

The Hallmark Traits of Ahlul Bayt

In the Name of Allah, the Infinitely Compassionate the Most Merciful. May the peace and blessings be upon the Seal of the Prophet and his immaculate Family.

The greatness of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (s) and his Ahlul Bayt (s) lies in the divine knowledge and perfection that Allah (swt) has enabled them with. The Prophet and each member of his Ahlul Bayt possessed a treasure of qualities unmatched by others. They were graced with absolute purification (“Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless.” Holy Quran 33:33) and devoted their lives in pure devotion to the Divine and deliverance of His message to humankind. They never wavered from the Divine compass that grounded them despite the monumental political pressures and threats made to their life. They were the inspiration of the soul, the instructor of the mind, the calming of the heart, and the guide towards salvation.

I was asked to write briefly about particular virtues of the Holy Prophet Muhammad and his noble Ahlul Bayt. A task that I found extremely difficult to do, considering the nobility of these figures and what they represented. Apprehensive every time I put my thoughts and knowledge to writing; feelings of unworthiness to even entertain the thoughts of writing about their character surrounded me.

Although the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt have innumerable qualities, a short focus is made on a particular hallmark that seems more dominant and conspicuous in each character. In my brief research, I found a surplus of repetitive writings available and did not want to continue in being an addition to those works. Thus, my writings will be missing a great deal of biographical information and credited contributions; nonetheless, the objective is to highlight the hallmarks of the Holy Prophet and his immaculate Ahlul Bayt.

With sincere humbleness and gratitude, I present this work and make countless apologies for any of my shortcomings.

Fatma Saleh
Ramadan 1431

The Prophet Muhammad

Truthfulness & Trustworthiness

The Prophet Muhammad was known amongst his tribesmen of Quraysh as *al-Sadiq, wa-Amin* (The Truthful, The Trustworthy), long before he began preaching his prophethood. He earned this title as a young child when people took notice of his innate honesty and trustworthiness, which he continued to bear the title into adulthood despite being opposed by his people. For more than twenty-three years, Allah had entrusted him to seal His divine message, had it not been for his perfect character as a trustworthy and honest person, Islam would not have taken rise.

Without trusting, how will a person learn truthfulness? Without being truthful, how will a person ever live a life of inner peace? Truthfulness leads to righteousness, and righteousness leads to Paradise. Truth and trust are essential qualities that bring human and spiritual value to a person. Integrity and value, ability and strength, confidence and hope are key components of human and spiritual character and purification. The Prophet Muhammad had been sent to perfect the moral character of the people. He was to be the example that spoke truthfully and held things in trust. Righteousness can never be attained without being truthful or trustful. The two go hand-in-hand; they are inseparable, and they became the entrance gate for the Prophet to introduce Islam to humankind.

His trustworthiness played an important role for being chosen by Allah to deliver the message of Islam truthfully. When he began to preach about Allah, he asked the people if they would believe him if he told them that an enemy was behind a hill ready to attack. They responded saying, “We have never known you to tell a lie.” He had lived among them for forty years; they did not hesitate in response to his honesty.

Before publically declaring the message of Islam and his prophethood, the people of Mecca entrusted their valuables with him. When the Prophet began his mission to propagate Islam, his tribesmen fervently opposed him for nearly ten years. They verbally and physically accosted him and his followers, and politically and financially boycotted him and anyone who followed him. Despite the antagonism they directed towards the Prophet, not one enemy reclaimed their valuables from the Prophet. The Prophet kept their valuables until he migrated to Yathrib (now Madinah) and left Imam Ali, his trusted cousin behind to return the goods to their rightful owners.

In his youth, the Prophet took part in the signing of Hilf al-Fudul (The Alliance of Virtuous). This alliance established ethical and fair commercial dealings and it became the most renowned alliance in the area at the time. The treaty formed because a man from Yemen had sold some goods in the Mekkan market to an important man from Quraysh, al-As Ibn Wail, whom later reneged on the payment. Unable to collect and powerless in the community, he stood in the center of the town laminating his story until the leaders of Quraysh heard of the incident. They met and made a covenant by Allah that they would unite with the wronged man against the one who had wronged him until the matter was settled by forcing the buyer to pay. The Prophet was amongst those who had signed the treaty. Years later, he said, “I was present at an alliance which was such that if I was invited to take part in it now in Islam, I would still do so.”

His honesty secured his employment with the most prominent and successful businessperson, Lady Khadijah. She was no ordinary woman, born of nobility, she captured the interest of leading men within Mecca for marriage, but she was not interested in any man until the Prophet came along. She knew of his honest reputation and thus entrusted him with the task to manage her business trade. After having returned from his first trade trip, Khadijah learned more of his impeccable trade ethics. She became captivated by his truthful nature and proposed herself in marriage to him. They were married for twenty-seven years until she died.

Even when faced with tremendous challenges, the Prophet never faltered in delivering his message, which Allah entrusted to him. The tribes of Quraysh put immense pressure by bribing him with wealth and position to cease his message. The Prophet responded by saying, “By Allah, if they put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left in return for my giving up this cause, I would not give it up until Allah makes Truth victorious, or I die in His service.

His honesty and trustworthiness was supremely manifested by his actions and word. When the Muslims were entering Mecca after its conquest in the 9th year of the Hijrah, the Prophet stood at the gate of the Kabah and asked the custodian of the Kabah, Uthman Ibn Talha for the keys. The Prophet entered the Kabah and destroyed all the idols. Afterwards he returned the key to Uthman Ibn Talha by the order of Allah.¹ The Muslims protested because Uthman was an idol worshipper and they wanted a Muslim to take possession of the Kabah, even the Prophet’s paternal uncle Abbas requested to be the new custodian. The Prophet refused them all and returned the key to its rightful owner despite Uthman being an idolater.

There is a tremendous lesson for Muslims in this verse and the story. The trust (*amana*) of something belongs to the person it originated with. When it comes to rightful ownership neither religion, race, nor gender determines the credibility or ability of the caretaker. Allah and the Prophet are illustrating this point. The Prophet exhorts Muslims to be honest in their dealings with others. As Muslims, especially those living in the West, we must maintain a transparent and ethical relationship with non-Muslims just as the Prophet did. We are not permitted to usurp the

¹ Allah had instructed the Prophet with the following verse: “Allah doth command you to render back your trusts to

trust of the people. Those who cannot be trusted are people without faith. The Prophet said, “There is no faith for a person who is untrustworthy and dishonest.”²

The Prophet said, “There are three qualities that Allah has *never* permitted to violate against any person: return the trust to the righteous and non-righteous; fulfilling the promise to the pious and non-pious; and being dutiful to parents whether they are pious or not.”³

Beside the trust of material items, the Prophet also stressed the trust of immaterial substances, such as respecting the privacy of people, keeping a promise, and not exposing secrets. The Prophet spoke about tangible consequences when such trusts are violated. The Prophet said, “Preserving the trust brings richness; betraying the trust brings poverty.”⁴

Prophet Muhammad stood as a pattern of moral perfection. His character was built off being a trustful and truthful person. Without these two elements, his message would have never taken flight. The growth and success of Islam was based on his moral character of truthfulness. He left for us examples of how to attain righteousness and salvation through being truthful and trustworthy.

² Bihar al-Anwar, vol.75, p.172

³ Al-Kafi, vol.2, p.162, hadith 15

⁴ Bihar al-Anwar, vol.75, p.114

Imam Ali Ibn AbiTalib

Knowledge

“No one knows its true meaning (Quran) except Allah and those firmly grounded in knowledge.”
(3:7)

Amir al-Mumineen, Ali Ibn Abi Talib lived by this verse; in verity, it is attributed to him, just as many other verses throughout the Quran extol him.⁵ He was the closest person to the Prophet Muhammad and the husband of God’s leading women, whose marriage was sanctified in Heaven by God. He was also the father of the eleven princes—the Holy Imams of Ahlul Bayt. His nature was one of piety; an impeccable moralists, scholar and intellect, husband and father, philosopher, judge, and warrior are just some of his outermost descriptions. Above all, he epitomized his legendary title as being “The Gate to the City of Knowledge”⁶ because he held imprint of the Prophet’s supreme knowledge.

Imam Ali not only grew up in the lap of the Prophet but the close relationship began when Ali was still in the womb of his mother. The Prophet was anxiously anticipating his birth. The Prophet’s face was the first to welcome him into this world after his mother delivered him in the Kabah. At the tender age of five, the Prophet took Ali beneath his folds, nurtured and fed him physically, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually. Holy Prophet Muhammad said on many occasions, “I am from Ali and Ali is from me.” They were of the same essence. No one knew the Prophet better than Ali, and no one knew Ali better than the Prophet. More interesting, the Prophet once commented that nobody knew Allah well except for him and Ali.

Ali lived in the life of the Prophet’s radiant silhouette. The Holy Prophet brought him up in his own arms and fed him with his own morsel. Imam Ali followed the Prophet wherever he went, like the imprinting of a young baby which follows its mother. Each day an aspect of the Prophet’s character would beam out of his noble soul and Imam Ali would absorb and practice it. He is the first person to believe in Islam and the first one to pray to Allah along with the Holy Prophet. Ahmed Ibn Hanbal once commented that no one among the Companions of the Prophet had more virtues than Ali Ibn Abi Talib.⁷

At the time of the Prophet, Muslims became apprehensive as to who would teach them the sciences of the Quran and Islamic principles after his departure, the Prophet assured them by saying, “If I am the city of knowledge, verily Ali is the gate by which people can enter that city.” Heavenly revelation descended on the Prophet and in turn, Ali became intimately privy of the Quranic verses. Whatever the Prophet learned from God he immediately taught it to Ali. God

⁵ Holy Quran: 33:33, 42:23, 33:56, 5:55-56, 5:67, 5:3, 76:7-11

⁶ Sahih, vol. 5, p. 637. An extension to this, the Prophet said, “Ali is the door of my knowledge, and the one who will clarify for my nation that which I was sent with.” Tafsir Al-Tabari, vol. 3, p.171; Shawahid Al-Tanzil, vol. 2, p. 356; Al-Darr Al-Manthour, vol. 6, p. 379; Yanabi Al-Mawda, 61

⁷ Al Mustadrak, al Hakim, vol. 3 p 107

attests to this when He said, "... and the retaining ear (Ali) might retain it."⁸ "The Prophet taught me 1,000 chapters of knowledge, and each of those chapters consists of 1,000 chapters," commented Ali. He had spent so much time with the Prophet discussing the science of the Quran that some of the Prophet's wives became jealous of the time he had taken of him. During his time, Imam Ali would plead to the Muslim community to ask him anything about the Noble Quran. Swearing by Allah that there is not a single verse which was revealed during the night or day, during travel or at home, but the Prophet had read it to him and taught him its deep meanings.⁹ The Prophet considered Ali to be the most knowledgeable person in his nation after him.¹⁰

The most prominent companions, including the caliphs came to Ali for religious advice when faced with problems. The truth was with Ali according to the Holy Prophet Muhammad, "Ali is with the Quran, and the Quran is with Ali."¹¹ Abu Bakr asked of Allah to never put him in a predicament that Imam Ali could not solve. Great companions, such as Ibn Abbas acknowledged that his knowledge and the knowledge of the Companions were but a drop in the seven seas compared with Ali's knowledge. Even Umar Ibn Khattab admitted saying, "Ali is the most knowledgeable of us in judgment and his insight is above us."¹²

At times, Umar would make wrong legal judgments, Imam Ali used to correct his wrong. One example is when Umar ordered a pregnant woman who had committed adultery to be stoned, but Imam Ali told him not to execute the sentence. When Umar asked him for the reason, Imam Ali said, "If this woman's sin has been proven and she has to be stoned to death, what is the sin of the infant she has in her womb? Therefore, give her respite and delay her punishment until she has given birth to the child and when the nursing period comes to an end." Umar complied with Ali's order saying, "If Ali were not here, Umar would perish!"¹³

Sa'id Ibn al-Musayyab has reported Umar as saying, "O Lord! Do not spare my life in relation to a complicated problem for whose solution Ali is not alongside me so as to guide me to its solution, for among this *Ummah* there is no one except Ali who can solve problems."¹⁴ Of his time, Ali was the best of judge according to the Prophet.

Guidance and judgment percolated from the knowledge he gained from the Prophet. Unique to Imam Ali was that he did not give any ruling without explanation. Solely on the knowledge and principles of Islam came his judgments. He became diligent in informing, teaching, and guiding the *Ummah* towards Islam.

⁸ Quran, 69:12. Verse interpreted in Hilyat al-Awliya, vol. 1, p. 67

⁹ Amali of Shaykh al-Toosi

¹⁰ Manaqib Al-Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib of Ibn Al-Maghazeli Al-Shafi

¹¹ Al-Bukhari, vol. 5, p. 19; Muslim, vol. 2, p. 360; Al-Tirmidhi, vol. 5, p. 304; Mustadrak Al-Sahihain of Al-Hakim Al-Nisabari, vol. 3, p. 109; Ibn Majah, vol. 1, p. 28; Musnad Ahmad, vol. 3, p. 328

¹² Manaqib, ch. 7, p. 47

¹³ Al-Ghadir, vol. 6, p. 111

¹⁴ Al Istiab, vol. 3, p. 39; Manaqib al Khawarizmi, ch. 7, p. 51; Al Riyadh al Nadirah, vol. 2, p. 194

For many Muslims, the second greatest book next to the Quran is Nahjul Balagha (Peak of Eloquence). Like the Quran, this book transcends the boundaries of religion, culture, and time. This masterpiece of a book compiles a corpus of literary letters, eloquent sermons, and astute sayings left to us by the great Imam. “Knowledge is superior to wealth. Knowledge guards you, whereas you guard wealth. Wealth decreases with expenditure, whereas knowledge multiplies with dissemination. A good material deed vanishes as the material resources behind it vanish, whereas to knowledge we are indebted forever,” is a sample of his wise sayings on knowledge. He elaborates on the nature of God and humankind, and provides insightful advice and resolutions in resolving social and political discord.

His knowledge went beyond theology; he canvassed calligraphy and grammar, set numerology, instituted laws, and delved in mysticism. He provided the blueprint for military defense and ruling government. Global organizations, institutions, intellectuals, and scholars have referenced his work, most notably, his famous epistle to the governor of Egypt, Malik al-Ashtar, written less than 1,400 years ago. In it, he highlights the moral duty of administering justice fairly and equally. Astonishing about the document is that Imam Ali eloquently talks about the inherent right and dignity of all people, irrespective of class, gender, or lineage. He writes that people are either your religious brothers or your equals in creation. In no previous time had any person or civilization spoke, let alone suggested, of such profound rights. It has been compared to the “International Declaration for Human Rights.” The United Nations noted Imam Ali’s work in the Arab Human Development Report 2002¹⁵ and urged Arab nations to use that letter as a model to govern.

Two astonishing figures stand exclusively in Islam’s history; Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib is the mirrored reflection of the Prophet. His knowledge has left an ever-living, pulsating influence on humankind, not just Muslims. Like the Prophet, Ali was unmatched in virtue and knowledge. He possessed and personified Islam in human form.

¹⁵ The Arab Human Development Report 2020, Creating Opportunities for Future Generations, p. 82 and 107

Imam Husayn Sacrifice

Standing alone on the desert, looking out against a fortified army of 30,000 men, nothing but a sword and armor as defense, you hold firm to what you have been born to do—to become the “Great Sacrifice”¹⁶ for Islam. Imam Husayn, son of Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib and Lady Fatima al-Zahra, and grandson of the Holy Prophet gave the ultimate sacrifice—his life for the sake of preserving Islam, for the love of Allah, and to awaken the conscience of the Muslim nation.

Islam was still in its infancy when Muslims began tinkering with its message and values. After the death of the Holy Prophet, some thirty year later, Islam began witnessing a transformation from a divine message to a distorted belief by the second caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty, Yazid Ibn Muawiyah.

Yazid was a despotic tyrant, whose family had openly opposed the Prophet and his message. When Yazid came to power, he continued with his family’s history of casting doubt on Islam by means of suppression, coercion, and persecution. Things that were lawful in Islam became unlawful under his rule. He belittled the Messenger, disbelieved in Allah, and mocked the Quran. His power affected the Muslim population. Either they followed suit in Yazid’s ways or they remained complacent, even worse, silent in fear of being threatened or killed by Yazid.

Imam Husayn believed that living with an oppressor is a major offense in itself. Oppression, according to Allah, is far worse than murder.¹⁷ Islam does not condone any form of oppression and no one understood this better than Imam Husayn did. Thus, the vicious hold of oppression had to be broken even if it took his life. “I do not view death except as a path to everlasting happiness while living under the oppressors is abject humiliation,” he once said.

The complacency of the people and the distortion of Islam were far reaching for Imam Husayn to bear. Muslims began ignoring the act of “enjoining good and forbidding evil (*amr bil-marooif nahy anil-munkar*).” He said, “...you made the tyrants dominant on you and left the divine affairs in their hands, while they shamelessly do the forbidden and notoriously live a licentious life. Your (fear) from death and attachment to this world have encouraged the tyrants to establish dominance over you.”¹⁸ Sensing the urgency of Islam’s dissolution, Imam Husayn set off on a journey that would save Islam from the brink of extinction, a journey that eventually took his life.

¹⁶ Quran, 37:107

¹⁷ Quran, 2:191, 2:217, 8:39

¹⁸ Tohaf al-Uqoul , p. 238

The threat arrived home, Yazid was pressuring Imam Husayn to accept his authority or face death. Yazid needed the support of Imam Husayn because he was the only living survivor of the Prophet's family. His acceptance would have been a political and theological endorsement, but the pure nature of Imam Husayn could never concede to an immoral and despotic ruler to lead the Muslim nation, for the Prophet had instructed, "One of the greatest struggle (*jihad*) is to stand up to a tyrant ruler, and say a word of truth."

Imam Husayn was the only representative of the Prophet and the Quran. He breathed, walked, and slept Islam. He loved Allah, the Prophet, and Islam more than he loved himself. He was the embodiment of Allah's verse in the Quran, "Say: verily, my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death are for Allah, the Lord of the Worlds."¹⁹ He could not be a party to the complacency and distortion facing Islam. He needed to safeguard the Quran and awaken the religious conscience of the Muslims.

When he embarked on the journey to save Islam, he left his home saying, "Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might in Allah's cause, with their goods and their people, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah, they are the people who will achieve salvation."²⁰

Achieving salvation is no easy task. It means the ultimate sacrifice—your life. This is what Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad did when he stood to uphold Islam and expose the fallacy of imposturous leadership. For the love of Allah, he gave the greatest sacrifice—his life, and in exchange for his life, Allah promised him eternal life in Paradise. "Allah has purchased of their believers their persons and their goods. For theirs (in return) is the Garden of Paradise."²¹

As a young child, Allah had tested him when he and his mother, father, and brother Hasan had fasted and forgone their *iftar*²² for three days. Allah said in Surat al-Dahr, "And they gave food, out of love for Him, to the poor, the orphans, and prisoner." That was a lesser trial compared to the momentous one that laid ahead for him. The Almighty was heavily testing the sincerity of his love for Him and the strength of his faith at Karbala. He had to have extraordinary belief and love for the cause; otherwise, he would have waived. Many people could perhaps stand the test of giving their hard-earned money to charity, sheltering the orphaned and widowed, even volunteering their time to advance Islam, but how many of us, if faced with the danger of being slain could withstand such an experience? No doubt, Imam Husayn remained true to his faith; he passed the ultimate test. Allah says, "Do you think you will enter the Garden without such trials as come to those before you."²³

The trial was laid and Imam Husayn did not waiver in standing firm against oppression and falsehood. As he said, "I never revolted in vain, as a rebel or as a tyrant, but I rose seeking

¹⁹ Quran, 6:162

²⁰ Quran, 9:20

²¹ Quran, 9:111

²² Breaking of the fast meal

²³ Quran, 2:214

reformation for the nation of my grandfather Mohammad. I intend to enjoin good and forbid evil, to act according to the traditions of my grandfather, and my father Ali Ibn Abi-Talib.”²⁴ His sacrifice was not in vain, for Allah promises eternal provisions (Paradise) to those who leave their homes for His cause and then slain.²⁵

Imam Husayn set the example of true martyrdom, which earned him the title of “The Master Among Martyrs (*Sayyidu Shuhad*).” He taught us courage, integrity, truth, and sacrifice. By sacrificing himself, Islam was preserved and honored, and the Muslims awoke from their slumber. Had Islam succumbed to the tyrant rule of Yazid, it would have been extremely difficult for the people to distinguish true Islam from an altered version, but when his life was taken, the Muslims realized that “truth arrived, and falsehood perished: for falsehood is by its nature bound to perish.”²⁶

²⁴ Bihar al- Anwar, vol. 44, p. 329

²⁵ Quran, 2:58-59

²⁶ Quran, 17:81

Imam Zain Al-Abideen

The Devotional Worshipper

Ten years before the birth of Imam Ali Ibn Husayn, the Holy Prophet Muhammad was sitting with a close companion while holding his grandson Husayn on his lap. He informed his companion that a son named Ali would be born of Husayn, and on the Day of Judgment, a caller will say, "Let Sayyid Al-Abideen (Master of Worshippers) stand up." Thus, his son Ali will stand up. Afterwards, the Prophet named his great grandson, the fourth imam, Ali Ibn Husayn, as Zain Al-Abideen, the Ornament of Worshippers.

Imam Zain Al-Abideen is the fourth imam in the Household of the Holy Prophet. He rose to the occasion of Imamate after the most horrific and tragic event in the history of Islam, the martyrdom of his father Imam Husayn in Karbala. His life is remembered as the courageous orator who brought down the Umayyad Dynasty. Dedicating his life in service of worship and theological writings, he mastered the third greatest Islamic literature, which has become the prayer manual of Muslims.

Having been raised on the wing of his grandfather, Amir al-Mumineen Ali Ibn Abi Talib and then fostered by the light of his uncle Hasan and father Husayn, Imam Zain Al-Abideen sharpened his innate knowledge of Islam, ascertained the moral qualities of the Prophet, and flourished to be the radiance of Islam.

At the tragedy of Karbala, Imam Zain Al-Abideen remained the only male survivor of the household of the Prophet. After having been taken captive by the Ummayyad ruler, Yazid Ibn Muawiyah, and imprisoned, he delivered a most powerful sermon, one in which broke the shackles of his imprisonment and brought the reality of Karbala to the Muslim nation. A courageous orator, firing theological, political, and ethical truths about the ordeal he and his family had experienced at the hands of Yazid and his army. In the courtyard of Yazid's palace in Damascus, his words captured the heart of the people when he said, "I am the son of Mecca and Madinah, I am the son of ZamZam and Safa,...I am the son of the one to whom the Almighty reveled what He revealed..." The profound words he delivered exposed Yazid's true actions at Karbala and forced the despotic ruler to release him and his womenfolk ending one year of imprisonment.

Imam Zain Al-Abideen never forgot the tragedy that had befallen his family in Karbala. For the remainder of his life he constantly wept for the death of his father, Imam Husayn, his family members, and close companions. A man once asked him when his grief would end for his family, sorrowfully he replied, "Jacob, the prophet had twelve sons, and Allah made one of them disappear. His eyes turned white [blind] from constant weeping; his hair turned grey from sorrow; and his back became bent from gloom, though his son was alive in this world. However,

I watched while my father, my brother, my uncle, and seventeen members of my family were slaughtered all around me. How should my sorrow come to an end?"

Upon his return home to Madinah, Imam Zain Al-Abideen dedicated his life in pure and full worship of Allah. The devotional act of prayers earned him the title of *Sayyid as-Sajideen*, Master of Prostration. He would pray for long durations, especially during the nights, and would pray many prayers of gratitude towards Allah. His piety was exceedingly remarkable; his close companions would often remark that his saintliness was matchless. He would be found trembling, weak, and pale when preparing and offering his prayers to Allah. When asked why this was, he replied, "Know you not before whom I stand in prayer, and with whom I hold discourse?"

From prostration to words, he left an eternal legacy for humanity in the form of literary beauty that deal with the struggle of the soul and temporal life. The invocations penetrate the deepest emotions and secretive acts of the soul that seeks salvation, redemption, and Allah's grace. Every reader can find himself in the words. Eloquently, he captures every person's fear, every person's struggle, every person's ill, and every person's plea through words by which are made difficult to express, yet heavily remain ragging in every person's heart. In a most distressing cry, he would cup his hands towards heaven and call upon his Lord to relief him of his pain. In one of his treasured supplication, he cries out, "O Allah, take to Thyself from my soul what will purify it and leave for my soul that of my soul that will set it right, for my soul will perish unless Thou preserves it."²⁷

His words of supplication became a canonical book entitled "As-Saheefah As-Sajjadeeya, the Perfect Book of The Prostration," referred to by scholars as the "Psalms of the Household of Muhammad." Scholars have compiled more than sixty-five commentaries on the book. The fifty-four artistic supplications found in it stand as a lantern of moral guidelines, heart-wrenching pleas to Allah, beautiful devotions, social and cultural affairs, and scientific points. For over a thousand years, it has become the prayer manual of Muslims. They were also the pulpit by which his supplications represented the medium of political and ideological opposition of the ruling government.

The treasure work of his devotional supplications became the venue by which he preserved and taught Islam. Unable to fully teach Islam openly because of the watchful eye of the Ummayyad government, Imam Zain Al-Abideen took a more subtly approach of preaching through prayers supplications, and private teachings. His lifestyle was based on Islamic ethics and principles, and thus, he was able to enlighten the people towards Islam. He lived an ascetic life and secretly performed charitable acts for the destitute and wayfarer. Yet, he remained the forerunner in Islamic sciences, such as *hadith*, jurisprudence, philosophy, theology, and Quranic interpretation.

²⁷ Imam Zain al-Abideen supplication on "Noble Moral Traits & Acts Pleasing to Allah"

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir

Knowledge

Being the only Imam to have a paternal and maternal union to Fatima al-Zahra,²⁸ the fifth imam, Muhammad Ibn Ali, also known as *al-Baqir al-Uloo* (The Expounder of Knowledge)²⁹ cherished and devoted his life to knowledge. He fathered the branch of Islamic Jurisprudence and commenced the grandest Islamic academy in Madinah. Under his teachings, many prominent Muslim scholars and theologians went on to master manuscripts of Islamic literature and science. He valued and respected Muslims scholars and entreated upon the people to fraternize themselves with knowledgeable scholars in order to learn from them. He equated learning as a means of protection, knowledge as a form of worship, studying as glorifying God, and teaching it to others as almsgiving and proximity to God.

Prophet Muhammad had prophesized about his birth and named him “Biq al-Ilm (the one who splits open knowledge).” Well-renowned Muslim scholars and historians attest to his intellectual insight. Ibn Hajar al-Haythmi, a famous scholar says, “Imam Muhammad al-Baqir has disclosed the secrets of knowledge and wisdom and unfolded the principles of spiritual and religious guidance. Nobody can deny his exalted character, his God-given knowledge, his divinely gifted wisdom and his obligation and gratitude towards spreading of knowledge. He was a sacred and highly talented spiritual leader, and for this reason, he was popularly titled 'al-Baqir' which means 'the expounder of knowledge'.”

Imam al-Baqir nurtured an intellectual and scientific renaissance that would birth Muslim sages and forever influence Islamic science. During the time of the Imam, there were no intellectual circles or religious science. Thus, he preached, lectured, wrote, and debated publicly and privately amongst layman, intellectuals, professionals, thinkers, and historians. Scholars and ordinary Muslims flocked to his insightfulness and logical interpretation of Islamic issues. He developed the scientific arts of philosophy, jurisprudence, theology, and medicine. Although, historically, he is most famous for his contributions towards Islamic Jurisprudence and collections of *hadith*, but he did not exclusively confine himself to them, he also tended to literature, philosophy, and reason. Within the sacred institutional walls of his university, his voice echoed on issues of human rights and ethics. He lectured, authored, and wrote treatise on human rights and ethics.

The Imam discoursed fully on many topics such as the nature of the soul (*nafs*), and the nature and attributes of God. On monotheism, he preached that human reason was incapable to encompass fully the nature of God. That reason has limits just as the eye is limited in sight.

²⁸ His mother was the daughter of Imam Hasan

²⁹ Literally means to rip or cleave open

Imam al-Baqir was sincerely devoted to teaching Muslims about their faith. Living in a time when the Muslim governments were occupied with internal political fractions, the intellectual and ethical venues were being ignored, and thus, Muslims suffered of not knowing the ethical and moral spirit of Islam. Muslims, at that time, were also lacking in some fundamental observances. A historical study shows that rulers, scholars, and ordinary people lacked basic Islamic affairs and were irresolute in them even in worship.³⁰ An example can be witnessed when a scholar delivered a sermon on the pulpit of Basra in the end of the month of Ramadan. He said, "Take out the alms of your fasting." Surprisingly, the people did not know that. Thus, he said, "Is there anybody from Madinah here? Let him stand up to teach his bothers, for they do not know anything about the obligatory *zakat fitr*."³¹ Thus, Imam al-Baqir sensed the urgency to disseminate Muslim scholars throughout the Islamic states.

He had a profound effect on Quranic exegesis. He was its master. Innately able to discern the origin and circumstances of the verses, he dissected its underlining root and elaborated extensively on its meaning, and then articulated the denotation easily to others. One of his students, Muhammad Ibn Muslim once made a reference to the Quranic verse, "So, ask the people of the reminder if you do not know," he said, "Some of us claim that this verse concerns the Jews and the Christians." He said, "Therefore they summon you to their religion." Then the Imam pointed to his chest and said, "We are the people of the reminder and we are the people who are questioned."³²

One of the greatest contributions the Imam made towards Islam was the school of Islamic Jurisprudence. He orchestrated the development and study of this field by providing Muslim scholars, historians, and thinkers with essential guidelines in deducing Islamic laws to fit contemporary time and circumstantial situations. Under his direction, what Islamic Jurisprudence primarily did was make a direct connection of the *hadiths* to the Prophet. He personally overlooked to the gathering and recording of the Prophet's *hadith*, at a time when it was strictly forbidden by the ruling party. One of his students, Jabir Ibn Yazid al-Jufi reported seventy thousand traditions from him.³³ Islamic Jurisprudence then provided flexibility of the Islamic laws, it opened the door of *Ijtihad* (deducing religious opinions), and allowed the judgment of reason to preside rulings.

Contemporary and early Muslim jurists heavily relied on the jurisprudence literature that Imam al-Baqir left behind, such as al-Hadaiq, al-Jawahir, Mustamsak al-Urwat, and al-Withqa. They reported many traditions on his authority. The founding Hanafi School (*Madhab*) owes a great deal of its teachings to Imam al-Baqir because its founder, Abu Hanifah Numan Ibn Thabit was a pupil of Imam al-Baqir. A report states, "Abu Hanifah sat for a long time at Imam Muhammad al-Baqir's feet and acquired from him much valuable knowledge of law (*fiqh*) and *hadith* not

³⁰ The Life of Imam Al-Baqir

³¹ Ibn Hazm, al-Ahkam fi Usul al-Ahkam, vol. 2, p. 131

³² Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 211

³³ Mizan al-Itidal, vol. 1, p. 383

available anywhere else.”³⁴ The Imam’s name can even be found in the chain of narrators (*isnad*) in many of the collections of *hadith* in Sunni *sahih* books. Undoubtedly, Shia jurists depend on the Imam’s narrated *hadiths* when they conclude legal precepts and give religious opinions. Imam al-Baqir also contributed to the rich Shia traditions found in *Wasail al-Shia*, *al-Tahdhib*, and *Man La Yahdarahu al-Faqih*. Until now, these works continue to be regarded as important references for Islamic jurisprudence. In fact, and worth mentioning, the Shiites were the first to write down jurisprudence because the imams of the Ahlul Bayt urged them to write down their judgments and religious opinions.

Ilm al-Usul (Science of Reasoning) became his second greatest contribution to Islamic sciences after jurisprudence because *Ijtihad* (deducing religious opinions) relies on it. Sayyid Hasan al-Sadr commented, “Imam Abu Jafar, Mohammed Ibn Ali al-Baqir, was the first to open the chapters of this science and to split open its problems.”

One example of *Ilm al-Usul* can be found in the “Rule of Passing (Qaidat al-Tajawiz).” This rule means that the doubt occurs in the ensuing act. For example, a person may doubt his recitation after he has bowed down. Concerning this rule, many traditions were narrated on the authority of Imam al-Baqir that the person should pay no attention to this doubt and to go on with his prayer.³⁵

Another one of his milestones was the establishment of an Islamic seminary in Madinah. Personally, he took great care and overlooked to the welfare of his students. He invested his knowledge and time in molding Muslim theologians. Prominent Muslim jurists such as, Aban Ibn Taghlab, Muhammad Ibn Muslem, Abu Basir al-Asadi, al-Fadel Ibn Sayyar, Maruf Ibn Khrbudh, and Zarara Ibn Ayun were just some of his pupils who compiled books on different branches of science and arts under his instruction and guidance.

He infused scholars with the passion, drive, and rewards of spreading Islamic knowledge to the masses. He considered the *zakat* (alms) of knowledge is to teach the servants of Allah. He reminded, “The scholar of whose knowledge people make use is better than seventy thousand worshippers.” He also encouraged Muslims to adhere to the scholars. He said, “Learn knowledge from scholars. Then teach it to your brothers as the scholars have taught it to you.”³⁶

The Imam abhorred ignorance and stagnation of the mind. He encouraged others to discuss, debate, and seek knowledge. He placed knowledge as a form of worshipping God. He reported that four persons will be rewarded out of knowledge: the questioner, the speaker, the listener, and the one who loves them.

Knowledge is the most powerful tool of understanding and prosperity of life. Imam al-Baqir knew very well how knowledge contributed towards the survival and moral felicity of

³⁴ Sirat-e-Numan

³⁵ The Life of Imam Al-Baqir

³⁶ Nasikh al-Tawarikh, vol. 2, p. 205

humankind. To him, knowledge is a treasure and the key is the question, and thus, he spent his entire life dedicated to teaching and spreading knowledge. He established a commanding university, graduated hundreds of prominent scholars, and saw to it that the public was taught accordingly about their faith. Today, Muslim theologians are indebted toward his contributions of Islamic sciences. Without the Science of Jurisprudence, Islamic scholars would have been at a loss in resolving contemporary issues.

Imam Jafar As-Sadiq

Piousness & Educator

PIOUSNESS

Many figures in history have contributed vastly towards the advancement of human civilization, from famous scientists, such as the great philosopher Aristotle to Benjamin Franklin, who discovered electricity. Such people have undoubtedly supplied humankind with an abundance of knowledge and better living conditions, but the best contribution one can make to humanity is to improve oneself by living a life of piety. To whom do we look for as living a model life of piety? We should look into the lives of those whom God had set the example in, someone like Imam Jafar Ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq who is known for his impeccable piety.

A man of great piety and intellect, Imam as-Sadiq not only left a great legacy on Islamic science but also left inspiring imprints of humanistic behavior. He believed that the most perfect of men in intellect is the best of them in ethics. Our ethical behavior is not merely found in the number of prayers we perform or in the number of days we fast, but rather it is found in the inner core of our soul that manifests itself through our actions.

Attaining piety is attaining closeness to Allah. “And those who are foremost (in faith) will be foremost the Hereafter. These will be those nearest to Allah.”³⁷ Imam as-Sadiq encouraged his followers to live piously in this world in hope of being close to Allah in this life and the Hereafter. The Imam said that if you want to be the closest to Allah, you have to be humble and modest in all your relations and deeds with others. These core elements constitute the necessity for human perfection. When a person is humble (and modest), they are in essence exhaling truthfulness, and to be a truthful person one must be in the constant state of God’s *consciousness* (*taqwa*). In his traditions, the Imam advises on ways to attain humbleness. He advised us to visit the weak and to **oppose arrogance with humbleness by dropping an argument even if you were in the right. That the sign of an honored (humble) person is that he is soft in his speech and dealings.**

Imam as-Sadiq was keen on establishing an Islamic ethical system that has to do with how the individual behaves. This concept was institutionalized by the Imam in how he modeled his personal life. He advised us to “start our day with a good deed” and to carry that throughout the day. He turns our attention and focus on treating our parents with the upmost honor, reminding us that their care is a form of worshiping the Almighty.

In his work ethics, he was known for his honesty in trade and physical work. Following in the teachings of Islam, the Imam physically labored to sustain himself and his family. He did not believe that others should carry out his responsibility of sustenance. A close companion once came to offer the Imam relief from tending to his pasture. Politely the Imam refused the man’s

³⁷ Holy Quran, 56:10-11

assistance by saying, "Everyone must work for his own livelihood instead of depending on others. I must earn my livelihood, so that I am not be needy towards others." He brought dignity to labored work by saying, "It is no insult to bear the heat of the summer sun for the sake of my household." He had much respect for the poor whose body labored more profusely than the rich did.

Laziness in Islam is frowned upon. Allah has provided us with an incredible body that is built to toil physically and intellectually. We will be questioned and held accountable on how we sustained ourselves. According to tradition, Allah loves to see the sweat on the forehead of a person whom labors for their family. Depending on others for financial support is a violation against the Creator, a humiliation of the self, and a burden on society. Certainly, the Islamic duty of the community is to care for those who are displaced of work or disabled, but idleness is not something to be condoned.

Once the Imam hired a man to do some trade for him in Egypt. The man bought some local goods for Egyptian clients and then headed towards Egypt with a caravan.

When he reached Egypt, he met some businesspersons, and discovered that the goods he brought to sell in Egypt had become very rare and were in high demand. So he made a deal with the other businesspersons to create an exclusive pricing gauge that would return a 100 percent profit, which they did.

When he returned, he gave the Imam two bags of money. The Imam asked, "What is this?"

The man said, "One is the money you gave me, the other is the profit."

Imam said, "This is too much. Tell me, how did you do it?"

He told the Imam about the pricing deal with the other businesspersons. Imam said, "You made deals so that you could create an unethical market among the people and take advantage of their needs! No. I will never accept such profits."

Then he took his own bag back and did not touch the other and said, "I have nothing to do with the other one," and said to the man, "Being in combat is much easier than earning lawful money!"

Imam as-Sadiq lived an ethical life that was based on hospitality, charity, the helping of the needy in secrecy, the fair treatment of the relatives, forgiveness, patience and fortitude.

EDUCATOR

Madinah was the most important center of Islamic learning and scholarship during Imam as-Sadiq's time. The Islamic university in which his father, Imam al-Baqir had founded was thriving with Muslim sages and intellects. Imam as-Sadiq carried on as its master educator and took it to greater heights of learning. Hundreds of scholars, commentators of the Quran, historians, and philosophers lined the courtyard to gain from his knowledge. The founders of two

notable Schools of Thought, Abu Hanifah and Malik Ibn Anas learned under the guidance of the Imam. The Jafari school of thought, the dominant legal (*fiqh*) school of the Twelver (*Ithna 'ashariyyah*) was named after Imam as-Sadiq. An estimated four thousand scholars went on to teach Islam to the masses and academically contributed towards Islamic science. Much of the Prophetic traditions cited amongst Muslim scholars are directly linked to his authority, a feature no other Muslim figure maintains.

Imam Jafar as-Sadiq was far ahead of his time. Deeply enriched with Divine knowledge, he made incredible contributions to various branches of knowledge. He believed that philosophy and science were two different subjects. His comments were, "Science gives us definite and exact results even if they are small and insignificant. Nevertheless, philosophy serves no practical purpose and gives no useful results. However, it is beyond the scope of science to discover the ultimate truth; but it is within the domain of philosophy to do that." And of course, the "truth" was recognition of Allah. He formulated methods of diagnosis and treatment in the field of medicine, detailing the extraordinary development of the embryo and advising mothers to hold their baby on their left side. He gave rise to the famous Arab chemist, Jabir Ibn Hayyan (known in Europe as Geber), who said throughout his books, "I acquired this knowledge from my master, Jafar Ibn Muhammad, the leader of the people in his time."³⁸ Twelve hundred years ago (and confirmed by science in the last few hundred years) he spoke about the presence of oxygen in the air, and in his theory on light, the Imam said light reflected by different objects comes to us, but only a part of the rays enter our eyes. That is the reason why we do not see distant objects clearly. The Imam's superb knowledge not only attracted learners of his time but also contemporary ones, The Research Committee of Strasbourg published a French thesis about the contribution of Imam Jafar as-Sadiq to science, philosophy, and literature.

The men of knowledge and piety saw in Imam Jafar al-Sadiq as a leader, scholar and an unmatched educator. No other man had gained the same great and high position that Imam Jafar as-Sadiq had during that time. The Imam had a special and unique status in the eyes of the people at the time. He was the illustrious symbol of the Quran, a noble descendant of the Holy Prophet, the rightful representative of Ahlul Bayt, and impeccable model of piety.

³⁸ Abdullah Nima. *Falasifat ash Shi'a*, Beirut, 1966. p. 196

Imam Musa al-Kathim

Tolerance

The dehumanization of man is his act of intolerance. It is intolerance that brings out the worse and most heinous crimes man has ever known to commit. Wars, atrocities, ethnic cleansing, racial and religious prejudice, family violence, and other notorious acts all share a common feature—intolerance. It was Satan's downfall of Allah's grace. Satan could not tolerate Adam or Allah's command to show respect towards Adam. Humans have all practiced it in one form or another even in the minutest form we have some guilt. At times, we may have been intolerant of our parents, children, neighbor, colleagues, opinions, nations, even the poor and disabled.

In 2010, a rising tide of intolerance towards Islam and Muslims is increasing in America and Europe. Since Imam al-Kathim, the seventh imam of Ahlul Bayt is known for his exceptional level of tolerance, what would he have done or guided the ummah to do had he been living amongst us today?

In hindsight, perhaps his era is no different from ours. He too lived in a time of religious and political intolerance. It may have been even more insufferable because of the personal death threats he lived under. Nonetheless, we should look back into the life of the Imam al-Kathim and learn from him on how to combat intolerance and bring a life of peaceful co-existence amongst people.

Combating intolerance and nurturing tolerance is a trademark of Imam Musa al-Kathim. He was named Kathim because he was the epitome of tolerance. Al-Kathim means the one who holds his temper and controls his anger. He laid the guidelines and manners on how tolerance should be practiced. One of the counter measures the imam used to fight intolerance was to exercise love, peace, understanding, and forgiveness. He used to be of exceptional manners that were similar to the great morals of the Prophet himself. Like the Prophet, throughout his life he held firmly his temper and controlled his anger. Even when faced with persecution and harm he exercised unmeasured tolerance, even towards those who mistreated him he met them with goodness and charitable acts.

Tolerance begins with recognition and understanding that human beings are born with inalienable rights. In the Holy Quran, Allah eloquently says, "We have honored the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of our creation." Long before America's ancestors documented the Declaration of Independence, which stands as the balance of justice and fairness to all human beings, Allah states this in His final revelation. Allah established that human beings are innately born with dignity and honor, and they have the right to access work and to be fed by Allah's bounties. He also states, "To every People have We appointed rites and ceremonies which they must follow, let them not then dispute with you on

the matter, but do invite (them) to your Lord: for you are assuredly on the Right Way. If they do wrangle with you, say, ‘God knows best what it is you are doing. God will judge between you on the Day of Judgment concerning the matters in which you differ’.” (Quran Al-Hajj 21:76-69)

Imam al-Kathim upheld Allah’s openness towards all. He believed that everyone has hope of Allah’s salvation and thus he remained a haven for those who sought redemption (*tawbah*) and righteousness. He sincerely dealt with others with wisdom and beautiful preaching and gracefully discussed matters of faith objectively and without judgment. He knew that faith could never be enforced upon others, even the Prophet could not enforce his ways on others, the Prophet’s mission was to convey Allah’s message, “Say, Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger: but if you turn away, he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and you for that placed on you. If you obey him, you shall be on right guidance. The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear Message.” (An-Nur 24:54)

He did not turn his enemy out; rather, he embraced them with love, kindness, and tolerance. Even those who cursed and caused him harm, he embraced and forgave them. Just as we raise our hands in seeking forgiveness from the Almighty, “Hasten to forgiveness from your Lord,” (Holy Quran 57:21) so too were his arms raised in forgiveness and not revenge. He clung to lenience, for he believed that lenience is felicity. When faced with anger he extinguished it with love because he believed that anger was the root of evil. He became a friend of his enemy just as Allah had said would be the result of those who do well unto others, “And not alike are the good and the evil. Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! he between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend.” Whenever someone reviled him he would send to them money.

He was a true follower and model of Islamic ethics and morals. His voice was soft, his heart was warm, and his tongue either praised or refrained in silence. He knew how to penetrate the heart of a distressed soul. Not once did he speak ill or harshly to anyone. Even in the most unpleasant situations, he was seen smiling bearing the pain gracefully. This was in accordance with the saying of his distant grandfather Imam Ali that the faithful keeps his grief confined in his heart with a smile on his face. His aim was perchance their hearts were open to be inspired. Hence, he used to deal with them in the best and kindest manner hoping to lead them to the right path.

His most treasured moments were when he was able to bring assistance and relief to others. He was called “the gateway of needs” for he was never asked for help by anybody who was in need whom he did not respond favorably to. “The expiation of any ruler is to show kindness to his people,” he once said. He not only provided solutions to the needs of the people, but more importantly, taught them ways to solve them. Even if an enemy knocked on his door, he would provide relief and assistance. He lived according to his words, “The most perfect faithful believers are the most well-mannered.”

One day Imam Kathim was passing by the tent of a peasant Nomad. He went up to him and said, “Salam-Alaikum,” in a warm and friendly manner.

Upon leaving he said good-bye to him in a very kind manner with these words, “If there is anything I can do for you, I’m more than willing to do it.”

One of the followers of the imam who saw this attitude said, “Is it suitable for you, the son of the messenger of Allah, to sit and talk with a man of no reputation and make such an offer as, ‘if you need me in any work, I’m more than willing to do it’? Is it right for a man of great dignity to talk to a man like that?”

The imam replied, “This is one of Allah’s creatures. Allah has created all men equal. Besides, as a Muslim, he is our brother in faith. After all, life does not remain the same forever. One who needs help today may be the one who will be able to help us tomorrow when we need help! If we don’t pay any attention to him today, one day when we may need him and we will be embarrassed to ask him for help.”

This Imam filled his age with all kinds of knowledge. He is well-known for this religious edict.

Imam Musa al-Ridha

Prudence & Respect

Imam Ali son of Musa al-Ridha was born in the richest period of Islamic thought and culture and he filled that era he lived in with his knowledge, wisdom, and guidance. He inherited the knowledge of his great grandfather, thus becoming its pioneering fountainhead that quenched the thirst of those who were thirsty for knowledge about Islam and life.

In the second century of Hira, when Imam Musa al-Ridha was already Imam of the Muslims, the movement of knowledge and thought spread throughout the Muslim nation. During this period of copious knowledge, well-known innovative men who specialized in different branches of Islamic knowledge lived. Various branches of scholarship excelled with which he provided the seekers of knowledge and the thinkers of the time. Scholars indulged in writing books. A new writings on hadith (traditions of the Prophet) and the life of the Prophet and his descendants and companions, appeared. Research, the writing down of Islamic oral knowledge, categorization of knowledge and science, were activated. Schools of thought crystallized, branches of philosophy and ideological currents surfaced. Translation from other languages of new ideas and theories became common. Schools and study groups were set up. They were crowded with both teachers and students who would discuss every branch of knowledge.

The religious scholars and learned men found refuge in Imam Musa al-Ridha, who argued with commentators, discussed with philosophy students and masters, refuted the claims and suspicions cast by the atheists, issued guidelines to the legal jurists, and stated the basis of *shari'ah* and principles of monotheism. In one of his famous titles he is known as, "Alim Al Muhammad" (scholar of Prophet's progeny). He was in continuous movement, the axis of guidance, the center of illumination, and the source of originality and purity. His teaching assembly was the meeting place of knowledge-seekers and great scholars, and that his word was the final word that settled disputes. He was such an outstanding and unique scholar that when other religious scholars could not answer a question they would tell the people to go to the imam and ask him "for he knows what we do not." It has been recorded that his companions and students complied over eighteen thousand questions in which he was able to answer. Imam al-Ridha said, "I used to sit with them at *al-Rawdhah*. The religious scholars of Madinah were numerous. But when one of them failed to find a solution to any question, all of them would refer to me. They would send me the questions and I would answer them." His knowledge was not restricted to a single branch of religious knowledge. It included all aspects such as theology, jurisprudence and all other scientific and religious branches. His father, Imam Musa Ibn Jafar, used to tell his children, "This is your brother Ali Ibn Musa, the scholar of Muhammad's family. Ask him about your religion, and learn what he tells you."

History narrates a great deal of his scholarly stances and intellectual discourses in which he achieved victory over those who opposed the Divine Message. Assemblies would be held, to which prominent Muslim scholars, preachers, teachers, and leaders of schools of thought were invited to discuss, argue, and debate matters with Imam al-Ridha who was a constant participator

in these activities. At one gathering, a number of the best theologians and jurists were invited to contest him, but he trumped them all.

Good manners constitute a significant part of one's personality. They unveil the innermost nature of the individual, highlighting the extent of its purity of origin when it translates belief into action. Imam al-Ridha was characterized by a most noble personality, which won him the love of the commoners as well as elites.

His moral qualities were exceptional, one of his companions said, "I have never seen the imam rude to any person. And he never interrupted anyone's talk. And he never refused to offer a favor he knew he was capable of doing. He never cursed any of his slaves. He never laughed in a high voice. His laugh was but a smile."

As for his humbleness and respect of the poor and especially for the servants and slaves, traditions have stated that he used to sit with them at the same table refusing to let them sit at a separate one for we have "the same God, the same father and the same mother. And Allah rewards the people for what they do." The imam was emphasizing that people are equal; we are all the children of Adam and Eve and the servants of Allah. The only difference between us is in what we do. He also said to one of his companions, who asked him not to sit with his servant at the dinner table. "I do not think that I am better than this (slave) because I am related to the Messenger, except by my good deeds." The imam several times declared the hadith of the Prophet that a slave can be better than a person from his own family if his deeds are better. This gives us a general rule in Islam that lineage no matter how great it is does not make an individual better than others. Thus, the imam did not behave in an arrogant way towards those who were socially in a lower rank, since they are his brothers in Islam and humanity.

Imam Ali al-Ridha's life contains countless anecdotes of this sort. A man once declared, "By God, you are the best in the world." The imam checked him by saying, "Don't you declare an oath. Any man who is more pious than me can be better than me."

Imam Muhammad Taqi

Individuality & Generosity

More than forty years of the life of Imam Ali al-Ridha had passed and still he did not have a son. Muslims were showing restlessness and anxiety and praying to God to grant the imam that son who was being awaited, since they had heard from their previous imams that the ninth imam is the son of eighth imam. Imam al-Ridha would say, “God will give me a son who will be my heir and the imam to follow me.”

At last, the waiting of Muslims ended and the ninth holy imam was born on the 10th of Rajab, 195 H in Medinah. He was the only son of Imam Ali al-Ridha.

The Holy Imam has many titles; the two most notable are Al-Jawad and At-Taqi.

Once when Imam Muhammad al-Taqi was among the children of his age playing on the road they all saw the Abbasid caliph Mamun suddenly approaching. They quickly dispersed from the place and hid themselves except for the little Imam al-Taqi.

Mamun asked him, “Why haven't you run away like everybody else?”

Imam replied, “The path is not narrow that it would become wider by me moving away from it, nor have I committed any crime that I should run away from you. And I don't think that you are the sort who would punish an innocent person!”

Seeing the handsome and illuminated face of the young boy and listening to his bold reply, Mamun was wonderstruck. Therefore, he asked, “What is your name?”

The young boy replied, “Muhammad.”

“Whose son are you?” asked Mamun.

“I am the son of Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha,” replied the young boy.

When Mamun heard this, he praised the eighth imam and went away.

The span of the life of Imam Muhammad al-Jawad was shorter than that of his predecessors as well as his successors. He was born in a period full of events, political situations, and conflicts. He became imam at the age of eight, and sadly, poisoned and killed at the age of twenty-five in 225 H.

A careful study of his short life shows that he made enormous contributions to Islam and his literary attainments were many. He observed and maintained Islamic requisites of equality and

imparted true Islamic learning to those interested in the acquisition of knowledge, especially to the scholars of religion and the like, and guided the people to the right path.

His ethical qualities commanded great respect and esteem. Imam Muhammad al-Taqi occupied the highest position in human virtues. He was the symbol of the Prophet Muhammad's affability and Imam Ali's attainments. He taught us through his behavior, a very important lesson of self-control despite all the riches that surrounded him. He emphasized a life of simplicity under all circumstances. During his time, he lived under the most distinguished monarch of the time who offered him lavish living quarters but the imam refused to stay in royal palaces and lived instead in a small house, thus maintaining the Islamic values of virtue and ethics of a simple and humble life. His hereditary qualities comprised of gallantry, boldness, charity, learning, forgiveness and tolerance. The brightest and most outstanding phases of his nature and character were to show hospitality and courtesy to all without discrimination and to treat foes fairly. It was customary for the imam to meet everyone humbly and secretly fulfill the needs of the poor, homeless, and orphans.

The door of the Imam al-Taqi was always open to deliver benevolence. Like his holy ancestors, the imam had a very generous heart. Many eligible poor people of Medinah used to get a stipend from the imam. No applicant went dejected from his door. For the people in need in other places, the imam used to send funds to his representatives. The deprived ones of Medinah, in addition to, monetary help, also received free meals but all this charity was performed in such a secret way that no one knew who was behind it. On most of the nights, the imam himself roamed the streets and alleys of Medinah carrying provisions for the poor. Whenever he found a needy person, he would assist him by either covering his face or from behind a door or a wall.

During the eight years of his stay in Baghdad, Imam Muhammad Taqi regularly imparted religious education to the people. Most of the days people remained in his presence from morning until night. One day he had a high fever, when he was informed of some people waiting for him outside to narrate their problems. The family members of the imam said that it was not the time to meet him and they would tell the people to come sometime later. The imam said, "No, maybe someone is having an urgent need to meet me." So he came out with the support of others and in that same high fever listened to the people. One of them said, "My father is on the death bed. He wanted to make some bequest regarding his property in your presence and to see you for the last time. But how can I request you to come while you have a severe fever?" The imam said, "I will come." His family protested how he could go out in such a condition but the imam said that he would walk slowly. Thus, he went keeping his hands on the shoulders of two other men, one on each side.

He spent most of his time sitting in the Mosque of the Prophet where Muslims came to avail from his knowledge and preaching. The narrators of hadith and other students of theology came to enquire about religious sciences and the imam guided them by explaining every complicated

matter. The world saw that Imam Jafar al-Sadiq's successor, seated on the same mat, was guiding the people towards piety, which was the hallmark of Islam.



Imam Ali Al-Naqi

Forbearance & Submission

Imam Ali al-Naqi was born in Medinah in 827 (214 H) to the ninth Imam, Muhammad al-Taqi. He was only eight when his father died, and like his father, he became the imam at a very young age. He served the longest period of Imamate (besides the 12th Imam), 34 years that can be divided into two parts: 17 years of freedom and 17 years under arrest.

He lived most of his life in forbearance of the animosity that haunted the family of the Holy Prophet. In 848, Al-Mutawakkil, the Abbasid caliph wrote a letter to the imam, which showed sincere attachment towards him and exhibited an intense desire to pay homage to him. The caliph invited the imam to come to capital of Samarra. The army contingent that was sent to accompany him was allegedly meant for ensuring a safe as well as a dignified journey for him. However, when the imam reached Samarra, and Mutawakkil was informed of his arrival, his initial and regrettable attitude was that instead of welcoming the imam or at least, receiving him in his court, he ordered him to be lodged in Khan-us-Salik (which means a place for housing beggars) for three days. This gives an idea of the nature of the place where he was made to stay. It was a dilapidated structure in a desolate place far from the city where the imam was forced to stay, although the pious soul of the imam never considered it humiliating to sit by the side of the poor and indigent persons. Thereafter, Mutawakkil kept him under detention in the custody of his chamberlain.

Imam Ali Naqi resided in Samarra for thirty years. During this period, he had to bear every kind of hardship and difficulty at the hands of the Abbasid rulers, especially at the hands of Mutawakkil, the most oppressive one. However, the imam remained patient and thankful. Seeing the atrocities of Mutawakkil and the patience of the imam the people were much astounded. In spite of the fact that the imam had hundreds of visitors from among his followers, he never mentioned his woes to them.

Mutawakkil was always trying to find means to discredit the imam. One day while his court was in session, he told Ibn Sikkit to ask the imam such a question in the presence of all the people that he cannot reply. Ibn Sikkit posed many questions to the imam one after another. The imam replied to all the questions, but since Ibn Sikkit had other intentions, he remained unrelenting and continued to say that the imam has not replied to him satisfactorily. Along with this, he passed some unbecoming remarks about the imam. The imam observed forbearance.

Imam Ali Naqi set an admirable example of trust in God, ignoring all worldly gains. In spite of his permanent residence in Samarra, the imam neither made a protest to the caliph, nor did he ask for any favors. The same worshipping and hermit-like life that he led during his imprisonment was passed in this state of house arrest. The tyrant changed his behavior but the saint had maintained his own. Even in such circumstances, he was not allowed to live peacefully. His followers were not allowed to approach him openly to gain the true Islamic knowledge from the

imam. Nevertheless, he endured all hardships for the sake of giving knowledge to all who sought it from him.

His submission to his faith led him to dig up in his own grave by his prayer mat. When people entered his home, they would inquire about the grave to which he would say, “In order to remember my end I keep the grave before my eyes.”

Like his ancestors, Imam Ali al-Naqi was a lover of the remembrance of Allah. When Mutawakil summoned him from Medinah to his capital and put him into prison, he appointed a stonehearted person named Zarraqi as the warden who had no mercy for anyone. Nevertheless, he was astounded by his excellent manners and his worships all day and through the night. Gradually he became the imam's devotee and supporter. When Mutawakil 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 replied, “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 and sleep whole 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 favorite 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 Quran 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 have not seen anyone like him.”

The imam was unique in asceticism, devotion and prayers. He had a great attachment and affiliation with the holy Quran and spent most of his time in prayer. Whenever he was free from the works of the people, he would recite Quran. He conducted people with smiling and bloomed face and when he walked, he took slow steps. He attended and helped the afflicted ones.

The quarter of the city where al-Hadi lived was known as al-Askar since it was chiefly occupied by the army (*askar*) and, therefore, al-Hadi and his son Hasan are both referred to as “Askari” or together as “Askariyayn (the two Askaris).”

He would live out his life under house arrest, and died at the age of 39. Like his predecessors, it was by poison. His son, who was also the only person to attend his funeral, buried him at his house in Samarra (Iraq). His burial spot is now the Al-Askari Mosque, one of the holiest shrines for Muslims.

Imam Hasan Al-Askari

Humbleness and Courage

“Generosity has a limit, when crossed becomes extravagance; caution has a limit when crossed becomes cowardice; thriftiness has a limit, when crossed becomes miserliness; courage has a limit, when crossed becomes fool-hardiness. Let this moral lesson suffice: refrain from doing anything which you would disapprove of if done by someone else.”
Imam Hasan Al-Askari

At the age of twenty-two, Imam Hassan al-Askari became the 11th Imam of Ahlul Bayt. Like his father, Imam Ali al-Naqvi, he was born in Medinah but raised under house arrest in Samarra. His Imamate lasted a short six years.

He was called Al-Askari, because he lived in a city called Al-Askar, known nowadays as Samarra. The Abbasids had built the city for their soldiers (*askar*) to live in; therefore, the one who used to live there was called “Al-Askari (the soldier).”

His only son is Mohammad Mahdi (Mahdi, the promised one) who will upon his advent fill up the world with equity, justice, and fairness.

Imam Hasan Al-Askari was one of that illustrious series of the immaculate infallible each member of whom displayed the moral excellence of human perfection. He was peerless in knowledge, forbearance, forgiveness, generosity, sacrifice and piety. Whenever the Abbasid caliph asked anybody about his captive Imam Hasan al-Askari, he was told that the imam fasted during the day and worshipped during the night, and that his tongue uttered no word but remembrance of his Creator.

During the brief periods of freedom and stay at home, people approached him hoping to avail from his benevolence, and they went back well rewarded. Once when the Abbasid caliph asked one of his ministers about the descendants of Imam Ali, he reported, “I do not know anybody among them who is more distinguished than Hasan al-Askari. None can surpass him in dignity, knowledge, piety and abstinence, nor can anybody match him in the point of nobleness majestic grandeur, modesty and honesty.”

Imam Hasan al Askari’s life from childhood to adulthood was spent in a house where his father Imam Ali al-Naqi was to remain under house arrest. Despite this close guard on the imam, he conducted his duties as imam from inside the house. He taught people Quran and instructed his followers the true teachings of Islam as taught by the Prophet of Islam and his Ahlul Bayt. In fact, Imam Hasan al-Askari wrote a complete Tafseer of the Quran which was mentioned by many scholars, historians and exegetes.

Imam Hasan al-Askari was of exceeding humble nature. He once said, “As for those who accept to sit in a place other than the first row of a session, God and His angels will bless them until they leave that session.” He used to meet the high and low, all with utmost humility and simple

demeanor. This was the reason that every class of people of Samarra used to chant his praise. When the imam passed on the way, people used to stand up as a mark of respect. The effect of this was that the crowd that attended his funeral was so multitudinous that it was not seen thus even in the funeral of the ruler.

It is narrated that Al-Mutamid, the Abbasid Caliph had kept a spy to keep a watchful eye on the imam's movements. One day, a follower of the imam sent some pomegranates to him as a gift. The pomegranates were placed in front of Imam al-Askari.

The spy, who happened to be present at that time, kept on staring at the pomegranates longingly. When Imam Hasan Askari noticed this behavior, despite his knowledge about him, the imam picked up one pomegranate and gave it to the spy. The spy took it but did not eat it.

Imam al-Askari asked him, "Why aren't you eating the pomegranate I gave you?" He said, "I have five children and I never eat without them. I was just wondering how will share this one pomegranate with them?"

Imam Hasan al-Askari felt pity for him and gave away all the pomegranates to him. The man refused but the imam insisted saying, "If your children eat these, it is better than I eat them!"

