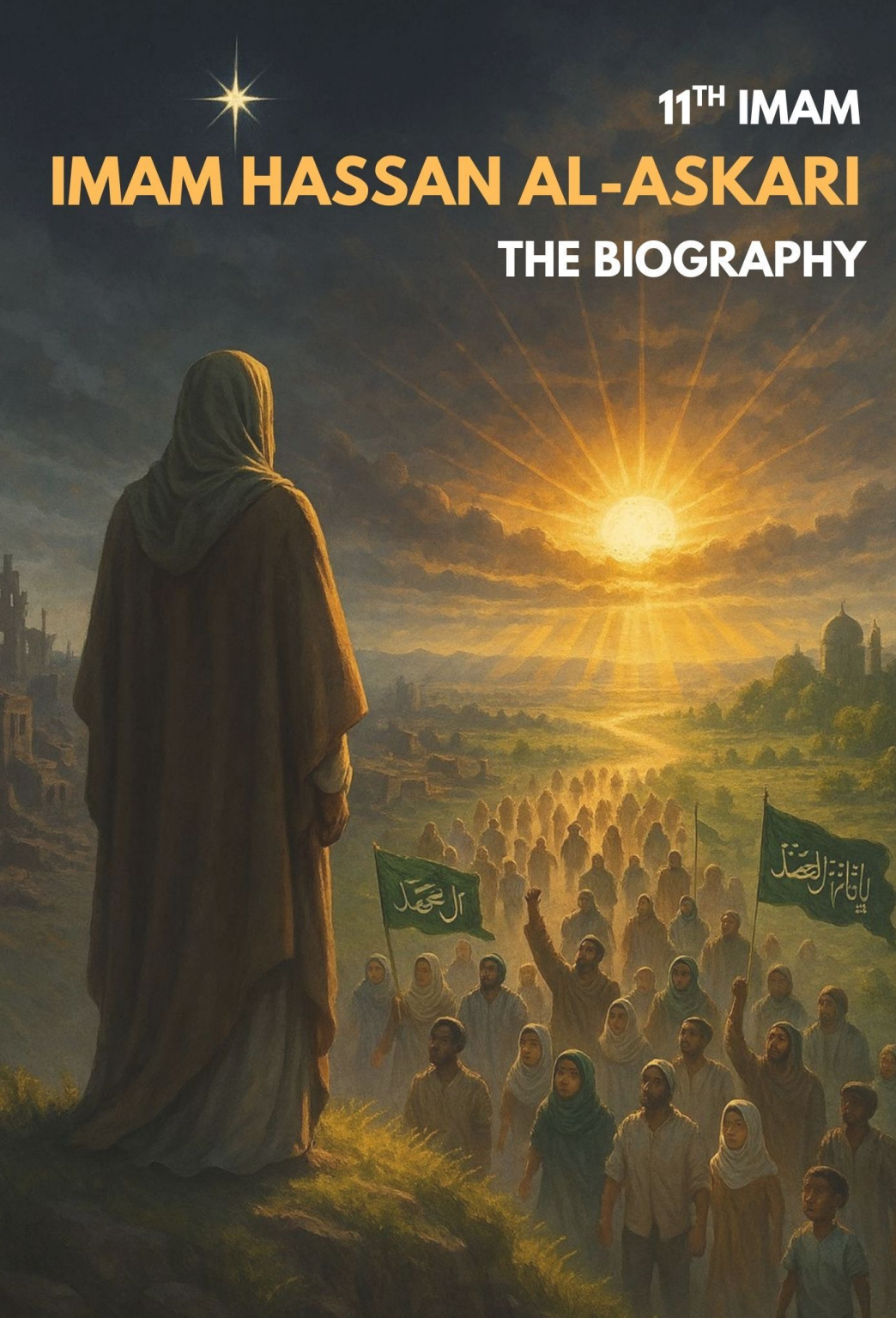
11TH IMAM

IMAM HASSAN AL-ASKARI

THE BIOGRAPHY



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PREFACE

With the grace of Allah, this short biography of our eleventh Imam Hadhrat Hasan Askari (a.s.) is now in your hands. Needless to say, this work, is only a thumb-nail sketch of this great personality whose life though short, but was very eventful. Any interested person wanting to know the life history of this Imam (a.s.) in much more detail will have to do so, referring to other sources. My main source of reference was Allama Majlisi's *BIHAR UL ANWAR*, Vol. 9 and Shaykh Abbas Qummi's *AHSAN UL MAQAL* Vol.2 (both in Urdu translation). Shaykh Mufid's *AL-IRSHAD* (English Translation) also has a useful chapter on the life of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

At the time when I was contemplating on writing this work, a tragedy befell my family. My son-in-law, Muntazir Moledina, who had read all my previous works on the biography on our Imams and who was nudging me all the time to complete this project, was diagnosed with a rare and fatal cancer. He died at a young age of 28. At that moment of trial and tribulation, I sought comfort and solace in the life of the eleventh Imam (a.s.) who, as we shall see in the course of this work, lived a shot life of 28. His life was short but very effective. To the readers, my humble appeal is to pray for the departed soul of Muntazir Moledina and to appeal to Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) to arrange for Muntazir to be in the neighborhood of the 14 masoomin, whom Muntazir loved and for whom he served when alive.

I must also acknowledge the fact that this work wouldn't be completed without the effort of Murabbi Fidahusein Hameer, who constantly reminded me of my obligation to finish this work. My earnest appreciation is for my teacher and my friend, Mohsin Mohamed Hussein Alidina, who has very kindly kept his collections of valuable books at my disposal.

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I have tried my utmost to weed out any error that might have cropped up in this work. However, if readers do come across any errors, typographical or otherwise, they are requested to make the necessary corrections, and if possible, draw my attention as well.

I have tried to state facts as they have been recorded by reliable sources. Nonetheless, I beg the forgiveness from Allah for any shortcomings due to me.

Mohamed Raza Mohamed Husein Dungersi, Ph.D.
New York, USA
July 2nd, 2001
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CHAPTER 1
IMAM HASAN BIN ALI AL-ASKARI (A.S.): HIS CHILDHOOD

INTRODUCTION

Imam Hasan Bin Ali (a.s.) is the eleventh Imam from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.). He is known also by the title Al-Askari. There are two different explanations as to why this title was given to him. Some say that he was called Al-Askari (man of the barracks), because he spent a major part of his life in the barracks in Samarra; hence the title, Al-Askari. Others say that through a miracle, his father and he showed the tyrant Caliph of their time, Mutawakkil that at their command there was a whole army of angels. Therefore, both the father and the son are known as "Askariyyain"- Two Askaris.

His other titles include, Zaki (the just), Hadi (the guide), Siraj (the beacon), and Khalis (the pure one). Like his grandfather and father, he was popularly known as Ibnul-Ridha (the son of Ridha.)

HIS BIRTH

Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was born on 11th Rabi ul Akhir 232 AH in Medina. His mother is known by these names: Haditha, Susan, Ghazala, Salil, and Haribta. Allama Majlisi reports that she was the most learned and pious woman of her time. She was also known for her chastity and generosity. As a matter of fact, on the death of her son, Imam Askari (a.s.), she was one of his trustees.

According to Jassim Husain, she was the custodian of our twelfth Imam during the lifetime of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) and she took him to Mecca for safekeeping. Her fame as a scholar and as the advisor of the community was such that she was called 'Jeddah' or the grandmother. Shaykh Abbas Qummi in his *AHSAN UL MAQAL* quotes Masoodi, who says that when she was married to Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.), he told her that she had been purified from

all the impurities and that it was Allah's will that through her would come His "hujjat" to the universe and he would fill this world with justice as it would have had previously been filled with injustice.

Like all other eleven divinely appointed Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), he was born clean and circumcised. Between his shoulders was the seal of 'Imamat', naturally imprinted on the body. When he was born, he bowed down and supported himself on the ground. Then he looked at the sky and pronounced the 'Kalimah' and then called out the names of the Imams born before him. His father read 'Adhan' and 'Iqamah' in his right and left ears respectively.

HIS CHILDHOOD

When he was just about two years old, he was called upon to accompany his father to Samarra. For reasons of security, he remained almost unknown till when his elder brother, Sayyid Muhammad, passed away. Only then did his father introduce him to the community, hinting to them that he would be the next Imam.

However, an incident is mentioned about the Imam's encounter with Bahlool; this incident shows the kind of childhood Imam (a.s.) led.

Bahlool was one such unique scholar who assumed lunacy so to as escape the oppression of the tyrant rulers of his time. However, he was known for his wisdom, which he displayed while acting as a loony! He had the opportunity of living during the time of five Imams; starting with the sixth Imam (a.s.) and ending with the eleventh Imam (a.s.).

Bahlool once saw Imam Askari (a.s.) in the bazaar weeping while other children were playing. The Imam (a.s.) was then very young. Bahlool was attracted towards the Imam (a.s.), though he didn't know his identity. The dialogue between Bahlool and the Imam (a.s.) is summarized here under:

Bahlool: My child, why are you weeping and not playing?
Imam: I am not playing because we were not created to play.

Bahlool: Then why were we created?
Imam: To acquire knowledge and to worship Allah.

Bahlool: Do you have any proof for that?
Imam (a.s.) read the following verses from the Quran:
'YOU THINK YOU WERE CREATED IN VAIN AND TO US YOU SHALL NOT BE RETURNED?' (Ch.23, v.115)

Bahlool was wonder struck. He asked the Imam (a.s.) to enlighten him more. The young Imam (a.s.) recited some elegies depicting the shortfalls of the human life on this earth. The effect of this encounter affected the Imam (a.s.) so intensely that he swooned. When he recovered from the swoon, Bahlool inquired as to why he took such matters so seriously at this young age. The Imam (a.s.) replied, "You cannot even imagine how such matters impact me. For I have noticed that when my mother lights her oven, she needs the big and small wooden splinters to start and keep the heat in the oven alive. My fear is on the Day of Judgment to keep the Hell fire burn perpetually there may arise a need for elders and the young ones and I do not want to be that young person picked for the Hell Fire."

Bahlool could not help but kiss the Imam (a.s.) respectfully and then depart.

On the whole, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) remained unknown to most of the Shia Community members till when his elder brother, Sayyid Muhammad, passed away. Hasan Bin Husayn Al-Aftas, who was from the Banu Hashim, reports that at the funeral ceremony of Sayyid Muhammad, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was introduced to them, the Imam (a.s.) was then in his early twenties.

CHAPTER 2
IMAM HASAN BIN ALI AL-ASKARI (A.S.): HIS ADULTHOOD

LIFE WITH HIS FATHER

At a very young age of two, he accompanied his parents who were summoned to Sammara, and remained there till the end of his life. He spent twenty-two years of his life with his father either in prison or under house arrest. He shared with his father all the atrocities that were committed against them by the Abbasid caliphs. All along, people were under the impression that his son, Sayyid Muhammad, would succeed Imam Naqi (a.s.) as Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) remained incognito for all that time. This is confirmed by the following incidents reported by Shaykh Mufid in his *AL-IRSHAD*:

- Ali Bin Amr al-Attar visited Imam Naqi (a.s.) at the time when Sayyid Muhammad was still alive. Assuming that the latter would succeed his father, Ali asked Imam Naqi (a.s.) to name his successor. Imam (a.s.) responded, saying, "Do not specify anyone until when my commands come to you."
- Abdullah Bin Muhammad Isfahani says that Imam Naqi (a.s.) had told him that the next Imam would be the one who will lead the funeral prayers of Imam Naqi (a.s.). Abdullah had not known Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) till when he came to lead his father's funeral prayers.

So far as Sayyid Muhammad, the eldest son of lmam Naqi (a.s.) was alive, people thought that he would succeed his father as their Imam. However, with the passing away of Sayyid Muhammad, Imam Naqi (a.s.) started to introduce his son Hasan Askari (a.s.) as the one to succeed him.

The first such introduction took place at the funeral of Sayyid Muhammad. In the presence of 150 members of the Banu Hasham

and all others who had come to console Imam Naqi (a.s.). Imam Naqi (a.s.) introduced his son Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) as the next Imam. Turning to Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) he said, "My son, give thanks to Allah, for He has made an important matter rest in you."

Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) responded, "We belong to Allah and to Him we may return. To Him do I request the perfect of his bounty upon us. We belong to Allah and to Him we return".

Four months before passing away from this world, Imam Naqi (a.s.) named formally Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) as his successor and the Imam of the mankind. He did this in the presence of Yahya Bin Yasar Al-Anbar and a group of his servants as his witnesses.

When Imam Naqi (a.s.) passed away, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was twenty-two years old. He had another six years to live and serve as the Imam of the time.

IMAM'S RESPONSIBLITIES AS THE IMAM OF HIS TIME

When Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) succeeded his father as the divinely appointed Imam, he was confronted with three major problems. First, the rulers of his time were aware of the "hadith" of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) that there would be twelve divinely appointed successors after him and that the twelfth one would fill the world with justice as it was filled with oppression. Despite the utmost precaution and effort to stop this from happening, the Abbasid rulers were alarmed by the fact that there were already eleven such Imams born. In an act of desperation, their full attention was now on the eleventh Imam. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) had to now operate under very much restricted space and time as shall become clear in the course of this and the following chapters.

The second problem stems from the first problem. One of the strategies used by the Abbasid rulers to prevent the birth of the twelfth Imam was to put the eleventh Imam in complete isolation.

This Imam (a.s.) therefore was made to spend his entire life either in prison or under house arrest.

Thirdly, as we mentioned earlier, for the security reason, the existence of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was kept a secret to many people. The common believer thought that the eldest son of the family, Sayyid Muhammad would succeed his father as the Imam of the time. Only after the death of Sayyid Muhammad did the matter of the next Imam began to become clear, as substantiated by the following instances:

- Abdullah Bin Muhammad Isfahani asked Imam Naqi (a.s.) as to who would be his Successor. Rather than give the name, the Imam (a.s.) said, "Your leader after me is the one who shall say the funeral prayer after me." Only when Imam Hasan Askari came out to lead the funeral prayers for his father, did Abdullah recognize him.
- Ali bin Muzahiyar asked Imam Naqi (a.s.) as to who would be his successor. The Imam said, "The eldest of my surviving sons." As a matter of fact, Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) "officially" named Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) as his successor only four months before the former's martyrdom.

These three problems working together created some serious restrictions for Imam (a.s.) to serve the Muslim masses. Some of these restrictions are listed here under:

1. Freedom of Movement - The Imam (a.s.) could not freely move about to communicate with his followers as he was either in prison or under house arrest. When in prison it was very difficult for an outsider to communicate with the Imam (a.s.). When he was under house arrest, all his domestic workers were on the government payroll. They were government informers and would report about anyone who paid the Imam (a.s.) a visit. They also reported every action the Imam (a.s.) took.

2. Freedom of Action and Speech - Under the conditions

mentioned under number one, the Imam (a.s.) had to be very careful in how he preserved and conveyed the Messages of Allah, without giving the government the slightest excuse of ending his life on the pretext that he was undermining the government.

3. Limited Time - The Imam (a.s.) had only six years to deliver the Message of Allah. For he was martyred when he was only 28 years of age.

SERVICES THE IMAM (A.S.) RENDERED TO THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

The following instances are examples of the Imam's contributions to humanity in general and to Islam in particular.

- Once during the reign of Mo'tamid, Sammara was caught in the grip of a severe drought. It did not rain for a long spell of time to that extent that animals began to die of thirst. Fear was that soon humans would die too. All prayers for rain went unanswered. Then appeared a Christian Priest. He would raise his hands towards heaven and pray for the rains. Clouds would appear and some rain would fall from the sky. This impressed the Muslim population so much that they were on the verge of converting into Christianity.

  The caliph was worried not so much that Islam would suffer but that his own influence as the Muslim ruler would diminish.

  It was at this point in time that a courtier suggested to him the name of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) as the only person who could solve the caliph's problem. Reluctantly, Imam (a.s.) was brought out of prison and was presented in the royal court.

  With great humility, the caliph begged the Imam (a.s.) to come out with a solution so as to "save the religion of the Imam's grandfather." The Imam (a.s.) requested that the Muslims living

in Samarra be asked to assemble for the special prayers of rain (called Salaatul Istisqa) at an open ground in the city. The Imam (a.s.) wanted the Christian Priest, too, to be present at this assembly.

Muslims and the Priest complied. The caliph and his courtiers too were present, anxious to see how the Imam (a.s.) was going to solve their problem. At first the Imam (a.s.), requested the Priest to perform his "miracle". The Priest complied. Clouds began to form in the sky. The Imam (a.s.) asked one of his attendants to search in the palms of the Priest and bring to him whatever he found hidden there. The attendant did as he was told. He found a small piece of bone hidden in the Priest's palm. As soon as the bone was taken away from the Priest, the clouds that had been forming in the sky disappeared. The Imam (a.s.) then asked the Priest to pray for the rain. He complied but to his shame and to the amazement of those present, there was no sign of any rain.

The Imam (a.s.) then addressed the gathering. He told them that the piece of bone was from the body of one of the prophet of Allah. As the Priest exposed it, in its honor, clouds would form and it would then rain. Other than that, the Priest himself had no power to perform any miracle. On the orders of the Imam (a.s.), the bone was buried. Then the Imam (a.s.) led the prayers of ISTISQA. All Muslims, including the caliph and his courtiers, joined the Imam (a.s.) in these prayers. After the prayers, Imam (a.s.) beseeched Allah for His mercy and then requested for rain. Soon after that clouds began to form. People began to run to their homes. Imam (a.s.) advised them not to rush as those clouds were meant to shower at some other place. Their rain would come after a while. So those in attendance went to their homes at their own good pace. The Imam (a.s.), too, began to go to where he had been imprisoned. The caliph was ashamed and also feared that if he did not show some

compassion for the Imam (a.s.), the public would have a bad impression about him. He therefore set the Imam (a.s.) free to live under house arrest.

- When under house arrest, the Imam (a.s.) was able to meet some of his well-wishers. It was at this time that one of the most gifted and famous scholars of all times, by the name of Is'haq al-Kindy, started a move that could have damaged Islam beyond repairs. Is'haq was working on a thesis to prove that there were countless contradictions in the Quran. Besides being a philosopher and a linguist, he was an accomplished scientist with renounced works in such specialized fields as medicine, mathematics, occult sciences, astronomy, music and logic. The work demeaning the Quran and coming from the scholar of Is'haq's caliber would indeed be accepted widely by both the friends and the foes of Islam. The resulting damage to Islam would be intense and widespread.

  But who would challenge Is'haq?

  One of the Imam's well-wishers happened to be Is'haq's student. Imam (a.s.) used his contact to challenge Is'haq. He did this by training the student to present a challenge to Is'haq in a very mild but effective way.

  The gist of the argument that the Imam (a.s.) presented to Is'haq through the student was: wasn't it possible that in all those instances where Is'haq thought there was a contradiction in the Quran, Is'haq had taken one meaning and ignored another meaning which made him see contradictions which, otherwise were not there at all? Read with proper meaning, every single word in the Quran would be consistent with the message of the Quran. The Imam (a.s.) then gave several examples to illustrate his point: when there was more than one meaning from a given word of the Quran.

When the argument, backed by specific examples, was presented to Is'haq, he was dumb-founded. He asked the student to repeat his argument and listened to it very attentively. He then pondered for a while and turned to his student, inquiring as to who had taught him this vein of thought; for he argued that a common intelligent person would never be able to come with such a high level of view. The student disclosed his source.

Is'haq admitted his mistake. He commended the Imam (a.s.) for his profound and perfect insight of the words of Allah saying, "Yes, this level of knowledge belongs to that house alone," and burned all his work.

This is how Imam (a.s.) nabbed at its bud a problem that could hurt Islam very badly.

OTHER SERVICES

Over and above guiding the Muslim community in such instances as mentioned above, the Imam (a.s.) also helped in the field of enhancement of knowledge for the benefit of Muslims in general, and the Shias in particular

KNOWLEDGE OF THE QURAN

Imam (a.s.) dictated commentary of the Quran to be written by his students. Today this work is the titled, *TAFSIR AL-HASAN AL-ASKARI*. According to Shaykh Suduq (Ibn Babawayh) this is indeed the work of Imam Askari (a.s.). This work used as a model by future commentates. The unique feature of this work is that it is very systematic. The Imam (a.s.) starts commenting on a chapter, then moves on to the verse that makes the chapter and ends with the words and their several meanings which make up the verse.

Over and above this, the Imam (a.s.) dictated the commentary of the Quran to one of his students, Abu Ali Hasan Bin Khalid,

who turned these dictations into a book totaling 1920 pages. Unfortunately this work has been lost.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT TRADITIONS OF THE PROPHET (S.A.W.W.) AND GENERAL ETHICS

Because of the restrictions under which the Imam (a.s.) had to live, he had to communicate these branches of knowledge in the form of letters. During the short periods when he was under house arrest, he managed to invite a few of his students and dictate to them his teachings. As a result, Imam (a.s.) succeeded in raising a number of scholars who went out and produced work of enormous merit for of the Muslim community. A list is given here of a few of the most prominent students of the Imam (a.s.) who untimely fledged into full scale scholars and produced valuable work from the teachings of the Imam (a.s.).

1. Abu Abbas Abd Allah Bin Jafar al-Humair al-Qummi. He was a great scholar and authored many books. One of such books was *QURB AL-ASNAD*, which became one of the most important sources of Qulayani's *Al-Kafi*.
2. Muhammad Bin Hasan Sarrar al-Qummi wrote several books, including his book, *BASAIR AD-DARAJAAT*. He also collected several letters from the Imam (a.s.) answering his questions on various fields of knowledge.
3. Abu Jafar Hamani al-Barmaki wrote several letters to (a.s.) containing questions on jurisprudence. He turned replies of these questions into a book.
4. Ahmed Bin Ibrahim Bin Ismail Bin Daud learnt from the Imam (a.s.) and became an authority on literature and lexicography. Accordingly, he wrote several books on these subjects.
5. Ahmed Bin Is'haq al-Qummi was a scholar and an author of several books including *HILAL AS-SAUM*.

Even the non-Shia scholars felt the impact of the Imam's knowledge. For example, Sibt Ibne Jauzi quotes a tradition on prohibition of wine-drinking in his book *TAHRIM AL-KHAMR* on

the authority of the Imam (a.s.). Ibne Waki grades it as an authentic hadith, with the chain of narrators traceable to the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) himself. Samani in his *KITAB AL-ASNAB* states that Al-Baladhiri has recorded several traditions from Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

HOW DID THE IMAM (A.S.) OVERCOME THE OBSTACLES AND SUCCEEDED IN SERVING EFFECTIVELY AS THE IMAM OF THE TIME?

More than any other divinely appointed Imams from the house of the Prophet, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) spent most of his time in prison. Moreover, his period of Imamat was very short: only six years. Nonetheless, his contributions as noted were enormous. This was possible owing to the following reasons:

1. All Abbasid rulers in whose times the Imamat of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) stretched, adopted a singular attitude towards the Imam (a.s.); keep him in prison, away from his family and friends. However, instances would arise when for a brief period of time the Imam (a.s.) would be released from prison and kept under house arrest. It was during these short spells of time that the Imam (a.s.) would meet with a few chosen companions and train them inventively so that each one of them could convey the Message of Islam to the outside world. Moreover, during the short period of time when the Imam (a.s.) was kept under house arrest, he was required to visit the court twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays. Then the Imam (a.s.) had the opportunity to meet with the courtiers and government officials. Despite the shortness of such spells, the Imam (a.s.)'s impact managed to influence the officers such as Ubdullah bin Khaqan, who was one of the most influential government administrators.

2. The personality of the Imam (a.s.) was such that whether in prison or under house arrest, it would affect positively those who were kept to spy or to "take care" of the Imam (a.s.). Although they were supposed to treat the Imam (a.s.) harshly,

they would do so for some time only and then change completely, wanting to oblige the Imam (a.s.). Two illustrations are given here: One to show how Imam's personality converted a stone-hearted informer into a gentle and loving attendant; another how a domestic servant, employed to spy on the Imam (a.s.) assisted the Imam (a.s.) in delivering his confidential messages to Imam's followers.

- When the Imam (a.s.) was in the prison of Mo'tamid, a friend sent a few pomegranates to the Imam (a.s.). When the Imam (a.s.) wanted to eat them, he saw the jailer watch him very closely. The Imam (a.s.) gave him one of the pomegranates to him. Instead of eating it, the jailer kept it aside. The Imam (a.s.) asked him as to why he was not eating it. The jailer said he wanted to share it with his family. On hearing this, the Imam (a.s.) gave him all the pomegranates not keeping for himself even one of it, insisting that the jailer and his family deserved to have them all. The jailer was so much moved by Imam's gesture of compassion and kindness that he decided from then onwards to submit himself totally to Imam's service. Mo'tamid came to know of his jailer's complete change and decided to replace him.
- While the Imam (a.s.) was under house arrest, one of his attendants, who was the government informer, turned to be Imam's messenger. He reports that once the Imam (a.s.) gave him a knife and told him to go deliver it to one of Imam's friends. The Imam (a.s.) warned the errand boy not to linger around or have any discussions with anyone on his way to his destination. The messenger, however, got into an argument on his way to deliver the knife. In the scuffle that followed, the knife fell down. The messenger then noticed that inside the handle of the knife was hidden a letter. The messenger reports that then he realized why he had been warned not to get involved in any argument on his way to deliver the knife, since in the knife was

hidden an important message intended for the Imam's friend.

3. Despite the restrictions, because those guards who were supposed to oppress the Imam (a.s.) became sympathetic to him, the Imam (a.s.) was able to have some kind of communication with his special agents who would act as a link between the Imam (a.s.) and the member of the public. One such agent was Uthaman Bin Said al-Umari. As a matter of fact, Uthman Bin Said was the most trusted agent of Imam Muhammad Taqi (a.s.) and Imam Naqi (a.s.). Through him and a few other trusted agents, the institution of Wikala (which we discussed about when we dealt with the life of lmam Naqi (a.s.)) was kept alive and functioning. Note also that Uthman Bin Said was the first (of the four) agents of the twelfth Imam (a.s.), his son Muhammad succeeded him and was the second "Naib;' of the twelfth Imam (a.s.).

CONCLUSION

In spite of the fact that Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) spent his entire life under restrictions, and despite the fact that he lived such a short life, yet he impacted the lives of so many that he came to be loved and remembered by many, both friends and foes. We shall close this chapter by quoting some of these remarks on the life of that illustrious Imam (a.s.)

Ahmed Ibn Khaqaan, who was Imam's opponent and the minister of Awqaaf (charities) describes the Imam's character in these words, "I do not know anybody among them who is more distinguished than Hasan Al-Askari. He is unsurpassable in dignity, knowledge, piety, abstinence, nobility, modesty and honesty. When he died, the news of his death spread in Samarra. The markets were deserted. Banu Hashim, the military officers, the state secretaries, the judges and the members of the public attended his funeral. On that day Samarra was like the Day of Judgment."

CHAPTER 3
IMAM HASAN ASKARI (A.S.): HIS CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY

INTRODUCTION

A person's character is reflected through the life that he leads in company with others. For reasons explained earlier, Imam Hasan Askari's entire life was spent in solitary confinement. His father, the tenth Imam (a.s.), kept Imam Askari's childhood and early adulthood life in obscurity, for his safety. The Abbasid caliphs kept him in prison for the remaining of his lifetime. Added to that is the fact that his entire life span was very short, only twenty-eight years. With this kind of life, one would have expected the character of our eleventh Imam (a.s.) to remain little known to invite any mention on his personality. Contrary to this, the Imam (a.s.) overcame all these oddities and like the rays of the sun, penetrating the dark and damp clouds, the Imam's personality overwhelmed hurdled on his way and impacted even the most anti-Shia historians like Ibne Hajar Makki, to comment on the life of this Imam with the most laudable words. In this chapter we shall briefly shed some light on the personality of the Imam (a.s.) to outline the greatness of this divinely appointed Imam.

PIETY

In Chapter One, we described briefly Imam Hasan Askari's brief encounter with Bahlool. We noticed the piety of the Imam (a.s.) when he was just a child. This vein of piety continued throughout his life. When in confinement, his guards saw him spend his days fasting, his nights in prayers. The effect of his piety was such that the prison guards, too, began to fast and pray as he did. When their employer. Salih Bin Waslf, rebuked them for being lenient to the Imam (a.s.), they responded, saying: "What can we say about a man who fasts through the day and stands in prayers during the night, who does not speak and is constantly in prayers...."

In his correspondence and direct conversation with his followers, he would advise them to adopt piety in their day-to-day lives. He outlined to them the elements of piety, which are:

- Fear of Allah
- Timely performance of the prescribed daily prayers - 'Salaah'
- Timely dispensing with the obligatory taxes - 'Zakah'
- Repentance of ones sins
- Control of anger
- Fulfillment of obligations of your brothers in faith
- Assistance, whenever possible, to your brothers of faith
- Keeping away from acts of evil
- Call people towards righteousness (Amr Bil Maroof) .
- Advise people to keep away from viciousness (Nahy Anil Munqar)

GENEROSITY

- A distant relative of the Imam (a.s.), by the name of Muhammad Bin Ali, had not seen the Imam in person but had heard about his generosity. Accompanied by his father, he went to see the Imam (a.s.). The father wished to have 500 dirhams: 200 for clothing, 200 for food and 100 for general expenses. When they met the Imam (a.s.) he asked them as to why they had not visited him earlier. The Imam (a.s.) then gave the father 500 dirhams and the son 300 dirhams though they had not even mentioned to him the amount of money and what they wished it for. lt is interesting to note, that this Muhammad was not the follower of the Imam (a.s.) and continued to be a Waqifi, though through Imam's blessings he had become a man of means.

- Ali Bin Zayd was left without means of conveyance when his horse died suddenly. Grief stricken, he went to the Imam (a.s.). Before he could inform the Imam (a.s.) about his ill fate, the Imam (a.s.) gave him a horse, for free, and told him that this horse was better than the one, which had just died.

- At the time when the Imam's family was busy arranging for the burial ceremony of the tenth Imam (a.s.), a servant or two took advantage of the time and stole some articles in the household of the Imam (a.s.). After the funeral, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) called the servants and told them to admit their theft, and if they admitted their wrong-doing, the Imam (a.s.) would forgive them, or else they would be punished. They admitted their guilt, returned the articles, and were accordingly forgiven.

- Yusuf Kaisar Abbasi narrates that he had a large family to take care of but didn't get any financial assistance from the government despite repeated appeals. Once, when he passed by Imam Hasan Askari's house, the Imam (a.s.) gave him a purse of money, though he had never appealed to him for help. With the help of this financial assistance, Yusufs financial hardships came to an end.

- A man by the name of Ismail Bin Muhammad Abbasi visited the Imam (a.s.) asking for financial help, on the pretext that he was penniless. The Imam (a.s.) mildly reproached him for pretending to be penniless, when he and hidden 200 dirhams in his home. Despite that, the Imam (a.s.) still gave him 100 dirhams and sent him away.

- Imam's generosity was not limited to giving financial assistance only. He was willing to help in any other way that was possible. When Mu'taz was the caliph, he put Imam (a.s.) in a dungeon and left him in the hands of Ali Bin Yarmashki, who was a very cruel person and was full of hatred. He used to make life very much miserable for the Imam (a.s.). Once, Ali's son fell sick and there was no hope for his recovery. One of his companions, who was aware of Imam's greatness and piety, advised Ali to seek Imam's help in this matter, saying that the Imam's prayers would certainly cure his dying son. Ali was reluctant to approach the Imam (a.s.), fearing that the Imam (a.s.) would not help because

of the harassment that he had received from Ali. Finally, Ali went to the Imam (a.s.) begging for forgiveness for his past mistakes and sought his assistance. The Imam (a.s.), in his unique generosity, forgave Ali for his past misconduct and prayed for his son's recovery. Ali's son recovered from his illness. Ali became a true follower of the Imam (a.s.).

KNOWLEDGE

Any study of the personality of this illustrious Imam (a.s.) remains incomplete if his extraordinary knowledge of the known and the unknown is left without discussion. In Chapter Two, we had a glimpse off his enormous knowledge of the known. In this chapter we should briefly talk about his "esoteric" knowledge, knowledge normally not found in ordinary human beings.

- Though the Imam (a.s.) never had any formal education that we know of, over and above proving himself to be the best educated in the fields outlined in Chapter Two, he was also a linguist. He was fluent in Latin, Greek, Persian and Turkic. (Given the opportunity, he would have shown his competency in any other known languages). Abu Hamza Nasir al-Khadim reports that he noticed the Imam (a.s.) speak with his servants in their own languages. Among them were from Turks, Byzantines and Damascus. As he was wondering how this was possible, the Imam (a.s.) approached him and said, "Allah has given His representative on this earth knowledge of everything. He knows languages, genealogies and events".

- Not only could he communicate with people of different nationalities in their own native languages, he was capable of communicating with animals as well. Nahvir, one of the tyrant slaves of the caliph put the Imam (a.s.) in the cage of wild animals in the hope of getting him torn by them. However, he saw the wild animals bow down with respect in front of the Imam (a.s.). What was it other than the Imam's ability to communicate with them that turned these wild animals meek?

Nahvir had no option but to remove the Imam (a.s.) from the cage to avoid the news about Imam's unique abilities to deal with animals spreading around.

- Ahmed Bin Harith Al-Qazwini reports that his father was a veterinary surgeon and employed to look after Caliph Musta'een's horses. There was one mule, unsurpassable in strength and beauty. But no one could ride it. No trainer could "break it". An enemy of the Imam (a.s.) advised the Caliph to make the Imam (a.s.) ride the mule! The Imam (a.s.) would lose both his fame and life and the Caliph's fears would end. The Caliph liked the idea and accordingly the Imam (a.s.) was invited to the court.

  Before going to the court, the Imam (a.s.) went to the stable where the mule was. He gently put his hand on the back of the mule. Ahmed didn't understand what happened but he noticed a complete change in the mule that now began to perspire heavily.

  The Imam (a.s.) then went to Musta'een. The Imam (a.s.) was told to saddle the mule. He did so with ease. He was then told to ride it. The Imam (a.s.) did so with ease and grace, to the embarrassment of the caliph and his cohorts. Ultimately, the mule was gifted to the Imam (a.s.)

KNOWLEDGE OF THE EVENTS TO HAPPEN

As Imam (a.s.) had informed Abu Hamza, Allah had given the Imam (a.s.) the knowledge of the events to happen in the future. Whenever necessary, with the permission of Allah, the Imam (a.s.) disclosed this knowledge as shown by the following instances:

- Muhammad Bin Ismail Bin Ibrahim Bin Musa Bin Jafar reports that Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) wrote to Abul Qasim warning him of the impending death of the Mu'taz. Twenty days later Mu'taz was killed.

- Imam (a.s.) also foretold the death of Muhammad Bin Dawood ten days before the event.

- Abu Hashim Jafar was imprisoned and treated very harshly. He wrote a letter to the Imam (a.s.) complaining to him about his difficulties. The Imam (a.s.) wrote back to him saying, "You will pray today's noon prayers in your own house." Soon after that Abu Hashim was released from prison and he prayed his afternoon prayers in his own house. Abu Hashim in his letter of complains had wanted to mention that he needed a financial assistance to the tune of 100 dinars, but out of shame, he didn't. As soon as he was released, the Imam (a.s.) sent him 100 dinars and asked him not to hesitate approaching the Imam (a.s.) when he needed further assistance.

- Husayn Bin Zarif wrote a letter to the Imam (a.s.) asking him several questions regarding the ways in which Hadrat Mahdi (atfs) would conduct the affairs of justice. He also wanted to know how to deal with a feverish condition a person was suffering from, but he forgot to write it in his letter. When the letter of reply came from the Imam (a.s.) he answered all the questions. The Imam (a.s.) then added saying that Husayn has forgotten to ask about how to deal with the fever. The solution to this problem, the Imam (a.s.) said, was to write the following verses from the Quran and keep it with the sick person:
  "FIRE BE COLD AND A PLACE OF SAFETY FOR IBRAHIM" (Ch.21, v.69)
  Husayn did this and the sick person fully recovered.

- Al-Muhtadi Abbasi threatened to kill Imam (a.s.). Ahmed Bin Muhammad wrote to the Imam (a.s.), informing him of the impending danger. The Imam (a.s.) replied him through a letter, telling Ahmed not to worry. Instead, on receiving the letter, he should count days; on the sixth day Muhtadi will be killed. As Imam (a.s.) had said Muhtadi, indeed, was killed exactly on the day foretold by the Imam (a.s.)

CONCLUSION

It was the unique character of lmam Hasan Askari (a.s.) that won him love and respect from friends and foes alike. We shall conclude this chapter by narrating a report on the Imam (a.s.) given by one of the Abbasid ministers who was totally against the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.). This person was Ahmed Bin Ubaydullah Al-Khaqan, the officer in-charge of estates and taxation in Qum. The narration goes as follows as reported in *Al-Irshad* by Shaykh Mufid.

Ahmed's father, Ubadydullah Al-Khaqan, was a very influential Abbasid officer, so much that, let alone government ministers, even royal princes used to visit him in his chamber. Ahmed reports that one day, Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) was mentioned to Ubaydullah in a manner only used to mention princes of the court. Ahmed continues, "When my father looked at him, he rose and walked some steps toward him. When he was near him, he embraced him, kissed his face and chest; he took him by his hand and made him sit on his prayer mat, which he had been sitting on. He sat beside him facing him, and began to speak to him and to use the honorific expression; may I be your ransom. I was amazed at what I saw."

On the inquiry as to why so much respect was shown to Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.), his father told Ahmed that this was on account of "his great merit, his self-restraint, his modesty, his asceticism, his devotion to Allah, his high morality and his righteousness."

Ahmed's curiosity was aroused and he carried out his own independent survey to find out more about the personality of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.). His inquiry involved the Banu Hashim, the military generals, the state secretaries, the judges, the court jurists, and the common people in the street. All of them unanimously talked about Imam's eminence, greatness, and elevated position. Ahmed's conclusion was, "his rank was so magnified to me since I never saw a friend or an enemy of his, except that he had good words and praise for him."

CHAPTER 4:
SOME MIRACLES OF IMAM HASAN ASKARI (A.S.)

INTRODUCTION

Like other divinely appointed Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) had the knowledge and the ability to perform miracles, with the permission from Allah. In this chapter, we shall briefly outline some of the miracles that were performed by this Imam (a.s.) when this was necessary, to establish his authority as the representative of Allah on the universe.

MIRACLE ONE

Muhammad Bin Ayyash narrates that once a group of people were discussing about the unique merits of the Imam (a.s.). Amongst them was a man hostile to the Imam (a.s.). He challenged the group saying that he would test the esoteric nature of Imam's knowledge, if any, by writing to him a letter without using ink. If the Imam (a.s.) could read and reply his letter, then and only then, would he accept the Imam (a.s.) as the true representative of Allah on the universe, He did as he said he would. After a while, the Imam (a.s.) replied all his questions, to his amazement, his shame and above all, his satisfaction. The man then accepted Imam (a.s.) as the Imam of the time.

MIRACLE TWO

Abu Hashim Jafari reports that once somebody asked the Imam (a.s.) as to why a man who is strong and capable of earning should get double amount in inheritance than a woman who is weak and not able of earning as much as a man does. Imam (a.s.) replied, "Jihad (religious battle) is obligatory for a man, whereas a woman is excused from it. Moreover, it is the responsibility of men to earn a living and to provide for his family for their daily necessities including clothing and shelter. A woman is exempted from this obligation". Abu Hashim says that when I heard this reply, a thought

crossed my mind that this same question was once asked to Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s.) and he gave exactly the same answer. As soon as this happened the Imam (a.s.) turned to Abu Hashim and said, "Indeed, this very question was asked to my grandfather, Jafar Bin Muhammad (a.s.) and he gave the same answer as I have given. As a matter of fact, we, the Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), have the same knowledge as that of Prince of the Believers, Ali ibne Abi Talib (a.s.), and the Prophet (s.a.w.w.). However, in the matter of the status and position in the presence of Allah, Ali Ibne Abi Talib is superior to us, and the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) is the most superior."

MIRACLE THREE

A man from Jurjan, named Ahmed, paid Imam (a.s.) a visit and handed him gifts and 'Huqooq' from people of Jurjan. Imam (a.s.) told him that Ahmed could now proceed for pilgrimage to Mecca. Imam (a.s.) foretold his arrival back home in Jurjan on the 190th day from then. Three days after that the Imam (a.s.) himself would pay the people of Jurjan a visit and at that instant the people of Jurjan would have an opportunity to address all their questions to the Imam (a.s.). Ahmed proceeded to Mecca and returned to his country exactly on the same day the Imam had foretold. On the third day the Imam (a.s.) was in Jurjan. After Dhuhr prayers he returned to Samarra.

MIRACLE FOUR

Abu Hashim Hadhrami paid Imam (a.s.) a visit. He had thought of asking from the Imam (a.s.) a rare stone that he would emboss in his ring and which would keep the Imam's memory alive in his mind. At the end of the visit, Abu Hashim forgot to ask for the stone. When he was going away, Imam (a.s.) called him back gave him a silver ring to which was embossed a rare stone. With a broad smile, the Imam (a.s.) said, "This will save you the cost of embossing the stone on a ring."

MIRACLE FIVE

Abu Hashim reports that once he visited Imam Askari (a.s.). The Imam (a.s.) was busy writing a letter. Before he could finish writing this letter, the time of prayers ushered in. The Imam (a.s.) went to pray. However, the pen continued to write the letter. Abu Hashim says he could not help but go into prostration 'Sajda', thanking Allah for giving him this opportunity to witness the miracle of the Imam (a.s.).

CHAPTER 5
IMAM HASAN BIN ALI (A.S.): HIS MARTYDOM

INTRODUCTION

As has been mentioned before, the Prophet's "hadith" regarding the role that the twelfth Imam, Hadhrat Mahdi (atfs) would play in the establishment of the rule of justice and equity the way the world would have been filled with injustice and inequity, was fresh in the minds of the Abbasid rulers. This bothered them a lot, given the fact that the eleventh Imam was already there, living among them. They kept the eleventh Imam (a.s.) imprisoned and under complete surveillance, hoping to prevent the birth of the twelfth Imam (a.s.). Alternatively, if the twelfth was already born despite their air-tight precautions, they could then kill him and end their life-long fear of being replaced by this Imam. Despite these efforts, they still felt insecure and were waiting for an opportune moment to end the life of the eleventh Imam (a.s.).

HURDLES THAT PREVENTED THE ABBASIDE RULERS FROM ENDING THE IMAM'S LIFE EARLIER THAN THEY ACTUALLY DID

There were two major factors that prevented the Abbasid ruler, Mu'taz from ending the Imam's life.

First, it was not clear to him as to who would be the successor of the tenth Imam (a.s.). This became clear only after the passing away of the tenth Imam (a.s.). Given the fact that the tenth Imam's "obscure" death aroused suspicion in the minds of the public who began to relate the Imam's cause of death to Mu'taz, it would be dangerous for Mu'taz to arrange the killing of the eleventh Imam (a.s.) whose fame and popularity was already sky-rocketing despite his confinement in prison.

Secondly, after the martyrdom of Imam Naqi (a.s.), Mu'taz himself did not live that Iong. After only one year, he himself was deposed and brutally killed by the Turks.

Thirdly, Imam (a.s.) ceased to be as much of a threat as was the Turks and Mu'taz's own family. Mu'taz was predominantly occupied with the Turks and their growing demands on him. The Imam (a.s.) therefore remained safe from him.

Fourthly, Mu'taz's successor, Muhtadi Billah, was equally unstable. As a matter of fact, he ruled only for one year. He was engaged in a bitter battle with the Turks. He lost the battle and was replaced by Mo'tamid. So far as Mo'tamid remained unstable, Imam (a.s.) remained safe. As soon as Mo'tamid had fully secured his position, as the caliph, he turned towards the Imam (a.s.) and planned to kill him.

IMAM HASAN ASKARI'S MARTYRDOM

Mo'tamid imprisoned the Imam (a.s.) and placed him under the supervision of his special servant, Nahvir. This man was totally hostile to the Imam (a.s.), keeping the Imam (a.s.) in a narrow dungeon, and giving him dry bread and limited water on daily basis. A woman who lived in the house of Nahvir once criticized him for being so cruel to his prisoner who was but a man of God, fasting in the days, and praying for the whole night. Nahvir was so much agitated by this reproach that he intensified his atrocities towards the Imam by throwing the Imam (a.s.) to hungry wild animals. However, the miracle of the Imam (a.s.) turned the wild animals into obedient pets. Nahvir had no alternative but to put back the Imam (a.s.) in his cell to avoid the news about the Imam (a.s.) to spread in the city.

Soon after that by the instructions of Mo'tamid, Nahvir started slow-poisoning the Imam (a.s.). On the first day of the month of Rabi-ul-Awwal, 260 AH, the effect of the poison became apparent. The Imam (a.s.) became very sick. The caliph was informed about this. He appointed a team of five of caliph's most trusted attendants accompanied by Ubaiduallah Khaqan who were to remain at the bedside of the Imam (a.s.). A couple of physicians, too, were sent

to give the Imam (a.s.) medical attention. However, as the Imam's physical condition continued to deteriorate and as it became clear that he would soon pass away, the caliph ordered the physicians to remain with the Imam (a.s.) all the time. He also ordered the Chief Justice to appoint a team of ten pious and loyal citizens to be present at the Imam's bedside. All this was being done so as to let the public believe that the Imam (a.s.) died a natural death, and to cover up the caliph's crime against the Imam (a.s.).

On 8th Rabi ul Awwal, Imam (a.s.) performed the morning prayers. Then he asked for some water to drink, but he was so weak physically that he could not hold the cup of water. His attendant, Akid, helped him hold the cup and drink from it. Soon after that he passed away from this world.
"From Allah do we come and to him is the return."

EVENTS AFTER IMAM'S MARTYRDOM

Abu Al-Adyan reports that he used to carry mail from the Imam (a.s.) to distant parts. Once he went to see the Imam (a.s.) for this purpose. The Imam (a.s.) gave him letters that he was to deliver in Madain. The Imam (a.s.) was showing signs of sickness. He informed Al-Adyan that he would be back after fifteen days. However, on the day he returns from Madain, the Imam himself would have already passed away. His family would be mourning for him and preparing for his funeral. Adyan then inquired as to who would be the next Imam. Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) gave him two clues. First, that the person who would lead the Imam's funeral prayers and; second, the one who would ask for the mails from Abu Adyan would be the next Imam.

Abu Adyan bid the Imam (a.s.) farewell and went away. When he returned, it was as the Imam (a.s.) had told him the fifteenth day since his departure. He also heard wailing from the house of the Imam, announcing the death of the Imam (a.s.). However, what surprised Abu Adyan was that he saw Jafar, the Imam's younger

brother, to be sitting at the door and receiving condolences from the people. Jafar's bad habits were known to all. Abu Adyan was confused as to how could Jafar be the Imam of the community, after Imam Askari (a.s.).

Soon Abu Adyan's doubts were to be cleared. For when Jafar was in the process of leading the prayers, a luminous young boy came from inside the house. Holding Jafar's gown, he addressed him "Uncle, more than you, I am eligible to lead my father's funeral prayers." Surprisingly, Jafar didn't utter even a word of protest and he gave way to the young boy who led the prayers to the end. After the burial ceremony, the young boy approached Abu Adyan and asked him to hand over to him the mail that he had brought for Imam Askari (a.s.). Abu Adyan did as he was told. He then went to Jafar and inquired from him about the young boy. Jafar swore to the name of God that he had never seen the young man before.

Then came a group of people, seeking the presence of Imam Askari (a.s.). They were informed of Imam's death.They inquired about his successor. They were referred to Jafar. They told Jafar that they had some mail and money. Would Jafar please let them know in whose name the mail was and what was the amount of money they were carrying with them? Jafar could not reply them. He left angrily, complaining that people expected him to have the knowledge of the unknown!

At that very moment, a servant came from inside the house. He disclosed to the group of people the name of the addressee of the mall. He also informed them that they were carrying a purse containing one thousand dinars of which ten dinars were fake! The group was totally satisfied by this and handed over the mail and money to the servant saying that indeed his master was the successor of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

Jafar went to the court of Mo'tamid and informed them about

the young Imam. Soldiers were immediately dispatched to arrest him, but they could not find him. A maiden, Saykal, was arrested and brought in the presence of Mo'tamid. For the protection of the Imam (a.s.), she observed "taquayya." She told the authorities that the child was not yet born and was still in her womb. She was put in detention under the supervision of Ibne Abi Shaarab. In the meanwhile, the caliph's right handman, Ubaidullah Bin Khaqan died suddenly. As if this was not enough, there was a mutiny, among the black slaves. In this confusion, the authorities forgot about Saykal and she quietly disappeared from the scene

THE EFFECT OF IMAM'S MARTYRDOM

Ahmad Ibne Ubaidullah Khaqan reports that when Imam Hasan Askari's death became known, the response was over-whelming. The shops were all closed in his honor and the market place was deserted. Men from all walks of life attended his funeral. According to Ahmad, that day in Samarrah was like the Day of Judgment (Qiyamah).

Imam (a.s.) was buried in his own house, next to his father. However, to convince the masses that there was no foul play in the death of Imam (a.s.), before burying the Imam Abu Isa bin Mutawakil displayed the Imam's face to the public and let them know that the Imam (a.s.) had died a natural death. He then announced the names of all those who were present at the death-bed of the Imam and presented their certification that the Imam (a.s.) had died a natural death.

Jafar took possession of the estate left by the Imam though the Imam (a.s.) had named his mother as his executor. She came back to Samarrah and claimed her rights. Though the court ruled in her favor, Jafar managed to retain almost half of the estate for himself.

CONCLUSION

There are two versions describing the last days of the Imam (a.s.) and on the surface they appear to be contradicting each other.

According to the sources of *AL-IRSHAD* at the death-bed of the Imam (a.s.) there was a strong team of physicians and scholars. According to the sources of *BIHAR UL ANWAR* at the time when the Imam (a.s.) passed away, there were only two persons present, a male attendant by the name of AKID, and SAYKAL, the maid. This apparent contradiction can be explained in the following way:-
The government had kept the physicians and the team of jurists in the presences of the Imam (a.s.) for a reason. The physicians were there not only to give an appearance that the Imam (a.s.) was given a complete medical attention, but also that he had died a natural death. The jurists were there to authenticate the physician's claim that the Imam (a.s.) had died from natural causes. The presence of this team was therefore only for a show. It is likely that after a while, the team might have conveniently left, leaving the Imam under the care of his real attendants, AKID and SAYKAL.

The hypocritical behavior of the government toward Imam (a.s.) is confirmed by the fact that, rather than leave the Imam's family to mourn their loss quietly, Mo'tamid sent his agents to search Imam's house for any child (that could be the future Mahdi) and put him to death. When such a child could not be found, women in the house of the Imam (a.s.) were all examined by state gynecologists to see if there was any hidden pregnancy. As was noted earlier, to divert the state attention from the real child kept hidden by his mother and grandmother, Imam's maid, Saykal, pretended that she was, indeed, pregnant. As a result, she was detained for a while and kept under close observation under the supervision of Ubaydallah Bin Khaqan, whose sudden death and political unrest made the government forget about her. She escaped unnoticed and was never bothered again.

As for other women in the house of the Imam (a.s.) who were suspects, carrying a child in their wombs, they were kept under surveillance for two years, and only then were they left on their own.

CHAPTER 6
IMAM HASAN BIN AL-ASKARI: HIS SAYINGS

INTRODUCTION

Of all divinely appointed Imams from progeny of the Prophet (s.a.w.w.), Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) is one who had the least opportunity to communicate freely and openly with the Muslim community in general and Shia community in particular for reasons already discussed in the earlier stages of this unit. However, his contribution as Imam of his times was tremendous especially in the field of learning and character building, the two essential elements for the life of this world and the hereafter. Imam (a.s.) managed to convey his teachings mostly through his agents who were in direct contact with him, or through the letters that he wrote to his friends and followers.

This chapter is devoted to outline some of these teachings that came to us from the Imam (a.s.).

Gist of Imam's letter to Ali Bin Husayn Bin Babawayah Qummi:

1. I advise you:
    - To be heedful to Allah
    - To establish prayers and give zakat, for prayers without zakat are not acceptable to Allah.
    - To suppress your anger
    - To forgive the wrongdoings of others
    - To maintain relationship with your kin
    - To comfort you brothers in faith and fulfill their needs in times of hardship and ease
    - To observe patience in face of adversities
    - To seek knowledge about Islam
    - To acquire the knowledge of Quran
    - To improve your character
    - To enjoin the good
    - To forbid the evil

2. Do not abstain from recommended night prayers ("SALATUL LAYL") because the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) told Imam Ali (a.s.) three times at a go "O Ali, the night prayers (salatul layl) are for you. Whoever neglects these prayers is not amongst us."

3. Put in practice what we advise you to do and advise our Shias to do the same. Observe ultimate patience and wait for the reappearance (of the Mahdi). For the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) has said that the best act of my followers during the time of the absence of the "Qaim" is to wait for his appearance. Until then, they will remain sad and in difficulties. The good tidings from the Prophet (s.a.w.w.) is that on reappearance, the Qaim will fill the universe with justice, the way it had been previously filled with injustice.

Signs of a Mu'min ('True Believer'):

A true believer will have acquired the following qualities:

1. On daily basis he prays 51 rakats of prayers. (17 obligatory prayers and 34 recommended prayers; the NAWAFIL).
2. He does his/her prostration (sajda) on earth from Kerbala and recites the ziyarah of Imam Husayn on the day of Arbaeen.
3. He wears a ring on his right hand's finger.
4. He recites Adhan and Iqamah.
5. In Adhan and Iqamah he says "HAYYA ALA KHAIRIL AMAL."
6. In the first two "rakats" of his daily prayers at the time of reading sura of "Hamd" recites bismillah audibly.
7. He prays the Dhuhrain prayers in time.
8. He "combines" his "Dhuhrain" prayers; he also does the same with "Maghribain" prayers.
9. He dyes his hair and beard.
10. He recites 5 takbirs in praying the prayers for the dead (Namaze Mayyit).

Other sayings of the Imam (a.s.):

1. Imam (a.s.) advised his followers to do the following:

- Be mindful of Allah
- Observe piety in your religion
- Be truthful in what you say
- Do not breach the trust given to you, whether for the pious or, otherwise
- Prolong your prostration ("sujood")
- Be good to your neighbors
- Pray with your people
- Attend funerals
- Visit the sick
- Give people their rights

This is what Prophet (s.a.w.w.) came with.

2. Worship does not mean only obligatory prayers and fasts, but true worship is in the contemplation of Allah's creation (and its operation).

3. The heart of the fool is in his mouth while the mouth of the wise is in his heart.

4. Wicked is that person who has two faces and two tongues: He praises a person when present, but speaks ill of him in his absence. He supports him in his prosperity but abandons him in paucity.

5. It is not a sign of good manners to express joy in the presence of a grieved person.

6. Nothing can surpass these two qualities: belief in Allah and service to the faithful.

7. Humility is a gift that invites no jealousy.

8. Anger is the key to all evils.

9. The key to the house in which all evils have been locked, is to say lies.

10. To educate the ignorant and to end an addiction in a habituated addict is like performing a miracle.

11. Friends are many for he who is pious, generous and tolerant

12. Sustenance has been guaranteed to you so it should not make you shun your religious obligations.

13. Refrain from overt struggle for fame and power for the result of such endeavor is damnation.

14. The greedy does not get more than what is decreed for him.

15. (Mild) audacity in a child towards his parents (if unchecked) results in serious disobedience in adulthood.

16. Your lives are short, your times are limited and death will approach you suddenly. He who has cultivated goodness will reap happiness. He who has cultivated evil will reap regrets. Everybody reaps what he sows.

17. He, who is not ashamed of his sinful acts in presence of people, will not feel ashamed committing sins in presence of Allah.

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

1. Why is the eleventh Imam called Askari?

2. Briefly describe the personality of Imam Hasan Askari's mother.

3. What kind of childhood did Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) have? Support your answer with examples from the Imam's conversation with Bahlool.

CHAPTER 2

1. Explain why:
   a) Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) delayed in letting people, know that their next Imam would be Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).
   b) The Abbaside rulers kept Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) in detention.
   c) Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) agreed to help the Caliph Mo'tamid against the tricks of the Christian priest.
   d) It was possible for Imam (a.s.) to communicate with the community despite the restriction imposed upon him.
   e) Imam (a.s.) used the 'wikala' extensively.

2. Outline the major contributions Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) made to the cause of Islam.

3. List the obstacles that were put in the way of lmam (a.s.) by the Abbasid Caliphs. Explain how the Imam (a.s.) overcame these obstacles.

4. Giving examples, describe the public opinion regarding Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

5. Each item in column (A) below has its equal in column (B). Match each item (1) to (10) from column (A) with its equivalent

in column (B).

Item	Column A	Item	Column B
1.	Al-Irshad	i.	Prayers asking for rain
2.	Sayyid Muhammad	ii.	Abbaside Caliph
3.	Mo'tamid	iii.	Famous scholar
4.	Salah of Istisqa	iv.	Imam's follower
5.	Is'haq al-Kindi	v.	Imam's chief agent
6.	Ahmad Bin Is'haq	vi.	Imam Hasan Askari's brother
7.	Uthman Bin Said	vii.	Name of a book
8.	Wikala	viii.	Government officer
9.	Ubaidullah Bin Khaqan	ix.	Non-Shia scholar
10.	Sibt Ibne Jauzi	x.	An institution

CHAPTER 3

1. Briefly explain what you understand by "piety" giving examples from the life of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

2. What made people consider Imam (a.s.) as very generous?

3. "The Divinely appointed Imams cannot be surpassed in knowledge by anyone." Support this statement giving examples from the life of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

4. "It was the unique character of Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) that won him love and respect from friends and foes alike." What was so unique about Imam's character? Give examples to show how his friends and foes loved and respected him respectively.

CHAPTER 4

What is a miracle? Explain by choosing anyone miracle performed by Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.).

CHAPTER 5

1. What type of persons were:
   i.Nahrir
   ii.Saykal
   iii.Muataz
   iv.Mo'tamid
   v.Ubaidulla Khaqan

2. When, where and how was Imam Hasan Askari (a.s.) martyred? Where is he burled?

3. Describe briefly the encounter between Jafar and lmam Mahdi (atfs). Why is this meeting important?

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