

Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) the Repository of Divine Knowledge

By Maulana Ali Naqi Naqvi

Name and Lineage

His name was Muhammad, kunniyat Abu Jafar and his well-known appellatives were Taqi and Jawad. Hence, he is generally known as Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.). Since prior to him Abu Jafar had also been the kunniyat of Imam Muhammad Baqir (A.S.), he is called Abu Jafar the second, and Jawad which was his second appellative. His esteemed father is Hazrat Imam Reza (A.S.) and the name of his revered mother is Janab Sabika or Sakina.

Birth

He was born in Madinah on 10 th Rajab 195 A.H. At that time Ameen, son of Harun Rasheed, was on the throne in the capital city of Baghdad.

Rearing and Upbringing

It is a very heart-rending fact that at a very early age Hazrat Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) had to prepare himself to face the hardships and sufferings of life. For a very short time, he could pass his days under the loving and instructive shadow of his father. It was in the fifth year of his age when his father, Hazrat Imam Reza (A.S.) was forced to leave Madinah for Khurasan. After separation from his father at that age, Imam Muhammad Taqi did not get the opportunity to meet him again in his lifetime. Mamun martyred Imam Reza (A.S.) The world must have been under the impression that there were now no means left for Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) whereby to gain access to the heights of knowledge and accomplishments and, thereby, the seat or learning of Imam Jafar Sadiq (A.S.) would remain unoccupied from now onwards. Nevertheless, the amazement of the people knew no bounds when after some time they witnessed this young child taking his seat by the side of Mamun, engaging himself in disputations with eminent scholars on jurisprudence, traditions, exegesis, reasoning, and compelling them to accept his viewpoint. Their astonishment was not to end until they were prepared to admit that against physical means there was also a divine system to impart knowledge and training. Without such a realization, the puzzle could not and cannot be solved.

First Journey to Iraq

When Mamun appointed Imam Reza (A.S.) as his heir apparent the imperatives of his diplomacy demanded that leaving aside Bani Abbas he should level up his relations with Bani Fatima in order to gain the favour of the followers of the Ahle Bait. He felt that, beside the demonstrations of his sincerity and solidarity with them, it was necessary that the old bonds that already existed between them by virtue of their belonging to the same Hashimite clan should be revived and the foundations of a new relationship should be laid. Therefore in the same ceremonial function in which Imam Reza (A.S.) was made his heir apparent, Mamun also solemnized the marriage of his sister Umme Habiba with Imam Reza (A.S.) and announced the engagement of his daughter, Ummul Fazl, with Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.). Most probably, he was under the impression that he would thereby be able to bring Imam Reza (A.S.) completely to his side. But when he realized that the Imam (A.S.) would not at any cost be prepared to relinquish the obligations that devolved upon him in his capacity as the successor of the Prophet (SAW) and now, being a pillar of the Abbassid State, his continued adherence to those principles was much more dangerous than when he was living a life of seclusion in the locality of Bam Hashim in Madinah, with a view to safeguarding the interests of his rule, found it necessary to end the life of Imam Reza (A.S.) through poisoning. In so far as the constraints behind the appointment of Imam Reza (A.S.) as the heir apparent were concerned i.e., to keep the Iranians and the Shiite community under his control, they were still there. Therefore, on the one hand he exhibited extraordinary sorrow and grief on the demise of Imam Reza (A.S.) to show that he had nothing to do with the unjust killing of the Imam (A.S.) and, on the other hand, he deemed engagement of his daughter with Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) With this end in view, he called Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) from Madinah to Iraq as after the demise of Imam Reza (A.S.) he himself had shifted from Khurasan to his old dynastic capital, that is, Baghdad. He was determined to get Ummul Fazl married to Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) without any delay.

Disputation with Religious Scholars

The very act of Mamun's nomination of Imam Reza (A.S.) as his heir apparent was intolerable to the Bani Abbas. With the demise of Imam Reza (A.S.) they heaved a sigh of relief. They even prevailed upon Mamun to notify the appointment of his brother, Mutaman, as heir apparent to the throne. He was later acknowledged as the caliph and became known as Mutasim Billah. Besides, during the tenure of Imam Reza's (A.S.) heir-ship the special mark of Bani Abbas, the black attire was replaced by the green, which was gaining general currency all around. This practice was abrogated and the wearing of black clothes was made compulsory so that the old traditions of Bani Abbas could be preserved. All this had convinced the Abbasids that they now had complete hold over Mamun. Now they had complete hold over Mamun. Now Mamun's intention to make Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) his son-in-law again became a cause of worry for them. They were so upset that they could not restrain their feelings and in the form of a deputation they waited on Mamun and gave vent to their sentiments. They told him plainly that they did not relish his very manner of dealing with Imam Reza (A.S.) However, at least with respect to his age, his attributes and accomplishments, he could be considered as worthy of honour and esteem. However, Muhammad, his son was only a child of quite a tender age. To give preference to a mere child over great scholars and respectable personalities and to pay him so much respect did not at all behove the caliph. They further asked what benefit had they gained from the marriage of Umme Habiba with Imam Reza (A.S.) that Ummul Fazl was now being given in wedlock to Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.)?

The reply of Mamun to their protests was: "No doubt Muhammad is of tender age, but I have fully assessed his capabilities and have found that he is the perfect successor of his father with respect to his attributes and accomplishments. These august scholars of the Islamic world whom you are referring to cannot compete with him in the field of knowledge and learning. You can test his capabilities if you like but then only perfectly reasonable but was in fact a sort of a challenge that obliged the deputationists to agree to a competition. Amongst the Abbasid rulers, Mamun occupied a special status and the historians have recorded that he was himself reckoned amongst great jurists. For that reason, his own judgement in this respect did not carry any lesser weight. Nevertheless, they were not satisfied with that and selected the greatest scholar of Baghdad Yahya bin Aktham, to argue with Imam Muhammad Taqi

For holding this disputation, Mamun arranged a grand function and gave wide publicity to it. Every body was eager to witness a seemingly strange and unequal competition in which there was an eight-year-old child on one side and, on the other, a veteran and renowned chief justice of the regime. The result was that a mammoth gathering turned up to witness the spectacle. Historians have stated that besides the nobles of the court and other prestigious personalities, nine hundred chairs were reserved only for the outstanding scholars and men of learning. There is nothing surprising in this because this was the time when the Abbasid regime was in the prime of its glory and, and more particularly, with respect to the advancement of knowledge and learning, it was its golden era. Baghdad was the capital where specialists in various branches of knowledge and art, drawn from all parts of the world, had gathered. Keeping this in view, this number does not seem to be based on any exaggeration.

Mamun got a cushion placed by his side for Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) The seat of Yahya bin Aktham was opposite to that of the Imam (A.S.). There was pin-drop silence. The entire gathering was all eyes and ears keenly waiting for the discussion to begin. The silence was broken when Yahya asked Mamun: "Your majesty, may I put a query to Abu Jafar regarding an issue?" Mamun told him to seek permission from the Imam (A.S.) himself. Yahya now turned to the Imam (A.S.) and permitted him to ask whatever he wanted and Imam (A.S.) gave his assent and permitted him to ask whatever he wanted to. The question put by Yahya was: "What is the verdict of the Shariat about a person who hunts after having put on the sacred garment (Ahram) of pilgrimage?" The question shows that Yahya had no idea whatsoever of the extent of knowledge possessed by the Imam (A.S.). Blinded by his pride in his own knowledge, he, foolishly, was under the impression that that young child might, at the most, be conversant with the commonly known directions regarding the prayers and fasts but the intricate questions related to Haj and the atonement prescribed for deeds prohibited during pilgrimage while wearing the sacred garment must be beyond his knowledge.

In reply to Yahya's question, the Imam (A.S.) analyzed the problem from various angles in such a manner that even before he could say anything about the main question, Yahya along with the entire audience had full perception of the depth of his knowledge possessed by him. Not only Yahya himself realized that he was overmatched but the entire gathering also

saw his discomfiture. In reply, the Imam (A.S.) observed: "Your question was incomplete and vague. It is necessary to know whether the hunted prey was within the precincts of the holy Kaaba (Haram) or outside it, the hunter was cognizant or ignorant of the implications of his deed, whether he killed the prey deliberately or it was killed by mistake, whether he was a free man or a slave, major or minor, he did it for the first time or had also done it in the past, whether the prey was a bird or other animal, whether it was small or big, whether the offender was insistent on what he had done or was repentant for it, whether he did the hunting in the night or clandestinely or in the daylight and publicly, the sacred garment worn by him was for Umrah (unscheduled pilgrimage) or for Haj? As long as the various aspects of the question are not explained no definite answer to it can be given.'

In spite of all the deficiencies that Yahya might have had, he was still somewhat conversant with the various points of Islamic jurisprudence. The Imam's (A.S.) impressive ramification of the question raised by him convinced him that it would not be easy for him to face him. The signs of despair were writ so large on his face that the audience could not help noticing them. He was now completely worried and did not utter a word in reply. Mamun, realizing Yahya's condition, thought that it was of no use to talk to him and, therefore, he himself requested the p Imam (A.S.) to explain the edicts of Shariat in respect of all the aspects of the matter described by him for the benefit of all of them. The Imam (A.S.) accordingly described in detail the various edicts with reference to the different aspects of the case. Dumbfounded Yahya just continued to gaze at the Imam (A.S.) in bewilderment. Mamun also was bent upon carrying the whole affair to its utmost extent. Therefore, he requested the Imam to put some question to Yahya also, as he might consider proper.

By way of courtesy, the Imam (A.S.) asked Yahya if he could put some questions to him as well. Yahya was no longer under any delusion with regard to himself. He had fully realized his own position with respect to that of the Imam (A.S.). Consequently, now his mode of addressing the Imam (A.S.) had altogether changed. He said: "Your venerable self may ask as you may deem proper I shall try to reply if I can, or else I shall find it out from you ownself." The Imam (A.S.) accordingly put a question to him in reply to which Yahya openly admitted his inability and helplessness. Thereupon the Imam explained the question himself. Mamun was jubilant and his stand was fully vindicated.. Addressing the gathering he said: "You now witness what I have been saying all along, namely, that this is the household that has been chosen to be the repository of knowledge by the Providence. No body can compete even with its children." The entire gathering was full of fervor and was unanimous in admitting that the opinion held by Mamun was absolutely correct and, further, that Abu Jafar Muhammad Bin Ali (A.S.) surely had no parallel. Mamun did not brook any delay whatsoever and immediately gave his daughter Ummul Fazl in matrimony to Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.). The wordings of the oration usually recited before the Nikah in Shiite marriage ceremonies is the same as was read out by Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) on his marriage. It has since been retained to this day by way of reminiscence of the happy event. As a mark of rejoicing on the marriage, Mamun exhibited extreme generosity. Money was distributed in charity in hundreds of thousands among the poor and the indigent. It was also given away lavishly and in abundance in the form of rewards and grants to all of his subjects.

Return Journey to Madinah

Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) stayed in Baghdad for about a year after his marriage. Thereafter, Mamun bid adieu to Ummul Fazl along with the Imam with all preparations and paraphernalia. The Imam (A.S.) finally returned to Madinah.

Manners and Virtues

In respect of his manners and qualities, Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) occupied that lofty position of humaneness that is the distinguished characteristic of the Prophet (SAW) and his progeny. The predominant feature of his life style was to meet everybody with humility, to help the needy, to maintain human equality and observe simplicity. To offer help to the indigent secretly, to treat not only friends but even adversaries kindly and politely, to be attentive in entertaining the guests and to keep the springs of bounties overflowing for those thirsty for religious and scholarly knowledge, were his chief occupations. His life pattern was the same as that of the other members of this chain of the infallible ones whose life history has already been given in earlier chapters.

The worldly people who did not have a full idea of the greatness of his soul must have certainly been under the impression that the very fact of a small child becoming the son in-law of the emperor of a great Muslim empire must alter his thoughts, nature, behavior and habits and, thus, completely remold his life style. In fact, this must have been an important objective before Mamun's shortsighted vision. The animus of the Abbasids or the Umayyad

kings was not so much against the members of the Prophet' (SAW) progeny as for their extraordinary God-given qualities. They were ever endeavouring to break that centre of lofty manners and humaneness that was established at Madinah and had become nucleus of exemplary spirituality against the material power of the realm. Accordingly, in desperation, they devised and tried various means with a view to achieving this objective. The demand of oath of allegiance from Imam Husain (A.S.) was one form of it and the appointment of Imam Reza (A.S.) as heir apparent another. Only outwardly in one case the method of dealing with the situation was hostile and in the other, seemingly devotional. Just as Imam Husain (A.S.) was martyred when he refused to pledge allegiance, Imam Reza (A.S.), being out of step with the materialistic objectives of the regime, was silenced forever through poisoning.

Now from the point of Mamun it was a valuable opportunity. The successor of Imam Reza (A.S.) was a mere child of about eight years who had been separated from his father three years back. The political sagacity of Mamun made him wrongly expect that it would be very easy to bring over that child to his own way of life after which the still and silent but extremely dangerous centre that was firmly established against the government of the day would be destroyed forever.

He did not deem the failure of Mamun in his plan related to the appointment of Imam Reza (A.S.) as the heir apparent as a ground for any disappointment. He felt so because the life pattern of Imam Reza (A.S.) was firmly based on a particular principle. If it did not alter, it did not follow that Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.), after having been brought in the palace environments right from the early formative years, would stick to his ancestor's principled way of life.

Except those who were conversant with the God-gifted perfections of these chosen beings, everybody in those days must have been of Mamun's mind. But the world was amazed to see that the eight year old child who had been made the son in-law of the emperor of the Islamic domain, was so steadfast in following his family traditions of sobriety and uprightness and its principles that he refused to stay in the imperial palace after marriage and, while in Baghdad insisted on residing in a rented house. An idea of the strong will power of Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) can be had from another event. Usually when the bride's family financially occupies a higher place it prefers that the son in-law should reside with it in the same house; if not, at least in the same town. However, Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.), only a year after the marriage, forced Mamun to let him (and his wife) return to Madinah. Certainly, this must have been extremely unpalatable for a loving father and a powerful potentate like Mamun. Nevertheless, he had to bear the pain of separation of his daughter and let the Imam (A.S.) return to Madinah along with Ummul Fazl. After coming to Madinah the style of functioning of the household was the same as before. There was no gatekeeper, no check and restraint, no pomp and show, no particular meeting time and no discrimination in dealings with the visitors. Mostly the Imam (A.S.) used to sit in the Prophet's mosque where Muslims in general came to benefit from his preaching and counseling. Narrators of traditions used to put questions about traditions and scholars would place their problems before him and seek solutions. It was evident that it was surely the successor of Imam Jafar Sadiq (A.S.) who, occupying the same seat of learning was providing guidance to the people.

With regard to household affairs and matters relating to conjugal life, he kept Ummul Fazl confined within the bound within which his ancestors used to keep their wives. He did not at all care for the fact that his wife was the daughter of the emperor of his time. Therefore, in the presence of Ummul Fazl he married an esteemed woman from amongst the progeny of Hazrat Ammar Yasir. The chain of Imamate should continue the divine will through this woman who became the mother of Imam Ali Naqi (A.S.). Ummul Fazl dispatched a written complaint to her father in his regard. For Mamun also this event must not have been any less painful. However, he had now no option but to bear with what he had himself done. He wrote to Ummul Fazl in reply that his objective in marrying her with Abu Jafar (A.S.) was not to make unlawful for him that God has made lawful. He forbade her writing such letters to him in future.

By writing this reply, he had only tried to wipe off his own humiliation. There are instances before us where in the presence of a venerable lady, from religious point of view, the husband did not take a second wife during her lifetime. Hazrat Ali (A.S.) and Hazrat Fatima Zahra (A.S.) are examples in this respect. In their lifetime, neither the esteemed Prophet (SAW) nor Hazrat Ali Murtaza (A.S.) even thought of having a second wife. However, to confer this distinction on the daughter of an emperor simply because she was the daughter of such a person, violated the Islamic spirit of which the progeny of Muhammad (SAW) was guardian. Therefore, Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) considered it his duty to follow a path different from theirs (that is, having a second wife in the lifetime of the first one).

Preaching and Guidance

His speech used to be very attractive and effective. Once, during Haj period, standing amongst the congregation of the Muslims he delivered a sermon propounding the edicts of the Shariat so beautifully that very eminent scholars were amazed and spellbound. They had to admit that never before they had heard such a consummate speech.

During the time of Imam Reza (A.S.) a group of people had come to the fore which entertained the belief that the chain of Imamate had ended with Imam Musa Kazim (A.S.) i.e., they did not acknowledge Imam Reza (A.S.) as an Imam after him. They were called Waqfiya. During his tenure Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) so successfully explained the factual position to this sect that all of them abjured their stance and during his lifetime itself not a single person of that creed was left.

A large number of scholars of high standing acquired from him the true knowledge of the teachings of the house of the Prophet (SAW). There is also a treasure of his short and sagacious sayings of the same pattern as are ascribed to his forefather, Hazrat Ameerul Momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S.). The sayings of Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) occupy a special place after those of Hazrat Ameerul Momineen (A.S.). There are also extant some of his sermons of high standard on the subjects of Divinity and Oneness of God.

Last Journey to Iraq

Mamun left this world in the year 218 A.H. Thereafter, his brother and Ummul Fazl's uncle Mutaman who had been appointed heir apparent after the demise of Imam Reza (A.S.) occupied the throne. He came to be known as Mutasim Billah Abbasi. Soon after, the frequency of letters from Ummul Fazl complaining against Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) (as she had earlier sent to Mamun) increased. Since Mamun had wedded his daughter to Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) in the face of opposition of the entire clan of Bani Abbas it was, therefore, by way defending his action and maintaining the honour of his words that he did not pay any particular attention to these complaints. Instead, the replies that he sent to her were so disappointing that they silenced his daughter. Nevertheless, Mutasim was still having in his bosom the scar caused by the shock of the appointment of Imam Reza (A.S.) as heir apparent. Moreover, he had been in the forefront of the entire Bani Abbas clan in opposing Mamun's decision to induct Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) as his son-in-law. He was now giving importance to the complaints of Ummul Fazl to justify his opposition to her wedding with Imam. Besides, there were other causes too that incited Mutasim against Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.). Most important of them were the attraction of the people towards his meritorious scholarship and his winning manners that had spread unto Iraq, transcending the boundaries of Hijaz. Moreover, there was that deep-rooted animosity which his ancestors had nurtured against the forefathers of Imam Muhammad Taqi. Furthermore, there was the realization of the failure of that diplomacy and planning that lay behind the solemnization of this marriage. All these factors and considerations made Mutasim hostile towards the Imam (A.S.). Consequently, in the second year of his rule he called Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) from Madinah to Baghdad. He wrote an urgent letter in this regard to Abdul Malik, he governor of Madinah. Imam Taqi (A.S.) was forced to go to Baghdad, leaving behind Imam Ali Naqi (A.S.) and his mother in Madinah.

Propagation of Mourning of Husain (A.S.)

Along with the propagation of the tenets of the true faith, Imam Reza (A.S.) also had the opportunity now to carry forward the mission of condoling the martyrdom of Husain (A.S.), the foundation for which had been laid earlier by Imam Muhammad Baqir (A.S.) and Imam Jafar Sadiq (A.S.). But those were the days when only such people used to visit those Imams (A.S.) who recognized them and had faith in them as their Imams or as religious scholars. Now the position was different. Imam Reza (A.S.) was not only a spiritual leader but also the heir apparent of the caliphate.

Therefore, the circle of the visitors attending his court was now much wider. The place (where the Imam had settled) was Marw, which is situated almost in the center of Khurasan, Iran. People thronged in from all sides and the condition of the Imam (A.S.) was such that the moment the new moon of Muharram was sighted tears would start flowing from his eyes. Others were also induced and stimulated to remember the calamities that befell the progeny of Muhammad (SAW) and manifestly exhibit their grief and sorrow. The Imam (A.S.) also used to say: "whosoever attends the Majalis where the events of our lives are narrated shall not have a dead heart on the day when the hearts of all others shall be dead."

The word Majlis, the technical name for gatherings wherein the tragic account of Imam Husain (A.S.) is narrated, is derived from the above tradition of Imam Reza (A.S.). He began holding Majalis himself wherein some time he personally would be the narrator and others would sit in audience. For instance, on a particular occasion when Rayyan bin Shaib

attended one of the Majalis, the Imam (A.S.) himself recounted the sufferings of Imam Husain (A.S.). On the other occasions when poets like Abdullah bin Thabit or Debal Khuzai would be present, the Imam (A.S.) would order them to recite verses about Imam Husain (A.S.). Thus, one of them would 'be the narrator and the Imam (A.S.) he would be among the audience.

The Imam (A.S.) gave a costly robe to Debal at the end of a Majlis. Debal showed reluctance saying that he did not need a costly robe. Instead, he requested for some used garment of the Imam (A.S.). The Imam (A.S.) readily agreed and along with the robe, he gave him a used gown of his own.

This event in a way laid down two guidelines pertaining to the Majalis. One is the lofty ideal for Zakir (one who addresses the Majlis) that he should not address Majlis for worldly rewards, or he should, God forbid, settle terms in advance. The other is for the person who arranges the Majlis that he may offer some thing to the Zakir but without any prior agreement.

Martyrdom

After the arrival of the Imam (A.S.) in Baghdad , Mutasim apparently did not treat him with any kind of harshness. Nevertheless, his stay there was in itself by way of compulsion which can I called nothing but a sort of forcible confinement. Thereafter, his life was brought to an end with the same secret weapon that had been used before in the case of the elders of his household. He was martyred by poisoning on 29th Zee al-Qadah 220 A.H. was buried adjacent to his esteemed grandfather Imam Musa Kazim (A.S.). By virtue of his sharing of the place, the city came to be known as Kazmain, according to Arabic grammar (which means two Kazims, that is, two persons who restrained their anger). In assigning this name to the city the appellative of Imam Musa Kazim (A.S.) was clearly given prominence. On the other hand, present the railway station in Kazmain is known as Jawadain (that is the two jawads or two generous persons). In this case, the appellative of Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) has been prominently displayed as he was called Jawad as well as Taqi.

Razvi Sadaat

It is a fact that the Sadaat who are known as Razvi are Taqvi in reality i.e., the descendant of Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.). If Imam Reza (A.S.) had any male issue other than Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.), his descendants would call themselves Razvi with a view to distinguish themselves from others and those of Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.) would call themselves Taqvi. However, as the progeny of Imam Reza (A.S.) thrived only through Imam Muhammad Taqi (A.S.), and by virtue of being the heir apparent of the Abbasid regime his personal reputation had widely spread amongst the Muslims in general, all his descendants came to be introduced with reference to him and are thus known as Razvi.