

## [DE 12:e IMAMERNAS LIVSHISTORIA](#)

# ***A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIVES OF THE TWELVE IMAMS***

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### **The Imams and Leaders of Islam**

The previous discussions lead us to the conclusion that in Islam, after the death of the Holy Prophet, there has continuously existed and will continue to exist within the Islamic community.

(ummah), an Imam (a leader chosen by God). Numerous prophetic hadiths<sup>33</sup> have been transmitted in Shi'ism concerning the description of the Imams, their number, the fact that they are all of the Quraysh and of the Household of the Prophet, and the fact that the promised Mahdi is among them and the last of them. Also, there are definitive words of the Prophet concerning the imamate of Ali and his being the first Imam and also definitive utterances of the Prophet and Ali concerning the imamate of the Second Imam.

In the same way the Imams before have left definitive statements concerning the imamate of those who were to come after them.<sup>34</sup> According to these utterances contained in Twelve-Imam Shi'ite sources the Imams are twelve in number and their holy names are as follows: (1) **Ali ibn Abi Talib**; (2) **Hasan ibn Ali**; (3) **Husayn ibn 'Ali**; (4) **Ali ibn Husayn**; (5) **Muhammad ibn Ali**; (6) **Ja'far ibn Muhammad**; (7) **Musa ibn Ja'far**. (8) **Ali ibn Musa**; (9) **Muhammad ibn Ali**; (10) **Ali ibn Muhammad**; (11) **Hasan ibn Ali**; and (12) the **Mahdi**.

## **The First Imam**

Amir al-mu'minin Ali<sup>35</sup>-upon whom be peace-was the son of Abu Talib, the Shaykh of the Banu Hashim. Abu Talib was the uncle and guardian of the Holy Prophet and the person who had brought the Prophet to his house and raised him like his own son.

After the Prophet was chosen for his prophetic mission, Abu Talib continued to support him and repelled from him the evil that came from the infidels among the Arabs and especially the Quraysh.

According to well-known traditional accounts Ali was born ten years before the commencement of the prophetic mission of the Prophet. When six years old, as a result of famine in and around Mecca, he was requested by the Prophet to leave his father's house and come to the house of his cousin, the Prophet. There he was placed directly under the guardianship and custody of the Holy Prophet.<sup>36</sup>

A few years later, when the Prophet was endowed with the Divine gift of prophecy and for the first time received the Divine revelation in the cave of Hira', as he left the cave to return to town and his own house he met Ali on the way. He told him what had happened and Ali accepted the new faith.<sup>37</sup> Again in a gathering when the Holy Prophet had brought his relatives together and invited them to accept his religion, he said the first person to accept his call would be his vicegerent and inheritor and deputy.

The only person to rise from his place and accept the faith was Ali and the Prophet accepted his declaration of faith.<sup>38</sup> Therefore Ali was the first man in Islam to accept the faith and is the first among the followers of the Prophet to have never worshiped other than the One God.

Ali was always in the company of the Prophet until the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina. On the night of the migration to Medina (hijrah) when the infidels had surrounded the house of the Prophet and were determined to invade the house at the end of the night and cut him to pieces while he was in bed, Ali slept in place of the Prophet while the Prophet left the house and set out for Medina.<sup>39</sup> After the departure of the Prophet, according to his wish Ali gave back to the people the trusts and charges that they had left with the Prophet. Then he went to Medina with his mother, the daughter of the Prophet, and two other women.'<sup>40</sup> In Medina also Ali was constantly in the company of the Prophet in private and in public. The Prophet gave Fatimah his sole, beloved daughter from Khadijah to Ali as his wife and when the Prophet was creating bonds of brotherhood among his companions he selected Ali as his brother.<sup>41</sup>

Ali was present in all the wars in which the Prophet participated, except the battle of Tabuk when he was ordered to stay- in Medina in place of the Prophet.<sup>42</sup> He did not retreat in any battle nor did he turn his face away from any enemy. He never disobeyed the Prophet, so that the Prophet said, "Ali is never separated from the Truth nor the Truth from Ali."<sup>43</sup>

On the day of the death of the Prophet, Ali was thirty-three years old- Although he was foremost in religious virtues and the most outstanding among the companions of the Prophet, he was pushed aside from the caliphate on the claim that he was too young and that he had many enemies among the people because of the blood of the polytheists he had spilled in the wars fought alongside the Prophet. Therefore Ali was almost completely cut off from public affairs. He retreated to his house where he began to train competent individuals in the Divine sciences and in this way he passed the twenty-five years of the caliphate of the first three caliphs who succeeded the Prophet. When the third caliph was killed, people gave their allegiance to him and he was chosen as caliph.

During his caliphate of nearly four years and nine months. Ali followed the way of the Prophet and gave his caliphate the form of a spiritual movement and renewal and began many

different types of reforms. Naturally, these reforms were against the interests of certain parties that sought their own benefit. As a result a group of the companions (foremost among whom were Talhah and Zubayr who also gained the support of A'ishah, and especially Mu'awiyah) made a pretext of the death of the third caliph to raise their heads in opposition and began to revolt and rebel against Ali.

In order to quell the civil strife and sedition, Ali fought a war near Basra, known as the "Battle of the Camel." against Talhah and Zubayr in which A'ishah, "the Mother of the Faithful," was also involved. He fought another war against Muawiyah on the border of Iraq and Syria which lasted for a year and a half and is famous as the "Battle of Siffin." He also fought against the Khawarij<sup>44</sup> at Nahrawan, in a battle known as the "Battle of Nahrawan." Therefore, most of the days of Ali's caliphate were spent in overcoming internal opposition. Finally, in the morning of the 19th of Ramadan in the year 40 A.H., while praying in the mosque of Kufa, he was wounded by one of the Khawarij and died as a martyr during the night of the 21st.<sup>45</sup>

According to the testimony of friend and foe alike, Ali had no shortcomings from the point of view of human perfection. And in the Islamic virtues he was a perfect example of the upbringing and training given by the Prophet. The discussions that have taken place concerning his personality and the books written on this subject by Shi'ites, Sunnis and members of other religions, as well as the simply curious outside any distinct religious bodies, are hardly equaled in the case of any other personality in history.

In science and knowledge Ali was the most learned of the companions of the Prophet, and of Muslims in general. In his learned discourses he was the first in Islam to open the door for logical demonstration and proof and to discuss the "divine sciences" or metaphysics (ma'arif-i ilahiyah). He spoke concerning the esoteric aspect of the Quran and devised Arabic grammar in order to preserve the Quran's form of expression. He was the most eloquent Arab in speech (as has been mentioned in the first part of this book).

The courage of Ali was proverbial. In all the wars in which he participated during the lifetime of the Prophet, and also afterward, he never displayed fear or anxiety. Although in many battles such as those of Uhud, Hunayn, Khaybar and Khandaq the aides to the Prophet and the Muslim army trembled in fear or dispersed and fled, he never turned his back to the enemy. Never did a warrior or soldier engage Ali in battle and come out of it alive. Yet, with full chivalry he would never slay a weak enemy nor pursue those who fled. He would not engage in surprise attacks or in turning streams of water upon the enemy. It has been definitively established historically that in the Battle of Khaybar in the attack against the fort he reached the ring of the door and with sudden motion tore off the door and cast it away.<sup>46</sup> Also on the day when Mecca was conquered the Prophet ordered the idols to be broken. The idol "Hubal" was the largest idol in Mecca, a giant stone statue placed on the top of the Ka'bah. Following the command of the Prophet, Ali placed his feet on the Prophet's shoulders, climbed to the top of the Ka'bah, pulled "Hubal" from its place and cast it down.<sup>47</sup>

Ali was also without equal in religious asceticism and the worship of God. In answer to some who had complained of Ali's anger toward them the Prophet said, "Do not reproach Ali for he is in a state of Divine ecstasy and bewilderment."<sup>48</sup> Abu Darda', one of the companions one day saw the body of Ali in one of the palm plantations of Medina lying on the ground as stiff as wood. He went to Ali's house to inform his noble wife the daughter of the Prophet and to express his condolences. The daughter of the Prophet said, "My cousin (Ali) has not died. Rather, in fear of God he has fainted. This condition overcomes him often.

There are many stories told of Ali's kindness to the lowly compassion for the needy and the poor, and generosity and munificence toward those in misery and poverty. Ali spent all that he earned to help the poor and the needy, and himself lived in the strictest and simplest manner. Ali loved agriculture and spent much of his time digging wells planting trees and cultivating fields. But all these fields that he cultivated or wells that he built he gave in endowment (uaqf) to the poor. His endowments known as the "alms of Ali," had the noteworthy income of twenty-four thousand gold (dinars toward the end of his life).<sup>49</sup>

## The Second Imam

Imam Hasan Mujtaba upon whom be peace was the second Imam. He and his brother Imam Husayn were the two sons of Amir al-mu'minin Ali and Hadrat Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet.

Many times the Prophet had said, "Hasan and Husayn are my children. Because of these same words Ali would say to his other children, ..You are my children and Hasan and Husayn are the children of the Prophet."<sup>50</sup>

Imam Hasan was born in the year 3 A.H. in Medina" and shared in the life of the Prophet for somewhat over seven years, growing up during that time under his loving care. After the death of the Prophet which was no more than three, or according to some six months earlier than the death of Hadrat Fatimah. Hasan was placed directly under the care of his noble father. After the death of his father, through Divine Command and according to the will of his father, Imam Hasan became Imam; he also occupied the outward function of caliph for about six months, during which time he administered the affairs of the Muslims. During that time Mu'awiyah, who was a bitter enemy of Ali and his family and had fought for years with the ambition of capturing the caliphate, first on the pretext of avenging the death of the third caliph and finally with an open claim to the caliphate, marched his army into Iraq, the seat of Imam Hasan's caliphate. War ensued during which Mu'awiyah gradually subverted the generals and commanders of Imam Hasan's army with large sums of money and deceiving promises until the army rebelled against Imam Hasan.<sup>52</sup> Finally, the Imam was forced to make peace and to yield the caliphate to Mu'awiyah, provided it would again return to Imam Hasan after Mu'awiyah's death and the Imam's household and partisans would be protected in every way.<sup>53</sup>

In this way Mu'awiyah captured the Islamic caliphate and entered Iraq. In a public speech he officially made null and void all the peace conditions<sup>54</sup> and in every way possible placed the severest pressure upon the members of the Household of the Prophet and the Shi'ah. During all the ten years of his imamate. Imam Hasan lived in conditions of extreme hardship and under persecution, with no security even in his own house. In the year 50 A.H. he was poisoned and martyred by one of his own household who, as has been accounted by historians, had been motivated by Mu'awiyah.<sup>55</sup>

In human perfection Imam Hasan was reminiscent of his father and a perfect example of his noble grandfather. In fact, as long as the Prophet was alive, he and his brother were always in the company of the Prophet who even sometimes would carry them on his shoulders. Both

Sunni and Shi'ite sources have transmitted this saying of the Holy Prophet concerning Hasan and Husayn: "These two children of mine are Imams whether they stand up or sit down" (allusion to whether they occupy the external function of caliphate or not).<sup>58</sup>

Also there are many traditions of the Holy Prophet and Ali concerning the fact that Imam Hasan would gain the function of imamate after his noble father.

## **The Third Imam**

Imam Husayn (Sayyid al-Shuhada', "the lord among martyrs"), the second child of Ali and Fatimah, was born in the year 4 A.H. and after the martyrdom of his brother, Imam Hasan Mujtaba, became Imam through Divine Command and his brother's will.<sup>57</sup>

Imam Husayn was Imam for a period of ten years, all but the last six months coinciding with the caliphate of Mu'awiyah.

Imam Husayn lived under the most difficult outward conditions of suppression and persecution. This was due to the fact that first of all, religious laws and regulations had lost much of their weight and credit, and the edicts of the Umayyad government had gained complete authority and power. Secondly, Mu'awiyah and his aides made use of every possible means to put aside and move out of the way the Household of the Prophet and the Shi'ah, and thus obliterate the name of Ali and his family. And above all, Mu'awiyah wanted to strengthen the basis of the caliphate of his son, Yazid, who because of his lack of principles and scruples was opposed by a large group of Muslims. Therefore, in order to quell all opposition, Mu'awiyah had undertaken newer and more severe measures. By force and necessity Imam Husayn had to endure these days and to tolerate every kind of mental and spiritual agony and affliction from Mu'awiyah and his aides-until in the middle of the year 60 A.H. Mu'awiyah died and his son Yazid took his place.<sup>58</sup>

Paying allegiance (bay'ah) was an old Arab practice which was carried out in important matters such as that of kingship and governorship. Those who were ruled, and especially the well-known among them, would give their hand in allegiance, agreement and obedience to their king or prince and in this way would show their support for his actions.

Disagreement after allegiance was considered as disgrace and dishonor for a people and, like breaking an agreement after having signed it officially, it was considered as a definite crime. Following the example of the Holy Prophet, people believed that allegiance, when given by free will and not through force, carried authority and weight.

Mu'awiyah had asked the well-known among the people to give their allegiance to Yazid, but had not imposed this request upon Imam Husayn.<sup>59</sup> He had especially told Yazid in his last will that if Husayn refused to pay allegiance he should pass over it in silence and overlook the matter, for he had understood correctly the disastrous consequences which would follow if the issue were to be pressed. But because of his egoism and recklessness, Yazid neglected his father's advice and immediately after the death of his father ordered the governor of Medina either to force a pledge of allegiance from Imam Husayn or send his head to Damascus.<sup>60</sup>

After the governor of Medina informed Imam Husayn of this demand the Imam, in order to think over the question, asked for a delay and overnight started with his family toward Mecca. He sought refuge in the sanctuary of God which in Islam is the official place of refuge and security. This event occurred toward the end of the month of Rajab and the beginning of Sha'ban of 60 A.H.

For nearly four months Imam Husayn stayed in Mecca in refuge. This news spread throughout the Islamic world. On the one hand many people who were tired of the iniquities of Mu'awiyah's rule and were even more dissatisfied when Yazid became caliph, corresponded with Imam Husayn and expressed their sympathy for him. On the other hand a flood of letters began to flow, especially from Iraq and particularly the city of Kufa, inviting the Imam to go to Iraq and accept the leadership of the populace there with the aim of beginning an uprising to overcome injustice and iniquity.

Naturally such a situation was dangerous for Yazid.

The stay of Imam Husayn in Mecca continued until the season for pilgrimage when Muslims from all over the world poured in groups into Mecca in order to perform the rites of the hajj'. The Imam discovered that some of the followers of Yazid had entered Mecca as pilgrims (hajjis) with the mission to kill the Imam during the rites of hajj with the arms they carried under their special pilgrimage dress (ihrami).<sup>61</sup>

The Imam shortened the pilgrimage rites and decided to leave.

Amidst the vast crowd of people he stood up and in a short speech announced that he was setting out for Iraq.<sup>62</sup>

In this short speech he also declared that he would be martyred and asked Muslims to help him in attaining the goal he had in view and to offer their lives in the path of God. On the next day he set out with his family and a group of his companions for Iraq.

Imam Husayn was determined not to give his allegiance to Yazid and knew full well that he would be killed. He was aware that his death was inevitable in the face of the awesome military power of the Umayyads, supported as it was by corruption in certain sectors, spiritual decline, and lack of will power among the people, especially in Iraq. Some of the outstanding people of Mecca stood in the way of Imam Husayn and warned him of the danger of the move he was making. But he answered that he refused to pay allegiance and give his approval to a government of injustice and tyranny. He added that he knew that wherever he turned or went he would be killed.<sup>63</sup> He would leave Mecca in order to preserve the respect for the house of God and not allow this respect to be destroyed by having his blood spilled there.

While on the way to Kufa and still a few days' journey away from the city, he received news that the agent of Yazid in Kufa had put to death the representative of the Imam in that city and also one of the Imam's determined supporters who was a well-known man in Kufa.

Their feet had been tied and they had been dragged through the streets.<sup>64</sup>

The city and its surroundings were placed under strict observation and countless soldiers of the enemy were awaiting him. There was no way open to him but to march ahead and to face

death. It was here that the Imam expressed his definitive determination to go ahead and be martyred: and so he continued on his journey.<sup>65</sup>

Approximately seventy kilometres from Kufa, in a desert named Karbala, the Imam and his entourage were surrounded by the army of Yazid. For eight days they stayed in this spot during which the circle narrowed and the number of the enemy's army

increased.

Finally the Imam, with his household and a small number of companions were encircled by an army of thirty thousand soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

During these days the Imam fortified his position and made a final selection of his companions. At night he called his companions and during a short speech stated that there was nothing ahead but death and martyrdom. He added that since the enemy was concerned only with his person he would free them from all obligations so that anyone who wished could escape in the darkness of the night and save his life. Then he ordered the lights to be turned out and most of his companions, who had joined him for their own advantage, dispersed. Only a handful of those who loved the truth about forty of his close aides -and some of the Banu Hashim remained.<sup>67</sup>

Once again the Imam assembled those who were left and put them to a test. He addressed his companions and Hashimite relatives, saying again that the enemy was concerned only with his person. Each could benefit from the darkness of the night and escape the danger. But this time the faithful companions of the Imam answered each in his own way that they would not deviate for a moment from the path of truth of which the Imam was the leader and would never leave him alone. They said they would defend his household to the last drop of their blood and as long as they could carry a sword.<sup>68</sup>

On the ninth day of the month the last challenge to choose between "allegiance or war" was made by the enemy to the Imam.

The Imam asked for a delay in order to worship overnight and became determined to enter battle on the next day.<sup>69</sup>

On the tenth day of Muharram of the year 61/680 the Imam lined up before the enemy with his small band of followers, less than ninety persons consisting of forty of his companions thirty some members of the army of the enemy that joined him during the night and day of war, and his Hashimite family of children, brothers, nephews, nieces and cousins. That day they fought from morning until their final breath, and the Imam, the young Hashimites and the companions were all martyred. Among those killed were two children of Imam Hasan, who were only thirteen and eleven years old; and a five-year-old child and a suckling baby of Imam Husayn.

The army of the enemy, after ending -the war, plundered the haram of the Imam and burned his tents. They decapitated the bodies of the martyrs, denuded them and threw them to the ground without burial. Then they moved the members of the haram, all of whom were helpless women and girls, along with the heads of the martyrs, to Kufa.<sup>70</sup>

Among the prisoners there were three male members: a twenty-two year old son of Imam Husayn who was very ill and unable to move, namely Ali ibn Husayn, the fourth Imam; his four year old son, Muhammad ibn Ali, who became the fifth Imam; and finally Hasan Muthanna, the son of the second Imam who was also the son-in-law of Imam Husayn and who, having been wounded during the war, lay among the dead. They found him near death and through the intercession of one of the generals did not cut off his head. Rather, they took him with the prisoners to Kufa and from there to Damascus before Yazid.

The event of Karbala, the capture of the women and children of the Household of the Prophet, their being taken as prisoners from town to town and the speeches made by the daughter of Ali, Zaynab, and the fourth Imam who were among the prisoners, disgraced the Umayyads. Such abuse of the Household of the Prophet annulled the propaganda which Mu'awiyah had carried out for years. The matter reached such proportions that Yazid in public disowned and condemned the actions of his agents. The event of Karbala was a major factor in the overthrow of Umayyad rule although its effect was delayed. It also strengthened the roots of Shi'ism. Among its immediate results were the revolts and rebellions combined with bloody wars which continued for twelve years. Among those who were instrumental in the death of the Imam not one was able to escape revenge and punishment.

Anyone who studies closely the history of the life of Imam Husayn and Yazid and the conditions that prevailed at that time, and analyzes this chapter of Islamic history, will have no doubt that in those circumstances there was no choice before Imam Husayn but to be killed. Swearing allegiance to Yazid would have meant publicly showing contempt for Islam, something which was not possible for the Imam, for Yazid not only showed no respect for Islam and its injunctions but also made a public demonstration of impudently treading under foot its basis and its laws. Those before him, even if they opposed religious injunctions, always did so in the guise of religion, and at least formally respected religion.

They took pride in being companions of the Holy Prophet and the other religious figures in whom people believed. From this it can be concluded that the claim of some interpreters of these events is false when they say that the two brothers, Hasan and Husayn, had two different tastes and that one chose the way of peace and the other the way of war, so that one brother made peace with Mu'awiyah although he had an army of forty thousand while the other went to war against Yazid with an army of forty. For we see that this same Imam Husayn, who refused to pay allegiance to Yazid for one day, lived for ten years under the rule of Mu'awiyah, in the same manner as his brother who also had endured for ten years under Mu'awiyah, without opposing him.

It must be said in truth that if Imam Hasan or Imam Husayn had fought Mu'awiyah they would have been killed without there being the least benefit for Islam.

Their deaths would have had no effect before the righteous-appearing policy of Mu'awiyah, a competent politician who emphasized his being a companion of the Holy Prophet, the "scribe of the revelation," and "uncle of the faithful" and who used every stratagem possible to preserve a religious guise for his rule. Moreover, with his ability to set the stage to accomplish his desires he could have had them killed by their own people and then assumed a state of mourning and sought to revenge their blood, just as he sought to give the impression that he was avenging the killing of the third caliph.



## The Fourth Imam

Imam Sajjad (Ali ibn Husayn entitled Zayn al-' abidin and Sajjad) was the son of the third Imam and his wife, the queen among women, the daughter of Yazdigird the king of Iran. He was the only son of Imam Husayn to survive, for his other three brothers Ali Akbar, aged twenty-five, five year old Ja'far and Ali Asghar (or Abdallah) who was a suckling baby were martyred during the event of Karbala.<sup>71</sup> The Imam had also accompanied his father on the journey that terminated fatally in Karbala, but because of severe illness and the inability to carry arms or participate in fighting he was prevented from taking part in the holy war and being martyred. So he was sent with the womenfolk to Damascus. After spending a period in imprisonment he was sent with honor to Medina because Yazid wanted to conciliate public opinion. But for a second time, by the order of the Umayyad caliph, Abd al-Malik, he was chained and sent from Medina to Damascus and then again returned to Medina.<sup>72</sup> The fourth Imam, upon returning to Medina, retired from public life completely, closed the door of his house to strangers and spent his time in worship. He was in contact only with the elite among the Shi'ites such as Abu Hamzah Thumali, Abu Khalid Kabuli and the like. The elite disseminated among the Shi'ah the religious sciences they learned from the Imam. In this way Shi'ism spread considerably and showed its effects during the imamate of the fifth Imam. Among the works of the fourth Imam is a book called Sahifah sajjadiyah. It consists of fifty-seven prayers concerning the most sublime Divine sciences and is known as "The Psalm of the Household of the Prophet." The fourth Imam died (according to some Shi'ite traditions poisoned by Walid ibn , Abd al-Malik through the instigation of the Umayyad caliph Hisham<sup>73</sup>) in 95/712 after thirty-five years of imamate.

## The Fifth Imam

Imam Muhammad ibn Ali Baqir (the word baqir meaning he who cuts and dissects, a title given to him by the Prophet)<sup>74</sup> was the son of the fourth Imam and was born in 57/675. He was present at the event of Karbala when he was four years old. After his father, through Divine Command and the decree of those who went before him, he became Imam. In the year 114/732 he died, according to some Shi'ite traditions poisoned by Ibrahim ibn Walid ibn Abdallah, the nephew of Hisham, the Umayyad caliph.

During the imamate of the fifth Imam, as a result of the injustice of the Umayyads, revolts and wars broke out in some corner of the Islamic world every day. Moreover, there were disputes within the Umayyad family itself which kept the caliphate busy and to a certain extent left the members of the Household of the Prophet alone. From the other side, the tragedy of Karbala and the oppression suffered by the Household of the Prophet, of which the fourth Imam was the most noteworthy embodiment, had attracted many Muslims to the Imams.<sup>75</sup> These factors combined to make it possible for people and especially the Shi'ites to go in great numbers to Medina and to come into the presence of the fifth Imam. Possibilities for disseminating truths about Islam and the sciences of the Household of the Prophet, which had never existed for the Imams before him, were presented to the fifth Imam. The proof of this fact is the innumerable

traditions recounted from the fifth Imam and the large number of illustrious men of science and Shi'ite scholars who were trained by him in different Islamic sciences. These names are listed in books of biographies of famous men in Islam.<sup>76</sup>

## **The Sixth Imam**

Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad, the son of the fifth Imam, was born in 83/702. He died in 148/785 according to Shi'ite tradition, poisoned and martyred through the intrigue of the Abbasid caliph Mansur. After the death of his father he became Imam by Divine Command and decree of those who came before him.

During the imamate of the sixth Imam greater possibilities and a more favorable climate existed for him to propagate religious teachings. This came about as a result of revolts in Islamic lands, especially the uprising of the Muswaddah to overthrow the Umayyad caliphate, and the bloody wars which finally led to the fall and extinction of the Umayyads. The greater opportunities for Shi'ite teachings were also a result of the favorable ground the fifth Imam had prepared during the twenty years of his imamate through the propagation of the true teachings of Islam and the sciences of the Household of the Prophet.

The Imam took advantage of the occasion to propagate the religious sciences until the very end of his imamate, which was contemporary with the end of the Umayyad and beginning of the Abbasid caliphates. He instructed many scholar's in different fields of the intellectual and transmitted sciences, such as Zerarah, Muhammad ibn Muslim, Mu'min Taq Hisham ibn Hakam, Aban ibn Taghlib, Hisham ibn Salim, Hurayz, Hisham Kalbi Nassabah, and Jabir ibn Hayyan, the alchemist. Even some important Sunni scholars such as Sufyan Thawri, Abu Hanifah, the founder of the Hanafi school of law, Qadi Sukuni, Qadi Abu'lBakhtari, and others, had the honor of being his students. It is said that his classes and sessions of instruction produced four thousand scholars of hadith and other sciences.<sup>77</sup>

The number of traditions preserved from the fifth and sixth Imams is more than all the hadith that have been recorded from the Prophet and the other ten Imams combined.

But toward the end of his life the Imam was subjected to severe restrictions placed upon him by the Abbasid caliph Mansur, who ordered such torture and merciless killing of many of the descendants of the Prophet who were Shi'ite that his actions even surpassed the cruelty and heedlessness of the Umayyads. At his order they were arrested in groups, some thrown into deep and dark prisons and tortured until they died, while others were beheaded or buried alive or placed at the base of or between walls of buildings, and walls were constructed over them.

Hisham, the Umayyad caliph, had ordered the sixth Imam to be arrested and brought to Damascus. Later, the Imam was arrested by Saffah, the Abbasid caliph, and brought to Iraq. Finally, Mansur had him arrested again and brought to Samarra where he had the Imam kept under supervision, was in every way harsh and discourteous to him, and several times thought of killing him.<sup>78</sup> Eventually the Imam was allowed to return to Medina where he spent the rest of his life in hiding, until he was poisoned and martyred through the intrigue of Mansur.<sup>79</sup>

Upon hearing the news of the Imam's martyrdom, Mansur wrote to the governor of Medina instructing him to go to the house of the Imam on the pretext of expressing his condolences to the family, to ask for the Imam's will and testament and read it.

Whoever was chosen by the Imam as his inheritor and successor should be beheaded on the spot. Of course the aim of Mansur was to put an end to the whole question of the imamate and to Shi'ite aspirations. When the governor of Medina, following orders, read the last will and testament he saw that the Imam had chosen four people rather than one to administer his last will and testament : the caliph himself, the governor of Medina, Abdallah Aftah ., the Imam's older son, and Musa, his younger son. In this way the plot of Mansur failed.<sup>80</sup>

## **The Seventh Imam**

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far Kazim, the son of the sixth Imam, was born in 128/744 and was poisoned and martyred in prison in 183/799.<sup>81</sup> He became Imam after the death of his father, through Divine Command and the decree of his forefathers. The seventh Imam was contemporary with the Abbasid caliphs, Mansur, Hadi, Mahdi and Harun. He lived in very difficult times, in hiding, until finally Harun went on the hajj and in Medina had the Imam arrested while praying in the Mosque of the Prophet. He was chained and imprisoned, then taken from Medina to Basra and from Basra to Baghdad where for years he was transferred from one prison to another. Finally he died in Baghdad in the Sindi ibn Shahak prison through poisoning<sup>82</sup> and was buried in the cemetery of the Quraysh which is now located in the city of Kazimayn.

## **The Eighth Imam**

Imam Rida (Ali ibn Musa) was the son of the seventh Imam and according to well-known accounts was born in 148/765 and died in 203/817 <sup>83</sup>

The eighth Imam reached the imamate, after the death of his father, through Divine Command and the decree of his forefathers.

The period of his imamate coincided with the caliphate of Harun and then his sons Amin and Ma'mun.

After the death of his father, Ma'mun fell into conflict with his brother Amin which led to bloody wars and finally the assassination of Amin, after which Ma'mun became caliph.<sup>84</sup> Until that day the policy of the Abbasid caliphate toward the Shi'ites had been increasingly harsh and cruel. Every once in a while one of the supporters of Ali ('alawis) would revolt causing bloody wars and rebellions which were of great difficulty and consequence for the caliphate.

The Shi'ite Imams would not cooperate with those who carried out these rebellions and would not interfere with their affairs. The Shi'ites of that day, who comprised a considerable population, continued to consider the Imams as their religious leaders to whom obedience was obligatory and believed in them as the real caliphs of the Holy Prophet.

They considered the caliphate to be far from the sacred authority of their Imams, for the caliphate had come to seem more like the courts of the Persian kings and Roman emperors and was being run by a group of people more interested in worldly rule than in the strict application of religious principles.

The continuation of such a situation was dangerous for the structure of the caliphate and was a serious threat to it.

Ma'mun thought of finding a new solution for these difficulties which the seventy-year old policy, of his Abbasid predecessors had not been able to solve. To accomplish this end he chose the eighth Imam as his successor, hoping in this way to overcome two difficulties: first of all to prevent the descendants of the Prophet from rebelling against the government since they would be involved in the government themselves, and secondly, to cause the people to lose their spiritual belief and inner attachment to the Imame.

This would be accomplished by having the Imams become engrossed in worldly matters and the politics of the caliphate itself, which had always been considered by the Shi'ite to be evil and impure, In this way their religious organization would crumble and they would no longer present any dangers to the caliphate.

Obviously, after accomplishing these ends, the removal of the Imam would present no difficulties to the Abbasids,<sup>85</sup> In order to have this decision put into effect, Ma'mun asked the Imam to come to Marw from Medina, Once he had arrived there, Ma'mun offered him first the caliphate and then the succession to the caliphate. The Imam made his apologies and turned down the proposal, but he was finally induced to accept the successorship, with the condition that he would not interfere in governmental affairs or in the appointment or dismissal of government agents,<sup>86</sup> This event occurred in 200/814, But soon Ma'mun realized that he had committed an error, for there was a rapid spread of Shi'ism, a growth in the attachment of the populace to the Imam and an astounding reception given to the Imam by the people and even by the army and government agents, Ma'mun sought to find a remedy for this difficulty and had the Imam poisoned and martyred, After his death the Imam was buried in the city of Tus in Iran, which is now called Mashhad.

Ma'mun displayed great interest in having works on the intellectual sciences translated into Arabic, He organized gatherings in which scholars of different religions and sects assembled and carried out scientific and scholarly debates, The eighth Imam also participated in these assemblies and joined in the discussions with scholars of other religions.

Many of these debates are recorded in the collections of Shi'ite hadiths.<sup>87</sup>

## **The Ninth Imam**

Imam Muhammad (ibn Ali) Taqi (sometimes called Jawad and Ibn al-Rida) was the son of the eighth Imam.

He was born in 195/809 in Medina and according to Shi'ite traditions was martyred in 220/835, poisoned by his wife, the daughter of Ma'mun, at the instigation of the Abbasid caliph Mu'tasim. He was buried next to his grandfather, the seventh Imam, in Kazimayn. He became Imam after the death of his father through Divine Command and by the decree of his forefathers, At the time of the death of his father he was in Medina, Ma'mun called him to Baghdad which was then the capital of the caliphate and outwardly showed him much kindness. He even gave the Imam his daughter in marriage and kept him in Baghdad.

In reality he wanted in this way to keep a close watch upon the Imam from both outside and within his own household, The Imam spent some time in Baghdad and then with the consent of Ma'mun set out for Medina where he remained until Ma'mun's death, When Mu'tasim became the caliph he called the Imam back to Baghdad and, as we have seen, through the Imam's wife had him poisoned and killed.<sup>88</sup>

## **The Tenth Imam**

Imam Ali ibn Muhammad Naqi (sometimes referred to by the title of Hadi), was the son of the ninth Imam. He was born in 212 827 in Medina and according to Shi'ite accounts was martyred through poisoning by Mu'tazz the Abbasid caliph, in 254/868.<sup>89</sup> During his lifetime the tenth Imam was contemporary with seven of the Abbasid caliphs: Ma'mun, Mu'tasim, Wathiq.

Mutawakkil, Muntasir, Musta'in and Mu'tazz, It was during the rule of Mu'tasim in 220/835 that his noble father died through poisoning in Baghdad. At that time Ahi ibn Muhammad Naqi was in Medina. There he became the Imam through Divine Command and the decree of the Imams before him. He stayed in Medina teaching religious sciences until the time of Mutawakkil. In 243/857, as a result of certain false charges that were made, Mutawakkil ordered one of his government officials to invite the Imam from Medina to Samarrah which was then the capital. He himself wrote the Imam a letter full of kindness and courtesy asking him to come to the capital where they could meet.<sup>90</sup> Upon arrival in Samarrah the Imam was also shown certain outward courtesy and respect,

Yet at the same time Mutawakkil tried by all possible means to trouble and dishonor him, Many times he called the Imam to his presence with the aim of killing or disgracing him and had his house searched.

In his enmity toward the Household of the Prophet Mutawakkil had no equal among the Abbasid caliphs. He was especially opposed to Ali, whom he cursed openly. He even ordered a clown to ridicule Ali at voluptuous banquets.

In the year 237/850 he ordered the mausoleum of Imam Husayn in Karbala and many of the houses around it to be torn down to the ground, Then water was turned upon the tomb of the Imam- He ordered the ground of the tomb to be plowed and cultivated so that any trace of the tomb would be forgotten.<sup>91</sup>

During the life of Mutawakkil the condition of life of the descendants of Ali in the Hijaz had reached such a pitiful state that their womenfolk had no veils with which to cover themselves. Many of them had only one old veil which they wore at the time of the daily prayers. Pressures Of a similar kind were put on the descendants of Ali who lived in Egypt,<sup>92</sup> The tenth Imam accepted in patience the tortures and afflictions of the Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil until the caliph died and was followed by Muntasir, Musta'in and finally Mu'tazz, whose intrigue led to the Imam's being poisoned and martyred.

## The Eleventh Imam

Imam Hasan ibn Ali Askari, the son of the tenth Imam, was born in 232/845 and according to some Shi'ite sources was poisoned and killed in 260/872 through the instigation of the Abbasid caliph Mu'tamid.<sup>93</sup> The eleventh Imam gained the imamate, after the death of his noble father, through Divine Command and through the decree of the previous Imams. During the seven year's of his imamate, due to untold restrictions placed upon him by the caliphate, he lived in hiding and dissimulation (taqiya). He did not have any social contact with even the common people among the Shi'ite population, Only the elite of the Shi'ah were able to see him, Even so, he spent most of his time in prison.<sup>94</sup>

There was extreme repression at that time because the Shi'ite population had reached a considerable level in both numbers and power, Everyone knew that the Shi'ah believed in the imamate, and the identity of the Shi'ite Imams was also known. Therefore, the caliphate kept the Imams under its close supervision more than ever before. It tried through every possible means and through secret plans to remove and destroy them. Also, the caliphate had come to know that the elite among the Shi'ah believed that the eleventh Imam, according to traditions cited by him as well as his forefathers, would have a son who was the promised Mahdi. The coming of the Mahdi had been foretold in authenticated hadiths of the Prophet in both Sunni and Shi'ite sources,<sup>95</sup> For this reason the eleventh Imam, more than other Imams, was kept under close watch by the caliphate. The caliph of the time had decided definitely to put an end to the imamate in Shi'ism through every possible means and to close the door to the imamate once and for all.

Therefore, as soon as the news of the illness of the eleventh Imam reached Mu'tamid, he sent a physician and a few of his trusted agents and judges to the house of the Imam to be with him and observe his condition and the situation within his house at all times.

After the death of the Imam. they had the house investigated and all his female slaves examined by the midwife. For two years the secret agents of the caliph searched for the successor of the Imam until they lost all hope.<sup>96</sup>

The eleventh Imam was buried in his house in Samarrah next to his noble father.

Here it should be remembered that during their lifetimes the Imams trained many hundreds of scholars of religion and hadith, and it is these scholars who have transmitted to us information about the Imams. In order not to prolong the matter, the list of their names and works and their biographies have not been included here."<sup>97</sup>

## The Twelfth Imam

The promised Mahdi, who is usually mentioned by his title of Imam-i 'Asr (the Imam of the "Period") and Sahib al-Zaman (the Lord of the Age), is the son of the eleventh Imam. His name is the same as that of the Holy Prophet. He was born in Samarra in 256/868 and until 260/872 when his father was martyred, lived under his father's care and tutelage. He was hidden from public view and only a few of the elite among the Shi'ah were able to meet him.

After the martyrdom of his father he became Imam and by Divine Command went into occultation (ghaybat). Thereafter he appeared only to his deputies (na'ib) and even then only in exceptional circumstances. 98

The Imam chose as a special deputy for a time Uthman ibn Sa'id 'Umari, one of the companions of his father and grandfather who was his confidant and trusted friend. Through his deputy the Imam would answer the demands and Questions of the Shi'ah.

After Uthman ibn Sa'id, his son Muhammad ibn Uthman Umari was appointed the deputy of the Imam. After the death of Muhammad ibn Uthman, Abu'l Qasim Husayn ibn Ruh Nawbakhti was the special deputy, and after his death Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari was chosen for this task 99

A few days before the death of Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari in 329/939 an order was issued by the Imam stating that in six days Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari would die, henceforth the special deputation of the Imam would come to an end and the major occultation (ghaybat-i kubra) would begin and would continue until the day God grants permission to the Imam to manifest himself.

The occultation of the twelfth Imam is, therefore, divided into two parts: the first, the minor occultation (ghaybat-i sughra) which began in 260/872 and ended in 329/939, lasting about seventy years; the second, the major occultation which commenced in 329/939 and will continue as long as God wills it. In a hadith upon whose authenticity everyone agrees, the Holy Prophet has said, "If there were to remain in the life of the world but one day, God would prolong that day until He sends in it a man from my community and my household, His name will be the same as my name.

He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny."100

## On the Appearance of the Mahdi

In the discussion on prophecy and the imamate it was indicated that as a result of the law of general guidance which governs all of creation, man is of necessity endowed with the power of receiving revelation through prophecy, which directs him toward the perfection of the human norm and the well-being of the human species. Obviously, if this perfection and

happiness were not possible for man, whose life possesses a social aspect, the very fact that he is endowed with this power would be meaningless and futile. But there is no futility in creation.

In other words, ever since he has inhabited the earth, man has had the wish to lead a social life filled with happiness in its true sense and has striven toward this end. If such a wish were not to have an objective existence it would never have been imprinted upon man's inner nature, in the same way that if there were no food there would have been no hunger, Or if there were to be no water there would be no thirst and if there were to be no reproduction there would have been no sexual attraction between the sexes.

Therefore, by reason of inner necessity and determination, the future will see a day when human society will be replete with justice and when all will live in peace and tranquillity, when human beings will be fully possessed of virtue and perfection. The establishment of such a condition will occur through human hands but with Divine succor. And the leader of such a society, who will be the savior of man, is called in the language of the hadith, the Mahdi.

In the different religions that govern the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam there are references to a person who will come as the savior of mankind. These religions have usually given happy tidings of his coming, although there are naturally certain differences in detail that can be discerned when these teachings are compared carefully. The hadith of the Holy Prophet upon which all Muslims agree; "The Mahdi is of my progeny," refers to this same truth.

There are numerous hadiths cited in Sunni and Shi'ite sources from the Holy Prophet and the Imams concerning the appearance of the Mahdi, Such as that he is of the progeny of the Prophet and that his appearance will enable human society to reach true perfection and the full realization of spiritual life.<sup>101</sup>

In addition, there are numerous other traditions concerning the fact that the Mahdi is the son of the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari. They agree that after being born and undergoing a long occultation the Mahdi will appear again, filling with.

Justice the world that has been corrupted by injustice and iniquity.

As an example, Ali ibn Musa al-Rida (the eighth Imam) has said, in the course of a hadith, "The imam after me is my son, Muhammad and after him his son Ali, and after Ali his son, Hasan, and after Hasan his son Hujjat al-Qa'im, who is awaited during his occultation and obeyed during his manifestation. If there remain from the life of the world but a single day, Allah will extend that day until he becomes manifest, and fill the world with justice in the same way that it had been filled with iniquity. But when? As for news of the 'hour,' verily my father told me, having heard it from his father who heard it from his father who heard it from his ancestors who heard it from Ali, that it was asked of the Holy Prophet, 'Oh Prophet of God when will the 'support'.

(qa'im) who is from thy family appear?' He said. 'His case is like that of the Hour (of the Resurrection). "He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares'. (Quran. VII, 187)."<sup>102</sup>



Saqr ibn Abi Dulaf said. "I heard from Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Rida [the ninth Imam] who said, 'The Imam after me is my son. Ali; his command is my command; his word is my word ; to obey him is to obey me. The Imam after him is his son. Hasan. His command is the command of his father his word is the word of his father to obey him is to obey his father.' After these words the Imam remained silent. I said to him, 'Oh son of the Prophet who will be the Imam after Hasan?' The Imam cried hard, then said.

'Verily after Hasan his son is the awaited Imam who is "al-qa'im bi'l-haqq'. (He who is supported by the Truth),' "103 .

Musa ibn Ja'far Baghdadi said, "I heard from the Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Ali [the eleventh Imam] who said, 'I see that after me differences will appear among you concerning the Imam after me. Whoso accepts the Imams after the Prophet of God but denies my son is like the person who accepts all the prophets but denies the prophethood of Muhammad, the Prophet of God upon whom be peace and blessing. And whoso denies [Muhammad] the Prophet of God is like one who has denied all the prophets of God, for to obey the last of us is like obeying the first and to deny the last of us is like denying the first. But beware!

Verily for my son there is an occultation during which all people will fall into doubt except those whom Allah protects." 104

The opponents of Shi'ism protest that' according to the beliefs of this school the Hidden Imam should by now be nearly twelve centuries old, whereas this is impossible for any human being. In answer it must be said that the protest is based only on the unlikelihood of such an occurrence not its impossibility. Of course such a long lifetime or a life of a longer period is unlikely. But those who study the hadiths of the Holy Prophet and the Imams will see that they refer to this life as one possessing miraculous qualities.

Miracles are certainly not impossible nor can they be negated through scientific arguments. It can never be proved that the causes and agents that are functioning in the world are solely those that we see and know and that other causes which we do not know or whose effects and actions we have not seen nor understood do not exist. It is in this way possible that in one or several members of mankind there can be operating certain causes and agents which bestow upon them a very long life of a thousand or several thousand years. Medicine has not even lost hope of discovering a way to achieve very long life spans. In any case such protests from "peoples of the Book" such as Jews, Christians and Muslims are most strange for they accept the miracles of the prophets of God according to their own sacred scriptures.

The opponents of Shi'ism also protest that, although Shi'a.

Isim considers the Imam necessary in order to expound the injunctions and verities of religion and to guide the people, the occultation of the Imam is the negation of this very purpose, for an Imam in occultation who cannot be reached by mankind cannot be in any way beneficial or effective.

The opponents say that if God wills to bring forth an Imam to reform mankind He is able to create him at the necessary moment and does not need to create him thousands of years earlier. In answer it must be said that such people have not really understood the meaning of the Imam, for in the discussion on the imamate it became clear that the duty of the Imam is not only the formal explanation of the religious sciences and exoteric guidance of the people.

In the same way that he has the duty of guiding men outwardly, the Imam also bears the function of walayat and the esoteric guidance of men. It is he who directs man's spiritual life and orients the inner aspect of human action toward God. Clearly, his physical presence or absence has no effect in this matter. The Imam watches over men inwardly and is in communion with the soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes. His existence is always necessary even if the time has not as yet arrived for his outward appearance and the universal reconstruction that he is to bring about.

## The Spiritual Message of Shi'ism

The message of Shi'ism to the world can be summarized in one sentence: "To know God." Or in other words it is to instruct man to follow the path of Divine realization and the knowledge of God in order to gain felicity and salvation. And this message is contained in the very phrase with which the Holy Prophet commenced his prophetic mission when he said: "Oh men! Know God in His Oneness (and acknowledge Him) so that you will gain salvation." 105

As a summary explanation of this message we will add that man is attracted by nature to many goals in this worldly life and to material pleasures. He loves tasty food and drink, fashionable dress, attractive palaces and surroundings a beautiful and pleasing wife sincere friends and great wealth. And in another direction he is attracted to political power, position reputation the extension of his rule and dominion and the destruction of anything that is opposed to his wishes.

But in his inner and primordial, God-given nature man understands that all these are means created for man. but man is not created for all these things. These things should be subservient to man and follow him and not vice versa. To consider the stomach and the region below it as a final end of life is the logic of cattle and sheep. To tear up cut and destroy others is the logic of the tiger the wolf and the fox. The logic inherent in human existence is the attainment of wisdom and nothing else. This logic based upon wisdom with the power which it possesses to discern between reality and the unreal guides us toward the truth and not toward things our emotions demand or toward passions, selfishness and egoism. This logic considers man as a part of the totality of creation without any separate independence or the possibility of a rebellious self-centeredness. In contrast to the current belief that man is the master of creation and tames rebellious nature and conquers it to force it to obey his wishes and desires. we find that in reality man himself is an instrument in the hand of Universal Nature and is ruled and commanded by it.

This logic based upon wisdom invites man to concentrate more closely upon the apprehension he has of the existence of this world until it becomes clear to him that the world of existence and all that is in it does not issue from itself but rather from an Infinite Source. He will then know that all this beauty and ugliness all these creatures of the earth and the heavens which appear outwardly as independent realities gain reality only through another.

Reality and are manifested only in Its Light, not by themselves and through themselves. In the same way that the "realities" as well as the power and grandeur of yesterday have no greater value than tales and legends of today so are the "realities" of today no more than vaguely remembered dreams in relation to what will appear as "reality" tomorrow. In the last analysis, everything in itself is no more than a tale and a dream. Only God is Reality in the absolute sense, the One Who does not perish. Under the protection of His Being, everything gains existence and becomes manifested through the Light of His Essence.

If man becomes endowed with such vision and power of apprehension, then the tent of his separative existence will fall down before his eyes like a bubble on the surface of water. He will see with his eyes that the world and all that is in it depend upon an Infinite Being who possesses life, power, knowledge and every perfection to an infinite degree. Man and every other being in the world are like so many windows which display according to their capacity the world of eternity which transcends them and lies beyond them.

It is at this moment that man takes- from himself and all creatures the quality of independence and primacy and returns these qualities to their Owner. He detaches himself from all things to attach himself solely to the One God. Before His Majesty and Grandeur he does nothing but bow in humility. Only then does he become guided and directed by God so that whatever he knows he knows in God. Through Divine guidance he becomes adorned with moral and spiritual virtue and pure actions which are the same as Islam itself the submission to God, the religion that is in the primordial nature of things.

This is the highest degree of human perfection and the station of the perfect man (the Universal Man; insan-i kamil), namely the Imam who has reached this rank through Divine grace. Furthermore, those who have reached this station through the practice of spiritual methods, with the different ranks and stations that they possess, are the true followers of the Imam. It becomes thus clear that the knowledge of God and of the Imam are inseparable in the same way that the knowledge of God is inextricably connected to the knowledge of oneself. For he who knows his own symbolic existence has already come to know the true existence which belongs solely to God who is independent and without need of anything whatsoever.