

Activities of the Shī'ahs for establishment of righteousness

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The majority of the Muslims of the first era of Islam were as we stated. As a result of this condition, the theoretical and practical doctrines of Islam were falling into decline. In addition, the methods of understanding and advancing these truths, i.e. the free debate method and the spiritual development method, headed towards the valley of forgetfulness.

On the other hand, the Shī'ah minority, which had risen against the majority from day one, did not have sufficient power to strike down the prevailing situation. In their view, restitution of the general circumstances of the Holy Prophet's (S) era did not seem likely.

Thus, they were forced to desist from general and positive resistance and utilize a different approach—an approach in which they could protect the theoretical and practical teachings of Islam and keep alive the legitimate methods of advancement, which were the methods of free debate and spiritual evolution.

The Holy Prophet (S) introduced the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) as the custodians and teachers of Islamic precepts and the spiritual leaders of Muslims. In accordance with this recommendation, the Shī'ahs embraced the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and endeavored to learn and record religious precepts even in the face of fear and trepidation.

In his twenty-five years of seclusion and arduous five years of office as caliph, the first leader of the Shī'ah, with his extraordinary eloquence and elocution, which both friend and foe recognized as unchallengeable and unrivaled, promoted Islamic precepts and opened the doors to excellent free logical debates.

He fostered men of God, sahābah and tābi'īn alike, such as Salmān, Kumayl Nakha'ī, Uways Qarānī, Rashīd Hīrī, and Maytham Kūfī. It cannot be said that these people, with their special spiritual approach and treasures of knowledge and wisdom, had no effect upon the Islamic society.

After the martyrdom [shahādah] of the first Shī'ah leader, the dreadful and despotic Umayyad sultanate emerged. During the reign of the Umayyad dynasty Mu'āwiyah and his agents and all other Umayyad sultans battled the Shī'ahs with all their might.

Everywhere they found a Shī'ah, even those who were presumed to be Shī'ah, they would wipe them out and destroy their families. Conditions for the Shī'ahs became more grave and pressures more intense by the day.

Even so, in this period the second, third, and fourth Shī'ah leaders brooked no neglect in vivifying and keeping alive righteousness. They operated in an environment awash in affliction and adversity under the threats of sword, scourge, and torture. Thus, day after day the truth of Shī'ism proliferated and veridical radiance outspread.

The best testimony to this is the time immediately after this period at the close of the Umayyad dynasty leading up to the consolidation of the 'Abbāsīd sultanate, concurrent with the fifth and sixth Shī'ah leaders, i.e. Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq ('a), when for a short period the chokehold on the Shī'ahs weakened slightly and the Shī'ahs gained a moderate amount of freedom.

In this interval, personages, scholars, and traditionists [muhibbātīn] gathered around these two great leaders to learn Islamic sciences. These were not non-Shī'ahs who first became Shī'ah at the hand of the Imām and then endeavored in studying the sciences; rather, they were Shī'ahs who by necessity lived in the guise of pretense and dissimulation [taqiyyah] and dropped the façade at the merest of opportunities.

This evolved spirit was not without influence in the majority of the social corpus. To a varying degree, it reflected righteousness and truth in the mirror of the people's minds and made everyone aware of the innate human need for natural religion, free debate, and spiritual evolution.

Furthermore, with the dark times that were progressively becoming darker and the extreme oppression and unrestraint of government agents at the time of the Third Caliph and throughout the Umayyad rule, the Shī'ah leaders made it clear to the people that religion is in no way safe in the hands of the Caliphate; that administration of religious precepts cannot be handed over to the Caliphate; that implementation of these precepts cannot depend on the ijtihād and judgment of the Caliph; and that ultimately, the power of the Caliphate works in its own interests not the interests of the people and the Islamic society!

Consequently, it was clearly established that religious precepts are immutable and eternal and that ijtihād which is against the wording of the Book and Tradition is meaningless.

Only, due to the affection the majority of the people had towards the sahābah and the

Traditions that extolled the status of the sahābah and acknowledged their ijtihād, the people refrained from protesting against the first three caliphs and Mu'awiyah. Even though their incumbency was blatantly based upon the previously-mentioned view and their conduct corroborated this, the people would justify their meddling in Islamic precepts and reinterpret these tamperings to make them seem correct. On the other hand, sometimes they were fair and took part in free debates and became acquainted with Islamic spirituality.