

Introduction to al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah
By martyred Āyatullāh Sayyid Muhammad Bāqir al-Sadr¹

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Praise be to the Lord of the Worlds and prayers and greetings be upon the seal of the Prophets and Messenger of God, Muhammad, and his pure progeny and righteous companions.

This book, al-Sahīfah al-Sajjādiyyah, includes certain supplications quoted from Imam Zayn al-Ābidīn ‘Ali b. Husayn b. ‘Ali Abī Tālib. He is one of the Imams belonging to the household of the Prophet whom God Almighty has kept pure and free of defilement.

The Imam was the fourth in the line of the Imams of the Prophet's household. His grandfather was Imam Amīr al-Mu’minīn, ‘Ali b. Abī Tālib, the vicegerent and trustee of God’s Prophet and the first to believe in him. His position in relation to the Prophet was like the position of Aaron in relation to Moses, according to authoritative Traditions.

The fourth Imam’s grandmother was Fātima al-Zahrā, peace be upon her, the daughter of God’s Prophet, most beloved to him and the highest among all the women of the world as the Prophet himself was used to describing her.

His father was Imam al-Husayn, peace be upon him, one of the two highest in degree among those who were destined for Paradise, a grandson of the Prophet and a very flower of his eye of whom the Prophet said: *Husayn is of me and I am of Husayn.*

Imam Husayn, peace be upon him, was foremost of those who were martyred at Karbalā on the day of ‘Āshūrā (the 10th of Muharram) in defense of Islam and Muslims. As stated in the Tradition narrated in the *Sahīh of Bukhārī* and *Muslim* and several others, Imam Husayn was one of the twelve Imams who were said to follow in the line of leadership (imamate) after the Prophet. The Prophet has been reported to have said: *The caliphs after me shall be twelve and all of them will be from among the Quraysh.*

Imam ‘Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be upon him, was born in the year 38 A.H. or, perhaps as it is conjectured, a little before that and lived for a period of 57 years, during a few years of which he grew up under the wing of his erstwhile grandfather, Imam ‘Ali, peace be upon him. Later he came under the guardianship and tutelage of his uncle, Imam Hasan, peace be upon him, and his father, Imam Husayn, peace be upon him, both grandsons of the Holy Prophet. He was nourished from the knowledge of the Prophet and nurtured by the sources of his pure ancestry.

¹ *Al-Sahīfah Al-Sajjādiyyah*, Islamic Propagation Organization, Tehran, 1984. Pp. xi – xxv.

In the religious sciences and in jurisprudence, ‘Ali b. al-Husayn was considered to be of high authority and a figure of supreme prominence as regards the orders and prohibitions of God which he was able to interpret and pronounce in the light of his knowledge. He was known for his exemplary devotion and piety towards God in all things. All Muslims in his age implicitly trusted and esteemed his knowledge, honesty, integrity and his excellence in jurisprudence, taking him for their leader in all matters and recognizing his authority in religious matters.

Al-Zuhrī said of him, “I have not seen a personality from the clan of Bani Hashim who excelled ‘Ali b. Husayn or one who was more just than he.” (The Banū Hāshim were among the most distinguished of the Arab tribes). In yet another context he said of him, “I have not seen a personality among all the Quraysh better than he”. (The Quraysh were the most distinguished among the Arab tribes and one of the largest). Sa‘īd b. Musayyib said “I have never seen a person the likes of ‘Ali b. al-Husayn. Imam Malik said, He was called by the name of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (honored among worshippers) by virtue of his unceasing worship and prostration in prayer.” Sufyān b. Ayīnah said, “I have not seen a personality from the Bani Hashim clan who was better than Zayn al-‘Ābidīn or one more just than he.”

Imam al-Shāf‘ī considered Imam ‘Ali b. al-Husayn as the most supreme jurist of all the people of Medina.” The rulers of his time from the Banū Umayyad, despite many hostile acts, have had to admit this one fact about Imam ‘Ali b. al-Husayn.

For example, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān said to him, “In the area of religious sciences, in devotion and piety, you have been granted that which no one before you has had other than your ancestors.” Further, Umar b. ‘Abd al-Azīz said, “The light of this life, the beauty of Islam is Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.”

Muslims in general had an abiding deep attachment for this Imam and he commanded the most profound spiritual loyalty and allegiance among them. His following among the Muslim public extended far and wide and the honor and adulation in which he was held by the Muslim people is recorded in a noteworthy poem of al-Farazdaq. In this he describes how during the annual hajj pilgrimage in the Holy City of Mecca, to which Hisham b. ‘Abd al-Malik went, the rush to get to the Sacred Black Stone (*al-hajar al-asmad*) was so great that this dignitary could hardly move towards it.

The people who knew him made a special place for him so that he could wait till the rush eased for him to make his way towards the Sacred Black Stone. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn then happened to come along to perform the pilgrim rites. When the multitude present became aware of him, they all stood back, making way for him, bowing in adoration and respect as he passed by towards the Sacred Black Stone. Here then, says the poet, was a demonstration of the veneration, admiration and respect which Muslims of all countries, states and tribes held for Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn.

The trust and veneration of the *ummah* in Zayn al-‘Ābidīn was not confined to the mere fact

of his versatility in jurisprudence or his high stature in spiritual affairs. He was in fact considered to be a virtual spiritual leader and supreme spiritual authority by those belonging to various schools of thought and all matters both civic and spiritual which was because he was in the line of celebrated and pure ancestors.

It was related that the Muslims at the time turned to Zayn al-‘Ābidīn when they desired release from the oppression of the Roman emperor of his time. The Roman emperor desired to seek dominance in the region and to humiliate the Muslims during the reign of ‘Abdul Malik by imposing a Roman coinage and currency system in the Muslim lands. ‘Abdul Malik was perplexed not knowing how to meet this confrontation. He was so dejected and depressed that he was quoted to have said, I look on myself as one of the most pessimistic persons of those born in Islam. At this, the people around him are said to have told him that there was one who could provide him with a safe way out of his predicament. Asked who, they said, “One who remains from the household of the Prophet.” On hearing the name of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, he said, “You have indeed spoken rightly and truly.”

Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, whose help was sought, dispatched his son, Muhammad b. al-Bāqir to Damascus in Syria with secret instructions and from this there emerged a new plan to use an Islamic currency.

Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn took over the mantle of spiritual responsibility after the martyrdom of his father. He took up this task during the second half of the first century during one of the most crucial phases in the history of the ummah, a period which was followed by a wave of early Islamic victories of liberation, a wave which extended over wide expanses of territory in the region and was spread by reason of the spiritual vigour and military and ideological enthusiasm of the Muslim armies. It shook the throne of Caesar and other vile tyrants of the time and spread the Divine message far and wide over the earth. The Muslims then became the spiritual and de facto conquerors and guardians of the greater part of the civilized world for over half a century of unchallenged supremacy.

Yet, despite the strength and power of Islam at the time, the ummah was exposed to two great dangers outside the military and political spheres. It was, therefore, necessary at this time to take a critical look and counter these dangers.

The first danger came from the fact that the Muslims now spread far and wide had their mental horizons opened to various cultures, customs and traditions, different social currents arising from the interaction with the nations which joined the folds of the religion of God in vast numbers. It was now necessary to make special efforts in the scientific, religious and ideological fields emphasizing and affirming the ideological originality and freedom and the distinctive legislative advantages of Muslims which is derived from the Holy Book and the Traditions.

There has to be an ideological movement to awaken Muslims and to have their eyes opened to the pure vision of Islam so that it would be capable as being a torch-bearer and a light of

both the Holy Book and the Traditions, bringing a message of enlightenment and perseverance of spirit among peoples with whom they came in contact. The trained intellectuals who were capable of benefiting from such teachings would have to embody and cultivate an Islamic personality to the full so that they could disseminate this among those with whom they came in contact.

Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, realizing the need for such a movement, conducted research and scientific studies at the Prophet’s mosque, teaching various branches of Islamic knowledge and explaining and illustrating both the Holy Qur’an and Traditions, as well as teaching jurisprudence and the knowledge derived from his pure ancestors. A new consciousness was being developed among the intellectuals at the time with training in jurisprudence, reasoning and deduction. A large number of skilled Muslim jurists and scholars were trained in these religious centers and a number of schools of jurisprudence sprung up giving a new vigor to religion which was to be developed further later on.

Imam Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, in these efforts, attracted a large number of scholars and exegetists of the Holy Qur’an and the Traditions. Such was his renown that Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyib said, “The scholars did not leave Mecca until ‘Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be upon him, left. When he left, we left with him and we were thousands who rode along with him”.

The second danger to Islam at the time arose from the very fact of the wealth and general prosperity that was everywhere prevalent in Islamic society following the wide extension of its political power.

There was the risk that this new wave of prosperity would expose those who came in contact with wealth, power and worldly pleasures to contamination and eventually to undermining the very spiritual bases of Islam and destroy the vigor of the moral and spiritual renaissance which derived from belief in God Almighty and the life hereafter.

Imam ‘Ali b. Husayn realized this danger and began to take steps to remedy this situation. The foremost of his methods was to take the path of supplication. This book, *al-Sabīfa al-Sajjādiyyah*, was one of the works that emanated as part of this great effort.

This great Imam was able to produce a work of tremendous significance with the endowments with which he was graced from his lineage and his wonderful rhetoric and elegant styles in the Arabic language. Using his divinely gifted abilities, the Imam was able to weave out the most splendid and subtle meanings in his description of the links between the human being and the Divine, the links between the people and their Lord and Creator and to emphasize the qualities of faith, moral values and the duties that were necessary to a virile and spiritual society.

It is my opinion that the Imam, with his multifarious gifts and his fervor in supplicating God, was able to include a truly spiritual atmosphere and create a moral tone in society which strengthened Islam at the time and served to act as a barrier against the invasion by

the satanic values of the world to which Muslims were exposed in his time. His efforts were a steadying influence on the *ummah* who were urged to keep their steadfastness in the face of worldly attractions at a time when the pull towards a life of pleasure stood forth as a great temptation and to affirm and remind the Muslims of their spiritual roots and of their duty to remain trustees of the spiritual amidst a life of riches and prosperity as they had been trustees at a time of misery and poverty.

It has been stated in the biography of the Imam that he constantly adjured the people at Friday prayers in sermons to take warning against being engulfed wholly by the life of this world and to remind themselves constantly of the hereafter. His supplications, in their wonderfully moving way, were able to induce in his hearers a feeling of devotion, of thanks, praise and gratitude to the Almighty and to strengthen them in their sincerity, obedience and submission to God who has no partner.

Al-Sabīfa al-Sajjādiyyah then represents and stands out as a profound social work of the time and a reflection of a supreme endeavor to meet the exigencies of spiritual ordeals facing the society at the time of the Imam. But beyond this it is a profound collection of supplications in the Divine tradition, a unique compilation which will remain throughout the ages as a gift to mankind, a work of moral inspiration for worldly conduct and a torch of guidance. Human beings will constantly remain in need of this Muhammadian ‘Alawī tradition and the need increases whenever Satan comes to increase the allurements of the world for people and by its fascination to keep them in thralldom.

Peace and blessings be upon our Imam ‘Ali b. al-Husayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, from the time he was born, when he delivered his message, when he departed and to the time of his resurrection to life in the hereafter.

al-Najaf al-‘Ashraf.