

Imām Muḥammad al-Jawwād and Imām ‘Alī al-Hadī, and Imāmah

The doctrine of Imāmah in the first two centuries was still subject to much criticism and debate in the Shī‘ah world, accepted only by a small minority of the Ummah, they could not come to an agreement even on the fundamental aspects—such as the candidates—or even the nature of their appointment and office. This disagreement further polarized, to such an extent that this already splintered group further fragmented, drastically, with confirmation bias overpowering the faculties of each sect or faction, deterring them from any form of lucid deliberation, and instead inciting them to obstinate adherence. A known symptom of confirmation bias is illusory correlation—whereby the afflicted has the tendency to see non-existent correlations in sets of data, a distinctive feature of the Shī‘ah. So infatuated are they by their preconceived notions that even what could undoubtedly be seen as divine intervention could not dissuade them from their deviant beliefs.

The doctrines of Badā—which suggests that Allah only learns of matters after they occur forcing Him to change His will—as well as Taqiyyah—used to discredit the open refutations of the Imāms—are all products of their confirmation bias. While these concepts have provided the Shī‘ah with enough impetus to adhere to their beliefs, the year 203 A.H saw a situation arise which no one had envisaged or prepared for. Imām ‘Alī al-Riḍā—whose Imāmah had barely been acknowledged—passed away leaving behind only **one son**.

Muhammad al-Jawwād—who was only a young child aged 7.

The doctrine of Imāmah was already delicate and hanging by a thread, when this new state of affairs confounded the Shī‘ah world. The few devotees of al-Riḍā were perplexed, and many returned to Waqf; deferring any judgement on the Imām after Imām al-Kāẓim, and refused to recognize even al-Riḍā.

Another group became known as the Qaṭ‘iyyah. They recognized al-Riḍā as the Imām but ended the line with him and refused to acknowledge anyone after him.

The diehards who were insistent on continuing the line of Imāmah—despite its falsity being more evident now than ever before—differed with each other in stipulating the next Imām.

1. Some turned to Aḥmad ibn Mūsā al-Kāẓim, around whom the Zaydīs also rallied. They carried on as if Muḥammad al-Jawwād didn’t even exist.¹

2. Others later rallied around Muḥammad ibn Qāsim ibn ‘Umar ibn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn when he revolted against the Abbasid ruler Mu‘taṣim in 218 A.H.

The primary argument put forward by these two groups was that Allah states in the Noble Qur’an:

وَابْتَلُوا الْيَتَامَىٰ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغُوا النِّكَاحَ فَإِنْ آنَسْتُمْ مِنْهُمْ رُشْدًا فَادْفَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ أَمْوَالَهُمْ

*And test the orphans [in their abilities] until they reach marriageable age. Then if you perceive in them sound judgement, release their property to them.*²

When Allah has made it incumbent *not* to give a child his wealth, as is the case with all orphans, then it invalidates him being the Imām; because the Imām is the leader in all religious and mundane

¹ *Firaq al-Shī‘ah*, p. 72.

² *Sūrah al-Nisā’*: 6.

issues. When he is considered unfit to have control of his own wealth how then can he be placed in charge over everyone else's charities and Khums. When his verdicts and decisions are not given any consideration regarding his own health and wealth then how can he be considered the leader over all jurists, judges, rulers, and entire Ummah—whose edicts are considered binding upon them all?³

3. While the young age of al-Jawwād—his father leaving him at 4 to go to Ma'mūn and then orphaned at 7—resulted in many considering him unfit for the post of Imām there were still those who maintained that he was the Imām. However it became very difficult and uncomfortable for them to deal with the problem of his age and knowledge.

And illusory correlation was displayed at its finest, with a number of theories emerging to justify the lie.

1. The first was that the Imām gained knowledge from the books his father had left for him. Books not seen or read by anyone else.

2. But since it was still difficult to accept that a 4 year old could master the intricate and delicate issues of Dīn, others felt it better to give this knowledge a divine flavour. Thus they alleged that the Imām gained knowledge through inspiration, divine whisperings into his ears, true dreams, and even angels talking to him.⁴

3. Others dismissed any objections against his Imāmah by comparing him to the Prophets Yaḥyā and 'Īsā ﷺ, citing the Qur'ānic verses concerning their prophethood as proof, as if these verses applied specifically to the Imāms.

4. Since these views contained gaping holes in its centre that would lead anyone with a sound disposition to disbelieve in Imāmah altogether, a few sought to adopt a more cautious path. They said that he is the Imām and the affairs are in his hands only, but we have to wait for him to reach maturity and then he will attain knowledge. Not by some supernatural means but through his own efforts and study.

This view, however, leaves one with the nagging question:

What is the WHOLE WORLD supposed to do while we wait for the Imām to reach puberty?

The diverse theories on who is the Imām and how he attains knowledge indicates that there was no clear direction from the Imāms themselves. All they had were a few notions posited by a few deviants in different areas of society, notions they eventually attributed to the illustrious Imāms.

The Imāmī Shī'ah were compelled to believe in the Imāmah of al-Jawwād merely to save this doctrine from collapse. They were forced to build this doctrine on scattered narrations of miracles—reported by one or two individuals—the credibility of which remains a question to this present day.

These secret miracles, performed in isolation, with no credible witnesses, are like:

A legendary superhero...

With the **amazing** ability to turn invisible.

³ Al-Ash'arī; p. 96; Mufid: *al-Fuṣūl al-Mukhtārah*, p.112-113.

⁴ *Firaq al-Shī'ah*, p. 86-90; al-Ash'arī, p. 99.

But only when no one is looking!

The Dīn of Islam—the last and final religion for mankind—cannot be based upon such flimsy superstitions.

As if this was not enough, divine intervention split the confused Shī'ah yet again. As Imām al-Jawwād passed away at the age of 25 while his two sons, 'Alī and Mūsā, were still little kids; the eldest not being even 7 years old!

Thus the same problem of tender age repeated itself in the period of 'Alī al-Hādī. Muḥammad al-Jawwād had left his wealth and belongings in the hands of Muḥammad ibn Musawwir, with the instruction to hand it over to him only when he attains maturity.⁵

This led many of the Shī'ah to ask:

If al-Hādī was not able to manage his wealth, gardens, and expenditures due to his tender age, according to the view of his father, then who was the Imām at that time?

How can a small child be the Imām?

Yet more confusion arose as to which of the two, 'Alī or Mūsā—was the Imām, if they were going to accept their Imāmah.

Al-Kulaynī and al-Mufīd narrate the perplexity of the Shī'ah on this issue, and that the Shī'ah met in the house of Muḥammad al-Faraj to discuss the issue.⁶

This exposes the reality of Imāmah and the true nature of their appointment. The Imāms were appointed by the Shī'ah and not by a divine decree from Allah.

Nevertheless after much debate, a man later came to them to inform them that al-Jawwād had told him **SECRETLY** that the Imām would be his son 'Alī al-Hādī.

So it is this—this solitary questionable narration—upon which his Imāmah rests, and upon which the Shī'ah expect us to believe is our salvation.

However, there were still those who believed that Mūsā ibn Muḥammad al-Jawwād was the Imām and held onto this belief until later—when he attained maturity—he belied them, dissociated from them and any person who claims to be the Imām.⁷

Amidst the confusion, along comes Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr al-Namirī and hijacks a portion of these followers. The founder of the Nuṣayriyyah—Muḥammad ibn Nuṣayr—claimed to be a Prophet and that 'Alī al-Hādī was Allah incarnate, along with a number of other claims such as legitimizing incestuous relations and homosexuality; with which he attempted to distort the pristine teachings of Islam.⁸

This was a tumultuous period in Shī'ī history, lasting almost 50 years—203 to 254 A.H—wherein the very foundations of their belief was shattered, leading them to even follow an imposter like Ibn Nuṣayr.

⁵ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1 p. 325.

⁶ *Ibid*, vol. 1 p. 324; *al-Irshad*, p. 328.

⁷ *Maqālāt wa al-Firaq*, p. 99.

⁸ *Firaq al-Shī'ah*, p. 78.

Imām al-Jawwād remained Imām for 17 years, almost half of that period spent in juvenescence unable to guide the community, only to be succeeded by another immature Imām also unable to guide the community, which led to a steady decline in those who subscribed to this particular line.

The narrations reported by al-Kulaynī in *al-Kāfi* from these personalities; only 24 from al-Jawwād and 33 from al-Hādī —who passed away only when Kulaynī was four years old, gives us a fair assessment of the support these “child Imāms” enjoyed as well as the legacy they left behind; especially when we consider that the same book reports 2448 narrations from al-Ṣādiq, who had passed away more than a century before al-Kulaynī was born.

The Shīʿah doctrine of Imāmāh thus comprises all the elements of wonder and mystery surpassing the imaginations of even the best fictional writers. But the story is yet to conclude as the greatest yarn ever, which would make even the devil himself blush, was about to be spun. The Man of the Hour, the Last Hero, the Final Conqueror, the Seal, the Twelfth Imām, the Mahdī, was about to be born... *but in the minds of the Shīʿah only*. An epic tale we could say is called **The Never Ending Story**.