

## Imām ‘Ali bn Mūsa (AS): An Exemplary Life of the Pious.

Written by freezak

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*By Yusuf Abdullahi*

In the name of Allah Who states “There is, in their stories, instruction for men endued with understanding. It is not an invented tale, but confirmation of what went before it, a detailed exposition of all things and a guide and mercy to any such as believe” Q12:111

May the everlasting peace and blessings be upon the Great Messenger, our Master Muhammad (S) and his purified progeny.

Mashhad, the second largest city, Northeastern Iran has over three million people according to 2016 census. Culturally, it was Khorasan, later renamed Mashhad, an Arabic word for a place of martyrdom. Serving as a great cultural site morally, spiritually and socially, the shrine is apparently the largest mosque with seven courtyards receiving millions of pilgrims across the world. The beautiful city with its unique spirituality has a steppe climate with hot summers and cold winters. Historically, the town had different ethnic groups which relatively lived prosperously since the Mongol era. The ancient city has numerous historic figures beyond the contemporary borders. They include Ferdowsi, the celebrated Iranian poet after whom the prominent conventional university of the city Ferdowsi with more than twenty thousand students including international was named. Among its famous alumni was Martyr Dr. Shariati, one of Imam Khomeini's lieutenants and icon in the 1979 Islamic revolution. There are also Reza University and other institutions including traditional seminaries actively engaged in educational and religious activities. Beside Ferdowsi, Mehdi Akhavan and Shajarian were among other famous artists of the city.

In modern days, Mashhad witnessed tremendous development under Reza Shah between 1925 to 1941 multidimensionally; Imam Reza hospital founded in 1934; Faculty of medicine of Mashhad in 1939 and the city's power station installed in 1936 among others. Later, the Shah's anti-religious policies erupted, when the clerics denounced its corruption, heavy taxes and ban on veils; headscarf and chador in 1936 which led to slogans; Shah was a new Yazid. Finally, the absolute monarchy was replaced by Islamic system on the success of Islamic revolution under the leadership of Imam Rohullah Khomeini (R) in 1979.

### ANNUAL COMMEMORATION

Considering the short interval between Imam Rida and his sister's birthdays ('a), the Astana Quds colorfully commemorate what it calls eleven days of honor, an event extolling the virtues of the Imam and Sayyidah Fatima popularly known Masoumeh annually. Precisely, they were born 11th and 1st of Dhulqidah respectively. However, Sayyedah fell ill and later died at Saveh near the Holy City of Qom as she left Medina to meet her brother exiled to Tus. She was accorded famous funeral and buried where her shrine stands today. Her tomb witnessed developmental stages in capacity expansions including decorations with mosaic tiles and gold plating since 1803 and final restoration in 2005.

### LIFE

Imam ‘Ali al-Rida was born on 11th Zulqada, 148 AH which coincided with 29th December, 765CE. His father was Imam Musa al-Kazem who named him ‘Ali titled al-Rida (AS) meaning

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the contented, well-pleased with or generally accepted. His mother was Najma - nicknamed Ummu-Banin - a Nubian pious woman of noble characters. Given the history of his mother, he was believed to be black in complexion. Though, there are variations in views of historians, but his children were mostly narrated as five sons and a daughter, most notable were Muhammad and Ja’far. Imam Rida succeeded his father at his martyrdom after the latter had admonished his followers regarding successorship. Yazid Bin Salit narrated from the seventh Imam when he met him on his way to Mecca ‘Ali, whose name is the same as the first and the fourth Imams, is the Imam after me.’ Said Imam Musa. ‘Ali Bin Yaqtin additionally narrated ‘Ali is the best of my children and I have conferred on him my epithet’. Imams were heirs of the Great Prophet to the end of time as clearly indicated by famous traditions. Bukhari and Muslim narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: “I shall be succeeded by twelve religious leaders, all of whom shall be of Qurayshite origin”. In another narration, all of them shall be from Banu Hashim.

Under the moral and spiritual guidance of his father, Imam Rida (‘a) was brought up with exceptional insight and unique brilliance. Thus, he lived embodiment of sterling qualities rarely possessed by man. He faced great enmity and hostility from the ruling class who assassinated his father before his eyes. However, he was declared earlier in presence of prominent religious personalities. Ibn Athir al-Jaza’iri narrated that Imam Rida was the greatest undisputed sage, saint and

### POLITICAL SITUATION

With the death of Harun, the fifth Abbasid caliph popularly known al-Rashid(148-193 Hijri), his two sons struggled for the power where al-Mamun believed to come from a Persian mother enjoying greater support succeeded against his half-brother. However, several insurrections were witnessed from Shi’a who were guided by their Imams and religious authorities in major occultation.

Al-Mamun was known for translation of various sciences to Arabic. Prior to that, his father who ruled in the Golden age of Islam was credited with the establishment of the historic Bait al-Hikma - house of wisdom –in Baghdad, the earliest centre of knowledge, culture and trade of its kind. He also arranged debates between the Imam and Muslim scholars as recorded in ‘Uyun akhbar al-Rida. The book impressively contains religious questions and sayings about the Imam and his martyrdom compiled by Ibn Babawayh or Sheikh al-Saduq. There were also famous Sahifah transmitted by ‘Abdallah bin Aḥmad bin Amer in 194 AH and al-Risalah al-Dhahabiah, a treatise on medical cures. The incidents demonstrated popularity, love and respect Muslims accorded the Imam which the king couldn’t withstand.

With the regard to the virtues of the purified progeny generally, Imam ‘Ali said: the descendants of the Prophet are his confidants, the shelter of his commands, the trustees of his knowledge, the stronghold of the Qur’an and the mountains of his faith. None of the followers of Muhammad can be compared with the descendants of the Prophet. The recipients cannot be equal to the bestowers of blessings. “O people let it be known to you that we are the descendants of the Holy Prophet. Angels come to us. We are the fountains of learning. We are the spring of wisdom and knowledge of Allah. He who is our friend and helper deserve the mercy of Allah, and he who is our enemy, waits for the punishment of Allah. They speak lies against us and do injustice to us. Allah elevated our position and He has made them inferior to us. He has opened the eyes of the people through us”.

### MARTYRDOM

Like their Umayyad predecessors, the Abbasid regimes considered Shiites a threat to their

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tyrannical authorities. Mamun therefore nominated the Imam as the rightful heir to the throne – with a sinister desire - to save the government. The Imam refused the offer for which the king uttered his famous words; “Your ancestor ‘Ali was chosen by the second caliph to be in a six-member council to elect the third caliph, and ordered to kill any one of the six who didn't comply. If you do not accept the position of Crown Prince in my government, I will follow through on the same threat&quot;.

Later, the Imam accepted on conditions agreed by the caliph for which he changed the traditional Abbasid black flag with green in respect to Shi'ism. Ultimately, it was believed that he poisoned the Imam to martyrdom on 17th Safar, 203AH at the age of 55. “Deem not that Allah is heedless of what the iniquitous do; He is only deferring them to a day when eyes shall stare” Q14:42. Proper interpretation of the Qur'an under unfavorable atmosphere was the most obvious challenge, beside other forms of persecution of his followers. Ever since, tens of millions visit his burial place from across the world. Some notable personalities buried in his vicinity include Sheikh-e Baha'i 1547-1621, Horr- e Ameli 1624-1693 and Harun al-Rashid to mention but few.

About seven years back, the shrine used the event to honor 16 International personalities from scholars, thinkers, writers and poets among the custodians of Imam Rida ('a). Sheikh Ibraheem el-Zakzaky (H), leader of the Islamic movement, Nigeria was among the respected honorees. In blessed memory of the past and forthcoming events, I urge all organisations and people with common spirit of humanity to challenge the oppression against the him and see to his urgent and unconditional release.



The shrine of the eighth Imam of Ahl-bait – Imam ‘Ali al-Rida ('a) in Mashhad