

?Why Mamun appointed Imam al-Reza (A.S.) as his successor

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The topic of discussion was the issue of Imam al-Reza's heir-apparency. We said in the previous session that there are a series of historical facts and a series of doubtful ones. Even historians like Jurji Zaydan have clearly stated that the policies of Bani al-'Abbas were confidential and they rarely let their political secrets be exposed and, therefore, their true intentions remain unknown in history.

What is definite and unquestionable is, first of all, that the issue of heir-apparency was not initiated by Imam al-Reza. It was initiated by Ma'mun and even when it started, it did not take the form of a single suggestion on Ma'mun's part and an acceptance on the part of Imam al-Reza; rather, they had decided on this without prior discussion with the Imam. They had gathered a group from Khorasan, Marw, Transoxiana, lands which are today considered parts of Russia and Ma'mun was there and sent them to Medina.

Then, they summoned a group of Bani Hashim the head of which was Imam al-Reza to Marw. There was no discussion of their desire or free will. They even had defined the route through which they (the Bani Hashim group) were going to pass beforehand. This was through the villages and routes that had no or very few Shi'ahs. They had especially specified that they should not cross Imam al-Reza through Shi'ah neighbourhoods.

When this group reached Marw, they separated Imam al-Reza from his group into a house and the rest in another place. That is where the issue was first discussed and suggested to Imam al-Reza by Ma'mun which was to accept the crown prince position. The first words Ma'mun used were, "I want to hand over the caliphate (this of course is not very definite)." In any case, he either proposed to transfer the caliphate to Imam al-Reza first and later said if you do not agree to take the caliphate then accept the position of crown prince or he offered the crown prince position from the beginning and Imam strongly refused.

Now, what was the Imam's logic for refusing? Why did the Imam refuse? We cannot of course answer all these with definite answers but according to the narrations quoted by the Shi'ahs in the "Uyun al-Akhbar al-Reza" which says, "When Ma'mun said, 'I thought of deposing myself from the caliphate, appointing you instead of my self and pledging my allegiance to you', the Imam replied, 'You are either the rightful leader or you are not. If this caliphate rightfully belongs to you and if this caliphate is a divine caliphate, then you have no right to take off the garb that Allah has chosen for you and give it to someone else.

And if it does not belong to you then you still do not have the right to give it out. Why should you give something that is not yours to someone else? This means that the caliphate does not belong to you. You must announce like Mu'awiyah, the son of Yazid that I am not rightful and inevitably denigrate your father just as he denigrated and say, 'My fathers put this garb on unrightfully. I also wore it unrightfully throughout these times, I will therefore leave.' You must not say I am handing over and entrusting the caliphate.' When Ma'mun heard these words, he immediately changed the manner of his approach and said, 'You have no choice.'

Then, Ma'mun threatened the Imam and mixed logic into his threat.¹ The sentence he used which was both threatening and logical was, 'Your grandfather, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, participated in the council (which consisted of six people) 'Umar had chosen. 'Umar who was the Caliph of the time, threatened and said, 'They must decide within three days and if they don't or one of them disobeys the decision made by the majority, Abu Talhah will be appointed to behead him'.'

He was trying to say you are in the same situation your grandfather was in and I am in the position 'Umar was in. You will follow your grandfather and participate. This sentence implicitly carried the meaning that even though your grandfather 'Ali considered the caliphate as his right, why did he take part in the council? He participated, so he could exchange views about the issue whom the vice-regency should be handed over to? This was a kind of demotion shown by your grandfather 'Ali who did not show obduracy and say, 'What is this council? The caliphate belongs to me. If you are stepping down, then step down so I will be the Caliph; otherwise, I will not participate in this council.' The meaning of his participation in that council was that he dispersed his explicit and definite right and placed himself among the people in the council.

Your situation is now similar to that of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's situation. This was the rational aspect of the story. But the threat aspect, 'Umar was a caliph whose actions were regarded almost as evidence for the time and age. Ma'mun was trying to say if I make a rigorous decision, society will accept it and would say he made the same decision the second Caliph made. He said, 'The Muslim interest lies in the council and if anyone violates it, behead him.

And I give this order upon the decree that I am the Caliph and I say it is to the best interest of Muslims that 'Ali ibn Musa accepts the heir-apparency and if he disobeys I will behead him because I am the Caliph.' He mixed logic and threat. Therefore, another one of the historical facts is that Imam al-Reza refused to accept to be Ma'mun's crown prince but later agreed because of Ma'mun's threats.

The third issue which is again among definite historical facts is that from the beginning, the Imam set a condition for Ma'mum which was I will not interfere in anything meaning practically

I do not want to be a part of this system whether under the title of 'crown prince' or not. They can make coins in my name if they want to, read sermons in my name if they want to, but do not involve me in any job practically. I do not want to interfere in judgements or the administration of justice nor in any removals from or appointments to a position or any other job.²

In that same formal ceremony (for his crown prince position), the Imam behaved in such a way which proved his separation from Ma'mun's system. In my opinion, the first sentence he read in his first 'crown prince' speech is very amazing and valuable. Ma'mun prepared that great ceremony and invited all the heads of the country including the ministers, the army heads and other figures to all participate with green clothes that was the slogan they set then.³

The first person he ordered to come and give oath of allegiance to Imam al-Reza as the crown prince was his son 'Abbas ibn Ma'mun who was apparently the previous crown prince or the candidate for this position. They all then came one by one and gave oath of allegiance. Then, the poets and rhetoricians came and read excellent poems and dictated some brilliant sermons.

It was then decided for Imam al-Reza to read a sermon. The Imam stood up and only said one and a half sentence which was actually criticizing all their actions. This is the content of it, "We (meaning us Ahl al-Bayt, the infallible Imams) are benefactors to you as your guardians." This meant: the right is basically ours and not something for Ma'mun to hand over to us. (I cannot remember the exact phrase) and you are indebted to us. Your right is for us to manage you and once you respect our rights meaning when you accepted us as caliphs, it would be obligatory upon us to carry out our duty in regards to you. Wassalam.

Two sentences: we have a right that is the caliphate and you, as a people, have a right to be maintained by a caliph. You people must give our right and if you give our right, we have a duty to fulfill towards you and we will fulfill it. No thanking Ma'mun and nothing else. The content was not in tune with the spirit of a ceremony held for a newly-elected crown prince.

This story then carries on the same way. Imam al-Reza is a crown prince by so-called formalities who is not willing to interfere in any jobs. In case he is forced to interfere, he gets involved in such a way that does not fulfill Ma'mun's intentions. Just like the story of 'Id Prayers when Ma'mun sends somebody to the Imam and the Imam says, "We had a deal with you which was not getting me involved in anything." He replied, "But, because you are not getting involved people are making accusations towards me. Now there is no harm in this one duty." The Imam says, "If I do this, I have to do it according to my grandfather's customs and not the customs that are common today." Ma'mun says, "Alright." The Imam leaves his home.

Such an upheaval was formed in the city that made them return the Imam from half way. Therefore, the issue is definite to this extent that Imam al-Reza was brought to Marw forcefully and the title crown prince was imposed on him. They threatened to murder and after this threat the Imam agrees under the condition that he does not get involved in any practical duties and he later did not interfere and kept a low profile. This was in such a way that, in brief it proved .the Holy Imams not to go with them and them not to go with us

Doubtful issues

The issues we discussed are doubtful. There are many doubtful cases here. This is where the difference in analytical thought of scholars and historians appears.

What was this issue of crown prince? How come Ma'mun prepared to summon Imam al-Reza from Medina for the crown prince position and delegate the caliphate to him? Or take the caliphate away from the 'Abbasids and hand it over to the 'Alawi family? Was this his own initiative or was it Fadl ibn Sahl Dhu al-Riyasatayn Sarkhasi's initiative and it was him who had imposed on Ma'mun because he was a very powerful minister and the majority of Ma'mun's army, who were mostly Iranians, were under his supervision, giving him the power to impose whatever view he had? Now why did Fadl do it?

Some (which, of course, is of a very small probability even though some people like Jurji Zaydan and even Edward Brown have accepted it) say, "Fadl ibn Sahl was basically a Shi'ah and he had sincere intentions in this regard and he truly wanted to transfer the caliphate to the 'Alawi family." If this assumption is correct, Imam al-Reza should have then cooperated with Fadl ibn Sahl, because the foundations were truly prepared for the transfer of power to the 'Alawis and the Imam should not have rejected, before he was threatened to be murdered and when he accepts, say: it should only be a formality. I will not interfere in any jobs. He should have rather accepted it seriously and must have gotten involved in jobs and practically expropriated Ma'mun from the caliphate.

There is, however, a fault here which is if we assume this took place so that as a result of the cooperation between Imam al-Reza and Fadl ibn Sahl, Ma'mun would have been expropriated. This would not have changed the situation of the caliphate to a more organized one since Khorasan was only a part of the Islamic territory. As soon as you enter Rey borders, from there onwards meaning the part of Iraq which was previously the capital and also Hijaz and Yemen and Egypt and Syria, all had different situations. They were not keen on following the desires of the Iranian or Khorasani people and had rather opposite desires to them.

This means, even if we assume that this was the case and was put into practice and Imam al-Reza was the caliph in Khorasan, Baghdad would have stood up against him very strongly in

the same way when the news of Imam al-Reza's acceptance of the position of crown prince reached Baghdad, and the 'Abbasids were informed about what Ma'mun had done, they immediately deposed Ma'mun's representative and gave oath of allegiance to one from among themselves (Bani al-'Abbas) who was called "Ibrahim bin Shiklah", even though he was incompetent for the task.

They announced riot and said we refuse to accept the 'Alawis. Our ancestors have drudged and toiled for one hundred years, now hand over the caliphate to the 'Alawis? Baghdad would have rebelled and following that, lots of other places would have rebelled. This, however, is just an assumption and yet the basis of this assumption has not been proven.

Thus, the saying that Fadl ibn Sahl Dhu al-Riyasatayn was a Shi'ah and did all this out of sincerity and the respect he had towards al-Reza is not acceptable. There is room to doubt whether the initiative was his or not? Secondly: assuming the initiative was his, what is more probable is that Fadl ibn sahl who had recently converted to Islam wanted to turn Iran to the way it was before Islam by this means.⁴

He thought to himself, now Iranians will not accept this as they are true Muslims and truly believe in Islam. It was enough to name fighting against Islam to raise their opposition. He thought to himself to get rid of the 'Abbasid Caliph through a man who was reputable himself. He thought of bringing Imam al-Reza on the job and later entangle him with the trouble of 'Abbasi oppositions from outside and from inside prepare the basis for returning Iran to how it was in the age before (i.e. the Zoroastrian era). If this assumption is correct, the duty of Imam al-Reza would be to cooperate with Ma'mun to crack down the bigger danger; meaning the danger of Fadl ibn Sahl is one hundred percent bigger than the danger of Ma'mun to Islam, because no matter what Ma'mun was a Muslim caliph.

I must also say that we should not think that all of the caliphs, who were against the Imam, martyred them and are all on the same level. What is, therefore, the difference between Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah and Ma'mun? They were as different as chalk from cheese. On this level, meaning the level of caliphs and kings, Ma'mun is one of the best caliphs and kings from a scientific, as well as political, point of view.

The same goes for aspects relative to justice and oppression, management and usefulness towards people's living standards. He was a very intellectual man. This massive civilization in which we pride ourselves was created by this very Ma'mun and Harun. That is to say, they had an extra ordinary broad-mindedness and intellectuality that made most of the duties they fulfilled a case of pride for the Muslim World. The issue of 'kingdom is infertile' and Ma'mun uprising because of kingdom and kingship against his beliefs and poisoning the Imam he

believed was one issue and the other parts another issue. If, in any case, the issue of Imam al-Reza's heir-apparency had been initiated by Fadl ibn Sahl, and, as the evidents have proven, Fadl ibn Sahl had evil intentions, then the Imam must have taken Ma'mun's side. Our narrations can confirm that Imam al-Reza had more hatred towards Fadl ibn Sahl than he had towards Ma'mun. At times, where there was a disagreement between Fadl ibn Sahl and Ma'mun, the Imam would take Ma'mun's side. It has been mentioned in our narrations, Once, Fadl ibn Sahl and another person called "Hisham ibn Ibrahim" went to Imam al-Reza and said, 'The caliphate is your right. They are all usurpers. Give us your consent and we will kill Ma'mun. You will then officially be the caliph.' The Imam repudiated the two strongly and made them realize that they had made a mistake. They immediately went to Ma'mun and said, 'We were with 'Ali ibn Musa. We wanted to test him and made this offer to him to see if he has good intentions towards you or not, we realized that he has good intentions. We told him that come and cooperate with us to kill Ma'mun. He strongly denied.' Later, in a meeting Imam al-Reza had with Ma'mun (who had previous knowledge of what had happened), he disclosed the issue and said, 'They came to me. They were lying, they were serious.' Then, the Imam advised Ma'mun to beware of them!" According to these narrations Imam al-Reza considered the danger of Fadl ibn Sahl more severe and serious. Therefore, assuming that the 'crown prince' initiative was Fadl ibn Sahl's⁵, Imam al-Reza considers the position innovated by this man dangerous. He warned, "There are bad intentions involved. They want to use me to return Iran from Islam to Zoroastrianism." We are thus talking based on assumptions. If the initiative had been Fadl ibn Sahl's and he truly was a Shi'ah (as some European historians have said) Imam al-Reza should have cooperated with him against Ma'mun. And if the Zoroastrian spirit was involved, he (Imam al-Reza) should cooperate with Ma'mun against them to get rid of them. Our narrations mostly confirm the second assumption, meaning the assumption that the initiative was not Fadl ibn Sahl's. Imam al-Reza and Fadl were not on good terms and Ma'mun was even warned of his danger by the Imam. This is an incontrovertible issue among our narrations. The other assumption is that this was not Fadl ibn Sahl's initiative and that it was Ma'mun's. If the initiative was Ma'mun's, why did Ma'mun do such a thing? Did he have good intentions or did he have evil intentions? If he had good intentions, did he keep his good intentions till the end or did he eventually change his mind? It is unacceptable to say that Ma'mun had good intentions and kept his good intentions till the end. This was never the case. We can at most say he had good intentions at the beginning but they changed in the end.

As we have already mentioned Shaykh Saduq and apparently Shaykh Mufid also believed this to be true. In his book entitled, “Uyun Akhbar al-Reza”, Shaykh Saduq writes that Ma’mun had good intentions at the beginning and had truly made an oath. When he found himself entangled in trouble with his brother Amin, he made an oath that if Allah made him victorious over his brother Amin, he would return the caliphate to its rightful owners.

The reason why Imam al-Reza refused was because he knew that Ma’mun was under the influence of his emotions at the time and would later regret it. Of course, most of the scholars do not agree with Shaykh Saduq and believe that Ma’mun did not have good intentions from the beginning and a political ploy was involved. Now what was this political ploy? Did he want to diffuse the ‘Alawi movement in this way? Did he want to disrepute Imam al-Reza? Because

when they were aloof, they would continue to criticize their policies. He wanted the Imam involved in the system so that he, too, would have had enemies from among the people, just as what is usually done in politics. In order to disrepute an active and well-liked national critic, they give him a position only to sabotage his job later. First, they give him a position and then they cause disruption so that all those who were in favor of him turned away from him.

It is in our narrations that Imam al-Reza said to Ma’mun in one of his sayings, “I know you want to disrepute me by this!” And Ma’mun got angry and upset and said, “What are these words that you are saying? Why are you making such accusations towards us

Analysing the assumptions

Among these assumptions is one which suggests Imam al-Reza’s full cooperation, i.e. the assumption that Fadl was a Shi’ah and the initiative was his. According to this assumption, there was no criticism toward Imam al-Reza for accepting the position of crown prince and if there was, it would be why he did not accept it seriously. From here, we should realize that this was not the way the story was. We are not saying this as a Shiah but as a so-called impartial person. Imam al-Reza was either a religious man or a materialistic man? If he was religious, he should cooperate with Fadl, when he saw such grounds prepared for the transfer of the caliphate from Bani al-‘Abbas to the ‘Alawi family. If he was materialistic, then he should still cooperate. Therefore, the fact that the Imam did not cooperate and rejected him is a reason that makes this assumption wrong.

But if the assumption is that the transfer was initiated by the Zoroastrians whose intentions were aimed against Islam, then what Imam al-Reza did was completely correct. Therefore, between the two evil ones, he chose the less evil and by doing so (cooperating with Ma’mun), he limited himself to the least.

The problem mostly arises when we say the initiative was Ma'mun's and that it was Imam al-Reza's duty to resist when Ma'mun invited him to cooperate because he had evil intentions. Imam al-Reza must have resisted from the beginning. He must have consented to being killed and, in no way, agreed to go through with the formalities of the crown prince title, even at the cost of getting killed.

This must be reviewed from a religious perspective. We know that getting killed (doing something that would lead to getting killed) is sometimes permissible in a situation where the probability of getting killed is higher than staying alive. Therefore, the issue is either limited to a person getting killed or his toleration of a certain depravity, just as in Imam al-Husayn's story. They wanted his oath of allegiance to Yazid and it was the first time Mu'awiyah was practising the issue of crown prince. Imam al-Husayn opted to get killed rather than to give oath of allegiance. In addition, Imam al-Husayn was in a situation where the Muslim World was in need of an awakening by enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil, even at the cost of his blood. He did this and achieved some results.

But was Imam al-Reza in the same situation? Or, in other words, was he truly at a crossroad about whether it was permissible for him to get killed? One may reach a point where he is killed in spite of his free will, for example, by being poisoned which is historically incontrovertible. Most historians, even Shi'ah historians like Mas'udi⁶, believe Imam al-Reza left this world as a result of a natural death and that he was not killed. However, according to the famous Shi'ah belief, Imam al-Reza died as a result of being poisoned by Ma'mun.

All right! An individual may be put in a situation where he gets poisoned in spite of his free will. Sometimes, however, he is in a situation where he has freedom of choice and has the liberty to choose one from between the other.

He must choose either to get killed or take over the job. And do not tell me that everyone will eventually die! If I am certain that I will die at dawn today, but I am given the option to choose between getting killed and taking over a certain job, can I say that I am dying at dawn anyway and that these two remaining hours are not really worth it? I must evaluate, during the hours I have left to live, is choosing the other side [getting killed] worth losing my life with my own hands? Imam al-Reza is given the freedom to choose between the two, either accept the heir-apparency, which was also incontrovertible historically, or get killed, so history can later condemn and find him guilty. In my view, he must definitely choose the first one. Why not choose the first one? Just because of cooperating with someone like Ma'mun who we all know .is not sin? The form of cooperation is the one that matters

Cooperation with caliphs from the holy Imam's point of view

We all know that during the time of the 'Abbasids, despite all the strong oppositions our Imams had towards the Caliphs, by prohibiting people from collaborating with them, in certain cases they recommended and even encouraged cooperation with their system (the 'Abbasids) for the sake of acquiring certain Islamic goals.

Safwan Jammal who was one of the followers of Musa ibn Ja'far lent out his camels to Harun for a Hajj pilgrimage. He then discusses this with Imam Musa ibn Ja'far. The Imam tells him, "Every thing about you is good except for one thing." He asks, "What is that?" The Imam replied, "Why did you rent out your camels to Harun?" He said, "But I did not do a bad thing! It was for a Hajj pilgrimage and not for bad purposes." The Imam then said, "Then, perhaps some of the rent money is still due which you will receive later?" He said, "Yes." Imam said, "If you were informed that Harun was going to get perished, would you become happy? Or would you rather he paid his debt to you and then die. Would you want him to survive for this cause?" He replied, "Yes." The Imam then said, "Even this much agreement to the survival of a tyrant is a sin."

Safwan is a devoted follower but has a lot of history with Harun. He immediately went and sold all his trade goods. He owned a business which provided transportation services. Harun was informed that Safwan had suddenly sold all his trade goods. Harun summoned him and said, "Why did you do such a thing?" He said, "I have grown old and I am not as flexible as I used to be. I cannot manage my family well. I have thought of completely giving up this job." Harun said, "Tell me the truth." He replied, "This is the truth." Harun was very clever, he said, "Would you like to tell me what the story is? I think once you signed this contract with me, Musa ibn Ja'far informed you of something." He said, "No, there was no such thing." Harun said, "Do not reject this in vain. If it was not for the many years of history I have had with you, I would have had you beheaded right here."

The same holy Imam who prohibited people from collaborating with the caliphs, considering it forbidden, regarded certain cooperations permitted but only when the cooperation was intended for the interest of the Muslim society, to help reduce oppression and wickedness. His endeavors were in the way of his religious purposes. This, however, is not what Safwan Jammal did. At times, a person cooperates with tyrant system so he can use this position to his own advantage. This is exactly what our jurisdictions allow, as well as the holy Imam's .normative practices and the Holy Qur'an

Imam Rida's reasoning

Some objected to Imam al-Reza inquiring as to why his name went among theirs? He said, "Is the status of a Prophet higher or the status of his trustees?" They replied, "The status of the

Prophet.” The Imam then said, “Is a pagan king better or a Muslim licentious king?” They said, “A pagan king.” The Imam then asked, “Is the one who is asked for cooperation better or one who has been demanded to cooperate?” They said, “The one who is asked.” The Imam said, “Truthful Yusuf was a prophet.” The Egyptian ‘Aziz was a pagan and a non-believer. Yusuf himself requested, “He said, ‘Set me over the storehouses of the land. Lo! I am a skilled custodian’.”⁷

This was because he wanted to occupy a position which he could put to best use. In any case, the Egyptian King was a pagan, Ma’mun is licentious Muslim. Yusuf was a prophet, and I am the Prophet’s trustee. Yusuf suggested it and I have been forced. One cannot be criticized just for the sake of this.”

Now, on the one hand, Imam Musa ibn Ja’far strongly prohibits Safwan Jammal, whose cooperation was only to their benefit by asking him, “Why did you lend out your camels to Harun?” On the other hand, the Imam encourages ‘Ali ibn Yaqtin who denied being a Shi’ah and had intriguing contacts with Ma’mun to remain in the system but to continue to deny that he was a Shi’ah by not letting anyone find out. Make wudu their way, pray as they do, conceal your Shi’ism in the strictest of ways, but stay in their system so you can be active.

This is what logic permits. Any individual with any religion must allow his people to enter the enemy’s system in order to help maintain their religion on the condition that their purpose is for the sake of religion not personal benefits. This means to use a system for one’s own purposes and not be used by that system for the system’s goals. The two are different: one is being part of the system, employing the system’s force in the way of his interests and to the advantage of the goals he has.

In my opinion, if someone claims that even this much should not be there, then this is a kind of pointless dogmatism and stagnation. This is how all the holy Imams were; from one side they strongly prohibited cooperation with the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid systems, even if people made excuses such as ‘if we don’t do it, someone else will ultimately do it,’ they would say, “Everyone should not do it. This is not an excuse. When no one does it, the system will cripple.”

From the other side, they encouraged those who followed the principle of using the system. They were in the system for the sake of their own goals. When they were in the Umayyad or the ‘Abbasid systems, they received encouragements from the Imams. Examples of such people are “‘Ali ibn Yaqtin” or “Isma’il ibn Bazi”. Narrations which admire and praise such people are amazing. They have been introduced as first class saints of Allah. Their narrations are quoted by Shaykh Ansari in “Makasib” when he is discussing the issue of “undertaking a task from a [tyrant] [wilayat-e ja’ir

Undertaking a task from a tyrant [wilayat-e ja'ir]

We have an issue in jurisprudence called "undertaking a task from a tyrant" [wilayat-e ja'ir]. This means accepting a post from a tyrant which is inherently forbidden, but jurists agree that even so, in some cases it is recommended and in other cases obligatory. It has been established that if the capability to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil (where enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil is actually a service) is dependent upon accepting a post from a tyrant, accepting it becomes obligatory.

This is also logically acceptable because if you agree to it, you can work toward your goals and be of use. You can strengthen your forces and weaken your enemy's forces. I do not think that people of other ideologies, the materialists and communists, would ever reject accepting a post from an enemy in this way. They would say, 'Accept it but do your job.'

We see that during the time when Imam al-Reza undertook the position of crown prince; however, nothing was accomplished in their favor. Everything was carried out in favor of the Imam, their cliques became more distinguished. In addition, the Imam proved his qualifications in the crown prince post unofficially which would not have been proven otherwise. From among the holy Imam's, the scientific qualities of no other Imam had been confirmed as much as Imam al-Reza and Imam 'Ali's (and for Imam al-Sadiq in another aspect). For Imam 'Ali, this was achieved during the four to five years of caliphate and the sermons and arguments that were left behind from him. Imam al-Sadiq achieved this through the period in which the war between the 'Abbasid and Umayyad dynasties took place. In this period, the Imam established four thousand individual study sessions.

As for Imam al-Reza, this was achieved through the limited period of heir-apparency and Ma'mun's knowledge loving character and the amazing session Ma'mun formed in which he gathered the scholars of all religions including the materialistic philosophers, Christians, Jews, Mazdakis, the Sabi'is and the Buddhists and invited Imam al-Reza to speak to all of them. In those sessions, Imam al-Reza truly confirms his scientific qualifications and was of a lot of service to Islam. In fact, he used his crown prince post unofficially. He did not undertake those tasks but at the same time used his position this way

Question and answer

Question: When Mu'awiyah chose Yazid as his crown prince, everyone disagreed. This was not because Yazid had a corrupt personality but because everyone disapproved of the position of crown prince. Then, how come there was no objection towards the crown prince position during the time of Ma'mun?

Answer: Firstly, when they say it was disagreed with, there was not really such a disagreement.

At that time, others had not yet realized the dangers of such an idea. Only a small group were aware. This was an innovation created for the first time in the Muslim World. This was the reason for Imam al-Husayn's strong reaction and his attempt to make clear the invalidity and unlawfulness of this job, which he did.

Later on, this affair lost its religious aspect. It took the same shape as that of the crown prince position of the pre-Islamic era which had to use force as its only support; therefore, losing its so-called Islamic aspect. This was another reason for Imam al-Reza's disagreement to accepting this position. According to the Imam, "The title of 'crown prince' is essentially false, since 'crown prince' means that I hold the right to choose so and so as my successor." This is also present in the statement where the Imam said, "Is this yours or does it belong to someone else (the caliphate)? If it belongs to someone else, you have no right to give it away.

This also includes the position of crown prince."

Question: Assuming that Fadl ibn Sahl was truly a Shi'ah, it would have been to the Imam's best interest to cooperate with him during his time as crown prince and then deprive Ma'mun of access to the caliphate. A problem would be created here which is: in this case it would have become necessary for the Imam to confirm Ma'mun's actions for a while whereas according to Imam 'Ali, permitting the actions of a tyrant is not permissible to any extent?

Answer: It appears that this problem is not relevant. You said assuming Fadl ibn Sahl was a Shi'ah, should the Imam consent to Ma'mun's actions for a while whereas this would not have been permitted by Imam 'Ali during Mu'awiyah's government.

There are many differences between Imam al-Reza's circumstances in relation to Ma'mun's and Imam 'Ali's circumstances in relation to Mu'awiyah. Imam 'Ali permitted Mu'awiyah to be his representative, as someone appointed from his behalf. Therefore, an oppressor like Mu'awiyah fulfilled the role of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib's deputy. But in the case of Imam al-Reza: he should have left Ma'mun on his own for a while which meant not creating any obstacles on his way.

In general, logically as well as lawfully, there are many overall differences between the times when we want to influence the formation of corruption—in which case we have one duty—and times when we want to prevent the spread of corruption which is present—in which case we have another duty. I will explain both situations with an example.

When I intentionally cause an overflow of water in your yard by leaving the tap open and by doing so, I create destruction, here I am the warrantor of your yard, because I was involved in its destruction. Another time, when I am passing by your house and I see that it has been left open and water has reached the base of your wall, I have a moral duty to close this tap and do

you service. If I do not do this, your property will be damaged as a result. Here, this duty is not my obligation. I said this because there are a lot of differences between a task that is carried out by an individual and a task that is carried out by one person and stopped by someone else. 'Ali was superior to Mu'awiyah. Mu'awiyah's consolidation meant that 'Ali had accepted Mu'awiyah as his representative. But Ma'mun's consolidation by Imam al-Reza meant that Imam al-Reza could not object to Ma'mun's actions for a while. These are two different obligations. There, 'Ali is superior whereas in Imam al-Reza's case the story is the opposite.

Ma'mun is superior in power.

The Imam's temporary cooperation with Fadl ibn Sahl or as you said [Ma'mun's consolidation by Imam al-Reza] meant that he had to refrain from objecting to Ma'mun's actions temporarily. There are no problems in keeping silent for a bigger interest and awaiting a better opportunity. In Mu'awiyah's case, the issue is not Imam 'Ali's disagreement with his leadership only for one day (this is, of course, another issue about which the Imam said: "I will not consent to an oppressor's leadership even for one day.") The issue was that if the Imam was to keep Mu'awiyah, he would grow stronger day by day and not revert from his aims. The assumption here, however, is that they must have waited until Ma'mun grew weaker by the day while they became more powerful. These two cases are, therefore, incomparable.

Question: My question was related to Imam al-Reza's poisoning because during your speech you said that it was not clear if Imam al-Reza was poisoned. The fact is that as more days passed, it became more and more clear that the caliphate was Imam al-Reza's by right and Ma'mun intentionally poisoned the Imam.

Their reason was Imam al-Reza's age. Imam al-Reza left this world at the age of fifty two. It is very unlikely for an imam who observes all aspects concerning his health and hygiene and who is not on the two extremes like us, to die at the age of fifty two. Also, the famous narration says, "There is none among us who was neither killed nor murdered." Therefore, this matter is unquestionable from the Shi'ah point of view. The author of Murawwij al-Dhahab (Mas'udi) made a mistake, this is no reason for us to say that Imam al-Reza was not poisoned; rather, the view of the majority of Shi'ah historians is that Imam al-Reza was definitely poisoned.

Answer: I did not say Imam al-Reza was not poisoned. I personally approve of your view based on the collective evidences. The evidences show that he was poisoned and one of the main reasons for it was the uprising by the 'Abbasids in Baghdad. Ma'mun poisoned Imam al-Reza while going from Khorasan to Baghdad and was being constantly informed of Baghdad's situation.

They reported to him that upheaval had taken over Baghdad. He knew that he could not depose

the Imam and go there in such circumstances, because it would become very difficult. In order to prepare the basis for going to Baghdad and to tell Bani al-'Abbas that the job had been done (murdering Imam al-Reza), he poisoned Imam al-Reza. This was the fundamental reason they mentioned, which is also acceptable and in accordance with history.

This means Ma'mun realized that going to Baghdad would not have been possible as well as the continuation of the position of crown prince (even though Ma'mun was younger than Imam al-Reza. He was about twenty eight and Imam al-Reza was about fifty five years old. At the beginning, Imam al-Reza had told Ma'mun: I am older than you and will die before you).

Therefore, if he had gone to Baghdad in such circumstances, it is impossible that Baghdad would have surrendered and a massive war would have taken place. He saw the dangerous situation facing him. This is why he also decided to take out Fadh al-Sayid as well as Imam al-Reza. He got rid of Fadh al-Sayid in the Sarakhs Bath House.

So much is known that when Fadh al-Sayid was in the Bath House, a group of men with swords rushed into the Bath House and then left him there in pieces. It was later rumoured that there was a group who had a grudge against him (incidentally one of his own cousins was also among the group who murdered him) and defiled his blood. However, it seems that this was also Ma'mun's doing. He realized that Fadh al-Sayid had gained a lot of power and would cause trouble. So, he got rid of him. After Sarakhs, they came to Tus.

Reports were constantly arriving from Baghdad. He realized that he could not enter Baghdad with Imam al-Reza, an 'Alawi crown prince. This is why he killed Imam al-Reza right there. Once we say that an issue is incontrovertible from our point of view. According to Shi'ah narrations, there is no doubt that Imam al-Reza was poisoned by Ma'mun. This, however, is not the view of other historians.

For example a European historian does not accept this. He studies the historical evidences and comes to the conclusion that the phrase "it is said" [qila] has been written in history. Most Sunni historians, who have quoted this event, wrote, "Imam al-Reza came to Tus, fell ill and passed away." As such, "It is said [qila]" that he was poisoned. This is why I wanted to discuss this issue based on a non-Shi'ah rationale; otherwise, all the evidences show that Imam al-Reza had been poisoned.

References:

1. Ma'mun was a truly informed and erudite man. He was knowledgeable in hadith, history, logic, literature, philosophy and also in medicine and astrology. He was basically a scholar and maybe there is none like him from among the kings and caliphs of the world.
2. The Imam, in fact, did not want to become a part of Ma'mun's system as if he was clinged to

it.

3. In response to the question, 'Why green clothes?' Some say this was Fadl ibn Sahl's tact, because the 'Abbasid's slogan was black cloth. Since that day, Fadl ordered everyone to come with green cloth. They have also said this tact carried Zoroastrian spirit and green color was the slogan of the Zoroastrians, but I do not know how founded this saying is.

4. As we said none of these are definite and are among the historical doubts; however, this is what some narrations say.

5. Now either he had recently become Muslim or his father had become a Muslim and converted to Islam via the Barmakis, his Islam was for political purposes because a Zoroastrian person could not be the minister of a Muslim caliph.

6. Majority of the scholars believe that he was a Shi'ah historian.

.7. Surat Yusuf 12:55