

Imam Sajjād عليه السلام and Supplications¹

A Brief Look at the Life and Personality of Imam Sajjād عليه السلام

Imam Sajjād عليه السلام is the son of the chief of paradise's youth, Abū 'Abdillāh al-Husayn عليه السلام and is one of the twelve Imams from the Prophet's ﷺ progeny. His first name is Ali and his most renowned titles are: Adornment of the Worshippers, Abundant in Prostration and Master of Prostrators. His agnomen (*kunyah*) is Abū Muhammad. He was born on 15th Jumādī al-ūlā in the year 36 or 38 Hijri (year 656 or 658 CE) and he was martyred on 25th Muharram year 94 or 95 Hijri (year 712 or 713 CE) at the age of 58 and the duration of his Imamate was 35 years.

He was born three years before the martyrdom of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali عليه السلام. His grandfather was occupied with the battle of Jamal during this period. Thereafter, he lived through a period of hardship with his uncle Imam al-Hasan عليه السلام. One of the many hardships he encountered was the Omayyad raid on the Prophet's ﷺ mosque in Medina, in which they attacked and tied their horses inside the mosque.² He also witnessed the uprising of his father and the tragic events of Karbala.

He was a contemporary of the Omayyad caliphs Mu'āwiya, Yazīd, Mu'āwiya son of Yazīd, Marwān, 'Abd al-Malik and Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik. Walīd, the last of which poisoned him, leading to his death.

He was renowned for his piety, virtue and scholarship. We have cited a few among the many of his virtues that have been mentioned in various books.

1. Ya'qūbī in his book *Tārikh* says:

He was the most virtuous of men and the most intense of them in worship and was thus named the Adornment of Worshippers. He was also given names attributed to the marks of worship on his forehead. It is said he would offer one thousand units of prayer in a day. Upon his martyrdom, marks of injury were seen on his shoulder. Perplexed, some of his companions asked his family what the marks were from. They said it was due to the food he would carry to the needy at night. Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab would say, certainly I have not seen one more virtuous than Ali ibn al-Husayn."³

2. Shāf'ī says: Ali ibn al-Husayn, who was the most learned in Medina, would rely on traditions with a single transmitter.⁴

¹ Muhammad Ali Majd Faqīhī, *An Introductory Commentary to al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah*, Tr. K. Bhojani, pp. 15 – 25.

² Editor: This act intended to violate the sanctity of the Prophet's (s) mosque. It was one of the numerous indecent acts committed by the Omayyad army like killing of innocent people in Medina and violating the sanctity of their women.

³ Ahmad Ya'qūbī, *Tārikh Ya'qūbī*, v. 2, p. 303.

⁴ Rasūl Ja'fariyan, *Hayāt-i imamān-i shi'ah*, p. 260. Quoting from Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, *Sharh Nahj al-balāgh*, v. 15, p. 274.

3. Muhammad ibn Sa'd, a Sunni historian says:

Ibn al-Husayn was a man of piety. He was a trustworthy man that held an honorable position among the people. Innumerable traditions have been narrated from him?⁵

4. Shaykh al-Mufīd narrates in his book *al-Irshād*:

One of the relatives of Imam Sajjād عليه السلام insulted him obscenely in the presence of some of his companions and left. Turning towards his companions, he said, 'Did you hear what he said?! Now come with me and hear my reply.'

'We will come with you, but it would have been better if we replied him immediately' they said. Imam عليه السلام went towards his house along with his companions and he recited the following verses of the Qur'an, '. . .and those who restrain (their) anger and pardon men; and God loves the doers of good.'⁶ Upon hearing the verse, contrary to their expectations, they realized he intended no revenge.

They reached the man's house where Imam requested him to come outside. Thinking he had come to retaliate; the man came out prepared for a quarrel.

Upon seeing him, the Imam عليه السلام said: *My brother! A short while ago you came to me and said some things. If what you said befits me [is true], may God forgive me and if what you said does not befit me [is not true] then may God forgive you.* Overcome with shame, the man came forward and kissed his forehead saying, 'Whatever I said is not in you and I testify that I myself am more deserving of what I said'.⁷

The Era of Imam Sajjād عليه السلام and Recourse to Supplications

Prior to engaging in a discourse pertaining to the political situation during his era, it is necessary to elaborate based on the movements assumed by the Imams عليهم السلام in social affairs.

The Quran, which is a book of guidance, contains a complete program for human perfection. The goal of the uprising of the Prophets عليهم السلام and revelation of divine books is to guide man's ascension to the zenith of perfection through God's servitude, which is the loftiest position he can 'acquire. The meaning of servitude is that man is released from satanic slavery and that of the evil-prompting soul (*al-Nafs al-Ammārah*) and that he exerts his entire being in achieving divine pleasure. So, a true human being in eyes of the Quran is the grateful servant whose only concern is achieving his master's pleasure.

Based on this principle, the pivotal force behind their actions, is divine pleasure, both in individual his silence, his taking charge of governance or keeping aloof from it, his initiating

⁵ Ibid. Quoting from Ibn Sa'd, *Tabaqāt al-kubrā*, v. 5, p. 222

⁶ Aal 'Imrān, verse 134. وَالْكَاطِمِينَ الْغَيْظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ فَاِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

⁷ Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād*, p. 257

battles or accepting a peace treaty; are entirely pivoted around acquiring divine pleasure. This is because he is free from the evils of the soul and satanic whispering; therefore, everything he does indicates God's pleasure.

A citation from the book *Hayāt-i fikri wa siyasi-i imāmān-i Shī'a* says:

Islamic values, and its principles were exposed to distortion at the hands of the Omayyad dynasty during his era. Islamic precepts had been rendered a game in the hands of ibn Ziyad, Hajjāj and "Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Evidently, the religiosity of the people declined during their reigns, while the values of the age of ignorance were revived.⁸

If he did not rise given the situation of the time, it was not because his personality differed from that of his father Imam al-Husayn عليه السلام but rather all the Imams عليهم السلام are from a single divine source and all of them submit in obedience to God in the same manner. For the very same reason we see that Imam Sajjād عليه السلام recited his famous sermon while he was a captive in the court of Yazid, disgracing him in his own court. On the other hand, we should not forget that starting any form of movement requires certain conditions. Two essential conditions for any reformative movement are:

1. Leadership with all its necessary qualities. We will refer to this condition as the effective condition (*shart fi'lī*).

2. Receptive condition (*shart-i qābilī*) which includes favorability of the situation at that time and willingness of the people to reform.

With regards to the Shī'ah Imams عليهم السلام the first aspect is complete and whenever the second condition is actualized the first manifests itself.

It is cited in the book *Hayāt-i fikri wa siyasi-i imāmān-i Shī'a*:

History testifies that Imam Sajjād عليه السلام led the Shī'ah through one of the most harsh periods of history during his 34 years of Imamate. This period offered naught but suppression | at the hands of the Omayyad and Zubayrīs.⁹

The Omayyad committed every imaginable crime to achieve their sinister goals.

Concurrently, the people were put to test through their inviting Imam al-Husayn عليه السلام. They were transformed into a nation devoid of understanding and faith. Their lives were occupied with mundane pleasures, enameled with the shade of religion. Of course, they would express their love for Imam Sajjād عليه السلام, and he did enjoy a distinct position before them, however, these sentiments were like those they showed to his father Imam al-Husayn عليه السلام. Not only did they abandon them during trials, where necessary, they would even unsheathe their swords against them.

⁸ Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Hayāt-i fikri wa siyasi-i imāmān-i Shī'a*, p. 260

⁹ Ibid, p. 265

He thus occupied himself with propagating religion indirectly. He avoided direct verbal methods such as sermons or letters and refrained from direct practical steps in initiating an uprising. On the contrary he occupied himself in conveying the true form of Islam via indirect expressions such as supplications, prayers, worship, and moral dispositions.

“It should be noted that the modes of propagation assumed by him were not mere practices utilized by him to teach others, rather they are an integral part of the perfect man. Similar demeanor can be observed in the other Imams عليه السلام as they too were prototypes of the perfect, man. However, the infeasibility of direct propagation caused this mode to acquire prominence in his time.

One of the primary characteristics of a God-fearing individual is that he should be cognizant of the social difficulties of his time and beseech God to alleviate their anguish. As a result, a portion of the supplications of Imam Sajjād عليه السلام clearly reflects the social condition of his time, aiming to preach the Islamic doctrines in this regard.

Salutations upon the Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله and his pure progeny faded were used as a means of creating a bond between them and the people.

His supplication upon completing the Quran elaborates on the reality of the Quran. It draws attention to its pragmatic nature, which demonstrates that its application is more crucial than merely maintaining the sanctity of its words.

Invoking God’s wrath upon oppressors in his supplications is indicative of his discontent with the tyrannical rule of the time and is an invitation to the people towards vigilance and resistance.

Some supplications describe the role of Imamate in the Islamic nation and invite people to follow the Imam whose obedience is obligatory.

In other supplications, in which he praises and glorifies God, he instructs the people to observe the true form of monotheism. These were aimed at rectifying the theological beliefs of the people.

His mystical supplications keep the hearts from being captivated by the love of this world and submission to it, engaging them in divine love and proximity.

These supplications are from a person who enjoys the loftiest station of God’s gnosis and possesses the most intense love for Him. Through these supplications he hopes to elevate others to the stations of God’s gnosis. Know that a person who acquires such a station shall neither submit to other than God, nor harbor love for other than Him.

Supplication and its Philosophy

The theme of this book is supplication. Therefore it is essential that we elaborate on its philosophy.

Supplication (Du‘ā) is a means of communication and entreaty. It originates from a person’s cognizance of his indigence, and God’s self-subsistence. The feeling of indigence prompts the soul to strive towards the stations of perfection. Since our needs and shortcomings are of different kinds, supplications too take varying forms depending on our intentions.

Supplicating is part of man’s primordial nature (*Fitrah*). As a result, it manifests itself in all the nations and religions in one form or the other. The moments in which man seeks seclusion with God, imploring Him, he acquires a feeling of tranquility, vigor and freshness in his soul, which is usually tired of routine mundane material life of the corporeal realm.

At times it is possible for man’s primordial nature to be repressed and buried, manifesting itself solely in times of distress (Q 29:65). however, it incessantly manifests itself as an active agent in the hearts of the believers and is a primary part of their spiritual life.

In the Quranic and religious worldview, supplications are deemed an integral part of faith, disdain from which, is considered the cause of man’s decline and veiling God’s mercy? (Q 40:60).

There are two ways people view supplications. Some view supplications as a tool and means. Thus, if their supplications are answered, they no longer feel the need to supplicate and if their supplications are not answered they despair, often uttering blasphemy. ' They have no gnosis of the One Whom they call upon, being unaware of His compassion and wisdom.

However, the other group views supplication as a goal. Supplication in the eyes of these people is love of God, being enamored by Him and pleading before His sacred presence. If their needs are fulfilled, they are thankful, and if their requests are not granted, they persevere. The connection that is built by means of their beseeching is what they desire. We read in the whispered prayer of the desirers: *وَيُؤْنِسُ الْمُتَلَابِسِينَ - وَ فِي مُنَاجَاةِكَ رُوحِي وَ رَاحَتِي - In praying to you is my vigor and my comfort.*

It is necessary for the religious seminaries to examine supplications as a source of knowledge. Its different aspects need analysis like other subjects like theology, practical law and ethics. Along with being a part of a believer’s life, they should also be studied academically as they are a source of divine knowledge.

Though *al-Sahīfab al-Sajjādiyyah* is a book of supplications, it is full of lofty teachings. It contains numerous passages elaborating on the philosophy of supplication.

The language of supplications in the school of the Prophet's ﷺ progeny along with its mystical teachings are rarely seen in traditions. The Imams were impelled to use elementary language when addressing the people as they were obliged to address them in accordance to their 'level of intellect. However, in their supplications they would address God directly. They therefore would manifest what lay in their hearts. As a result, a great number of esoteric teachings can be derived from them.