

Imāmah: Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī and thereafter

Thus far in our series we have investigated the historical development of the Shīʿī concept of Imāmah, from its inception under the notorious hypocrite Ibn Saba' through the lives of the illustrious Imāms, until the tenth Imām ʿAlī al-Hādī. We discovered that it lacked any sort of foundation or Islamic justification, the concept itself as well as its purport was rejected by the Imāms of the Ahl al-Bayt, their brothers, and the majority of the Shīʿah in their respective generations. We have seen it warp from a political movement to what one may describe as an aberrant cult, teeming with elements of kufr and shirk.

Seeing this doctrine heading off a cliff, many abandoned the cart—its adherents lessening even further with the passage of time—thus inevitably leaving its devotees clutching at straws to ensure their doctrines survival. It no longer mattered whether the reasoning was logical or even supported by evidence; hearsay and speculation became the lifebuoy keeping it afloat.

The issue of childhood in the eras of Imām al-Jawwād and Imām al-Hādī literally shook the foundations of this ideology, and by the time the year 254 A.H arrived, the Shīʿah were more inclined to Zaydī principles; aligning themselves with any member of the Ahl al-Bayt who led them against the powers of that time. Thus, the support enjoyed by Imām ʿAlī al-Hādī was miniscule, which would be further split after his demise.

During the lifetime of ʿAlī al-Hādī, the Shīʿah had already come to believe that his eldest son, Muḥammad would succeed him, even circulating an edict to the same in the name of the Imām. However, just as it occurred in the case of Ismāʿīl ibn Jaʿfar, Muḥammad passed away during the lifetime of his father, forcing the Shīʿah to revisit this opinion. While others did switch their opinion on the matter, some continued to maintain that Muḥammad was the Imām, and in fact the Mahdī who had gone into occultation and would one day return.¹

Others were divided between the two brothers, with equal claims made for candidacy of Ḥasan and Jaʿfar—the two sons of Imām al-Hādī. Amongst them now were some of those who had initially believed in the Imāmah of Muḥammad ibn al-Hādī but were forced to make a u-turn on the death of Muḥammad, attributing the mistake not to themselves but to Allah ﷻ, accusing Him of Badā and the ultimate cause of their confusion.

The tenure of Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, however, did not last long and he passed away just 6 years after, at the young age of 28, leaving behind no issue. This in itself should have resolved the matter once and for all, but the Shīʿah would not have any of it and instead grasped onto every possible opinion to save them from the abyss they found themselves plummeting into. Al-Nawbakhtī counts no less than 14 sects that emerged on the death of al-ʿAskarī. A few of the theories that emerged were:

- Some claimed Jaʿfar was the rightful Imām from the beginning and not his brother.
- Others claimed that Jaʿfar was now the Imām after his brother.
- Others returned back to their belief that Muḥammad ibn al-Hādī was in fact the Imām.
- Some ended the line,
- Some chose to postpone all judgement on the issue, effectively burying their heads in the sand,
- While a few others pulled out an old card from the Shīʿah box of tricks and said: There is a son, there has to be a son, and he is the Mahdī and he is gone into occultation, only to return one day at the appointed hour and restore justice to the earth.²

The questions which plagued the minds of many at that time though could not be simply shrugged off:

- Where is he then?
- Why hasn't anyone seen him?

¹ *Firaq al-Shīʿah*, pg. 79.

² *Firaq al-Shīʿah*, pg. 79-94.

- If he was truly born then why was the estate of his father divided between the mother and brother of Ḥasan?

But the advocates of this theory could not be bothered by the facts, and between the doctrines of Bada and Taqiyyah, they had enough to keep the ruse going.

Soon a small group emerged, setting themselves up as the representatives of the “Hidden” Imam. At the head of them was a person by the name of ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd al-Amrī, who controlled this integral network, a network designed for the sole purpose of collecting money in the name of the Hidden Imām. All followers of the Imāms were obliged to pay one fifth of their income to the ‘representatives’ of the Imam. This is called Khums, which is compulsory in the Shī‘ah faith. This practice of Khums continues to this day: the Shī‘ah of Iran pay a religious tax that goes into the coffers of their Ayatollahs.

So, the tale was soon crafted that the Eleventh Imām, Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, had left behind a son before he died, who was supposedly four years old and was named Muḥammad. According to ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd, this son went into occultation and **nobody** but ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd himself could have any contact with the Hidden Imam. And from that point onwards, ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd would act as the wakeel or representative of the Hidden Imam and collect MONEY in his name.

Ja‘far, the brother of Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, insisted that no such son existed and tried his level best to expose the lies of ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd. Moojan Momen writes in *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam*:

Ja‘far remained unshakable in his assertion that his brother (Hasan al-Askari) had no progeny.³

But it was easier for the Shī‘ah to accuse Ja‘far of being a liar and a thief who stole from their Hidden Imam, than accept the bitter truth.

It should be noted that Ja‘far, according to Shī‘ī belief, would also be part of the Ahl al-Bayt, since he was the brother of Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. The Ithnā ‘Ashariyyah, thus, abandon Ja‘far, a member of the Ahl al-Bayt, and instead follow ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd.

‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd spread this wondrous fairy-tale of a son who was born to Ḥasan al-‘Askarī from the union of the 11th Imam and a Roman slave-girl, who is variously named as Narjis, Sawsan, or Mulaykah. She is mentioned as having been the daughter of Yusha’ (Joshua), the Roman Emperor, who is the direct descendent of the apostle Simon Peter. The story goes on to tell of the Roman slave-girl’s capture by the Muslim army, how she eventually came to be sold to Hasan al-Askari, and of her supernatural pregnancy. The story then relates the secret birth of the “son”, whom no one—aside from ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd and his clique—knew anything of. Everything about the child is enveloped in a thick and impenetrable cloud of mystery.

Then the story goes that ten days before the death of Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, that child of four or five years disappeared and took along with him all the things which had been passed down from their first Imām—Sayyidunā ‘Alī عليه السلام—to the eleventh Imām Ḥasan al-‘Askarī. For instance, the original and complete Qur’ān compiled and written by Sayyidunā ‘Alī عليه السلام himself, all the ancient Holy Scriptures like the Torah, Bible, Psalms of David, etc., in their original forms, and the Muṣḥaf Fāṭimah, al-Jafr and the leather bag containing al-Jāmid (two other divine books believed by them to have been revealed after the Qur’ān), as well as the miracles of the Prophets of the past—the Staff of Mūsā, the Shirt of Ādam, the Ring of Sulaymān etc. etc. With all these materials the four or five year old child singly vanished and hid himself in a cave of his city called Samarra.

³ *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam*, (London, 1985, p. 162).

‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd remained the representative of the Hidden Imam for a number of years. In all that time, he was the only link the Shī‘ah had with their supposed Imam. During that time, he supplied the Shī‘ah community with *Tawqī’āt* or written communications which he claimed were written to them by the Hidden Imam. Many of these communications, which are still preserved in books like al-Ṭūsī’s *al-Ghaybah*, had to do with denouncing other claimants to the position of representative. In fact, many people had come to realise exactly how lucrative a position ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd had created for himself.

‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd blocked all efforts by other claimants by these *Tawqī’āt*, which called them liars and frauds. The Shī‘ah literature dealing with ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd’s tenure as representative is replete with references to money collected from the Shī‘ah public (i.e. Khums).

When ‘Uthmān ibn Sa‘īd died, his son—Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad—produced a written communication from the Hidden Imam in which he himself is appointed as the second representative, a position he held for about fifty years. A period in which, once again, no one saw the Imām and the sole link to him was this individual collecting funds on his behalf.

He too, like his father, had to deal with several rival claimants to his position, but the *Tawqī’āt* which he regularly produced to denounce them and reinforce his own position ensured the removal of such obstacles and the continuation of the support from a credulous Shī‘ah public.

Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad was followed in this position by Abū al-Qāsim ibn Rawh al-Nawbakhtī, a scion of the powerful and influential Nawbakhti family of Baghdad. Before succeeding Abū Ja‘far, Abū al-Qāsim was his chief aide in the collection of the one-fifth taxes (Khums) from the Shī‘ah.

Abū al-Qāsim, like his two predecessors before him, too had to deal with rival claimants one of whom—Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Shalmaghani—used to be an accomplice of his. He is reported in Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭūsī’s *Kitāb al-Ghaybah* as having stated:

We knew exactly what we were into with Abū al-Qāsim ibn Rawh. We used to fight like dogs over this matter (of being representative).

When Abū al-Qāsim al-Nawbakhtī died in 326 A.H, he bequeathed the position of representative to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Samarrī. Whereas the first three representatives were shrewd manipulators, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Samarrī proved to be a more conscientious person. During his three years as representative, there was a sudden drop in *Tawqī’āt*. However, when asked upon his deathbed as to who his successor will be, rather than expose the scam for what it was, he answered that Allah Himself would fulfil the matter. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Samarrī then produced a letter in which the Imam declared from that day till the day of his reappearance he will never again be seen, and that anyone who claims to see him in that time is liar.

Thus, more or less after 70 years, the last “door of contact” with the Hidden Imam closed. The Shī‘ah term this period, in which there was contact with their Hidden Imam through his representatives or rather tax collectors the *Ghaybah Sughrā* (Lesser Occultation) and the period from the death of the last representative onwards the *Ghaybah Kubrā* (Greater Occultation). The *Ghaybah Kubrā* has lasted for over a thousand years.

When one reads the classical literature of the Shī‘ah in which the activities of the four representatives are outlined, one is struck by the constantly recurring theme of Money. The representatives of the Hidden Imam are always mentioned in connection with receiving and collecting “the Imam’s money” from his loyal Shī‘ah followers. There is a shocking lack of any activities of an academic or spiritual nature.

The Shī‘ah community never had the privilege of seeing or meeting the person they believed to be the author of the *Tawqī’āt*. Their experience was limited to receiving what the representatives produced. Even the argument of a consistent handwriting in all the various *Tawqī’āt* is at best melancholy. There is no way one

can get away from the fact that the existence of the Hidden Imam rests upon nothing other than acceptance of the words of the representatives, who had set themselves up in a rather lucrative position. The activities of those representatives go a long way to show that they were much, much more inspired by the desire to possess wealth than by pious sentiments of any kind.

In Iran today, the Shī'ah Ayatollahs are multi-Millionaires or rather Billionaires as a result of the Khums they procure from the Shī'ah devout. They exploit religion for money, wealth, and power. These Ayatollahs are today's "Representatives" of the Hidden Imam, as expounded upon at length by the Supreme Ayatollah Khomeini who has duped the entire Shī'ah community—yet again—by the doctrine of Wilāyat al-Faqīh, granting himself *Wilāyat al-Mutlaqah*, meaning that he has absolute authority from Allah, since he is the representative of the Imam in his absence. And just as the four early representatives during the lesser occultation condemned and denounced all rival claimants, so too did Ayatollah Khomeini arrest and condemn all those Ayatollahs who questioned his position as representative of the Imam.

And so, the scam continues... Love for the Ahl al-Bayt continues to be exploited for political and financial gain, emotions are stirred to override logic, passions to cast aside reason, and hatred to blind from the truth; but it can only last so long:

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

*But We have certainly tried those before them, and Allah will surely make evident those who are truthful, and He will surely make evident the liars.*⁴

Fraudsters always get exposed and their schemes laid to waste...

And they are inevitably left to face the wrath of Allah *سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّكَ الْعَمَلِ*...

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ قَالَ سَأُنزِلُ مِثْلَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَاسِطُو أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرَجُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ تُجْرُونَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَكُنْتُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهِ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

And who is more unjust than one who invents a lie about Allah or says, "It has been inspired to me," while nothing has been inspired to him, and one who says, "I will reveal [something] like what Allah revealed." And if you could but see when the wrongdoers are in the overwhelming pangs of death while the angels extend their hands, [saying], "Discharge your souls! Today you will be awarded the punishment of [extreme] humiliation for what you used to say against Allah other than the truth and [that] you were, toward His verses, being arrogant."⁵

⁴ Sūrah al-Ankabūt: 3.

⁵ Sūrah al-An'ām: 93.