

Biography of Imam al-Sadiq (as)

*The Sixth Star**

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Abstract: *In the present article, the author provides readers with a very brief look at the life of the holy Imam of Shias, Imam al-Sadiq (as). This article is divided into these categories: Divine matters, social responsibilities, fiqh, social interactions, and physical fitness.*

Keywords: *Imam al-Sadiq, Lifestyle, Biography*

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*J*afar al-Sadiq (*as*) is the sixth Imam of the Shias. He was born on the 7th of *Rabi al-Awwal* in the year 83 AH / 702 AD. His name is Jafar but he is best known as al-Sadiq. He is also referred to by the title Abu Abdullah and he is also called Patient (*Saber*), Learned (*Fadhil*), Pure (*Taher*) and Truthful (*Sadiq*) are all names derived from his beautiful character and attributes.

His mother was Fatimah known as Umme Farwa who was the daughter of Qasim ibn Abi Bakr.

Qasim, was one of the close companions of Imam Zain al-Abedin (*as*). He was one of the seven jurisprudences of Mecca.

Umme Farwa was a greatly respected lady who was very pious and generous. Because of this, Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) is also called the “Son of the Great Lady”.

Jafar al-Sadiq (*as*) succeeded his father Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (*as*) following his death and became Imam in the year 114 AH / 731 AD when he was 31 years old. In those days constant revolts and uprisings by sympathizers of Imam Ali’s family and his offspring and by the Abbasid family had shaken the foundations of the Umayyad government and its institution. Eventually the government was toppled in 132 AH / 750 AD and paved the way for the rise of the Abbasids.

The falling of one and the rising of another dynasty led to a period of relative freedom and served as an ideal opportunity to spread Islamic sciences among the people.

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) took the best possible advantage of this situation, and he taught several thousand students of whom many became knowledgeable scholars. By doing this, the Imam (*as*) spread a variety of sciences ranging from theology to ethics, jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) and Islamic legal codes among the followers of Ali (*as*). People, thirsty for his knowledge, came from far and

wide to attend his classes. It was from this time on that true Islam emerged in its real face.

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) was not only an oracle in religious sciences but he was also a great authority in life sciences. The most famous Muslim chemist of those times, Jabir ibn Hayyan, frequently refers to the Imam in his writings as his teacher and his lord!

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) can be called the “Teacher” because all great Islamic scholars who emerged after him were directly or indirectly his students. The fact that Islamic scholars had a great role in building the foundations of science in those days is no secret. Thus it is not a big claim if we say that Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) - apart from his high station of Imam-hood - was one of the greatest scholars of science and culture of all times.

In Islamic history, Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (*as*) was by far the only Imam who had the most chances to propagate Islamic ideology. Even though he was transferred from Medina to Kufa and imprisoned there in the last years of his life by the order of Mansoor al-Dawaniqi, the Imam also devoted his time there to spread Islamic knowledge.

It was because of all this that Shia jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is also known as Jafari jurisprudence and the religion of Imami Shia is known as “the Jafari religion”: Since it was Imam al-Sadiq who expanded the scope of Islamic law and minutely explained, interpreted and expounded its legal codes and many other issues, the Shia belief came to be named after him as the “Jafari religion”. It was through this Imam that the Shia belief remained safe from corruption and was not influenced by the judgments and viewpoints of outsiders.

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) lived during a very critical period of time and had to grapple with four serious and important issues with intelligence and effort. We will now concisely speak of these matters:

Divine Matters

The days of Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) were days of intense religious ferment where arguments were put forth and against many ideological issues which were interwoven with the politics of those days. Some of the most notable of these issues were related to “the status of the Quran”, “the will and fate of man regarding his actions”, “is Quran sufficient by itself or must it be explained by an Imam”, “life after death” and “the matters regarding revelation” (*vahy*).

In this situation the Imam (*as*) had to take a stance regarding each of these issues and firmly answer the mentioned questions. And so he explained all of these matters from the viewpoint of the Quran and true Islam.

Husham ibn al-Hakam, Hisham ibn Salem and Mo'men al-Ta'q were some of his disciples who took up the task of defending these true beliefs and propagating them far and wide. Gradually a learned group emerged who became a force in defending Islam from the onslaughts of foreign and domestic schools of thought.

This atmosphere of relative freedom and the ability to argue with different beliefs created an ideal opportunity for the Imam to spread the true Quranic beliefs and viewpoints regarding many different matters. These viewpoints which were in exact accordance with the Quran and the fundamentals of Islam were in clear contradiction with the aggressive and sometimes racist viewpoints of the Arab rulers.

Social Responsibilities

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) cared much about socio-religious behaviors and the responsibilities he had regarding the

society. Revolts and uprisings against the Abbasids were frequent in those times and even though he did not involve himself in these actions, he expressed his opinion about some of them.

Of these many uprisings, one stands out; this was the uprising of Zaid, the grandson of Imam al-Hussain (*as*) who headed a particularly bloody rebellion.

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) used to encourage the commemoration of the 10th of Muharram (*Ashura*), which was the day of the martyrdom of his great grandfather Imam al-Hussain (*as*) and his followers. To the Imam, this ceremony signified the re-enactment and revival of the mission of al-Hussain (*as*).

Poets and orators were urged to recall and recount this event and were well rewarded by the Imam for their efforts.

All these actions served to create a general awakening of feelings against tyrants and tyranny, a spirit that propagated in waves across society.

Jurisprudence (Figh):

The Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs had long endeavored to train and gather around them a circle of loyal scholars (*fuqaha*) who would endorse and promote what they proposed and shield their actions and unlawful plans. In short, these scholars were expected to back religiously all the deeds and actions of the Caliphs and support their tyranny.

This trend was a matter of some anxiety to the Imam and in order to counter it the Imam trained pious, staunch and sincere scholars who were well versed in Islamic law who would stand up to the corrupt scholars and oppose any of their deeds which ran counter to Islam.

The Imam (*as*) chose the best of men, trained them and sent them to other cities. As a result, a group of the most talented

scholars emerged from the Imam's school who fanned out throughout the cities and towns of the region, mingled with the people and awakened and educated them on day-to-day issues, as well as in Islamic legal codes.

The presence of these pious scholars among the people led to them being freed from ignorance to a very great extent and converted large numbers of them into true Muslims.

The knowledge on Islamic codes disseminated by the group of students trained by Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) proved to be so useful that many Sunni theologians were inspired by these movements to take a right direction in their verdicts. The decrees (Fatwas) which the Imam issued circulated among scholars who studied their basis and implications and they in turn corrected their methods of declaring decrees.

On matters of Islamic law and jurisprudence Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) had such a high stature that Abu Hanifah -one the four Imams of the Sunni sect- became his disciple.

The Imam's disciples were like a breath of fresh air in a suffocating environment overwhelmed with the presence of unlawful scholars and jurists who did not dare contradict the caliph's beliefs.

Interacting With Society

One of the things that had become popular in those days was mystic beliefs which mainly consisted of Sufism. Those who practiced this belief neglected worldly matters and were indifferent to the affairs of this world. They lived a life of asceticism. The tendency among such groups was to desert society in favor of solitude and enjoyment of the limited company of such mysterious groups which they belonged to. They termed these actions 'piety' and they called themselves pious.

The government supported such groups for political reasons. They mostly did so to try to prove to the people that they themselves were pious and supporters of piety. In reality they supported these groups because they were a bunch of citizens who were indifferent regarding the Caliph's actions and evildoings.

The Sufis claimed they were descendants of the "companions of the *Suffah*" who were a group of pious people at the time of the Prophet (*as*). What the Sufis forgot was the fact that the "companions of the *Suffah*" were the lions of day and the worshippers of night. They worshipped Allah by night but in daytime they performed many duties and social services. The reason they didn't pay attention towards worldly matters was probably because they wanted to be ready for any duty given to them whether it be participating in a war or striding toward the welfare of the community.

The Imam had to deal with the apparently decent but truly corrupt actions of the Sufis. He emphasized on keeping the spirit pure and paying attention to spiritual matters and at the same time prevented the misuse or misinterpretation of these teachings. By doing this the social aspects of Islam would be revealed and not be forgotten behind the curtains of ignorance drawn by the Sufis.

The campaign that Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) undertook on this front was not easy but he accomplished it in such a manner that not only the scholars and clerics regarded themselves as his disciples but the Sufis too tried to connect their beliefs to Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) to gain stature from his spiritual highness.

Physical Fitness

*I*mam al-Sadiq paid very special attention to matters of health and body power. Islam has many recommendations regarding these matters and the Imam (*as*) urged people to

practice activities such as archery and horse riding, which were very important at those times.

He narrated:

“The Prophet (*as*) had a horse race with Osama ibn zaid.”¹

He quoted the Prophet (*as*) saying:

“Angels come down to earth at the time of horse racing².”³

According to Ibn Abi Umair, the Imam (*as*) used to take part in archery and horse-riding contests⁴.

Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) finally passed away at the age of 65. During his years he performed many important divine duties. He introduced the true Islam, educated outstanding scholars, protected the religion and left behind an ocean of knowledge and wisdom.

During his life, he suffered greatly at the hands of the Caliphs who sometimes sent him to exile or tortured him in one way or another.

Finally, he was cruelly poisoned and martyred by Mansoor al-Dawaniqi on the 25th of Shawwal 148 A.H. He was buried in the *Baqee* cemetery situated in the southeastern section of Medina beside the holy graves of Imam al-Hasan, Imam Zain al-Abidin and Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (*as*).

Throughout the ages scholars of all religions have spoken about the high stature of Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) and have praised the foundations he put in place. The famous social philosopher and thinker, Ibn Khaldoon says:

¹ Al-Ameli, *Vasa'il Al-Shia*, vol. 13, p. 347, 348

² This should not be mixed up with some of the disgraceful horse races of today which involve betting by the on-lookers.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

“Miracles narrated of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (*as*) by credible sources are definitely acceptable whether they were performed by the Imam himself or by the members of his family. Because this family is one who has miracles. It has been said in verified narrations that Imam al-Sadiq (*as*) had correctly foretold of future events to those close to him and those events had unfolded just as he had predicted them. When miraculous things are narrated about others, why can't they be narrated about them (i.e. the household of the Prophet (*s*))?”

Their knowledge, their faith and what they have inherited from Prophet-hood and the generosity God has towards them all testify that these branches have sprouted from this root (i.e. the Prophet (*as*)). Many miracles have been narrated from the household of the Prophet (*as*) ...”¹

¹ Ibn Khaldoun, *Al-Moghaddamah*, p. 277 - 280