

A Series of Ideological Researches

Infallible Imams (a)

A Short Study on the Lives of the Infallible Imams (a)

Volume Four

Imam al-Riḍa

(peace be upon him)

Ayatollah al-Sayyid ‘Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Mīlānī

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Author: Ayatollah al-Sayyīd ‘Alī al-Husaynī al-Mīlanī

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In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

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Foreword

The last and the most perfect divine religion was conveyed to humanity by Prophet Muḥammad, peace be upon him and his family. The prophethood came to an end with him. The religion of Islam emerged in Mecca but it spread all over the Arabian Peninsula after twenty three years of strenuous efforts made by the Messenger of Allah (s) and a handful of his loyal companions.

The continuation of this divine mission was an important undertaking that was delegated publicly on Dhūl Hijja, the 18th, by Allah, to ‘Alī (a), the Commander of the Faithful and the first and the noblest personality after the Holy Prophet (s) in the Islamic world.

With proclamation of Haḍrat ‘Alī's guardianship and succession on this day, divine blessings were completed and the religion of Islam was perfected and announced as the only religion chosen by Allah. That was when and how unbelievers and pagans despaired of destroying and harming Islam.

Soon after the demise of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, some of the companions of the Holy Prophet (s) premeditatedly deviated from the course of guidance and leadership. They closed the gate of the city of

knowledge putting Muslims in perplexity and confusion. From the very beginning of their rule, they placed the truths of Islam – that were like a shining sun – behind the dark clouds of doubt and skepticism by way of putting a ban on recording prophetic traditions, spreading fabricated ones, casting doubts and embarking on hypocritical and deceptive tactics.

Obviously, in spite of all conspiracies hatched by the enemies of Islam, the truths of Islam and noble sayings of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, continued to spread as they were carried on and communicated by the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī, peace be upon him, his successors and a few of his devout companions and those truths kept flowing and manifesting themselves in one way or the other in the course of history. By explaining the truths, they did away with doubts, specious arguments, and false beliefs presented and inculcated by the enemies of Islam, and made the truth clear to all.

In this respect, great scholars and men of knowledge such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, al-Sayyid Murtaḍa, Khwāja Naṣīr, al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, Qāḍī Nūrullah, Mīr Ḥāmid Ḥussain, al-Sayyid Sharaf al-Dīn, al-‘Allāma al-Amīnī etc. having been glittering like shining stars, since they are the ones who defended Islamic truths, explained the realities of the school of Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them, and dealt with spurious arguments using their tongues and pens.

In our era, one of the outstanding scholars and researchers who has, with his eloquent pen and expressive writing, explained the truths of the religion of Islam and astutely defended the *imamate* and *wilāyah* (guardianship) of the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī (a) is the great researcher Ayatollah al-Sayyid ‘Alī al al-Ḥusaynī al-Mīlānī, may he live long.

The Islamic Truths Center is proud to take up the task of

reviving the fruitful and precious works of this great researcher by reviewing, translating and publishing them in a bid to make them available to students, scientific figures and those who are in search of Islamic truths.

The book in your hand is a translation of one of his works entitled *Infallible Imams (a)* and which hopefully will acquaint English readers with Islamic truths. It is expected that this humble effort will earn the pleasure of the Baqiyatullah, the Imam of Age, Imam Mahdī, may Allah hasten his reappearance.

Islamic Truths Center

Imam al-Riḍa
(peace be upon him)

A Brief Look at the Life of Imam al-Riḍā (a)

Looking briefly at the life of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, Al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī writes:

Imam al-Riḍā, the son of Imam al-Kāzīm, peace be upon him, was also the most abstemious and austere among the people of his time and was more knowledgeable than all the people of his time. Sunni jurists and scholars learned a lot from him and Ma’mūn appointed him as his successor and crown prince due to his piety and merits.

One day, Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, advised his brother Zayd saying:

يا زيد، ما أنت قاتل لرسول الله إذا سفكت الدماء وأخفت السبيل وأخذت المال من غير حلّه، غرّك حُمقاء أهل الكوفة! وقد قال رسول الله: "إن فاطمة أحصنت فرجها فحرّم الله ذريّتها على النار" و الله ما نالوا ذلك إلا بطاعة الله، فإن أردت أن تتال بمعصية الله ما نالوه بطاعته، إنك إذا لأكرم على الله منهم!

"O Zaid! What will you say to the Messenger of Allah (s) if you spill blood, take people's property unjustly, make roads unsafe and you are deceived by the foolish men of Kufa? The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) has said: Surely Fāṭima (peace be upon her) has protected her chastity and thus Allah has freed her offspring from Hell-

Fire. By Allah, they never attain that but through obedience to Allah and if you want to attain it through disobedience to Allah then you are more honored by Allah over them."

Ma'mūn inscribed his name on minted money, he wrote to all parts of the Caliphate informing them that he is his successor and therefore, people shall give him vow of allegiance."

Abū Nuwās was asked as to why he did not praise Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, in his poems. He answered:

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| قيل لي: أنت أوحدهم طراً | في فنون من الكلام النبیه |
| لك من جواهر الكلام بديع | يثمر الدر في يدي مجتنيه |
| فعلى ما تركت مدح ابن موسى | والخصال التي تجتمعن فيه |
| قلت: لا أهتدي لمدح إمام | كان جبريل خادماً لأبيه |

I was told that you have advantage over all people in speaking. Many praise you. One who listens to it is as if he is picking jewels. Despite all these perfections and grate traits of the son of Mūsa ibn Ja'far, why did you leave praising him? I said in response: I am incompetent to praise the one whose father "Gabriel" served.

The Most Abstemious Person

Al-'Allāma al-Ḥillī, may Allah have mercy on him, said:

"Imam al-Riḍā, the son of Imam al-Kāzim, peace be upon them, was also the most abstemious and austere among the people of his time and was more knowledgeable than all the people of his time."

Ibn Taymiyya says in this regard:

"Among the greatest calamities that befall the offspring of al-Ḥusayn (progeny of the Messenger of Allah from his lineage) is that they have been tried and tested through the attachment of Shī'a Rāfiḍah to them, honoring them,

extolling their virtues and praising them. Surely, they are praising them with that which is in reality contempt and disrespect to them. They made claims in their favors without evidence and they mention statements by which if their real virtues are not known from other than them (Rāfiḍah) then they have tarnished and dented their image for what they (Shī'a) are mentioning are censures and not praises."¹

In response to Ibn Taymiyya's nonsensical words, we must say:

One of the calamities the family of the Prophet of Allah, his daughter and family members (peace be upon them) suffered is the fact that there have been enemies who claim to be Muslims and have knowledge of Islam. Such people also maintain that they follow the Prophet and his household, peace be upon them, while narrating their sayings. These are people who have gone so far in their animosity that they not only do not consider explicating their piety, abstemiousness and other merits as a praise but as censure and dent of their images.

Ibn Taymiyya further says:

"As for the claim that 'He is the most abstemious of his time and more knowledgeable than his contemporaries', it is only an assertion without evidence."

Imam al-Riḍā (a) and Sunni Scholars

These claims are without evidence according to Ibn Taymiyya and his co-thinkers but there are non-Shī'a experts and scholars of hadith and history whose arguments suggest that what Shī'a Muslims believe about their imams is true and justified.

In proving our point of view Shiite scholars often quote

¹ *Minhāj al-sunnah*, vol.2, p.125 – 126.

Sunni scholars who have beliefs similar to theirs. Here are few examples:

‘Alī b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Samhūdī (d. 911 AH) writes the following in this regard:

"‘Alī al-Riḍā, son of Mūsa al-Kāzīm (peace be upon them), was unique among the people of his time; he was highly precious and Abū Maḥfūz, better known as al-Karkhī, converted to Islam at his hands."

Ma’ mūn told him (Imam al-Riḍā): Tell me how your great grandfather ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is the distributor of paradise and hell (Qaṣīm al-Nār wa al-Janna i.e. taking his friends to Jannah and his enemies to the hellfire)?

He answered: Didn't your father narrate from his fathers from ‘Abdullah b. ‘Abbās that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said:

حُبُّ عَلِيٍّ إِيمَانٌ وَبُغْضُهُ كُفْرٌ

"Love of ‘Alī is faith, and enmity towards him is disbelief."

"Why not, I have heard it," he answered.

Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, then said:

فقسمة الجنة والنار إذا كانت على حبه وبغضه فهو قسيم الجنة والنار.

"Therefore, Paradise and Hell-fire are distributed based on his love and enmity and if that is the case, he is the distributor of Paradise and Fire."

Ma’ mūn then said: "O, Abā al-Ḥasan, may Allah not make me live after you. I bear witness that you are the heir to the prophet's knowledge."¹

Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ṭalḥa (d. 652 AH), a Shāfi’ī traditionist (muḥaddith) and jurispudent writes the

¹ *Jawāhir al-‘aqdayn fī faḍl al-sharafayn*, vol.2, p.427.

following about Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

"Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Kāzim b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq... we talked earlier about the Commander of the Faithful, 'Alī, peace be upon him, and Zayn al-'Ābidīn (peace be upon him). He (Abū al-Ḥasan) is 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā (peace be upon him). Whoever looks more carefully, will see that he is the third of the three 'Alīs.

He was a man of tremendous piety and lofty position. His status was high and he was competent. He had many friends and the truthfulness of his argument was tangible so much that Caliph Ma'mūn appointed him as his crown prince and authority in his government. He offered to surrender the caliphate to him. He married out his daughter to him in the presence of everyone.

He had great virtues and merits. He was generous like Ḥātam al-Tāyī and inherited his moral characters from his father. He maintained Arabic manners and indisposition and was a Hashemite from the lineage of the Prophet (s). He is higher and more magnanimous than what is said about him. He is far greater than the merits and attributes ascribed to him."¹

Al-Shaykh Mu'min b. Ḥasan al-Shablanjī (d. 1308 AH), also writes the following in this regard:

"Ibrāhīm b. 'Abbās says: I did not see Imam al-Riḍā (peace be upon him) receiving a question except that he knew the answer to it. I have not seen anyone more learned than him before him and until he was alive. Ma'mūn tested him with whatever question he could direct to him but he would give adequate answers to whatever questions that were put to him.

He slept less, observed fast a lot and he would never miss the fast of the three days of every month. He would say:

¹ *Maṭālib al-su'ūl*, p.84.

"That is the fast tantamount to fasting for eternity."

He was extremely kind and gave a lot of charity. He did all this in the darkness of the night. In the summer he sat on a mat and in the winter on *mish* (ground cloth)."¹

Another Sunni scholar is al-Shaykh Ibrāhim b. Muḥammad al-Juwaynī (d. 730 AH). He was one of al-Dhahabī's teachers. He writes the following about Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

"The eighth Imam had a perfect appearance. He had hidden secrets, he was the discloser of hidden things, the source of virtues and lofty merits. He had a great personality, a lofty status and was gracious and kind, the chief of the nobles, the light of the eye of Āl-e Yāseen and Āl-e 'Abd Manāf. He was a pure sayyid, immaculate and infallible. He had knowledge of the reality of sciences and was well aware of hidden and invisible secrets, he gave news of the future and past events. He was a man with whom Allah was satisfied and pleased because he is also pleased and satisfied with Allah in all circumstances. That was the reason why he was called "riḍā" (satisfaction). He is the very 'Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him..."²

Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī al-Makkī (d. 972 AH) writes about the eighth infallible leader, Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

"Mūsa b. Ja'far (peace be upon them) had thirty seven children, daughters and sons, one whom was 'Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. He was the most knowledgeable and most venerable of them. Ma'mūn appointed him as his crown prince, married his daughter to him, shared the power

¹ *Nūr al-absār*, p.312.

² *Farā'id al-samā'ayn*, vol.2, p.187.

with him and offered him the caliphate ..."¹

What was just mentioned was a selection of Sunni scholars' writings about the piety, abstemiousness and greatness of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him.

Sunni Jurists' Acquiring Knowledge from Imam al-Riḍā (a)

Al-ʿAllama al-Ḥillī, may Allah have mercy on him, said:

"Sunni Jurists and scholars learned a lot from him."

However, Ibn Taymiyya says in this regard:

"Never has any of the hadith experts taken any narration from ʿAlī b. Mūsā (peace be upon him). No tradition has been reported in the six sound books of Ahl al-Sunna. In fact, Abū Ṣult al-Hirawī and people like him have narrated something from his fathers in which there are lies which are unbecoming of honest people let alone the truthful members of the family of the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family.

With regard to his assertion that "Jurists and scholars learned a lot from him," we reply that this is one of the most apparent clear lies... What some people mentioned that Maʿarūf al-Karkhī had been his servant, he is connected to him and that he embraced Islam at his hand or received a gown from him are all lies by the consensus of those who have knowledge about this issue."

We shall outline a few points in response to Ibn Taymiyya:

First, the following passage would suffice as a proof of the fact that Sunni jurists acquired knowledge from Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

¹ *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-muhriqa*, p.122.

Al-Wāqidī writes:

"‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riza, peace be upon him, heard hadiths from his father, uncles and others. He was trustworthy and reliable. He was more than twenty years old when he sat at Masjid al-Nabi, peace be upon him and his family, and gave fatwa. He is from the eighth category of the tabi‘ūn (successors)."¹

Al-Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī writes:

"Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Mūsa, peace be upon him, arrived in Nīshābūr in the year 200 AH. He used to sit in the Prophet's Mosque (Masjid al-Nabī) and give fatwa when he was twenty or something. Many great hadith experts including Mu‘allā b. Manṣūr al-Rāzī, Adam b. Abī Ayās al-‘Asqalānī, Muḥammad b. Abī Rāfi‘ al-Qaṣrī al-Qushayrī, Naṣr b. ‘Alī al-Jahḍamī and others have narrated traditions from him.

He was martyred in Sanābad of al-Ṭūs in the month of Ramaḍān 203 AH. He lived for forty nine years and six months."²

Ibn al-Jawzī writes the following about Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

"He gave fatwa in the Masjid of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, when he was over twenty years of his age."³

Ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī also writes the following about Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him:

"‘Alī b. Mūsa b. Ja‘far b. ‘Alī b. Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him) is Qurashī, Hashimī and ‘Alavī. His title is al-Riḍā. As we said in the past, Ma‘mūn decided to relinquish the caliphate but ‘Alī b. Mūsa, peace be upon him,

¹ *Tadhkirat khawāṣ al-‘umma*, p.351.

² *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, vol.7, p.338; *Farā'id al-samṭayn*, vol.2, p.199.

³ *Al-Muntaẓam*, vol.10, p.120.

was not prepared to accept the position. For this reason, Ma'mūn appointed him as his crown prince so that he would become the next ruler after him."

‘Alī b. Mūsa, peace be upon him, passed away in al-Ṭūs in the month of Safar this year. He has narrated traditions from his father and others. A number of people including Ma'mūn, Abū Salt al-Hirawī and Abū ‘Uthmān al-Māzanī al-Nahvī have transmitted traditions from him."¹

Describing Imam al-Riḍā, al-Mazzī writes:

"Q (qāf)², ‘Alī b. Mūsa, peace be upon him, ... people such as Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ḥubāb b. al-Ḥamza al-Ḥimyarī, the genealogist, Ayyūb b. Maṣṣūr al-Nīshābūrī, Dāram b. Qubayḍa b. Nahshal al-Ṣan‘ānī, Abū Aḥmad Dāwūd b. Sulaymān b. Yūsuf al-Ghāzī al-Qazvīnī (this individual has a copy from Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him), Sulaymān b. Ja‘far, ‘Āmir b. Sulaymān al-Ṭā‘ī, father of Aḥmad b. ‘Āmir who is among the weak narrators (and who has a big copy with him from Imam al-Riḍā), ‘Abdullah b. ‘Alī al-‘Alavī, Amīr al-Mu‘minīn Abū al-‘Abbās ‘Abdullah Ma'mūn b. Hārūn al-Rashīd, Abū al-Ṣalt ‘Abd al-Salām b. Ṣāliḥ al-Hirawī (Q), ‘Alī b. Ṣadaqa al-Shaṭṭī al-Ruqqī, ‘Alī b. ‘Alī al-Khazā‘ī al-Da‘balī, ‘Alī b. Mahdī b. Ṣadaqa b. Hishām al-Qāzī (who has a copy with him from Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him), Muḥammad b. Sahl b. ‘Āmir al-Bajalī, his son Abū Ja‘far b. ‘Alī b. Mūsa (peace be upon him), Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥayyān al-Tammār al-Maṣrī, Mūsa b. ‘Alī al-Qurashī and Abū ‘Uthmān al-Māzanī al-Nahvī have narrated from him."³

Al-Dhahabī writes the following about Imam al-Riḍā, peace

¹ *Al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*, under the title al-Hawādith, p.203.

² The letter "q" or "qāf" is used about those on whose authority Ibn Māja al-Qazvīnī has narrated traditions in his *Sunan*. Cf. Taqrīb al-tahdhīb, vol.1, p.9.

³ *Al-Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol.21, p.148.

be upon him:

"Based on what was said above, Adam b. Abī Ayās – who is older than ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā – Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Muḥammad b. Rāfi‘, Naṣr b. ‘Alī al-Jahḍamī and Khālīd b. Aḥmad al-Dhuhālī Amīr have narrated from ‘Alī b. Mūsa, peace be upon him."¹

Al-Dhahabī also says in this regard:

"‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him – Q, D, T² – is one of the prominent figures. He is Imam Abū al-Ḥasan b. Mūsa al-Kāẓim b. Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq b. Muḥammad al-Bāqir b. ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon them. He is Hashimī, ‘Alavī and Ḥusaynī.

He has reported narrations from his father and ‘Abdullah b. Arṭa’a. These people have also transmitted narrations from him: His son Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad, peace be upon him, Abū ‘Uthmān al-Māzanī, Ma’mūn, ‘Abd al-Salām b. Ṣāliḥ, Daram b. Qubayṣa and a number of other people.

‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, was the master of Banū Hāshim; he was the best and wisest person of his time. Ma’mūn treated him with respect; he was respectful and humble towards him. He gave him so much respect that he appointed him his successor and sent out this news across the Islamic lands..."³

Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī writes: Ḥākim al-Nishābūrī says:

"I heard Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Mu‘mmil b. Ḥasan b. ‘Isa

¹ *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, vol.9, p.387.

² The letter "D" (dāl) refers to those on whose authority Abū Dawūd has transmitted traditions in his *al-Sunan*. Also, the letter "T" (tā) refers to those on whose authority al-Tirmidhī has transmitted traditions in his *al-Sunan*. Cf. *Taqrīb al-tahdhīb*, vol.1. p.9.

³ *Tārīkh al-Islam*, p.269, Events 20-210.

say: "Accompanied by the Imam of Ahl al-Hadith, Abū Bakr b. Khuzayma and his colleague Abū 'Alī al-Thaqafī and a number of his teachers – who were many – went to al-Ṭūs to visit the grave of 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. I was surprised to see Ibn Khuzayma paying so much tribute and respect and showing so much homage and humility to that tomb."¹

Hadith Silsilat al-Dhahab

In addition, it has been reported in different books that when Imam al-Riḍā (a) reached Nīshābūr on his journey to Khurasān, after he decided to leave, the penmen gathered and said, "O son of the Messenger of God (s), are you leaving our city without giving us a statement to benefit from?" Upon this request, the Imam (a) stopped the animal he was riding and said: "I heard my father Mūsā b. Ja'far say that I heard my father Ja'far b. Muḥammad say that I heard my father Muḥammad b. 'Alī say that I heard my father 'Alī b. al-Husayn say that I heard my father Husayn b. 'Alī say that I heard my father Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib say that I heard God's Messenger say that I heard Gabriel say that I heard Allah, may His majesty be glorified, say:

كَلِمَةٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ حِصْنِي فَمَنْ دَخَلَ حِصْنِي أَمِنَ مِنْ عَذَابِي

'The sentence 'There is no god but Allah' is my stronghold, thus whoever enters my stronghold shall be safe from my punishment.'²

In another narration, it has been reported that Imam al-Riḍa,

¹ *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, vol.7, p.339.

² This hadith is famously called Hadith Silsilat al-Dhahab (The Golden Chain Hadith) because of its chain of narrators whom are all infallibles, starting from Imam al-Riḍā (a) who quotes the seventh Imam, who narrates from the sixth Imam and goes all the way to the first Imam who himself has obtained it from the Holy Prophet (s) who has received it from God.

peace be upon him, narrates from his fathers who narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Alī (peace be upon him) that he asked the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family: "What is imān (faith)?"

The Messenger of Allah (s) said:

الإِيمَانُ مَعْرِفَةٌ بِالْقَلْبِ وَإِقْرَارٌ بِاللِّسَانِ وَ عَمَلٌ بِالْأَرْكَانِ

"Imān is to acknowledge with the heart, to voice with the tongue, and to act with the limbs."

Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal says in a report:

If this *sanad* (chain of narrators) is read out to an insane person, he will get healed (owing to the names in the chain of narrators).

In addition, top among the scholars who requested Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, to teach them some narrations are Abū Zar‘a al-Rāzī, Muḥammad b. Aslam al-Ṭūsī, Yāsin b. Naḍr, Aḥmad b. Ḥarb, Yaḥya b. Yaḥya. Also, over twenty thousand people have been reported to have recorded his narrations."¹

Now we must ask: Who is the liar?

Imam al-Riḍā (a) and the Writers of the Six Books

The second point is that, as we quoted some Sunni scholars, three of the authors of the six so-called authentic books (better known as *Ṣiḥāḥ-e Sitta*) have narrated traditions from Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him because the letter "Q" (qāf) is an abbreviation representing Ibn Māja al-Qazvīnī and the letter "D" (dāl) is an abbreviation standing for Abū Dawūd al-Sajistānī and the letter "T" (tā) is also an abbreviation

¹ *Akḥbār Iṣbahān*, vol.1, p.138; *al-Muntaẓam fī akḥbār al-umam*, vol.10, p.120, *al-Ṣawā‘iq al-muḥriqa*, p.122 (citing *Tārīkh Nīshābūr*), *al-Fuṣūl al-muḥimma fī ma‘rifat al-a‘imma*, p.253.

representing al-Tirmidhī. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya's claim that "no narration has been recorded and transmitted from him in the six books" is yet another lie.

It goes without saying that it has been demonstrated and proved in its respective place that it is not true to say that a narration found and transmitted in these books from someone is a sign of his being reliable and trustworthy or that the absence of one such narration is a sign of his being unreliable and untrustworthy.

Obviously, the Infallible Imams being from the household of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, are higher in position than we can measure the authenticity of the narrations transmitted from them by using these criteria. In fact, we must say that a prosperous person is one who learns their sayings and adheres to them and a wicked person is one who opposes their sayings and turns away from them.

Getting to Know Abū Ṣalt al-Hirawī

The third point to deal with concerns Abū Ṣalt al-Hirawī.

Abū Ṣalt, ‘Abd al-Salām b. Ṣāliḥ al-Hirawī was one of the close companions of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. He is also one of his narrators. It has been reported in *Tahdhīb al-kamāl* that:

"Abū Ṣalt was a servant of Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him.

It has been reported the Abū Ṣalt was a scholar, jurist and a literary man. He replied to the doubts and spurious arguments raised by unbelievers and deviant sects such as Murji’a, Jahmiyya, Zandaqa¹ and Qadariyya. He engaged in

¹ Zindīq is a medieval Islamic term applied by Muslims to individuals who are considered to hold views or follow practices that are contrary to central Islamic dogmas. Zandaqa is the abstract noun describing these views.

debates with them and came out triumphant in all of them.

It has also been said that Abū Ṣalt believed that Abū Bakr and ʿUmar were the first and second caliphs and that he did not speak about the companions of the Messenger of Allah except with respect and admiration. For these reasons and many others, a number of Sunni leaders including Yahya b. Muʿīn who was known as a teacher of the science of criticism and praise [al-jarḥ wa al-taʿdīl] have considered him trustworthy and reliable."¹

Nonetheless, some have considered him Shīʿa inasmuch as he has narrated from Imam al-Riḍā (a) and others some virtues and traits which suggest that according to him the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAlī (a) was more meritorious and entitled to immediate leadership after the demise of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family. One of the traditions he has narrated is the following:

أَنَا مَدِينَةُ الْعِلْمِ وَعَلِيِّ بَابُهَا

"I am the city of Knowledge and ʿAlī is its gate."

Some bigoted individuals have gone overboard putting false blames on him and accusing him of being a Nāṣibī². For example, al-Jawzjānī writes:

"Abū Ṣalt al-Hirawī was deviated from the right path."

Ibn ʿAdī says: Abū Ṣalt has reported unacceptable traditions about the virtue and merits the Ahl al-Bayt. He was to blame for transmitting these narrations which are not acceptable."

Dāru Quṭnī writes: "Abū Ṣalt was a malicious Rāfiḍī."³

As it is clear from these passages, all these words against

¹ Cf. *Taqrīb al-tahdhīb*, vol.2, p.358.

² Cf. *Lisān al-mīzān*, vol.1, p.16.

³ Cf. *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol.18, p.73 and books that have recorded his biography.

Abū Ṣalt are because of the narrations which he has transmitted concerning the merits of the Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them; otherwise he is trustworthy, reliable and honest.

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī’s words about him are indicative of the same fact. He says:

Abū Ṣalt is truthful; he has narrated traditions that are unacceptable. He was Shī‘a. Al-‘Uqaylī has transgressed the limits in accusing him of being a liar."¹

Imam al-Riḍā and Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī

The fourth point has to do with the way in which Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī converted to Islam at Imam al-Riḍā’s hands. Ibn Taymiyya considers the report about Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī’s conversion to Islam at Imam al-Riḍā’s hand as false just as he considered Bushr al-Ḥāfī’s repentance at Imam al-Riḍā’s hand to be false and incorrect, whereas in fact, this narration has been recorded in many books. Ibn Khallikān, for example, says:

"Ma‘rūf al-Karkhī, about whom we talked earlier, was one of the lovers and supporters of ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. He was born to Christian parents. His *nisba* (agnomen) probably refers to an association with the Karkh quarter of Baghdad. His parents sent him to a teacher in his childhood. The teacher ordered him on different occasion to say:

ثالث ثلاثة

"God is the third of the three."

And he would say: "God is one."

His teacher bate and punished him harshly and severely.

¹ *Taqrīb al-tahdhīb*, vol.1, p.506.

Ma'rūf ran away from the teacher. His parents later said wishfully: "We wish he returned to us. It does not make any difference for us as to what he has. No matter what his religion, we accept him."

Thereupon, Ma'rūf converted to Islam at Imam al-Riḍā's hands and then returned to his parents. When he knocked on the door, he was asked: "Who is that?"

He answered: "This is Ma'rūf."

He was asked: "What religion do you believe in?"

He answered: "Islam."

That was when his parents converted to Islam."¹

Sunnis have ascribed strange merits to him; they have tried to hide the fact that he was a lover of Imam al-Riḍā and that he converted to Islam at his hands so that it is not considered one of his merits!!"

The fact that Ma'rūf was one of the lovers of Imam al-Riḍā (a) and was converted to Islam at his hand has been kept a secret and has never been reported by some of them. They have not also transmitted the narrations which he has reported from Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. Ḥāfiẓ Abū Na'im al-Iṣfahānī and Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Jawzī are in this category of people.²

Some other Sunni scholars such al-Sha'rānī have admitted that Ma'rūf was among the lovers and supporters of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, but they have not stated anything about how he converted to Islam.³

Some others such al-Dhahabī has mentioned Ma'rūf's story

¹ *Wafiyāt al-a'yān*, vol.5, p.231.

² *Hilyat al-awliyā'*, vol.8, p.360; *al-Muntazam*, vol.10, p.88.

³ *Lawāqih al-anwār*, vol.1, p.72.

and that of his teacher saying: "Later he returned to his parents who also converted to Islam" but he has not provided further details."¹

Some others have said: "Ma'rūf was Imam al-Riḍā's doorman. His ribs were broken and he died later due to the broken ribs."²

Al-Dhahabī rejects this report and considers it a lie. He goes on justifying it as such:

"Perhaps, Imam al-Riḍā (a) might have had a doorman who had the same name as that of Iraq's pious man e.g. Ma'rūf al-Karkhī."³

Obviously, we should know that those noble Imams' positions are not raised or lowered irrespective of whether these reports are proved to be true or false. The important goal is to know Ibn Taymiyya's enmity and grudge against the household of the Holy Prophet, peace be upon him and his family.

Imam al-Riḍā's Appointment as Crown Prince

Al-ʿAllama al-Ḥillī (ra) said:

"Ma'mūn appointed him his crown prince due to his piety and virtues."

This is also an indisputable and irrefutable historical fact. Ibn Taymiyya would deny it if he were able to, but since he was unable to refute it, he has just kept silent.

When it comes to this historical event i.e. the designation of Imam al-Riḍā as crown prince, many books have been written which make us needless to discuss it here for the sake

¹ *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, vol.9, p.339.

² *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya*, p.83.

³ *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, vol.9, p.343.

of brevity.

Imam al-Riḍā (a) and Advice to Zayd

Al-‘Allama al-Ḥillī (ra) said:

One day, Imam Al-Rida, peace be upon him was exhorting his brother Zayd. Addressing him, the Imam (a) said: "O Zayd, What will you say to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) if you spill blood, take people's property unjustly and make roads unsafe?"

This Zayd was better known as Zayd al-Nār (fire). He believed that it was obligatory to revolt against the ruler of his time. That was why he and Abū al-Sarāyā led an uprising against Ma'mūn.

The reason why he was nicknamed Zayd al-Nār was because he set houses and buildings on fire. When Ma'mūn defeated him, he forgave him and sent him to Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him.

Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, vowed that he would never talk to him.

Reports about him and his uprising can be found in *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyīn* and other historical sources.¹ This saying of Imam al-Riḍā (a) addressed to his brother has also been narrated by many biographers including al-Mannāwī.²

Ibn Taymiyya on Protection of Lady Fāṭima's Offspring from Hell-Fire

Ibn Taymiyya says that the hadith concerning Fāṭima is a lie and a fabrication by the consensus of those who are versed in hadith sciences. He writes the following:

The hadith that he mentioned of the Prophet (s) concerning

¹ *Maqātil al-ṭālibiyīn*, p.436.

² *Fayḍ al-qadīr – sharḥ al-Jāmi‘ al-saghīr*, vol.2, p.462.

Fāṭima is a lie and a fabrication by the consensus of those who are versed in hadith sciences. Even those who are not scholars of hadith can uncover its falsity because the hadith stated: “Surely Fāṭima has protected her chastity and thus Allah has forbidden her offspring from the Hell-Fire.” This entailed that protecting her chastity is the cause of forbidding her children from the Fire and this is absolutely, false for Sarah (the wife of Prophet Abraham) has protected her chastity and Allah does not forbid all her offspring from entering Hell-Fire. Allah, the Exalted says:

وَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِإِسْحَاقَ نَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ¹

"And We gave him the good news of Ishaq, a prophet among the good ones."

Also, Ṣafiyya, the aunt of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, lived a pure life but some of her off-springs are good doers and others are evil-doers and unjust.

Generally speaking, there are many ladies who have lived chaste lives, and only God knows their number but some of their off-springs are good-doers and some are bad-doers, some are faithful and others are infidels.

Again, Fāṭima's merit is not only chastity because Fāṭima (a) and other faithful ladies have the same merit in common. It was not because of this merit that Fāṭima (a) was the chief of the women of the two worlds; rather she attained this position because of another merit which was particular to her. Mostly Shī‘a Rafīda's proofs are nothing but slogans that suited their ignorance and injustice, in addition to fabricated stories that suited their ignorance and lies.

On the other hand, not Fāṭima's all off-springs are free from Hell-fire because the Rafīḍīs themselves left Zayd b. ‘Alī b.

¹ Quran, Chapter al-Ṣāfāt, verse 112.

Ḥusayn and his supporters alone accusing him of infidelity, disbelief and corruption. In fact, it should be said that Rafiḍīs have been, because of their ignorance and grudge, inimical to the off-spring of Fāṭima, peace be upon her, rather than friends."¹

Scholars' Opinions on the Said Hadith

A key question that comes up in response to Ibn Taymiyya's claim is that "how is there a consensus of those who are versed in hadith sciences about this hadith being a lie when, in fact, it has been narrated by Ḥākīm al-Nīshābūrī, Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Abū Bakr Bazzār, Abū Ya'la al-Mawṣilī al-Ṭabarānī, Abū Na'im al-Iṣfahānī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, Muttaqī al-Hindī and many others?

Ḥākīm al-Nīshābūrī says about this hadith: "It is an authentic tradition."²

Obviously, this merit is particular to the chief of the women of the world, Lady Fāṭima, peace be upon her, though some other meritorious women might have the same attribute i.e. chastity.

Mannawī interpreting this narration writes:

"Allah has freed her and her offspring from Hell-Fire because of her chastity. That is, Allah has forbidden her offspring from the Hell-Fire.

The conclusion is that the freedom of her and her offspring from Hell-fire is absolute and unrestricted by anything. As for others, they have been forbidden from Hell-fire perpetually (in the sense that they may enter the Hell-Fire for a short time) but, for some, entering the Hell-fire to get

¹ *Minhāj al-sunna*, vol.2, p.126.

² *Al-Mustadrak 'ala al-ṣaḥīḥayn*, vol.3, p.152.

purified; it is something in which there is no objection.

This tradition has been understood as such. Biographers have written that: Zayd b. Mūsa al-Kāẓim b. Ja'far al-Şādiq (peace be upon him) revolted against Ma'mūn..."¹

Al-Zarqānī also has said something in this regard. In his *Sharḥ al-mawāhib al-laduniyya*, he writes:

"It has been narrated from Ibn Mas'ūd in a disconnected (marfū')² way that if the birth of the Prophet's daughter was before his prophethood, the name Fāṭima given to her daughter was inspired to him by Allah. If her birth had been after the prophethood, the name had most probably been divinely revealed to the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family.

That is because the term "Fāṭima" derives from "Faṭam" which means abstaining or weaning. In Arabic language, the word is used when a child is weaned. That is when they say (فُطِمَ الصَّبِي) i.e. the child was weaned.

The reason why she was named Fāṭima is because of the fact that Allah Almighty protects Fāṭima and her off-spring from fire on the Judgment Day.

This protection about Fāṭima and her two sons is absolute but her other descendants will be protected from Fire perpetually. Hence, some of her descendants may temporarily enter the fire in order to be purified but then after they are purified, they will be freed from the fire.

This is a glad tiding to the family of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, who will die Muslims, not unbelievers or Kafirs.

¹ *Fayḍ al-qadīr – sharḥ al-jāmi' al-ṣaghīr*, vol.2, p.462.

² Hadith marfū' is a hadith attributed to the Prophet (s), but not proven to have a continuous chain of transmitters up to him

This interpretation is similar to what al-Samhūdī has said on the purport of a narration which says: "Whoever dies in Medina will be interceded with Allah" whereas the Prophet's intercession will include all his Ummah.

Or it means that in order to honor Fāṭima and her noble father, Allah Almighty wants to forgive the sins of the people from her off-spring.

Or it means that Allah wants to enable them to repent sincerely and genuinely and accept their repentance, though at the time of death. This narration has been reported by Ibn 'Asākir al-Dimashqī.

Al-Ghassānī and Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī have transmitted the following with a broken chain of transmission:

إِنَّمَا سُمِّيَتْ فَاطِمَةَ لِأَنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ فَطَمَهَا وَمُحِبِّهَا عَنِ النَّارِ

Fāṭima was named Fāṭima, because Allah, the Exalted, protected her and her lovers from fire.

This is a general glad-tiding for every single Muslim who loves and supports Fāṭima, peace be upon her.

When it comes to the meaning of this narration, the same three interpretations are offered here. As for the narration which has been transmitted by Abū Na'im al-Iṣfahānī and Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, it has been said that:

"Alī b. Mūsa b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him, was asked about this hadith that "Fāṭima protected her chastity and thus Allah has freed her offspring from Hell-Fire" to which he replied:

خَاصٌّ بِالْحَسَنِ وَالْحُسَيْنِ عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَامُ

That is particular to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon them.

Also, what Akhbārīs have reported about Imam al-Riḍā,

peace be upon him, rebuking his brother Zayd for leading a rebellion against Ma'mūn is nothing but a sign of humility and persuasion to obedience and not to become proud. In fact, the word "Dhurriya" in Arabic does not refer exclusively to a person who was given birth by that lady; rather it also includes her grandchildren and great grandchildren as evidenced in the following verse of the Quran:

﴿وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِن قَبْلُ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ
وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾¹

"And We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob; each of them We guided; and Noah did We guide aforetime; and of his seed (We guided) David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good."

David and Solomon, peace be upon them, are many centuries away from Prophet Abraham. Therefore, Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, being well acquainted with Arabic rhetoric, does not want to convey this meaning.

Moreover, if we say that this narration refers to the obedient descendants, we have then attached no importance to the particularity for the descendants and lovers of Fāṭima, peace be upon her, except for when it may be said that God has the right to punish his obedient servant.

Therefore, the feature mentioned in the narration is to suggest that God Almighty does not punish the obedient person in order to honor Fāṭima. God knows best.

On the other hand, the narration which deals with asking question from Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, has been reported by Abū Ya'la, al-Ṭabarānī and Ḥākīm al-Nīshābūrī.

In the addition, Ḥākīm al-Nīshābūrī confirms the authenticity of this tradition narrated on the authority of Ibn

¹ Quran, Al-An'ām: 84

Mas'ūd, not to mention the fact that there are evidences authenticating this narration.

Obviously, the fact that the body of the offspring of Fāṭima, peace be upon her, is protected from Fire is owing to her merit and status in relation to others, because Lady Maryam daughter of 'Imrān also had the same feature.

Also, with this commandment, God, the Exalted, wants to praise the attribute of chastity; otherwise Allah has forbidden her offspring from the Hell-Fire according other explicit narrations.¹

The Status of Zayd b. 'Alī (a)

Having learned Zarqāni's opinion about the narration, we must now say that Ibn Taymiyya's claim that "Rāfiḍīs abandoned Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon them) and his supporters and testified to his being a disbeliever and a corruptor" is a false and baseless accusation repeated by him in his book against the Shi'a.

There is no doubt as to the fact that Shi'a respects and honors Zayd. Even there are narrations from the Prophet (s) and Imams concerning his status. An example of those narrations is the narration transmitted by Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, the most important Shi'a traditionist. As per the narration, the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, said to Imam al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon him:

يَا حُسَيْنُ، يَخْرُجُ مِنْ صُلْبِكَ رَجُلٌ يُقَالُ لَهُ زَيْدٌ، يَتَخَطَّى هُوَ وَأَصْحَابُهُ رِقَابَ النَّاسِ
وَيَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ بِلا حِسَابٍ.²

"O Ḥusayn, it will not be long until a man will be born among your descendants. He will be called Zayd. On the day of resurrection, he and his companions will enter heaven

¹ *Sharḥ al-mawāhib al-laduniyya*, vol.3, p.203.

² *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā (a)*, vol.1, p.249.

without questioning, setting their feet on the necks of the people."

Also, in another tradition from Imam al-Ṣādiq (a), it has been reported that he said:

إِنَّ زَيْدًا كَانَ عَالِمًا وَكَانَ صَدُوقًا وَلَمْ يَدْعُكُمْ إِلَى نَفْسِهِ، إِنَّمَا دَعَاكُمْ إِلَى الرِّضَا مِنْ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ، وَ لَوْ ظَهَرَ لَوْفَى بِمَا دَعَاكُمْ إِلَيْهِ.¹

"Zayd was a scholar and a truthful person and he did not call you to himself. Rather he called you to the pleasure of the progeny of the Prophet (s). If he had been victorious, he would have remained loyal to that cause for which he called you to."

There is a narration from Imam al-Riḍā in which he says:

"كَانَ مِنْ عُلَمَاءِ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ، غَضِبَ لِلَّهِ فَجَاهَدَ أَعْدَاءَهُ حَتَّى قُتِلَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ."²

"He (Zayd b. ‘Alī) was one of the scholars from the Household of Muḥammad and got angry for the sake of the Honorable the Exalted God. He fought with the enemies of God until he got killed in His path."

Not only Shiite traditions praise Zayd b. ‘Alī, peace be upon him, but there are also prominent scholars who have praised him. For example, al-Shykh al-Mufīd says:

"Zayd b. ‘Alī b.al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon them, was the eldest of his brothers after Imam al-Bāqir, peace be upon him. He was abstemious, God-fearing, knowledgeable, generous and brave. He rose to enjoin virtue and forbid evil as well as to avenge al-Ḥusayn's blood."

Quoting narrations with different chains of narrators on the merits of Zayd b. ‘Alī (a), al-Shaykh al-Mufīd writes:

"When the news of Zayd's death reached Imam al-Ṣādiq,

¹ *Rijāl al-Kashshī*, p.184.

² *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā (a)*, vol.1, p.250.

peace be upon him, he was saddened and grieved so much that grief and sorrow became visible on his face. The Imam (a) allotted one thousand dirham of his property for the families of Zayd's companions."¹

Imam al-Riḍā's Successorship

Al-ʿAllama al-Ḥillī (ra) said:

"Maʿmūn inscribed his name on minted money, he wrote to all parts of the Caliphate informing them that he is his successor and therefore, people shall give him vow of allegiance..."

Ibn Taymiyya writes in this regard:

That he (al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī) says "that Maʿmūn relegated the matters of the caliphate to Him" is true, but it did not happen in practice... and Maʿmun did not appoint him as his successor."

We must say in response to Ibn Taymiyya: "This report has been documented in all historical and biographical sources some of which were named earlier.

Ibn al-Jawzī writes:

"In this year, Maʿmūn appointed ʿAlī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā b. Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon them, as his successor and caliph after him. He was given the title "al-Riḍā min Āl-i Muḥammad". He ordered his forces to take off their black clothes and wear green ones.

This order was announced and communicated to all parts of his country. He (Imam al-Riḍā) was appointed crown prince on Monday two nights after the month of Ramaḍān this year.

Ḥasan b. Sahl wrote a letter to ʿIsa b. Muḥammad informing him that the Commander of the Faithful, Maʿmūn, had

¹ *Al-Irshād*, vol.2, p.171-173.

appointed ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā (peace be upon him) as his successor and crown prince inasmuch as he did not find anyone among Banī ‘Abbās and the descendants of ‘Alī, peace be upon him, more meritorious, abstemious and learned than him.

He also informed him that Ma’ mūn had given ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā (peace be upon him) the title "al-Riḍā min Āl-i Muḥammad" and ordered that all his army and the entire Banū Hāshim and tribal chiefs be told to vow pledge of allegiance to him..."¹

Ibn al-Jawzī further narrates the text of the covenant and treaty that Ma’ mūn had written for Imam al-Riḍā (peace be upon him). He also quotes the Imam's writings and testimonies given on them.²

It is worth mentioning that long before Ibn al-Jawzī, al-Ṭabarī has also recorded this narration in his *History*.³ Ibn Athīr also has narrated the same in his *al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*.⁴

Touching on this issue, Ibn Khallikān writes in his history book the following:

"Ma’ mūn appointed Imam al-Riḍā (peace be upon him) his crown prince and inscribed his name on the minted dinar and dirham. He did so because he looked at Banū ‘Abbās and the children of ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon them, and found no one better qualified than ‘Alī al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. That was why he vowed pledge of allegiance to him..."⁵

Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī reports this event in the following words:

¹ *Al-Muntaẓam*, vol.10, p.93-99.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, vol.8, p.554.

⁴ *Al-Kāmil fī al-tārīkh*, vol. 6, p.326.

⁵ *Waḥyāt al-a’yān*, vol.2, p.432.

"Ma'mūn appointed 'Alī al-Riḍā b. Mūsa al-Kāẓim, peace be upon them, as his crown prince because of his strict adherence to the Shi'ism. It has even been said that Ma'mūn was determined to step down from the caliphate and surrender the government to him.

It was Ma'mūn who named 'Alī b. Mūsa (peace be upon him) "al-Riḍā", minted dirham in his name, married his daughter to him, announced his successorship across the country and ordered his army to take off their black clothes and wear green ones."¹

Having studied these historical facts, we must say that Ibn Taymiyya sternly denies all these truths owing to enmity and grudge.

Abū Nuwās and Praise of Imam al-Riḍā (a)

Abū Nuwās was asked as to why he did not praise Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him. He replied:

"I cannot be able to praise an Imam, whose father's servant was Gabriel."

Ibn Taymiyya says: These people (Shiites) are ignorant of the merits, virtues and defects. They are praising them with that which is in reality contempt and disrespect to them. That is why they make use of Abū Nuwās' poems to prove a virtue. Even if these poems are true, yet again no virtue is proved for someone by the testimony of a person who is known to be a liar. One who has little knowledge of the lives of people also knows who this poet is not to mention the fact that what this poet has said is wrong. He says:

قُلْتُ لَا اسْتَطِيعُ مَدْحُ امَامٍ كَانَ جَبْرِيلُ خَادِمًا لآيِيهِ

I said in response: "I cannot be able to praise an Imam, whose

¹ *Tārīkh al-khulafā'*, p.307.

father's servant is Gabriel.”

Obviously, this attribute is common to the off-spring of the prophets ... because people are all from the descendants of Noah and Prophet Adam...”

We reply to Ibn Taymiyya in the light of the following points:

First, do Ibn Taymiyya and other scholars of his religion quote those who are immaculate and just? Do they narrate from such people any poems or sayings in this or any other books?

Why does this man forget that he has quoted Abū Sufyān, the infidel, and other well-known hypocrites?

Second, Shiite scholars never prove the merits and virtues of their Imams with reliance on the poems of poets inasmuch as they present solid and indisputable proofs from the Quran and prophetic tradition which make them needless of these poems and such likes.

Third, this poem and the like of it indicate what the narrations and religious sources purports. It is not only the poem of a poet who may have said something based on his taste and mindset.

Therefore, citing such poems is in reality citation of the narrations which are contained in those poems, especially when the poets are themselves among the narrators.

Fourth, this poem and other poems composed by Abū Nuwās in praise of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, have been mentioned in the biographical works authored by prominent scholars before al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī and his contemporaries and more recent scholars to praise the Imam, peace be upon him. If quoting these poems was inappropriate in terms of the poet and the content, there is no doubt that these scholars would not quote them. We will mention the names of

scholars who have cited these poems.

Fifth, in view of the above four points, the real reason why this man has made such comments is the fact that Abū Nuwās has been among the poets who loved the Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them. His poems in praise of Imam al-Riḍā and his fathers, peace be upon them, suggest that he praised them a lot. Ibn Taymiyya hates those who openly express love of the Ahl al-Bayt, peace be upon them.

When it comes to the features (i.e. promiscuity and indecency), an accusation leveled against Abū Nuwās, we must say that according to the scholars, these allegations are baseless. Even if they are presumably true, he could have been a person of a loose character at an earlier age. As said by Ibn al-Jawzī, he repented in the last part of his life.

Who is Abū Nuwās?

It is appropriate now to get to know Abū Nuwās:

He is Ḥasan b. Hānī. He was born in 136 or 145 AH in Ahvaz or Basra. He learned Arabic literature from Abū Zayd and Abū ‘Ubayda.

Abū Nuwās learned Sībwayh's book in Arabic literature and he was also a student of Khalaf Aḥmar. He was also in the company of Yunūs b. Ḥabīb al-Jaramī al-Naḥvi. He learned the Quran under Ya‘qūb.

Abū Nuwās has narrated traditions from Azhar b. Sa‘d, Ḥammād b. Zayd, Ḥammād b. Salama, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Ziyād, Mu‘tamir b. Sulaymān and Yahya Qaṭṭān.

A number of famous and prominent scholars including Shāfi‘ī, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal and Ghandar have narrated traditions from him.

It is said that Shāfi‘ī is a poet who was overwhelmed by jurisprudence (fiqh) and Abū Nuwās was a jurist who was

overwhelmed by poetry.

A number of literary men and theologians such as al-Aṣghamī, Jāḥiz and Niẓām have spoken of Abū Nuwās with great admiration and respect.

His poem was at the peak. Ibn Manzūr, the author of *Lisān al-ʿArab* has dedicated a part of his encyclopedic work to Abū Nuwās' reports. In fact, the third part of Mukhtār al-Aghānī printed in Damascus, is dedicated to his reports.

Ibn Manzūr has written a good preface to that book in which he has demonstrated with clear and explicit proofs that most of what is said about Abū Nuwās being lewd and promiscuous is false. Therefore, such allegations against him are not true.

Among the proofs that bear witness to this fact is that prominent Sunni leaders listened to Abū Nuwās' poem.

According to one report, Abū Nuwās died in the year 195 (or according to another report in the year 196 or 198) AH in the city of Baghdad of Iraq.

What was mentioned above was just a summary of Abū Nuwās's biography which briefly suggests that he was a jurist and expert as well as a literary man. Although he could have committed some mistakes or indecent actions, they were not such that would keep Sunni jurists and leaders away from him or cause them to boycott him.

Moreover, he repented for his indecent actions. Ibn al-Jawzī says: "I would rather not mention his indecent actions because I remember he repented in the end of his life and that he committed those ugly actions in the early stages of his

playful life."¹

Abū Nuwās' Poems in Praise of Imam al-Riḍā (a)

As mentioned earlier, Abū Nuwās has been reported to have praised Imam al-Riḍā in his poems. These are poems narrated by different scholars including al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, may his soul rest in peace.

Ibn al-Jawzī says: Al-Ṣūlī said: Abū Nuwās uttered these verses in praise of Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him.

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| قيل لي أنت واحد الناس في كلّ | كلام من المقال بديه |
| لك في جوهر الكلام بديع | يثمر الدرّ في يدي مجتنيه |
| فعلى م تركت مدح ابن موسى | والخصال التي تجمّعن فيه |
| قلت: لا اهتدي لمدح امام | كان جبريل خادماً لأبيه ² |

*It was said to me that mine was the best rhyme,
Articulate in arts of brilliant speech and chime,
That I have pearls of beautiful speech,
Bearing fruits in the hands that can reach;
"So why did you leave the praise of the son
Of Mūsa, and equal to his merits is none?"
I said how could I possibly praise and be fair
To one whose father Jibreel did serve and care?*

Al-Dhahabī writes: Abū Nuwās has a poem in praise of Imam ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā (peace be upon him) which is as

¹ For further information about Abū Nuwās' life, see *History of Baghdad*, vol.7, p.436; *Al-Muntaẓam*, vol.10, p.16; *Wafiyāt al-a ‘yān*, vol.1, p.373; *Al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*, vol.10, p.227, *Siyar a'alām al-nubalā’*, vol.9, p.279; *Ḥāshiyat al-wāfī bil-wafiyāt*, vol.12, p.283.

² *Al-Muntaẓam*, vol.10, p.120.

follows:

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| قيل لي أنت أحسن الناس طراً | في فنونٍ من الكلام النبيه |
| لك من جيد القريض مديح | يثمر الدر في يدي مجتنيه |
| فعلى مَ تركت مدح ابن موسى | والخصال التي تجمعن فيه؟ |
| قلت لا أستطيع مدح إمام | كان جبريل خادماً لأبيه ¹ |

It is said to me, you are the best of men

In the various styles of noble discourse

Your panegyrics expressed in admirable verse are

A blossom filling the hands of he who culls it with a fruit of pearl

Why then have you neglected to celebrate the son of Mūsā

And extol the noble qualities united in his person?

I answered: "I am unable to praise an Imām for

Whose father Gabriel was a servant."

Also, Al-Dhahabī writes:

Al-Ṣūlī says: Aḥmad b. Yaḥya narrated to us that al-Sha‘bī says: The most brilliant poem is the poem which Anṣār had said in the Battle of Badr and it is the following poem:

وبيش بدر إذ يرُدُّ وجوههم جبريل تحت لوائنا ومحمّد

Beside the well of Badr when the faces turn away,

Gabriel and Prophet Muḥammad are under our flags.

More brilliant than this are al-Ḥasan b. Hānī's word in praise of Imam ‘Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā, peace be upon him when he

¹ *Tārīkh al-Islam*, vol.14, p.271, events of the years 201-210.

said:

*It was said to me that mine was the best rhyme,
Articulate in arts of brilliant speech and chime.¹*

Also, al-Şafdī has narrated these poems in *Al-Wāfi*.² Also, Ibn Ṭūlūn³ has narrated the same.

Ibn Khallikān⁴ and Ibn Ṭūlūn say:

The reason why these poems were composed by Abū Nuwās is that some of his companions objected to him telling that they had not seen anyone more abject and lowlier than him because he had composed poems about everything, even wine, but he had not composed any poems about Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, despite living in his time.

He answered: I swear by Allah that the reason I did not compose poems about him is because of giving him respect and considering him great. (That is, I did not want to degrade him by composing poems about him). People like me are not able to praise people like him. There and then he composed these poems.

Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī has also mentioned a narration in *The History of Nīshābūr (Tārīkh Nīshābūr)* which Ḥāfiẓ al-Ḥamwīnī al-Juwaynī has also narrated from Ḥākim. Al-Ḥamwīnī writes:

Al-Shaykh ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zujāj narrates from Qāḍī Jamāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Şamad b. Muḥammad b. Abī al-Faḍl that Muḥammad b. Faḍl Abū ‘Abd Allah and Abū al-Qāsim Zāhir b. Ṭāhir have reported: Ḥāfiẓ Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Ḥusayn narrates from Imām Ḥākim al-Bayyī’, he from ‘Alī b. Muḥammad Mudhakkār,

¹ *Sīyar A‘lām al-Nubalā*, vol.9, p.388.

² *Al-Wāfi bil-wafiyāt*, vol.22, p.249.

³ *Al-A‘imma al-ithnā ‘ashar*, p.98.

⁴ *Wafiyāt al-a‘yān*, vol.2, p.433.

from Muḥammad b. ‘Alī Faqīh from Ḥusayn b. Ibrāhīm that ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim narrates the following from Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Yaḥya al-Fārisī:

One day Abū Nuwās saw Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him when he was coming from the Caliph's court and was riding a mule. Abū Nuwās approached and greeted him. Then he said:

"O Son of the Messenger of Allah, I have composed poems which I would like to read out to you."

The Imam said: "Read them."

Abū Nuwās then read these poems:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| تجري الصلاة عليهم أينما ذكروا | مطهرون نقيات جيوبهم |
| فما له في قديم الدهر مفتخر | من لم يكن علويّاً حين تنسبه |
| صفاكم واصطفاكم أيها البشر | الله لما برا خلقاً فأثمنه |
| علم الكتاب وما جاءت به السور | وأنتم الملاء الأعلى وعندكم |

The immaculate progeny [of ‘Alī], the pure of heart!

Whenever their names are pronounced, benedictions accompany it,

He, who cannot trace his ancestry back to ‘Alī,

Has no claim from the ancient times to boast over,

When God created and perfected the world,

He made you unpolluted, and chose you for himself, O mankind,

But you, [sons of ‘Alī] are the noblest of all mankind,

You possess knowledge of God's book, and the meaning of its chapters.

Imam al-Riḍā, peace be upon him, then said to him:

قَدْ جئتَ بأبياتٍ ماسبقكَ لها أحدٌ.

You recited poems no one had recited before you.

Then he said to his servant:

يا غُلام، هل معكَ من نفقتنا شيءٌ؟

"O servant, how much is remained of our expenditure?"

He answered: "Three hundred *dinars* (every *dinar* costing a *mithqal* – equivalent to 5 grams)."

The Imam (a) said:

أعطيها إياه

"Give all of it to Abū Nuwās."

Then he said:

لعله استقلَّها، يا غلام. سقى إليه البغلة.¹

Maybe he would regard that amount as little, take this mule to him, as well."

Ibn Khallikān and Ibn Ṭūlūn have also narrated these poems.²

Al-Ṣafḍī writes:

Abū Nuwās composed these poems about Imam al-Riḍā:

"The immaculate progeny [of 'Alī], the pure of heart!

*Whenever ..."*³

Also, Ḥākīm al-Nīshābūrī narrates from al-Ṣūlī, he from al-Mubarrad:

One day, Abū Nuwās came out and saw someone riding a

¹ *Farā'id al-samṭayn*, vol.2, p.200.

² *Wafiyāt al-a'yān*, vol.2, p.433; *al-A'imma al-ithnā 'ashar*, p.99.

³ *Al-Wāfi bil-wafiyāt*, vol.22, p.250.

quadruped. "Who is he?" he asked.

They answered: "Alī b. Mūsa al-Riḍā, peace be upon him."

He then composed these poems:

إذا أبصرتك العينُ من بعد غايه
و عارض فيك الشكَّ أثبتك القلب
و لو أنّ قوماً يَمَموك لقادهم
نسيمك حتى يَسْتَدِلَّ بك الركب

Had the eyes sought you for a goal,

And the mind doubted you and the soul,

The heart would surely you recognize

Even when not seen by the eyes.

If people wish to see you but do not know,

Your fragrance will tell them where to go.

The incident has also been narrated by al-Ḥamwīnī al-Juwaynī from Ḥākim al-Nīshābūrī.¹

¹ *Farā'id al-samṭayn*, vol.2, p.202.

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