

Imam Raza's (A) Debate Concerning the Prophet's Family

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Yet this is another debate in which the Imam has provided evidence of that Allah chose the pure family (of the Prophet). The debate took place in the presence of al-Ma'mun and a group of scholars from Iraq and Khurasa`n. Al-Ma'mun asked the scholars about the meaning of this verse: "Then We gave the Book for an inheritance to those whom We chose from among Our servants."

"Surely those whom Allah chose were all Muslims," retorted the scholars.

Al-Ma'mun turned to the Imam and asked him: "What do you say, Abu` al-Hasan?"

"I do not say as they said," replied the Imam, "but I say that Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, meant the pure family (of the Prophet), peace be on them."

The Imam's words moved al-Ma'mun, and he asked: "How did Allah mean the Prophet's family apart from the community?"

"If Allah meant the community," replied the Imam, "then all of it would enter the Garden, while He, the Exalted, says: But of them is he who makes his soul to suffer a loss, and of them is he who takes a middle course, and of them is he who is foremost in deeds of goodness by Allah's permission; this is the great excellence."

The Imam added, saying: "As a result the inheritance belongs to the Prophet's pure family, not to other than them. It is they whom Allah has described in His Book and said: Verily Allah intends to keep off from you every kind of uncleanness. And to purify you, people of the House, with a thorough purification. It is they concerning whom Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, said: 'I leave behind me among you two things, if you cleave to them, you will never go astray that is the book of Allah and my offspring from my family (ahl al-Bayt). They will never scatter (from you) until they lead you to me at the (scared) waters (of Heaven). Take care how you will follow me with regard to them. People, do not try to teach them, for they are more knowledgeable than you."

The scholars hurried to say at one time: "Abu` al-Hasan, tell us about the offspring ('itra): are they the family (a`l) or other than the family?"

"They are the family (al)," answered the Imam. They opposed the Imam, saying: "It has been narrated on the authority of Allah's Apostle, who said: 'My community is my family(a`l).' And these are his companions who say with a diffused tradition which cannot be denied: 'The family (al) of Mohammed is his community.'"

The Imam indicated that the tradition was fabricated and incorrect, saying: "Tell me, is it forbidden for Mohammed's family to take alms or not?"

"Yes," was the answer.

"Is it forbidden for the community to take alms or not?" asked the Imam.

"No," came the answer. Having proved argument against them, the Imam retorted: "This is the difference between the family (a`l) and the community (umma). Woe unto you! Which creed do you follow?"

What! shall We then turn away the reminder from you altogether because you are an extravagant people? Did you not know that the tradition apparently concerned those who were chosen and rightly guided apart from the rest of the people?"

"From where did you say, Abu` al-Hasan?" asked the scholars.

The Imam began reciting to them the excellence of the pure offspring, saying: "From these words of Allah:

And certainly We sent Nu`h and Ibrahim and We gave to their offspring the (gift of) prophecy and the Book; so there are among them those who go aright, and most of them are transgressors.¹ So the legacy of prophecy and the Book was confined to those who went aright apart from the transgressors. Did you not know that Nu`h ask his Lord, saying: My Lord, surely my son is of my family, and Your promise is surely true?

That is because Allah had promised him to save him and his family, so Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, said: Surely he is not of your family; surely he is (the doer of) other than good deeds; therefore, ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge; surely I admonish you lest you may be of the ignorant. "

Al-Ma'mun burst with anger and rage, saying: "Did Allah prefer the offspring to the rest of the people?"

The Imam retorted: "Allah, the Great and Almighty, preferred the offspring to the rest of the people in the firm text of His Book."

"Where is that in the Book of Allah?" asked al-Ma'mun.

The Imam recited to him a group of the verses which lauded the excellence of the Household, peace be on them, saying: "Surely Allah chose Adam and Nu`h and the descendants of Ibrahim and the descendants of 'Umrān above the nations, offspring, one of the other; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

And Allah said in another place: Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace? But indeed We have given to Ibrahim's family the Book and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom.

Then after this Allah addressed the rest of the Muslims, saying: O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you. He meant those whom He made inherit the Book and wisdom, and they were envied for them, according to these words of Him: Or do they envy the people for what Allah has given them of His grace? But indeed We have given to Ibrahim's family the Book and the wisdom, and We have given them a grand kingdom. He meant obedience to those chosen and pure, and 'kingdom' here means obedience to them."

"Did Allah, the Most High, interpret 'choice' in the Book?" asked the scholars. The Imam answered them: "He interpreted 'choice' in outward apart from the inward in twelve places:]

"The first of that is the words of Allah: And warn your nearest relations⁴, and your loyal family in this manner it is in the recitation of Ubay b. Ka'b, and it has been established in the copy of the Qur'an of 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud. However, when 'Uthman ordered Zayd b. Thabit to collect the Qur'an, he omitted this verse. And this is an exalted position, great excellence, and lofty honor when Allah, the Great and Almighty, meant the family (al) by that. This is one (verse). "As for the second verse concerning choice, it is these words of Allah: Verily Allah intends to keep off from you every kind of uncleanness and to purify you, people of the House, with a thorough purification. None can deny this excellence except him who is obstinate, for this excellence is clear.

"The third verse: When Allah distinguished the pure from among His creatures, He ordered His Prophet in the Verse of Contest of Prayer (Ibtihal) and said: Say: Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our souls and your souls, then let us be earnest in prayer, and pray for the curse of Allah on the liars¹. So the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, brought out 'Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn, and Fatima, peace be on them, thus he associated their souls with his own soul."

Then the Ima`m turned to the scholars and asked them: "Did you know the meaning of His words: and our souls and your souls?"

"By that he (the Prophet) meant his own soul," they answered.

"You are mistaken," replied the Imam, "by that he meant 'Ali. The proof of that is the statement of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, when he said to 'Ali: 'Let the Banu` of Wulay'a refrain from (polytheism); otherwise, I will send to them a man who is like my own soul, namely 'Ali, peace be on him. This is a quality which none had before him, a merit over which no man differ, and honor to which no creature preceded him, for he (the Prophet) regarded 'Ali's soul as his own soul. This is the third (verse).

"As for the fourth (proof), it is that he (the Prophet) brought the people out of his mosque except the offspring. When the people spoke about that, al-'Abbas spoke and said: 'Allah's Apostle, you have left 'Ali and brought us (out of the mosque).' 'It was not I who left him and brought you out,' replied Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, 'but it was Allah who left him and brought you out.' This explains his statement to 'Ali, peace be on him: 'Your

position to me is as Harun had with Musa."

"Where is this in the Qur'an?" asked the scholars.

"That is in the Qur'an," replied the Imam.

"Recite it to us," they demanded.

So the Imam recited to them these words of Allah, the Exalted: "And We revealed to Musa and his brother, saying: Take for your people houses to abide in Egypt and make your houses places of worship. This verse demonstrates the position of Harun with Musa as well as it demonstrates the position of 'Ali, peace be on him, with Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. Besides there is a clear indication in this statement of Allah's Apostle: 'It is not lawful for those who are in a state of major ritual impurity and the menstruating to enter this

mosque except Mohammed and the family of Mohammed."

The scholars denied the knowledge of that and said to the Imam: "This explanation and this interpretation does not exist. Do you, members of the House of Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, have (such an explanation and interpretation)?"

The Imam answered them: "Who denies that while Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, says: 'I am the city of knowledge and 'Ali is its gate. Then, one who wishes (to enter) the city of knowledge, then he should enter from its gate.' We clarified and explained ('Ali's) merit, honor, precedence (in Islam), choice, and purity. Accordingly, none denies (these outstanding qualities) except him who is obstinate. To Allah, the Great and Almighty, belongs praise for that! This is the fourth (proof).

"As for the fifth (proof), it is these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: And give to the near of kin his due.

(This is) a quality for which Allah, the Great and Almighty, singled them out, and preferred them over the community. When this verse was revealed to Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, he said: 'Summon Fatima to me.' They summoned her to him, and he said: 'Fatima!' 'Here I am, Allah's Apostle!' she answered. 'None passes (through) Fadak with horses or stirrups; it especially belongs to me apart from the Muslims; and I have granted it to you according to Allah's command, so take it for you and your sons. This is the fifth (proof).

"As for the sixth (proof), it is these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: Say: I demand not,

of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations. This is a special characteristic of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, apart from the prophets, and a special characteristic of the Family apart from other than them. That is because Allah gave an account of the prophets when He mentioned Nuh, peace be on him: And, O my people! I ask you not for wealth in return for it; my reward is only with Allah and I am not going to drive away those who believe; surely they shall meet their Lord, but I consider you a people who are ignorant.

He gave an account of Hud, saying: O my people! I ask you not for wealth in return for it; my reward is only with Him Who created me; do you then understand? 4And He said to His Prophet: Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations. Allah has imposed showing love for them on people because He had known that they would never turn away from their own creed and never return to error. Another (proof):

A man may love a man, but he may hate some of his own household, so he is his enemy and his heart is not sound. Allah loved that there would be nothing in the heart of Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, toward the believers, for He imposed on them the love of his relations. Accordingly, he who loves Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and his Household, peace be on them, then Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, cannot hate him. He who hates Allah's Apostle and his household, then it is incumbent on Allah's Apostle to hate him, for he has abandoned one of the obligations imposed by Allah.

Which excellence or honor is better than this (love toward Allah's Apostle and his household)? "When Allah sent down to His Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, (this verse): Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations, Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, rose among his companions. He praised Allah and lauded Him, and then he said: 'People, Allah has imposed an obligation on you, then will you perform it?' None answered him. On the following day he rose among them and said the like of that, but none answered him. One the following day he rose among them and said: 'People, Allah has imposed an obligation on you, then will you perform it?' Yet none answered him. So he said: 'People, the obligation is neither gold nor silver nor food nor drink.' 'Say it,' they demanded. He recited this verse to them. 'As for this (love), we accept it,' they answered.

However, most of them did not perform it."

The Imam added, saying: [My father related to me on the authority of my grandfather on the authority of his grandfathers on the authority of al-Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be on them, who said:] "The Muhajirun and the Ansar gathered around Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and said to him: 'Allah's Messenger, you have the right to spend on yourself and the

delegations who come to you, then these are our properties along with our blood, so make decisions concerning them, may Allah be kind to you and reward you. Give whatever you desire and withhold whatever you desire without any objection.' So Allah sent down the Trusted Spirit

(Gabriel) to him, and he said: 'Mohammed,

Say: I demand not, of you any reward for it (the toils of preaching) except the love of my relations.

Do not hurt my relations after me. They went out and a group of them said: Allah's Apostle left what we presented before him because he wanted to urge us to show love toward his relations after him; and this is something which he fabricated at his session, so Allah revealed this

verse: Nay! they say: He has forged it.

Say: If I have forged it, you do not control anything for me from Allah; He knows best what you utter concerning it; He is enough as a witness between me and you, and He is the Forgiving,

the Merciful.

As a result, the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, sent for them and asked: 'Has anything happened?' 'Yes, by Allah, Allah's Apostle,' they replied, 'some of us say dreadful words and we hated them.'

Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, recited this verse to them. They wept and their weeping became intense, hence Allah, the Most High, revealed this verse: And He it is Who accepts repentance from His servants and pardons the

evil deeds and He knows what you do.

"As for the seventh (proof), it is that Allah says: Surely Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who believe! call for (Divine) blessings on him and salute him with a (becoming) salutation.³ When this verse was revealed, the obstinate from among them asked: 'Allah's Messenger, we have come to know how to salute you, then how shall we bless you?' He (the Prophet) said: 'You say: O Allah, bless Mohammed and the family of Mohammed just as You had blessed Ibrahim and the family of Ibrahim, surely You are Praiseworthy, Glorious.'"

The Imam turned to the scholars and asked them: "Is there any opposition to these (proofs)?"

All of them said in one voice: "No!"

However, al-Ma'mu`n said: "There is no opposition to them, and there is an unanimous agreement on them. Have you anything clearer than them about the family in the Qur'an?"

The Imam began giving more definite indications concerning the excellence of the Household (of the Prophet), peace be on them, saying: "Tell me about these words of Allah: Yasin, and I swear by the Qur'an full of wisdom; most surely you are of the apostles, on a right way¹. Whom

did Allah mean by His words 'Yasin'?"

The scholars said: "By that He meant Mohammed, may Allah bless him and his family, there is

no doubt about that."

The Ima`m turned to those who were present and said to them: "Allah gave Mohammed and the family of Mohammed excellence whose essence and quality none has reached. That is because Allah never saluted anyone except the prophets, the blessings of Allah be upon them.

He, the Blessed and Exalted, said: Peace and salutations to Nu`h among the nations. And He said: Peace be on Ibrahîm³. And He said: Peace be on Musa and Harun. He did not say: Peace be on the family of Nuh; nor did He say: Peace be on the family of Ibrahîm; nor did He say: Peace be on the family of Musa and Harun. And He, the Great and Almighty, said:

Peace be on Al Yasîn (the family of Yasîn) ; He meant the family of Mohammed."

Al-Ma'mun turned to Imam al-Rida` and said to him: "I have come to know that this explanation and clarification is concerning the source of the Prophethood."

(Then the Imam continued giving proofs, saying:) "As for the eighth (proof), it is these words of Allah, the Great and Almighty: And know that whatever thing you acquire in war, a fifth of it is

for Allah and for the Apostle and for the near of kin.

Allah associated His own portion with that of Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and of those near of kin. This is a difference between the family and the community, for Allah put them in one place and put all people in another place, accepted for them what He accepted for Himself, and singled them out for it. He started with Himself, then His Apostle, then the near of kin in every place of booty, and others which He, the Great and Almighty,

accepted for Himself and accepted for them. He said, and His words are the truth:

And know that whatever thing you acquire in war, a fifth of it is for Allah and for the Apostle and for the near of kin. As a result this is a certain verification and permanent matter for them to the Day of Resurrection in Allah's Book, which speaks (of the truth), before and behind which falsehood does not come, which is a revelation from the Wise, the Praiseworthy. As for these words of Him: and the orphans and the needy, surely the orphans are not included in booty when their orphanhood terminates; they have no share in booty, and it is not lawful for them to take it. As for the share of the near of kin, it subsists to the Day of Resurrection; it is for the rich and the poor, for there is none richer than Allah and His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family.

He appointed a share of the booty for Himself and a share for His Apostle, so He accepted for them what He accepted for Himself and His Apostle, similar to this (booty) is the war booty gained without fighting (fayya'). He accepted for the near of kin what He accepted for Himself and His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family. He also made it permissible for them (to take a share) of booty. He started with Himself, then His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his

family, and then them. He associated their own share with His own share and the share of His
Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family.

He also (associated) obedience (to them with obedience to Him and His Apostle), so He, the Great and Almighty, said: O you who believe! obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those in authority from among you¹. He started with Himself, then with His Apostle, then with his Household, similar to this (verse is the verse regarding) authority (wila`ya): Only Allah is your authority (Vali) and His Apostle and those who believe². Accordingly, He made their authority associated with obedience to Him and the Apostle and, in addition, He made their share (of booty) associated with that of Him and of His Apostle.

When the story of alms came, He, may His name be Exalted, deemed Himself far above it as well as He deemed His Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family and his household, far above it. Thus He said: Alms are only for the poor and the needy, and the officials (appointed) over them, and those whose hearts are made to incline (to truth) and the (ransoming of) captives and those in debts and in the way of Allah and the wayfarer; an ordinance from Allah. Do you find that He has appointed a share in any of these (verses) for Himself or for His Apostle or the near of kin. That is because when He deemed Himself far above alms, He deemed His Apostle and his Household far above it; rather He made it unlawful (to take alms), for it is unlawful for Mohammed and his Household (to take) alms which are the dirt of men. It is unlawful (for them) to take alms, for they were pure from every uncleanness and dirt. When Allah purified them and chose them, He accepted for them what He accepted for Himself, and He hated for them what He hated for Himself.

"As for the ninth (proof), it is that we are the followers of the Reminder, for Allah has said in the firm text of His Book: So ask the followers of the Reminder."

The scholars objected this statement, saying: "By that Allah meant the Jews and the Christians." The Imam disproved their viewpoints, saying: "Is it permissible for them to summon us (to follow) their own religion and to say that their religion is better than Islam?"

Al-Ma'mun turned to Ima`m al-Reza(A.S.) and asked him for more explanation of what he said, saying: "Have you any explanation of that which opposes their statement?"

"Yes," replied the Imam, "the Reminder is Allah's Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, and we are the men of it, and that is clear in the Verse of Divorce: Therefore be careful of (your duty to) Allah, O men of understanding who believe! Allah has indeed revealed to you a reminder, an Apostle who recites to you clear communications.

As a result, the Reminder is Allah's Apostle and we, his Household. This is the ninth (proof). "As for the tenth (proof), it is that Allah has said in the Verse of Prohibition: Forbidden to you

are your mothers and your daughters and your sisters. "

The Imam addressed the scholars, saying: "Tell me: If Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, was alive, was it permissible for him to marry my daughter or the daughter of my son or the offspring of my loins?"

"No," the scholars answered.

The Imam asked them again: "Tell me: Was it permissible for him to marry one of your daughters?"

"Yes," they replied.

"Accordingly, I am one of his family, while you do not belong to his family," said the Imam, "if you belonged to his family, then it would be forbidden for him to marry one of your daughters just as it is forbidden for him to marry one of my daughters. That is because we belong to his family while you belong to his community. This is another difference between the family (al) and the community, for the family belongs to him whereas the community if it is not the family does not belong to him. This is the tenth (proof).

"As for the eleventh (proof), it is that His words in Surat al-Mu'min giving an account of the words of a man: And a believing man of Firoun's people who hid his faith said: What! will you slay a man because who says: My Lord is Allah, and indeed he has brought to you clear arguments from your Lord?"

The man was the son of Firoun's uncle. He (Allah) ascribed the man to Firoun because of his lineage and He did not add him to him because of his faith. He (Allah) has also singled us out because we belong to the family of Allah's Apostle, may Allah bless him and his family, and our lineage belongs between the family (al) and the community. This is the eleventh (proof).

"As for the twelfth (proof), it is these words of Him: And enjoin prayer on your family, and steadily adhere to it.

So He (Allah) has singled us out for this special characteristic, for He ordered us through His ordering him (the Prophet), then He has singled us out apart from the community. Accordingly, after the revelation of this verse, Allah's Messenger would come to the door of 'Ali and Fatima, peace be on them, five times a day at the timing of the prayers and said: '(Perform) the prayer, may Allah have mercy upon you!' Allah did not honor any of the progeny of the prophets with this noble quality with which He has honored us and singled us out along with all the members of his Household, so this is another difference between the family (a'l) and the community.

Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, and Allah bless His Prophet Mohammed. "

With this proof we will end our talk about some of Imam al-Rida`s debates, which represent a .side of his scientific life and his struggle for defending Islam