to Ma'mun's court and disregarded the luxury life.

E. Policy-making and guiding the Shi'as

Imam al-Jawad endeavoured to preserve the Shi'as in various cities in the Islamic land during his forceful stay in Baghdad and then in Medina. He answered religious and legal questions of Shi'as through agents such as Ali ibn Mahziyar, Kheiran Khadim, Ibrahim ibn Muhammad Hamadani, Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Isa, and Salih ibn Muhammad ibn Sahl. In his letter to Ibrahim ibn Muhammad

¹⁸ Analytic History of Islamic Leaders, Ali Rafi'i, Qum, Yaqut Publications, 1382 solar, p. 210.

¹⁹ Bihar-ul-Anwar, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi, vol. 50, p. 48.

Hamadani, he said, "I have no agent there except you. I wrote to my friends in Hamadan to obey you."²⁰

F. Struggle against deviated ideologies

Throughout Shi'a history, the enemies plotted to disunite the Shi'as through forming religious sects. In his time, Imam al-Jawad fought the sects deviated from Imamate and guided the Shi'as to take an appropriate stance against them. The most prominent deviated groups were Mujassamah, Waqifiyyah, Zaydiyyah, and *Ghullat* (Extremist Shi'as).

To oppose them, the Imam prohibited paying zakat to them and having them as public prayer leaders. He wanted his followers to dissociate themselves from them because God dissociates Himself from them.²¹

G. Training religious scholars

The Imam trained a group of students to become religious scholars to benefit the society, as sometimes it was difficult to benefit from Imam al-Jawad's knowledge directly, and people needed answers to their legal questions from reliable sources.

Shaykh Tusi referred to 113 people who were the Imam's companions and the reporters of his hadiths, including prominent ones: Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr Bazanti; he was considered as the one of the people of consensus (*ashāb al-ijmā'*)²² and a jurist; Ahmad ibn Ishaq

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 109.

²¹ Wasa'il-u-Shi'a, Muhammad ibn Hassan Hurr 'Amili, Tehran, Maktabatul-Islamiyyah, no date, vol. 5, p. 390.

²² This is a common title for some of the great narrators of hadiths whose narrations are very highly regarded by scholars of hadith.

'Ash'ari, who was the 'Shaykh of Qum'; the 'Qummi' people's representative who received the Imams' legal rulings and orders, and then gave them to the people; Zakariyya ibn Adam Qummi, who Imam al-Jawad prayed for and considered a grateful, loyal companion; Ali ibn Mahziyar Ahwazi, an elite agent of the Imam who prayed for him and talked of him as a matchless figure; Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn Bazi', who like Ali ibn Yaqtin, albeit a vizier in the Abbasid court, was a reliable supporter of—and a refuge for—the Shi'as, and was at the service of Imam al-Kazim, Imam al-Rida, and Imam al-Jawad.²³

Like his forefather Imam al-Sadiq, Imam al-Jawad helped his companions and students infiltrate into every circle; they even attained high positions in the court. Nuh ibn Durraj was at first the judge of Baghdad and then Kufa. Muhammad ibn Isma'il ibn Bazi' and Ahmad ibn Hamza Qummi reached a high position in the government. Muhammad ibn Ash'ath, Ahmad ibn Bahil, Hussain ibn Ali Misri, and Isma'il ibn Musa ibn Ja'far paved the way for the spread of Shi'ism in Egypt by migrating there. Through his agents, the Imam led and guided a vast network in faraway lands. This network of agents—which also prepared the ground for political and cultural guidance of the Shi'as and prepared them for the Age of Occultation—was expanded by the next Imams and later took a particular form by the four special deputies of Imam al-Mahdi.²⁴

H. Imam al-Jawad's political marriage and his martyrdom

²³ *ibid*, pp. 211-212.

²⁴ *Analytical and Political History of Islam*, Tehran, The Office of Islamic Culture Dissemination, 1379 solar, p.258, as cited in *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 50, pp. 7-9; *Manaqib*, vol. 4, p. 380, *Dal'il-ul-A'immah*, p. 208; *Irshad*, p.326.

Adopting a special policy, Ma'mun pretended to love the Ahlul Bayt with the intention of drawing support from their followers and building friendship with them. This was clear in his measure to invite Imam al-Rida to Khurasan. After Imam al-Rida was martyred by Ma'mun, he acted deceitfully again by having Imam al-Jawad marry his daughter, Umm-ul-Fadl. Ma'mun pursued the following goals through this political marriage:

- To express love for Imam al-Jawad to deny the accusation of killing Imam al-Rida.
- To pacify the Shi'as and receive their support after the martyrdom of Imam al-Rida.
- To control the supporters of Imamate through watching their coming to Imam al-Jawad and to be immune from the Alawids' uprising.
- To make Imam al-Jawad succeed Imam al-Rida as the religious and scientific authority for him to answer people's religious questions.
- To secure his own political position, particularly after his killing his brother, Amin, and his removing Qasim from power.
- To exonerate himself from any role in the martyrdom of Imam al-Rida.
- To claim to have an intimate relation with the Prophet's household—for demagoguery—through this marriage. This eventually did not pay off.

Finally, Mu'tasim al-Abbasi called the Imam to Baghdad, and following in his corrupt forefathers' footsteps, he poisoned Imam al-Jawad through his niece, Umm-ul-Fadl. Imam al-Jawad was martyred in Dhil-Qa'dah 220 AH at the age of 25 and was buried besides his grandfather, Imam Musa al-Kazim. His Imamate lasted for 17 years.²⁵

Every Shi'a Imam acted on the basis of the requirements of the time and guided his followers in with wisdom. The important role of Imam al-Jawad in that critical era, facing such deceitful rulers as Ma'mun and Mu'tasim, can be referred to as an example. Although he was very young, he guided the Shi'as well and foiled the enemies' plots.

²⁵ *Manaqib Ale Abi-Talib, ibn Shahr Ashub, vol. 4, pp. 410-411.*