Imam al-Baqir(A.S.) Explains The Imamate

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The Ima`mate is a breath of Allah's spirit. It is a favor of His favors. He has bestowed it on man to lead him to belief and good and to guide him to the right path. The Shi'ites believe that it is among the fundamentals of the religion and the pillars of Islam. That is because it is the strong base on which Islamic social justice depends. Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, talked about many dimensions of the Ima`mate. The following are some of them:

The Critical Need for the Ima`m

The Ima`mate is a necessity of Islamic life. The affairs of society are not righteous without it. Moslems have unanimously agreed that it is obligatory and necessary. Ja`bir b. Yazid al-Ju'fı asked Ima`m al-Ba`qir, peace be on him, about the need for the Prophet and the Ima`m. Thus, he, peace be on him, said: "The world remains righteous. That is because Allah, the Great and Almighty, does not punish the people of the earth as long as the Prophet or the Ima`m is among them. Allah, the Great and Almighty, said: 'Allah does not punish them as long as you are among them.'

The Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, said:'The stars are safety for the people of the sky, and the members of my family are safety for the people of the earth. If the stars went away, what the people of the sky hate would hit them. If the members of my House went away, what the people of the earth hate would afflict them.' By the members of his House, he meant the Ima`ms whose obedience Allah, the Great and Almighty, joined to His obedience when He said: 'O You who believe, obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority among you.' They were infallible and purified.

The did not commit sins nor did they disobey (Allah). They were supported, successful, and guided (to righteousness). Through them Allah gives people. Through them the country is prosperous. Through them rain comes down from the sky. Through them the blessings of the earth comes forth. Through them the people of sins are given time and are not punished and tortured quickly. Gabriel did not separate himself from them (the Prophet's Household) nor did they separate themselves from him. They did not separate themselves from the Koran nor did it separate itself from them. Allah's blessings be on them all.(Illal al-Sharaiya', pp. 123- 124)

The speech of the Ima`m, peace be on him, is full of the words concerning the need for the Ima`mate, for it leads the world to righteousness and reforms the deviation from religion. The

Ima`m praised the pure Ima`ms from the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them. He underlined that they were safety for the people of the earth, and that through them the tribulation is driven away, rain comes down from the sky, and the blessings of the earth come forth.

To know the Ima`m is obligatory

The traditions reported on the authority of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and on the authority of the custodians of the sciences of the pure Ima`ms have agreed that to know the Ima`m of the time is obligatory, and that whoever dies and does not him is like those who died before Islam, as the Prophetic tradition stated. In this respect, many traditions were reported on the authority of Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him. The following are some of them: 1. Ja`bir b. Yazid al-Ju'fi reported. He said: [I heard Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, say:] "Surely, he who knows Allah, the Great and Almighty, and worships Him is the person who knows Allah and recognizes His Ima`m from among us, ahl al-Bayt, and he who does not know Allah, the Great and Almighty, and does not recognize the Ima`m from us, ahl al-Bayt, knows and worships other than Allah.(Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 181)

2. Mohammed b. Moslem reported. He said: [I heard Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, say:] Everyone who is obedient to Allah, the Great and Almighty, in worship in which he exerts effort, but does not have an Ima`m (appointed) by Allah, his deeds are unacceptable, and he is astray and bewildered. Allah detests his deeds. Such a person is like a sheep which has strayed away from its flock and its shepherd, and which runs in this and that direction the whole day.

When the night descends on it, it sees some flock of sheep with a shepherd. It goes towards it and is deceived. It passes that night with that flock in their resting-place. When the shepherd herds the flock, that sheep refuses to recognize the flock and the shepherd. It runs in bewilderment seeking its shepherd and its flock. Then it sees another flock of sheep with its shepherd.

Again the sheep turns towards it and is deceived by the second flock. The shepherd shouts: 'Join your shepherd and your flock. You are lost from, and bewilder over, your shepherd and your flock.' So, the sheep runs away in fear, bewilderment and loss, having no shepherd to guide it to a pasture or back to its own place. Being like this, a wolf takes advantage of its being lost, and eats it. Thus is it, by Allah, O Mohammed, he who wakes up in this community without having an Ima`m (appointed) by Allah, the Great and Almighty, who is manifest and just, wakes up astray and lost. If such a person dies in this condition, he dies the death of

unbelief and hypocrisy. O Mohammed, know unjust Ima`ms and their followers have been expelled from the religion of Allah. They are misguided and they misguide. So, the deeds which they perform are as ashes whereon the wind blow strong upon a tempestuous day. They have no power over what they have earned- that is the far error.(Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 181)

Indeed the Ima`ms of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them, must be known. That is because they were the custodians of the revelation and the trustees of the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him and his family, and his successors over his community. They were unlike the Umayyad and the 'Abba`sid kings who committed all sins and spread oppression and corruption in the earth.

To obey the Ima`m is obligatory

To obey the Ima`m is a religious obligation. Allah, the Most High, has mentioned that in the Koran: "Obey Allah and obey the apostle and those in authority among you.(The Holy Qur'an, al-Nisa', 59)

Many traditions have mentioned that. Zara`ra reported on the authority of Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, who said: "The apex of the thing, the height of it, the key to it, the gate to everything and the good pleasure of (Allah), the Most Merciful, the Blessed, is to obey the Ima`m after knowing him."Then he said: "Surely, Allah, the Blessed, the Most High, says: 'Whoever obeys the Apostle, surely obeys Allah. And whoever turns his back- We have not sent you to be a watcher over them.(Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 185) The Right of the Ima`m against People The Ima`m has a right against people. Meanwhile people have a right against the Ima`m. Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, talked about that when Abu` Hamza asked him:

-What is the Ima`m's right against people?

-His right against them is to listen and obey (him). -What is their right against them?

- He divides among them equally and treats the subjects with justice..(Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 405) Indeed the right of the Ima`m against people is that they should listen to him and carry out his orders, for he strives to achieve their happiness and righteousness. As for their right against him is that he should divide equally the properties of Allah among them. He should not prefer one group of people to the other. He should treat them with justice that is the shade of Allah in the earth.

The Dignity of the Ima`m

Surely, the Ima`m has a dignity and high position with Allah. No one of Allah's servants is able

to obtain such a dignity and high position. Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, talked about that. He, peace be on him, said to Ja`bir b. Yazid al-Ju'fi: "Surely, Allah took Abraham as a servant before He took him as a prophet. He took him as a prophet before He took him as an apostle. He took him as an a apostle before He took him as a friend. He took him as a friend before He took him as an Ima`m. When He gathered these things for him, He said to him : 'O Abraham, I am going to appoint you as an Ima`m over the people. ' Abraham regarded the Ima`mate as great, so he said: 'And of my offspring.' He (Allah) said: 'My covenant does not include the unjust.').(Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 175)

The meaning of this tradition is that the Ima`mate is the highest rank with Allah. The prophets and the apostles were unable to obtain it. However, Allah singled out His friend Abraham with it. He also singled out the pure Ima`ms from the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), who were the custodians of the revelation, the doors of guidance and mercy for this community.

Accepting the Leadership of the Ima`ms of ahl al-Bayt

Surely, accepting the leadership of the pure Ima`ms is part of Islam and proof for belief. The Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, proclaimed this holy religious obligation among his community. He made it incumbent on the community to adopt it. He took more care of it than any other religious obligation. Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, said: "Islam has been built on five (pillars): the prayers, zakat (alms), fasting, the hajj, and accepting the leadership (of my family). He did not proclaim a thing more than he proclaimed the leadership (of his family). However, people have adopted four (pillars) and left this (leadership).)(Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 183) It is incumbent on all Moslems to follow the good Ima`ms who are the source of light in the earth. In other words Moslems must follow the legal precepts and the rules of morals which have reported on their authority.

Al-Ba`qir praised the Ima`ms

Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, praised the good Ima`ms in many of his traditions. He talked about their high rank. The following are some of his traditions:

1. He, peace be on him, said: "We are the custodians of Allah's affairs, treasurers of Allah's knowledge, and inheritors of Allah's revelation. It is we who know Allah's Book by heart. Our obedience is an obligation. Love towards us is belief, and spite towards us is unbelief. He who loves us is in the garden, and he who hates us is in the fire.

2. He, peace be on him, said: "We are the friends of Allah, we are Allah's choice, we are the trustees of Allah, we are the store of the inheritance of the prophets, we are the proofs of Allah,

we are the strong rope of Allah, we are the right path of Allah. Allah, the Exalted said: 'And (know) that this is My path, the right one, therefore follow it, and follow not (other) ways. We are Allah's mercy for the believers. With us Allah started (Islam), and with us Allah will end (it). Whoever cleaves to us is safe. Whoever disobeys us goes astray. We are the noble honored leaders. Whoever knows us, recognizes our right, and obeys our order is from us and belongs to us.('Yyun al-Mu'jizat, p. 34)

3. He, peace be on him, said: "We are the treasurers of Allah's knowledge, we are the custodians of Allah's affairs. With us He started Islam, and with us He will end it. From us, you learn (Islam). By Him Who split open the seed and created the breath, Allah has never (put) His knowledge in anyone except us, and (no one) attains what Allah has except through us.(A'lam al-Wara, p. 270)

4. He, peace be on him, said: "We are the people of the House of mercy, the tree of Prophethood, the source of wisdom, the place of angels, and the landing place of the revelation.(Roudat al-Wa'izin, p. 270)

5. He, peace be on him, said: "By Allah, we are Allah's treasurers in His heaven and on His earth. We are the treasurers, not of gold nor of silver, but of His knowledge.

6. He, peace be on him, said: "We are the treasurers of Allah's knowledge. We are the expanders of Allah's revelation, and we are the strong Proof for those who are under heaven and on the earth.

Many traditions were reported on the authority of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, concerning the outstanding merits which Allah granted to the pure Ima`ms. The Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, regarded them as the fountains of wisdom, and the inheritors of the sciences of prophets. He singled them out with all noble deeds. This is true. There is no doubt in it.

Whoever studies their ways of life full of guidance, righteousness, and noble deeds believes that they were the lords of creation, the trustees of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, and the custodians of his sciences. There is no exaggeration or deviation from the truth in this opinion. Allah endowed His prophets with knowledge, wisdom, and sound judgments. However, they were not better than the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them. That is because they were loyal to Allah. For the sake of His obedience and religion, they made sacrifices which no reformer in the earth has made.

The Number of the Ima`ms

Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, mentioned the number of the pure Ima`ms,

who were the successors of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, over his community, his testamentary trustees, and the custodians of his sciences. The following are some of what was reported on his authority:

1. Zara`ra reported on the authority of Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, who said: "The Ima`ms are twelve. Among them al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and then the Ima`ms from al-Husayn's children.

2. Abu` Basir reported on the authority of Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, who said: "We are twelve Ima`ms.(Al-Karajiki, al-Istinsar, p. 17)

3. Abu` Basir reported that the Ima`m said: "There will be nine Ima`ms after al-Husayn. The ninth of them will be their Qa`'im (i. e. , the one who will undertake the office of the Ima`mate).(Al-Khisal, p. 388)

The great Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, announced that. In this connection, many traditions were reported on his authority. Salma`n, the Persian, reported. He said: "We were with Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. Al-Husayn b. 'Ali was (sitting) on his thigh. He gazed at his face, and then he said: 'O Abu` Abd Allah, you are a lord of our lords. You are an Ima`m, the son of an Ima`m, and brother of an Ima`m, father of Ima`ms whose ninth will be their Qa`'im, the most knowledgeable of them, the wisest of them, and the most meritorious of them.' 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar reported. He said: "I heard Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, say: 'There will be twelve successors after me.'

Shaykh Abu` Abd Allah, Ahmed b. 'Ayya`sh, commented on this tradition, saying: "This stipulated number was not of those who came after Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, nor was it of the Umayyad successors, for their number was over twelve, nor was it of those who came after them, for their number was more than them. No sect of this community has claimed this number for its Ima`ms except the Ima`mi (Shi'ites). This indicates that the number they have mentioned is correct.

Ima`m 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him, numbered the Ima`ms and mentioned their names one by one till he ended at al-Qa`'im (the one who will under take the office of the Ima`mate).(Al-Saffar, Basa'ir al-Darajat, p. 108)

Thus, the poet composed:

Indeed the Ima`ms are nine and three,
as it was reported from al-Hadi (the one who guides),
the bringer of good news, the warner.
There is neither increase nor decrease in them,
as it was said (their number) as the number of the months.

Prophethood was confined to people,

and the Ima`mate was also confined to people.(Ghayat al-Ikhtisar, p. 131)

The poet 'Abd Allah b. Ayyu`b al-Khuraybi addressed Ima`m al-Jawa`d after his father's death, saying:

O You who is the son of the murdered one,

O You who is the son of the roots of the soil,

May his origin and roots be good.

O You who is the son of the eight Ima`ms,

who went westward, and father of the three (Ima`ms),

who went eastward,

Indeed you are the east and the west,

The Book has come to confirm that.

It is sure that the successors of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, were twelve. Many successive traditions were narrated concerning them. They were the good Ima`ms from the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them. They represented the guidance and reputation of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family.

The Sufferings of the Ima`ms

Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, talked to Hamra`n about the tyrants who inflicted tribulations and misfortunes on the pure Ima`ms. He told him that if the Ima`ms, peace be on them, had asked Allah to dispel those tribulations and misfortunes, He would have responded to them. However, they had not asked him to obtain that noble rank with Him. He, peace be on him, said:

"O Hamra`n, Allah, the Great and Almighty, tested the Ima`ms. The tyrants supported each other against them. So, if they had asked Allah to drive that away from them and insisted on removing the tyrants and their kingdom, He would have answered them. Then the period of the kingdom of the tyrants would have ended. O Hamra`n, that which had hit them was not because of a sin they had committed nor was a punishment for disobedience towards Allah. However, they wanted to obtain ranks and dignity from Allah. Therefore, do not believe that concerning them.(Nasikh al-Tawarikh, vol. 2, p. 202)

Al-Baqir urged Reporters and Traditionalists to proclaim

He, peace be on him, urged reporters and traditionalists to spread the remarkable deeds and outstanding merits of the Ima`ms of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them, for they are the good

example to this community. Sa'id al-Iskafi said: "I said to Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir): 'I sit down to narrate and mention your right (to authority) and your outstanding merits.'"So, the Ima`m, peace be on him, thanked him for his efforts, and then said to him: "I wish that there was a narrator like you at every thirty cubits. (Al-Kashi, Rijal, p. 187)

The Knowledge of the Ima`ms

Since the beginning of their history till this day of people, the Shi'ites have believed that Allah endowed the Ima`ms of the members of the House (ahl al-Bayt), peace be on them, with knowledge, wisdom, and sound judgments, as He endowed His prophets and apostles with that. "That is Allah's favor. He gives it to whoever He wills.

The historians and the narrators have unanimously agreed on that the Ima`ms, peace be on them, had great scientific abilities which no one of the people had, and that they exceeded all the scholars in abilities and genus. Their is no blame for this claim, for there are many proofs for it. Ima`m 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him, was the lord and leader of this family. Did he not say on the pulpit of Ku`fa: "Question me before you lose. Question me about the ways of the sky, for I am more knowledgeable in them than the ways of the earth?"That means that his knowledge and sciences exceeded the affairs of this planet, on which man lives, to the affairs of the space, the galaxies, and other planets. Moreover, this means that his knowledge encompassed the mysteries of the universe and the obscure things in nature.

Did this great Figure not say: "If the cushion (on which a judge sits) was folded for me (to sit on), I could give judgments to the people of the Torah by their Torah, to the people of the Gospels by their Gospels, to the people of the Psalms by their Psalms, and to the people of the Furqa`n (i. e. , the Koran) by their Furqa`n."This indicates clearly that Ima`m 'Ali had comprehensive knowledge of all laws and religion. Besides he had knowledge of the legal precepts in those Divine Books.

Is 'Ali not the owner of Nahjj al-Bala`gha, which is the richest world book people have ever known after the Holy Koran. This is the leader of the pure family. He was the gate of the city of knowledge of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family. He was his testamentary trustee (of authority), for he exceeded all the scholars of the world in talents and sciences. All the pure Ima`ms, peace be on them, had such vast knowledge. Among them was Ima`m 'Ali b. Mu`sa`` al-Ka`zim, peace be on him. Al-Ma'mu`n designated him as his successor. Then he summoned all the scholars of the world to come to Khurasa`n to test the Ima`m. He wanted them to debate with him to show his feebleness.

Then he would be able to destroy the Shi'ite doctrine and to refute the Shi'ites who thought that

the Ima`m was the most meritorious of the people of his time and the most knowledgeable of them. When the scholars met in Khurasa`n, al-Ma'mu`n gave them a lot of gifts and summoned them to carry out his task. 'Ali b. 'Isa` prepared many questions for them to ask the Ima`m. He said that the Ima`m was questioned about twenty-four thousand problems. The problems were about various sciences such as astronomy, stars, medicine, physics, philosophy, theology, and the like. However, the Ima`m answered them. So, the scholars who met the Ima`m believed in his Ima`mate. Then 'Ali b. 'Isa` said: "Do not believe those who say that Allah has created a person better than 'Ali b. Mu`sa.

Ima`m Mohammed al-Jawa`d, 'Ali b. Mu`sa``'s son, assumed the office of the Ima`mate after his father's death. He was twenty years of age. Al-Ma'mu`n respected and glorified him. The 'Abba`sids were jealous of him. So, they talked to al-Ma'mu`n about his affair. However, al-Ma'mu`n made them know his Ima`mate. He told them that Allah endowed the Ima`m with knowledge and merits and distinguished him from all creatures. However, the 'Abba`sids did not believe that. So, he ordered them to test the Ima`m. Thus, they hurried to Yahya b. Aktham, who was then the outstanding judge in Baghdad. They asked him to examine the Ima`m, peace be on him. He compiled with their request. They held a science meeting in the 'Abba`sid Palace. Eminent scholars attended the meeting. Then Yahya` b. Aktham came and asked them about the most complicated problems. However, the Ima`m, peace be on him, branched those problems and asked Yahya` which branch he wanted. Thus, Yahya` was astonished at the Ima`m. Feebleness appeared on his face. So, he asked the Ima`m to answer those branched problems. The Ima`m, peace be on him, answered them, and the meeting was over. All those who attended the meeting were satisfied with his scientific abilities. All the historians reported the event. For example, b. Hajar reported it in his book 'al-Sawa``iq al-Muhriqa'. How do explain these scientific abilities of Ima`m al-Jawa`d when he was so young?

However, the knowledge of the Ima`ms, peace be on them, was exactly as that of the prophets. Ima`m Abu` Ja'far (al-Ba`qir), peace be on him, mentioned that. He said to one of his followers:

-What do the Shi'ites think of 'Ali, Moses, and Jesus?

- May I be ransom for you, about what are you asking me?

- I am asking you about knowledge.

- By Allah, he is the most knowledgeable of them.

- Do they not say: "Indeed 'Ali had exactly the same knowledge Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, had?

- However, they do not prefer any apostle to Uli al-A'zm (Arch-Prophets).

- Debate with them on Allah's Book.

- At which place of it?

- Allah, the Exalted, said to Moses: "And We ordained for him in the tablets admonition of every kind. He said to Jesus: "And that I may make clear to you part of what you differ in.(The Holy Qur'an, al-Zukhruf, 63) However, He said to Mohammed: "And bring you as a witness against these.(The Holy Qur'an, al-Nahl, p. 89) He also said in the same verse: "And We have revealed the Book to you explaining everything clearly" The traditionalists have unanimously agreed that the Ima`ms took their knowledge from their grandfather, the Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. The prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, bequeathed his sciences to his testamentary trustee (of authority) and the gate of the city of his knowledge, Ima`m 'Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him. Then the pure Ima`ms from his children inherited them after him.