

**Imām Zaid ibn Ali ibn al Husayn’s Biography Compiled
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Introduction

Several years ago I began to put together a biographical book about Imām Zayd Ibn ‘Ali. In the process I came upon many references: manuscripts and printed material. And as I began going through these references I began to discover an outstanding person. His life history and struggle exemplified the Scriptural persona. Zayd’s life pattern was a paradigm of da‘wah (and man with a mission) for Allah and the sacrifice that goes with it.

*Zayd was a confluence of noble features and idealistic traits. His courage and valor rendered him a thunderbolt that struck against the tyrannical ruler. This gained him the distinction of being known as “usher of jihad.” His regard for Allah deterred him from violating Allah’s commandments, for he knew there is a divine penalty for that. He experienced the pains and the agonies of the ummah. He would rather have his own physical self fall from Pleiades to earth and to be shredded in the process if that would result in the prosperity of the ummah.

*Zayd depleted himself in his devotion to Allah. His senses were charged with Allah. At times his intimate dedication to Allah would render him unconscious. The “hope and fear” verses of the Quran would sway him as a tree that wobbles in the midst of a twister⁸⁸.

He was in a constant vigil with Allah; and for that he was known as the “attendant of the Quran.” His brother, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ali described this quality

⁸⁸ Refer to Amali al-Murshid bi-Allah al-Ithninyah (transcript), al-Kutat by al-Miqrizi, Vol II, p. 437.

in him by saying: “My brother Zayd would read the Quran and weep to the extent that we thought he perished.⁸⁹”

*Zayd was a man of profound and extensive knowledge; he became the attraction of students and learners. His speech and delivery were grandiloquent and florid. His words were moving and articulate. Even his avowed enemy Hisham confessed to this saying: “His tongue is sword-shaped and razor-edged. His articulation is beyond magic and litany.”

*In issues of social reform, Zayd had to deal with vicious ideas; he had to contend with a social mind-set that believed that its oppressive ruler is its fate and inevitable predestination. This social mind-set believed that the tyrannical ruler’s entourage is the upholders of the truth; thus, taking issue with the munkar of tyranny is tantamount to insubordination and illegitimate defiance of authority punishable by banishment or crucifixion. Imām Zayd’s society was under the impression that a ruler is as invulnerable as to be beyond tolerating criticism and beyond accepting advice. The public was also tainted with other such nonsense.

*As life would have it, Zayd had to contend with implacable and cruel adversaries. The masses were outfoxed by the powers that be. Potential allies were in many cases opportunists, and the resources and wherewithal for change were limited.

*Zayd made the ultimate sacrifice for defending the truth, he became a martyr. His flowing blood and battle-scarred body were his contribution to shake up the ummah. He sought to pull the society of his time out of a creeping mortification and ineptitude. He also tried to salvage the intellectual integrity of the time which was increasingly assaulted by frivolous statesmen and statements.

*Imām Zayd’s physical presence came to an end but his soul lives as a shahid (martyr). His clarion call reverberates throughout time. His battle-cry against

⁸⁹ Ibid, Amali al-Murshid bi-Allah al-Ithnyniyah.

oppressors and tyrants ring recurrently wherever there are dictators and despots.

I spent an extended period of time researching this outstanding personality only to find out that expressing the facts about Zayd's personality is a lesson and an example for those who bear the responsibilities of Scripture. In a sense, Zayd is a watchtower for all who are on their missionary way to Allah... In my pursuit of reconstructing the facts about Zayd I encountered many criss-crossing subjects, the chapters and details were daunting so I finished this work before life would consume my priorities onto other endeavors.

Out of all that I decided to abridge it all in the account and pages that follow. This work may become the harbinger of a more assiduous narrative to follow this book. This book is referenced as apt as possible and will have to suffice until such time arrives when the more detailed original is finally published. I ask Allah to have this book of service and to give me the wherewithal to finish the original in-depth research of mine about Imām Zayd, for Allah's will shall be done...

Finally, if there is an inexact expression, or a sub-standard wording, or an incomplete description it is all due to my frail human knowledge for which I ask Allah His help to do better. And He is the Source and the Reference.

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Preface

After the atrocious tragedy that befell Ahl al-Bayt (the people of the Prophet's household) at Karbala which claimed the life of Imām Husayn ibn 'Ali as well as most of the rest of his followers-in-arms, an air of fear and intimidation gripped [Muslim] society as a whole. Any grassroots movement for change was anathematized by the high-handed regime. People kept a "low profile." They could only watch as events unfold. People basically had no recourse for any type of corrective action when that action applied to the rulers of the day.

Many people were busy trying to make ends meet as they were placed in an economic vicious circle. Much of the (Islamic) state's revenue was spent and squandered by a ruling hierarchy that was busy with its entertainment and leisure.

Honourable military commanders could no longer spend their precious time on duty guarding a corrupt ruling class so they preferred to go to the war-fronts for their jihad obligation and to participate in the military triumphs of the ummah. Still, the outstanding military figures were harassed and subject to the royal absolutism from which they tried to flee by going to the frontiers. Famous commanders were viciously killed by the Umayyads such as Tareq ibn Ziyad and Musa ibn Nusair.

Forward looking 'ulema that would not bend to official diktat were placed in prisons where they were tortured and severely beaten. Some left prison either to become a refugee or an assassin's target. A case in point is Sa'id ibn al-Musayyib, Sa'id ibn Jubair, al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan al-Rida, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Leyla, and other prominent second and third generation luminaries.

During such critical times Imām Zain al-'Abideen – who was the senior figure in the Ahl al-Bayt inner circle – advised his partisans to work on educating and motivating the Islamic public, out of which may emerge a more confident Islamic social order. With proper Islamic information and orientation — the reasoning was — there will be hope to launch a movement for governmental change.

Pre-Birth

During the lifetime of Zain al-‘Abideen there was talk within the kinship line of the Prophet (P) of a “Zayd” who will be born and who will take on the powers of injustice, support the oppressed, and work for change and fairness. Word had it that he will be killed, crucified with no clothes on; all this was to happen in the land of Kufah. One such narrative:

The Prophet (P) one day cast his sight on Zayd ibn Harithah and wept. He said: “Murdered for the cause of Allah in my ummah, stripped of his rights of my descendents will have his name” and he (P) pointed to Zayd ibn Harithah. Then he (P) said: “Come unto me O Zayd! Your name endears you to me; you are the namesake of the dearest of my children: Zayd.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Narrated by Imam Nasir al-Atrush – per al-Muhit bi-al-Imamah – who said: I was told by my brother al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali who said: ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Qasim stated on the authority of Is-haq ibn Yahya al-Baqqar who in turn was told by Abu Yazid al-Shu‘airi relating from an person who related this hadith from ‘Abdillah ibn Shuraik al-‘Amiri from Huthaifah...

This quote was also relayed by al-Hafez ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Zaydi in Al-Muhit bi-al-Imamah; he said: I was told by al-Sayyid Abu al-Husayn ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib al-Hasani who said I was told by al-Shaikh ‘Ali ibn Muhammad al-Abrani who was also told by al-Sayyid al-Tha’ir fi-Allah Abu al-Fadl Ja‘far ibn Muhammad from al-Nasir li-al-Haq (P)...

The quote was also narrated by al-Hafez Abu ‘Abdillah al-‘Alawi – in Amal al-Murshid bi-Allah al-Ithnyniyah – this was relayed by Abu Talib Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Muqri’, Zayd ibn Muhammad ibn Mudanah al-Mu‘addab and Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Matma‘ al-Khaza‘i al-Sani‘ – they said they were told by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-‘Amiri from Husayn ibn Nasr by way of Khalid ibn ‘Isa from Husayn ibn al-Makhareq from Shuraik ibn ‘Abdillah from Qays ibn Muslim from Tareq ibn Shihab from Huthayfah ibn al-Yaman...

Al-Murshid bi-Allah in his Al-Amali al-Ithnyniah narrated the same by way of Abi ‘Abdillah al-‘Alawi with the above two chain of narrations.

This was also presented by al-Imam al-Murshid bi-Allah who was told by Abu Taher Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn Hamdan via Abu ‘Abdillah al-Husayn ibn Ja‘far ibn Muhammad al-Jarjani of the city of Rey verbatim on the authority of ‘Umar ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Umar al-Fayyad ibn al-Dahhak. Muhammad heard it from al-Husayn ibn Ja‘far who heard it from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Isa al-Bazzar both of who

On the authority of Abi Ja‘far Muhammad ibn ‘Ali who said that the Prophet (P) said to [his grandson al-Husayn] : “From your progeny there will be a man by the name of Zayd who will on the Day of Judgement along with his supporters bypass many front rank fellows of Paradise. They all will enter Paradise without scrutiny⁹¹.”

One day Abu Hamzah al-Thamali approached Zain al-‘Abideen who said to the former: Abu Hamzah! Should I apprise you of a vision I had? Abu Hamzah said: Sure O son of Allah’s prophet. He said: In my vision I saw Allah’s

relay it from Harun ibn ‘Isa al-Sayrafi on the authority of Bakkar ibn Muhammad ibn Shu‘bah ibn Dahhan ibn Thawban ibn Malek al-Basri who relates it from Muhammad ibn Sa‘id ibn Dahhan from Bakr ibn ‘Abd al-Melek ibn Wa’il al-A‘naq (who is from Basra but who lived in Yemen, a man of virtue) from Tareq ibn Shihab from Huthayfah ibn al-Yaman...

Al-Hafez ibn ‘Asaker mentions the above quote in his Tarikh Dimashq (6-20) from Huthayfah ibn al-Yaman.

Also narrated by Imam Muhammad ibn al-Mutahhar in Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy; also by Imam al-Hasan ibn Badr al-Din in Anwar al-Yaqin; also by al-Amir al-Husayn in Yanabi‘ al-Nasihah; also by al-Shahid Hamid in Al-Hada’iq al-Wardiyah; also by al-Kutubi in Fawat al-Wafayat (2/35); also Al-Suyuti in Al-Jami‘ al-Kabir on the authority of Huthayfah ibn al-Yaman on the section of A‘mal (Actions) as per Al-Rawd al-Nadir (1/107); and by al-Sayyid Sarem al-Din in Hidayat al-Raghibin on good authority.

⁹¹ Pronounced by Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani in Al-Maqatel (130) through the narratives of ‘Ali ibn al-‘Abbas, Isma‘il ibn Is-haq al-Rashedi, Muhammad ibn Dawud ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar and his father, Jaber al-Ja‘fi, and Abu Ja‘far.

It was also related by al-Sheikh al-Saduq in Amali al-Majlis (53) by the following: Ahmad ibn Harun al-Fami, Muhammad ibn ‘Abdillah ibn Ja‘far al-Himyari and his father, Muhammad ibn al-Husayn ibn Abi al-Khattab, Husayn ibn ‘Alwan, ‘Amr ibn Thabet, and Dawud ibn al-Jabbar...

It was also narrated by Abu al-Husayn Ahmad ibn Musa al-Tabari (d. approx. 350 HE) in his Al-Anwar; also by Al-Hakem al-Jushami in Jala’ al-Absar; and al-Imam al-Hasan ibn Badr al-Din in Anwar al-Yaqin, and al-Amir al-Husayn in Yanabi‘ al-Nasihah in which the last words “without scrutiny” are not mentioned; also al-Imam al-Mehdi in Al-Minhaj, and al-Sayyid Sarem al-Din in Hadiyyat al-Raghibin, as well as al-Wasi‘i in Muqqadimat al-Musnad, p. 9 per al-Daylami in Al-Mishkat.

prophet (P) escorting me to paradise and betrothing me to a very attractive looking woman the likes of which I have never seen. And then he (P) said to me: O ‘Ali son of Husayn! Name your child Zayd who will soothe you.⁹²”

There was a divine purpose for all this. Al-Mukhtar ibn Abi ‘Ubaid had bought a Sindi lady whose name was Jida. She turned out to be of moral and religious character. She was also known to be chaste and well mannered. So he said I know of no one more deserving of her than ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn. He then sent her to ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn who had her choose her preference of his sons. She said she only wants Zain al-‘Abideen who consequently married her⁹³.

Abu Hamzah said, I went to Hajj in a subsequent year and I called on ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn. When I came upon him he was carrying a small infant. He told me: this is the fulfilment of my vision; my Sustainer has actualized it.⁹⁴”

Khalid ibn Bakir said: my uncle Muhammad ibn Isma‘il said: Son! I bear witness that I was at ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn’s residence when [his son] Zayd was still a young boy. Zayd had fell and injured his face. His father was tending to his wounded face and saying: I invoke Allah’s protection for you, lest you be the crucified of Iraq. We had mentioned that one of us by the name of Zayd will be crucified in public in Iraq... and whoever deliberately stares at his private part will have Allah exposing his face to the fire⁹⁵.

These and other such discussions were the talk of the time. Whatever the degree of authenticity of these deliberations is, the fact that gruesome events happened to Imām Zayd can only have us thinking about them twice.

⁹² Amali al-Murshid bi-Illah al-Ithnyniyah.

⁹³ Amali al-Imam Abi Taleb (7th chapter).

⁹⁴ Amali al-Murshid bi-Illah al-Ithnyniyah, Amali al-Saduq 275, al-Majlis 54.

⁹⁵ Narrated by Imam Abu al-‘Abbas al-Hasani in Al-Masabih whose communicators are ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Hatem, Khaled ibn Bakir and his uncle Muhammad ibn Isma‘il. Abu al-Faraj quotes a similar statement in Al-Maqatel (1/103) as well as in Al-Rawd al-Nadir, 1/11.

It was only a matter of time and we had a feeling that something was about to actually happen. Predictions became assertions, as Zayd ibn ‘Ali came to life and drafted a historical course of struggle and opposition to arbitrary authority and dictatorial designs.

Life-Stages and Personality Development

Birth and Blooming of Imām Zayd

As ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn was absorbed in his usual supplications and invocations after salat al-Fajr (morning prayer) anticipating another day, he was interrupted by good news: his virtuous wife Jida had given birth; a moment he had been patiently waiting for. As good fortune would have it the birth and the break of day were simultaneous.

At the instant he heard of this good news Zayn al-‘Abideen offered two rak‘ats of prayer as a token of thanks to Allah. Then he opened the Qur’anic Scripture in search for a name thus to glance the following ayat:

Allah has promoted the mujahideen far above those who remain passive...

(Q. 4: 95).

Then he closed the Holy Book. He followed that by offering more rak‘ats to Allah. Then he opened the Sacred Scripture again and read the first line which said:

But do not think of those who have been slain in Allah’s cause as dead. No, they are alive! With their Sustainer have they their sustenance.

(Q. 3: 169).

Then he went and volunteered more rak‘ats to Allah; after which he took the bountiful Book and read the following ayat:

Behold, Allah has bought of the committed Muslims their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return, [and so] they fight in Allah’s cause, and slay, and are slain: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in [the words of] the Torah, and the

Gospel, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain which you have made with Him: for this, this is the triumph supreme!

(Q. 9: 111).

After that Zayn al-‘Abideen closed the Holy Writ and struck one hand upon the other saying: Indeed we are all for Allah and indeed we are all returning to Him. I have been consoled by this newly born. He is Zayd. By Allah I find no one of [Imām] Husayn’s progeny more of a liaison than he on the Day of Judgement and his fellows of more preference than others⁹⁶.

These were to be prognostications of a newly born in a noble family. The father, Zayn al-‘Abideen, felt pity on the day of Zayd’s birth. The father thus was caught between the horrible recollections of the past and the painful expectancies of the future.

Then Zayn al-‘Abideen went to take his first look at his eventful son; a son who generated in his father feelings of sympathy for his death that preceded the feelings of joy for his birth. The father gave his son his birth rites: he said the azan in his right ear, then he pronounced the iqamah in his left ear, and then he invoked Allah’s name as his Guard from the accursed Satan.

In was in the affectionate care of the foremost educator and mentor: Zayn al-‘Abideen that Zayd grew up. Zayd was engulfed by the compassion of his father. He was breast fed with virtue, and he was virtually surrounded by moral conduct from all sides. Besides that, his share of knowledge was extracted from the Prophet’s posterity. Zayd enjoyed unique access to both high standards of ethics and education.

As time went by and Zayd went from infancy to adulthood his father was closely watching his motivations and movements. He observed that his son was a free soul who resisted offences and was caring for the poor. He could never reconcile with tyranny and oppression. These observations would bring back memories to the father of the day Zayd was born and the ayats he read in the

⁹⁶ By al-Imam al-Murshid in Al-Amali al-Ithnyyah on good authority.

Holy Quran as well as the in-family chats about a Zayd who takes issue with injustice and is a champion of genuineness, who will die as the aggrieved party and who will be crucified in the city of Kufah (Iraq). Zayn al-‘Abideen could not help but feel a tragic future every time he took a thoughtful look at his son Zayd.

Correspondingly, Zayd would at times lay eyes on his father and notice a sorrowful look on his face. This was especially so whenever the battle of Karbala was on his mind. Zayn al-‘Abideen still had vivid recollection of the savage treatment that his family and supporters were subjected to by the Umayyads in Karbala. Zayd could see the past through the expressions on his father’s face. He could also reconstruct some of those bloody events. All of this impacted and prepared Zayd’s “personality of mission” and his role in as far as the ummah’s future politics and paladins are concerned.

The Environment and Circumstances Surrounding Imām Zayd’s

Development

Imām Zayd lived during the latter half of the Umayyad era, an era that lasted for nearly a century⁹⁷, and was teeming with incidents and changes on many levels.

As for political affairs: During Zayd’s boyhood the ruler was al-Walid ibn ‘Abd al-Melek who was known for his ostentatious lifestyle as well as his petrifying policies. His term of office was one of double-dyed reign as attested to from more than one source⁹⁸.

⁹⁷ Umayyad rule continued from the year 40 to 132 HE.

⁹⁸ Seyar A‘lam al-Nubala by Al-Thahabi (4/347), Al-Shafi by al-Mansur bi-Allah ‘Abdullah ibn Hamzah (1/184), and Al-Ma‘aref by Ibn Quteibah p.359.

After his death (96 HE) his brother Suleiman ibn ‘Abd al-Melek ruled. Suleiman was known for his gluttony and habitual eating to excess. It is said that he was a victim of his insatiable appetite and died in the year 98 HE⁹⁹.

The next ruler was the upstanding khalifah ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz. Imām Zayd was one of his associates when he was the governor of Medina during the reign of al-Walid and Suleiman. Zayd continued to correspond and advise him when he became khalifah. ‘Umar showed due respect to Zayd and said about him: Zayd is a very honourable man in what he says and in what he does (in his speeches and in his deen¹⁰⁰.)

‘Umar was followed by Yazid ibn ‘Abd al-Melek (101 HE). This succession was due to a “royal decree” by Suleiman ibn ‘Abd al-Melek. This ruler spent his time indulging in entertainment and the “good life.” He had a lover by the name of Hubabah; once he threw her a grape that landed in her windpipe causing her to choke and die. Her death broke his heart. He left her body in the palace until it deteriorated and turned foul. After that he was afflicted with tuberculosis and died in the year 105 HE¹⁰¹.

He was succeeded by the brutal dictator Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek who was known for his sadism and extreme cruelty. He was also infamous for his ultra stinginess and malice¹⁰². At that time Imām Zayd was thirty years of age.

Social Variables: Government corruption was in no small degree responsible for a breakdown of moral values. The extended family concept was dwindling, doweries were soaring, individuals who lacked good judgement were quickly climbing the social ladder, and the “entertainment industry” was gaining

⁹⁹ Seyar A‘lam al-Nubala (5/112), Al-Jawhar al-Thamin p 92, Al-Shafi (1/185).

¹⁰⁰ Amali al-Murshid bi-Illah al-Ithnyayah, the names of those who narrated hadith on the authority of Imam Zayd.

¹⁰¹ Al-Shafi (1/187), Al-Jawhar al-Thamin, p 97, Seyar A‘lam al-Nubala (5/152), Al-Ma‘aref 364.

¹⁰² Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi (2/328), Al-Shafi (1/187), Al-Jawhar al-Thamin p.99.

ground. It got so bad that one of the Umayyad princes summoned all the singers in Hijaz and lavished them with multiple prizes. One singer by the name of Ma‘bad was given ten thousand dinars¹⁰³. Corruption was eroding the features of the Islamic society. It was the ‘ulema who managed to preserve a balance of social sanity in which we had an otherwise deteriorating if not disintegrating Islamic social order. These ‘ulema did their best to check this slide by extending and expanding public knowledge and education along with a particular emphasis on “religious values.”

Intellectual and Cultural Changes: The Umayyad time-period may be referred to as the age of regression, dissension, intellectual clashes, and sectarian strife. Such ideas that would argue for predestination and others that would argue for man’s free will settled into incompatible positions. Rulers for their own personal interests entered the fray once in support of one side and then (in a political balancing act) in support of the other side. The sway of the Khawarej became popular and their agents increased. Polarization of opinions became common. Then came the Mu‘tazilites (the rationalists) only to be followed by their nemesis.

Poetry (a good gauge of public opinion at the time) was now composed with a particular emphasis on “making love,” amusing or stimulating distractions, “palace poets,” (praising the king instead of praising the Lord). This poetry was now in the service of the powers that be and the status quo.

Sycophants and mercenaries were recruited to fabricate hadith (quotes of the Prophet (P)) that would rationalize or explain royal fiat. The lucrative incentives were there¹⁰⁴.

This pretty much describes the Umayyad track. And this is not to exclude positive developments within particular circumstances and events which are to be encountered in almost every generation, the Umayyad included.

¹⁰³ Al-Aghani (5/161).

¹⁰⁴ Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah (4/68).

Personality Features

Imām Zayd had the traits of a man on a mission to establish a just order. He was firm in his conviction; he was brave, caring, sincere, and thoroughly honest. His was an on-going affair with the Notable Quran. He inherited good qualities. His father was Zayn al-‘Abideen; his grandfather was al-Imām al-Husayn, and his brother was al-Baqer. He was nurtured in a prophetic family of outstanding character. Zayd combined the valor of ‘Ali with the sense of honour of al-Husayn, with the devotion of Zayn al-‘Abideen, with the sagacity of al-Baqer. He was well known for his exemplary moral quality that was bequeathed to him from converging and complementary sources. In short, he was the embodiment of all that is good.

Devotion and Reverence

Zayd’s devotions and rituals were beyond what is ordinary or usual. His deep personal and private knowledge of Allah overwhelmed his self, spirit, and state of nature. At times when Allah’s name is mentioned he would lose consciousness... When he listened to the promising or punishing ayats of the Quran he would swerve like a tree subjected to the strong currents of the wind¹⁰⁵. His brother, ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Ali said: When my brother Zayd read the Quran he would cry, and we would think he was on the verge of passing on¹⁰⁶.”

Imām Yahya the son of Zayd recalls his father’s daily devotionals: Allah bless my father. He was so dedicated. Little was his sleep during the night, much was his fasting during the day. He spent time during the day praying, and when night arrived he slept for a short while only to wake up and spend the core of the night in his worship and supplication. At times he would stand and beseech Allah with tears running down his cheek until the break of dawn. At the break of light he would prostrate himself and pray the early morning prayer and follow that by invoking Allah’s blessings and mercy until sunrise. From then on he would go out and fulfill his immediate duties. At high noon he would

¹⁰⁵ The equivalent meaning was mentioned in *Amali al-Murshid bi-Allah al-Ithnyayah*, *Al-Khutat* by al-Meqrizi (2/437).

¹⁰⁶ *Amali al-Murshid al-Ithnyayah*.

return to his niche praising, exalting, and thanking the Glorious Sustainer. Then he would offer his noon salat and sit down. Then he would offer his afternoon salat and follow that up with more supplications and prostration. Once the sun went down he would perform his sunset and night prayers¹⁰⁷.

This heart and mind consuming devotion by Imām Zayd was not the type that people are accustomed to, the type that pacifies or marginalizes. There are rituals that have the effect of neutralizing the human being, but Zayd's devotion and rituals were motivating and fulfilling.

His Courage

To have courage is to be psychologically prepared to take on danger as it interferes with goal achievement. And the more the goal is noble and the commitment to it is deep the more psychological formulation is needed until eventually there is no longer a fear of danger. It is along these lines that Imām Zayd ibn 'Ali acquired his courage. Abu Mu'ammār Sa'id ibn Khathim said: We were in the quarters of Shabib ibn Gharqad when we heard the sound of approaching horses. All of us were frightened as we thought it may be [a contingent force belonging to] Yusuf ibn 'Umar. At that time I realized no one was as exuding courage and showing contempt for danger than Zayd ibn 'Ali. He did not interrupt his speech nor did he show any indication of fear. When the horses passed by and we were released he came to us and said: some of you may be afraid of an impending danger; but I do not intend to take on deviant authority because of some earthly interest, nor do I do so for financial gains, I do it solely for the sake of Allah and as a means of accessing Him. And whoever has Allah as his motivational objective then there is nothing that comes his way that can frighten him¹⁰⁸.

Due to this type of psychological potential he challenged tyrants and their functionaries. He was able to speak the truth to their faces. He was effective in disarming them by sound argument before confronting them with weapons. He continued along this course until his words eventually blended with his blood.

¹⁰⁷ A'yan al-Shi'ah (7/122).

¹⁰⁸ Amali al-Murshid bi-Illah al-Ithnyniyah.

This became the kindling matter for freedom, a freedom that erodes despotism and lights the torch for the rest of humanity; a humankind looking for its way out of the totalitarian tunnel.

A scan of his bold initiatives during his lifetime and we appreciate his determination and heroism. One narrative has it that the troops of the Levant (al-Sham) who were approaching from the direction of al-Hirah were confronted with this lion-heart who was able to fell more than two thousand of them between al-Hirah and al-Kufah¹⁰⁹.

His Articulation and Eloquence

The contemporaries of Imām Zayd were unanimous about his superior ability to communicate and convince his audience. Zayd was an interlocutor who commanded his words. His expressions were easy and graceful. His method of delivery was thoughtful and conclusive. Even his avowed enemy Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek said of him: His tongue was razor sharp, sword swift, and in a higher place than wizardry and liturgy¹¹⁰.

It has been narrated that people would assemble around when Zayd would discourse with Ja‘far ibn al-Hasan about the issue of revenue and financial contributions of the ruler. People would memorize Zayd’s words as if they were poetry or prodigious precedents¹¹¹.

Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi a renowned poet and a man of letters during that time said of Imām Zayd: “I have never seen anyone more fluent than Zayd ibn ‘Ali.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ In the book Al-Shafi (p189) it is mentioned that Imam Zayd killed two thousand Umayyad warriors.

¹¹⁰ Tarikh al-Kufah, p.345; A‘yan al-Shi‘ah (7/108), and Zahr al-Adab by al-Qairawani (1/118).

¹¹¹ Zahr al-Adab, by al-Qairawani (1/119).

¹¹² Al-Amali al-Ithnyniyah.

Khaled ibn Safwan, a well known sermonizer and oratorical speaker said: “Eloquence, articulation, asceticism, and devotion came to an end with Bani Hashem only to commence with Zayd ibn ‘Ali.”¹¹³

It also has been reported that the outstanding grammarian Seebaweyh would quote some of Imām Zayd’s poetry [apparently as grammatical citations]¹¹⁴.

Imām Zayd set the tone for the high spirits of men in pursuit of their Islamic mission. Words have to be chosen; sentences have to be effective, and expressions have to be moving. Zayd was well versed and well prepared along these lines. Words are captivating even if their content is of an inferior logic; likewise words are disenchanting even if their intended logic is superior!

His Austerity and Self-Discipline

Imām Zayd was familiar with the facts of life; he knew how driving and volatile life can be. He viewed life as a transient reality. Thus did he spend his time in life as a Spartan. His words to his Sustainer say it all:

“O Allah! I ask Thee gravity away from this world, and a dislike for it and its fans. This world’s plenty is inadequate; its iniquity is harsh, its assembly dissipates, its goodness is polluted, its current becomes obsolete, its favors turn sour. Whatever is missed in this world becomes a grief and whatever is gained becomes sedition, except [O Allah!] for those You have harbored. I ask Thee to guard me from this world. Do not have us satisfied with this world and its content, for it is a world that betrays all who have confidence in it, and it disappoints all who trust it. Those whose share and investment are in this world will be disappointed by its earnings and dividends.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Al-Ifadah fī Tarikh al-A’immah al-Sadah; and Hadiyyat al-Raghibein fī Mathahib al-A’immah al-Hadeen.

¹¹⁴ Nur al-Absar, p.217.

¹¹⁵ Majmu‘ Rasa’il al-Imam Zayd, the chapter on supplications.

Imām Zayd spent his worldly life away from its temptations, avoiding its pitfalls. He says:

“By Allah, I have never lied since I could distinguish left from right and I have never violated any sanctity of Allah since I realized He punishes such violations.¹¹⁶”

He once said to a friend of his:

“Aba Qurrah! By He who knows the blood life of Zayd ibn ‘Ali, this Zayd has not profaned any of Allah’s sanctities since childhood. Aba Qurrah! Whoever obeys Allah will find creation obeying him.¹¹⁷”

He would say to his companions:

“People! The best form of conformity to Allah is devotion and the most honourable provision man can have is a sense of Allah’s power presence. So be devoted in this world and provide yourself for the next.¹¹⁸”

Zayd’s devotion and austerity were vouched for by the scholars of his time. ‘Amer al-Sha‘bi said: “I have not seen anyone more abstentious than Zayd ibn ‘Ali.¹¹⁹” Abu Khaled al-Waseti said: “I have not seen a Hashemite more devoted and self-denying than Zayd ibn ‘Ali.¹²⁰”

Sincerity and Altruism

Imām Zayd had dedicated his life to Allah. He would only think about what would be in the best interest of the ummah and what would satisfy its Creator.

¹¹⁶ Taysir al-Mataleb, p.80.

¹¹⁷ Maqatel al-Talibiyeen, p. 128.

¹¹⁸ Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd, the chapter on Imam Zayd’s chronicles.

¹¹⁹ Al-Rawd al-Nadir, 1/97; Nur al-Absar, by Al-Shalbanji, p. 215.

¹²⁰ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy.

He would never hesitate to do whatever would serve the ummah and be to its advantage. One of his famous quotes:

“By Allah! If I knew that Allah’s gratification is in my sparking a fire and placing my own self in it, I would not hesitate to do so.¹²¹”

He says in his address to the ummah:

“I affirm by Whose permission I call upon you, and by Whose order I advise you, I do not seek preference over any committed Muslim, nor do I want to harm any affiliate. My wish is to spare you the doom of those who perish and to guide you away from iniquity. I would rather set a fire and throw myself into it rather than incur Allah’s wrath and be transfixed to this worldly life. I so desire your salvation and redemption. If you respond positively to our invocation you will be felicitous, well off, and prosperous.¹²²”

The more a person (like Imām Zayd) becomes devout and sincere to his Lord by carrying the burden of the ummah’s frustrations and expectations, the more he is selfless and the more sacrifices he makes.

Above were some quick references to some of Imām Zayd’s qualities. There are other aspects to his watershed lifetime that can only be expressed in poetic terms as bland language is incapable of capturing his cascading features.

As a Scholar

Medina was a city very well known for its concentration of ‘ulema. It was an encyclopedic city of sahabis, tabi‘een, and the figures of Ahl al-Bayt. Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali sought knowledge at an early age. He was involved in scholarly competition within Medina’s intellectual circles. He invested a considerable amount of time in personal achievement and in expanding his scholarly horizons. He gained a firm position in the sciences of his time. He knew that he

¹²¹ Taysir al-Matalib, p 84; Al-Masabih, by Abi al-‘Abbas al-Hasani.

¹²² An excerpt from Imam Zayd’s Risalah to the Ummah.

had to equip himself with rational tools to be able to contend with the trends and moods of his time; and he did so within perspective and within context.

Those who left an intellectual imprint on Imām Zayd were: his father ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-‘Abideen, his eldest brother Muhammad al-Baqer, the sahabi Abu al-Tufayl ‘Amer ibn Wathilah, Aban ibn ‘Uthman, ‘Ubaidullah ibn Abi Rafi‘, and others¹²³.

Much has been said about the relationship between Imām Zayd and Wasel ibn ‘Ata’. Which one was the student of the other? Who was influenced by the other? Historical documents do mention that Imām Zayd did meet Wasel ibn ‘Ata’ as he met with other ‘ulema in al-Sham, Kufah, and Basra. They had their dialogues as is expected when scholars converge and meet with each other. Imām Zayd, though, was older than Wasel and of more scholarly depth. Wasel did seek out Imām Zayd’s opinions and solutions. History though has not been as generous as to register all these encounters and answers by Imām Zayd¹²⁴. As for those who claim that Imām Zayd was a student of Wasel ibn ‘Ata’ and was influenced by Wasel’s ideas concerning Imāmat there is no substantiation or historical validity.

Imām Zayd: Kin and Fellow of the Quran

Historical precedence proves that any idea, movement, or mission based in the Quran is bound to the Quran’s infinite nature. It accompanies the Quran into people’s lives. This may be one reason that Imām Zayd’s thought has been preserved throughout the passage of time against all odds. Imām Zayd adopted the Quran as a perpetual guide and an accurate criterion, and a secure refuge. His initiation and his remuneration were from and to the Quran.

¹²³ Ibn Habban in his book *Kitab al-Thiqat*, writing about Imam Zayd (4: 249) says that Imam Zayd met the Prophet’s sahabis. Ibn Sa’d (5: 325) says Imam Zayd was a contemporary of al-Tabi‘een in Madina.

¹²⁴ One inquiry from Wasel to Zayd was about the Khilafat to which Imam Zayd gave a detailed answer, which I came across and included in the collection of Imam Zayd’s writings and authorships.

At an early time in his life Imām Zayd contemplated the meanings of the Quran. He practically allocated thirteen years of seclusion with the Quran: reading and understanding it as a program and a system emanating from practical behavior. Abu al-Jarud once said: I entered Medina and every time I would ask about Imām Zayd I would be told: He is the Quran's kith and kin¹²⁵.

Imām Zayd secluded himself to be in the companionship of the Quran; a seclusion that took him on a long sojourn into the world of facts and mysticism. This self-imposed seclusion began to have its effects on his behavior as well as his trend of thought and "creativity." Some narrators convey to us an incident in which Imām Zayd asks his brother Muhammad al-Baqer to pass on to him a book belonging to their grandfather Imām 'Ali (AS). After a while the book is handed over to Imām Zayd. After reading through it Imām Zayd says that I found whatever I was searching for in this book in the Quran. Abu Ja'far wanted to quiz him and so he said, "Could I ask you some questions?" And Zayd answered: yes, go ahead and ask. Abu Ja'far opened the book and began to ask Imām Zayd to which Imām Zayd gave answers written in this book. To this Abu Ja'far commented: "For father and mother's life! You are one of a kind. God grace your mother who gave you birth. She gave birth to a replica of your forefathers."¹²⁶

In this instance Imām Zayd's answers were carbon copies of Imām 'Ali's answers. This is attributable to the fact that they both were well versed and well entrenched in the meanings of the Noble Quran.

Explaining the Qur'anic Text

The tafsir (explanation) of the Qur'anic meanings during the sahabi and tabi'i (first and second generation Muslims) times was readily available to many people. These early exegesis (tafsirs) did not dwell on clarifying the meanings of ayats per se as much as they focused on explaining the meanings of

¹²⁵ Maqatel al-Talibiyeen, p 130.

¹²⁶ Narrated by Imam Abu Taleb in al-Amali, p 77 on the authority of Abu Hashem al-Rummani. This was also narrated by Imam al-Mansur billah 'Abdullah ibn Hamzah inal-'Aqd al-Thamin.

terminology and nomenclature. But then as time passed by the Qur'anic text was not easily understood for many reasons. And then each era's scholars began to exert effort to bring out the diminished and exclusive meanings of the Quran. Some of these interpretations had the flavor of the particular scholar's specialty: some of these scholars emphasized the linguistic quality of the Quran, others placed more emphasis on the fluent articulation of the Holy Text, yet there were others who focused on the fiqhi or doctrinaire contents of Scripture. With this variety we have what we have today of tafsir.

Imām Zayd (AS) developed a peculiar interest during a lifetime sojourn with the Quran. His concern was to establish a Qur'anic theory of knowledge that is inclusive of human mental discoveries. To do that he sought to assimilate unexplained words and unaccounted for intimations in the ayats of the Quran into a cognizant rendition which came out in book form called Tafsir Gharib al-Quran (The Interpretation of the Quran's Mystifying Words).

He proceeded by studying all the clusters of ayats that centered on a particular theme. In doing so he extracted or developed relative and substantial cognitive contents. Eventually he began to put together a Qur'anic paradigm which would integrate the issues and affairs of life and thought processes. A closer look at Imām Zayd's books and epistles reveals that they are a thematic rendition of the Quran's meanings. A review of Imām Zayd's works (which we have reexamined and published) brings out the penetrating and deep understanding Imām Zayd had of the Impeccable Quran; it also shows how he was brilliant to put these sublime meanings in human language. The following are some excerpts of his tafsir.

The Concept of "Harm" in Allah's Book

‘Ubaidullah ibn al-‘Ula says: “I heard a person ask Zayd ibn ‘Ali (AS) about what does “harm” mean in the Book of Allah, such as when Allah says: {Said he: “Do [you really think that] they [the idols] hear you when you invoke them, or benefit or do you harm?}” (Q. 26:73) Say [O Prophet]: “It is not within my power to avert harm from, or bring benefit to myself...” (Q. 10: 49).”

Zayd (AS) said: as to the verse: Said he: “Do [you really think that] they {the idols} hear you when you invoke them, or benefit or do you harm?” what is

meant hear is: do you think that these idols will bring you to life or cause you to die?

As for Allah's words: Say [O Prophet]: "It is not within my power to avert harm from, or bring benefit to myself... this means that I do not have it within my control to actualize what benefits me nor do I have any management of repelling what would eventually inflict me. "Harm" may also mean hard-times and an act causing pain or damage as in His words:

And if Allah should impact you with crisis...
(Q. 6: 10).

Or:

... and are patient in crisis and hardship...
(Q. 2: 177).

One interpretation of "harm" is drought as is ascertained from the ayat:

And [thus it is:] whenever We let [such] people taste [some of Our] grace after hardship has visited them...
(Q. 10: 21).

The word grace in the ayat above refers to rain which explains the word "hardship" in the ayat above which refers to drought in the context of the Qur'anic discourse. The word "harm" could also mean danger as in:

And whenever harm [danger] befalls you at sea...
(Q. 17: 67).

It could also mean "an impairment of health" as this ayat says:

And [remember] Job, when he cried out to his Sustainer: "Harm [Ailment] has befallen me...
(Q. 21: 83).

For [thus it is:] when harm [affliction] befalls man, he cries out unto Us, he be lying on his side or sitting or standing...
(Q. 10: 12).

The word “harm” in the Quran could also mean devalue:

Verily, they who are bent on denying the truth and on barring [others] from the path of Allah, and [who thus] cut themselves off from the Apostle after guidance has been vouchsafed to them, can in no way harm [devalue] Allah; but He will cause all their deeds to come to naught

(Q. 47: 32).

The meaning of “hand” in the Quran

Ubaidullah ibn al-‘Ula said, I heard Zayd ibn ‘Ali say about the following ayat:

And the Jews say, “God’s hand is shackled; and manacled [by Allah] are their hands because of this their assertion. No, but wide are His hands stretched out...”

(Q 5: 64).

Imām Zayd says that the reference here is to Allah’s magnanimity and generosity. In other verses in the Quran the words speak of Allah: “giving abundantly.” In Arabic discourse when it is said that a person is indebted to another person’s hand it is another way to express how one person extends is helping self to another person.

Allah also says:

And neither allow your hand to remain shackled to your neck...

(Q. 17: 29).

and this, according to Imām Zayd, this means do not withhold your hand from spending in good causes as it would be tantamount to having your hand tied to your neck.

Allah also says:

Said He: “O Iblis! What has kept you from prostrating yourself before that [being] which I have created with My hands?”

(Q. 38: 75).

This would mean that I [God] personally created him [Adam] without parents. This is not a specific reference to human-like “hands” as much as it is a reference to Him as a whole being responsible for Adam’s creation. It could very well be that Allah said to Adam “be” and he was without ever having His “hands” involved in the act of creation.

Also:

...and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand...
(Q. 39: 67).

“right hand” in the above ayat refers to His ability and potency. Likewise: “rolled up in His right hand...” would refer to His possession and dominion. It is like saying: If it is in my hand it is mine. Which does not necessarily and literally mean that I have it clenched in my fist. There are examples of this in Arabic poetry.

The Meaning of Waywardness and Guidance in the Quran

‘Ubaidullah ibn al-‘Ula said: I heard a man asking Zayd ibn ‘Ali about the Qur’anic statement:

Have you ever considered [the kind of man] who makes his own desires his deity, and whom God has [thereupon] let go astray, knowing [that his mind is closed to all guidance]...
(Q. 45: 23).

...however, He lets go astray him that wills [to go astray], and guides aright him that wills [to be guided]...
(Q. 16: 93).

...and the Samaritan has led them astray...
(Q. 20: 85).

Oh, woe is me! Would that I had not taken so-and-so for a friend!
Indeed, he led me astray from the remembrance [of God] after it had come unto me!
(Q. 25: 28-29).

...and preserve me and my children from ever worshiping idols – for, verily, O my Sustainer, these [false objects of worship] have led many people astray...

(Q. 14: 35-36).

What does “to be led astray” in the above verses mean? What does it mean when someone is misguided? Zayd ibn ‘Ali said that it has a variety of meanings:

Mis-guidance coming from Allah the Exalted may be understood in two ways. One way is that the definition of a wayward person as being mis-guided comes from Allah, remember the definition itself not the actual act by man comes from Allah. It would be like saying a person is a criminal. The description of “criminal” is after the fact. By defining a criminal act and its perpetrator we are not condemning anyone to a criminal lifetime. The other meaning is to forsake and abandon. Hence, a person goes astray because as a consequence of his disobedience of Allah he is deserted and eschewed by Allah. Subsequently, that means that Allah will not accompany or succor someone who has chosen to take issue with Allah. This would be like saying a father ruins his son if he fails to amend the pervert and obnoxious behavior of his son. But in fact the father never facilitated or approved of his sons wayward choices. Besides, a person has enough common sense and access to Allah to deter him from deviant choices. But after all this, if the final choice is to disregard Allah then all evidence goes against him.

A human misguiding another human, or being misguided by Satan takes the form of allurements, temptation, and deception. If a human-being is enticed or seduced to disobey God then he is misguided and misled. This particular meaning is not applicable to God, as He never tempts or deludes anyone into His disobedience.

As for idols (that cannot hear or see) being the source of misguidance as in:

...inasmuch as they said [to their followers], “Do not ever abandon your gods: abandon neither Wadd nor Suwa‘, and neither Yaghuth nor Ya‘uq nor Nesr!” And so they have led many astray...

(Q. 71: 23-24).

The explanation of this type of misguidance is traced not to lifeless idols but to their intrinsic choice to equate idols to God or replace Him with them. Their deifying of material objects worshiped as God explains why they are misguided. This would be like saying a particular lady drives a particular man crazy or to insanity even though this lady may not know the man at all. In a “round-about-way” the man, with the idol as catalyst, goes astray.

Likewise, guidance is in a variety of norms. Such as:

... and guided them unto a straight way...
(Q. 6: 87).

...[on the strength thereof] you, too, shall guide [men] onto the straight way...
(Q. 42:52).

...and made them leaders who would guide [others] in accordance with Our behest...
(Q. 21: 73).

In the above ayats we realize Allah is telling us that He guides, His prophet (P) guides, and so do the committed Muslims.

When Allah guides, it means that He establishes the truth, encourages its access, and designates it as such. This we understand from the illustration in the following ayat:

And as for [the tribe of] Thamud, We offered them guidance, but they chose blindness in preference to guidance...
(Q. 41: 17).

This means that Allah showed and clarified to them the issue of being guided. He says:

Verily, We have shown him the way: [and it rests with him to prove himself] either grateful or ungrateful.
(Q. 76: 3).

Another aspect of guidance from Allah is His ‘ismat (immunity of man). The above ayat exemplifies man’s choice of having to gain it or of choosing to lose it.

Guidance from the Prophet (P) and the committed community of Muslims is in the form of elucidating and demonstrating guidance through words and necessary action.

Imām Zayd: Refined by the Sunnah

In addition to the Holy Quran, the Sunnah is the complimentary and comprehensive source that man needs for laws and legislation within which an Islamic personality can grow, thrive, and have its flourishing ideas. Thus will life take on a course of integrity and prosperity. For that reason the Sunnah has been the concern of scholars and researchers throughout Islamic history.

During the Umayyad reign, the Sunnah was strained and stressed. Personal preferences, ethnic inclinations, and political priorities had their impact on the narration of the hadith (the Prophet’s precedents). Facts pertaining to the Prophet’s model were stuffed or skewed with fabrications and distortions. The Prophet’s pace-setting Sunnah was polluted with bida’ (prevarications and fraud). The speckless Sunnah was menaced and almost undermined had it not been for men who vowed their lives to preserve it; they exerted their best efforts to distinguish it from intruding accretions that came from political and personal quarters. They devised ways and means to identify true hadiths from fancied ones.

Foremost in this regard was Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali who was one of the first to collect and critique the body of hadith literature. It is narrated that he compiled his book Musnad al-Imām Zayd and wrote it himself. He circulated it to his inner circle of companions before he embarked on his course of martyrdom. It was the first book to classify the hadith into fiqh sections.

One of the criteria that were emphasized by Imām Zayd in the process of verifying a hadith’s authenticity was to place it in the faultless context of the Quran and draw a comparison between meanings. When asked by some of his admirers about “controversial” hadith, he replied: Know that no prophet parted with his society before leaving them with compelling and binding evidence that

affirm Allah’s truth and facts. Whatever fallacies and fables follow are a product of the generations that follow such prophets. Prophets (P) had people “put words in their mouths.” Allah’s final prophet (P) said: When you hear a hadith place it in the Qur’anic reference and if it is agreeable it may be related to me and I stated it; but whatever hadith seems to be contrary to established Qur’anic meanings that it is not from, I did not utter it, and I am extricated of its consequences¹²⁷.

He also said: You will never produce a hadith confirming me except if I am able to substantiate it by Allah’s Book¹²⁸.

Imām Zayd and Rationality

The human intellect has its field of activity within which it goes to work. Inside this range of thought there can be no barrier or religious “off-limits.” In this designated area the mind is expected to work objectively and sometimes judgmentally. Sometimes though, there are factors that veto or interfere with this mental pursuit, such as sentimentality, fanaticism, selfishness, and all other issues in which emotion is apt to precede the intellect. There are also some areas beyond the reach of human intellect and mental scrutiny, such as metaphysical issues, matters pertaining to how man’s behavior with God should be, and basically all otherworldly and paranormal phenomena.

It would appear that it was within these parameters that Imām Zayd exercised his mental faculty. Relying on the mind and intellect Imām Zayd pondered the sensual world, but when it came to the extrasensory or the unnatural he did not rely on the mind per se. In this case his reliance was upon the eternal miracle: the Sacred Quran. But he still held that the human mind should function within its given guidelines. He said in the introduction to his book: *Al-Iman* (Divine Commitment): “I advise you to adopt Allah’s Book as a trend setter, inspiration, and guide. You should always be second to it in whatever you

¹²⁷ Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd (The Compilation of Imam Zayd’s Epistles), the section on fatwas and answers.

¹²⁸ Narrated by Imam al-Murshid billah in *Al-Amali al-Ithninyah*.

favor or dislike. You should always suspect your own selves whenever at variance with the Quran. For the Quran is a cure for those seeking a remedy. It is light for those seeking a guide. It is a lifesaver for those who utilize it. Whoever is instructed by it is sure to reach his destiny, and whoever rules by it does so with justice. It tips the balance of arguments. Whoever contradicts it denies God. In it you will find the news of those preceding you in time, the news of the end of time, and the news of your affairs as they are exhausted by time.¹²⁹”

In his books, epistles, and other works Imām Zayd stimulated the mind to arbitrate some disputes and to focus on propositions. He encouraged the mind to relate what is tangible to what is not; and to detect the movement of history, the sequence of events, and the proper variables of the past.

Imām Zayd’s Fiqh

Imām Zayd is considered to be the founder of a substantial school of thought. He was known for his practical and in-depth fiqh. His ideas were fertile. The basis of his paradigm and fiqh is grounded in Islamic jurisprudence: the Quran and the Sunnah. It has been said that a person came to him inquiring about his opinions to which Imām Zayd responded: “Whoever relates to you something about me which your heart refuses to accept, and which is contrary to what you know of me, and which you have not learned from me, something which you are not able to find in Allah’s Book, then know I have nothing to do with it. But if there is a basis for it in Allah’s Book, and it seems to correspond to the truth, and you can relate it to me and you find it compatible to my course of thought then accept it; for the truth comes from its folks and it reverts to them.¹³⁰”

Zayd relied on Usuli (principles of jurisprudence) criteria in his fiqhi deductions and reasoning. Most of these criteria were not registered at that time and he did not dictate them to his circle of students which was customary at the

¹²⁹ Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd, the Book of Iman.

¹³⁰ Ibid, the section on Fatwas and answers.

time. Some of these criteria are recognizable by studying and examining his fiqh. Some Zaydi scholars of following generations identified these criteria and standards as did the followers of other schools of Islamic thought.

One of the most famous books on the fiqh of Imām Zayd is *Al-Majmu‘* which is published today under the title: *Musnad al-Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali*. It circulates widely among the Zaydis (the followers of the Zaydi math-hab). This book has been researched, quoted, and referenced¹³¹.

There is also *Manasek al-Hajj wa al-‘Umrah* (The Rituals of Hajj and ‘Umrah); published in Baghdad, Iraq. Some of Imām Zayd’s works have been narrated by his students. Imām Muhammad ibn Mansur al-Muradi quotes works of Imām Zayd in his books; especially, *Al-Amali* (known as *Amali Ahmad ibn ‘Isa*). So does al-Hafez Abu Abdillah al-‘Alawi in his famous book *Al-Jami’ al-Kafi*.

I found a book attributed to al-Shahid Hamid al-Muhalla of the 6th Hijri century under the title: *Fiqh al-Imām Zayd wa As-habeh* within which there are rare quotes about Imām Zayd.

Noteworthy here is the fact that the Zaydi fiqh today is not all the work of Imām Zayd alone. Rather it is a fiqh that threads together the scholastic deductions and opinions of legal scholars affiliated with Ahl al-Bayt who worked within a general framework of *Usul al-Fiqh* beyond the confinements of one particular Islamic school of thought and not limited to the methodology of a peculiar scholar.

For this reason the prominent scholars of the Zaydi school of thought are faqihs in their own right on a par with the Imāms of the four schools of Islamic thought who command followers due to their substantiated fiqh whose *Usul* are well known and well explained.

¹³¹ Much has been written about this book; for further information see *Muqaddimat al-Rawd al-Nadir* and *Al-Imam Zayd* by Muhammad Abu Zahrah.

Imām Zayd as Viewed by His Contemporaries

Imām Zayd climbed the intellectual ladder until he was recognized and his star shined. He delved into the details of his generation's body of knowledge and humanities and gained the acknowledgment of his contemporary peers. They all admitted his leading scholastic accomplishments, namely:

* The testimony of his eldest brother and unique mentor Imām Muhammad al-Baqer (AS) who said: "Zayd has been endowed with privileged divine knowledge¹³²; ask him as he knows what we do not.¹³³"

He replied to someone asking about Zayd: "You ask me about a man who resounds with fervent commitment and knowledge from head to toe and who is the master of his folks.¹³⁴"

*The testimony of his nephew, his classmate, and youth companion Imām Ja'far al-Sadeq (AS) when he says: "By Allah, he was more than any one of us the avid reader of Allah's Book and the astute to understand Allah's deen.¹³⁵"

*The testimony of Imām Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man ibn Thabet the renowned scholar of Sunni fiqh who said: "In his generation I have seen no one better equipped for fiqh, no one more knowledgeable and more sharp and eloquent. He [Zayd] was second to none.¹³⁶"

¹³² This is a form of knowledge that comes from Allah; and the reference to this is in Allah's Book: ... unto whom We had imparted knowledge [issuing] from Ourselves..." (Q. 18: 65).

¹³³ Al-Rawd al-Nadir, Vol I, p 112.

¹³⁴ Taysir al-Mataleb fi Amali al-Sayyed Abi Taleb, p 84.

¹³⁵ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy, Vol. I, p.5, t manuscript; also in Al-Muhit bi-al-Imamat, manuscript.

¹³⁶ Nur al-Absar, by Al-Shablanji, p. 215; also in Al-Khutat, by Al-Maqrizi, Vol. II, p 436.

*The testimony of the distinguished hadith narrator Sulayman ibn Mahran al-A‘mash who commented: “I have not seen among them (meaning Ahl al-Bayt) anyone preferable, knowledgeable, and more articulate than him [Zayd].¹³⁷”

Respect and Reverence

Imām Zayd (AS) was a personality that commanded the respect of creative people; be they commanders, scholars, communicators, ascetics, and others. His character was refined and his standards were high. All talented people expressed their admiration for his outstanding personality. Not to mention that Imām Ja‘far ibn Muhammad al-Sadeq and ‘Abdullah ibn al-Hasan al-Kamel who used to hold Zayd’s mount [horse] and fix his attire to his saddle¹³⁸.

Al-Baqer said: “Zayd is the language that I speak.¹³⁹” He also said: “No one of us was born to resemble ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb more than him [Zayd].¹⁴⁰”

*Selemeah ibn Kaheel said: “I have not seen anyone more articulate about Allah’s Book than Imām Abi al-Husain [Zayd].¹⁴¹”

*Abu Is-haq al-Subai‘i said: “I saw Zayd ibn ‘Ali but I haven’t seen anyone of his folks a close competitor. He supercedes in knowledge and in privilege. His articulation was superb and his expressions and self denial were unsurpassed.¹⁴²”

¹³⁷ Al-Khutut, by Al-Maqrizi, Vol II, p. 437.

¹³⁸ Maqatel al-Talibiyen, p. 129.

¹³⁹ Hayat al-Baqer, p. 61, from the book Safinat al-Bihar.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Anwar (manuscript).

¹⁴¹ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy (manuscript).

¹⁴² Khutat al-Maqrizi, Vol. II, p. 437, Nur al-Absar, p. 215, Al-Rawd al-Nadir, Vol I, p. 98, A‘yan al-Shi‘ah, Vol. VII, p. 108.

*Abdullah ibn Hasan al-Kamel said: “‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb drew the line between us and people; Zayd ibn ‘Ali drew the line between us and the Shi‘ah. Whoever follows him is a Shi‘i and whoever does not follow him is not a Shi‘i. I have not seen in our crowd or in other crowds anyone like him.¹⁴³”

*Ja‘far al-Sadeq once said to one of his fellows: “I do not think you will see any of us the likes of him [Zayd] until the end of time.¹⁴⁴”

*Al-A‘mash said: “In all the folks of Zayd ibn ‘Ali there is no equivalent to Zayd ibn ‘Ali. I know of no one in them who excels him. He is outspoken, a man and a scholar. Had they honoured their word to him he would have set them on the straight and obvious path.¹⁴⁵”

*Imām Abu Hanifah al-Nu‘man said: “I have not seen anyone equal to Imām Zayd, no one more versed and steeped in knowledge than he.¹⁴⁶”

Imām Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Nafs al-Zakiyah said: “By Allah! Zayd did renew the discontinued codes and edicts of prophets; he adjusted what had gone religiously off-track. We cannot but benefit from Zayd’s enlightenment. Zayd is the Imām of [all] Imāms .¹⁴⁷”

In speaking about Zayd, Shu‘bah ibn al-Hajjaj would state: “I was addressed by the foremost of Hashemites: Zayd ibn ‘Ali.¹⁴⁸”

¹⁴³ Maqatel al-Talibiyeen, p. 389, Al-Rawd al-Nadir, Vol. I, p. 115.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Muhit bi-al-Imamat (manuscript).

¹⁴⁵ Khutat al-Maqrizi, Vol II, p. 437 and A‘yan al-Shi‘ah, Vol VII, p. 108.

¹⁴⁶ The introduction to Musnad al-Imam Zayd, p. 7, Khutat al-Maqrizi, Vol II, p. 437.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Tuhaf Sharh al-Zulaf, p 28.

¹⁴⁸ Tahthib Tarikh Ibn ‘Asaker, Vol. VI, p. 117.

Sufyan al-Thawri put it this way: “[Zayd] stood in for [al-Imām] Husein ibn ‘Ali (AS). He was the most versed human concerning Allah’s [Holy] Book. I affirm: women have not given birth to the likes of Zayd.¹⁴⁹”

Al-Baqer (AS) asked about Zayd and Abu Hamzah al-Thumali answered: “I have not seen among Arab youth anyone who compares with him.¹⁵⁰”

Abu al-Jarud said: “I assert that no one was given a lifetime paramount to Zayd ibn ‘Ali, except for his forefathers.¹⁵¹”

At an early stage of his meritorious life, Imām Zayd endeavored to revitalize the role of the ‘ulema. He sought to minimize their [theoretical] differences as a means of freeing them from prejudices. He met during the time of hajj with people from different vicinities and variations of the ummah as his first step in reconstructing a consolidated and unified populace. He spoke to people who were accessible and corresponded with others who were in far-away lands.

One of his accomplishments was to send a written message to the ‘ulema in the ummah. This message expressed his “calling.” In it he clarified that “the affairs of the ummah can be restored by the “agency” of the ‘ulema; these affairs may also deteriorate through the “agency” of the ‘ulema if they exchange Allah’s orders and commands for aiding and abetting despots and dictators.¹⁵²” In addressing the ‘ulema, Imām Zayd called upon them to assume their scholastic responsibilities which places them in the limelight of the ummah and gives them status and prestige. To them he said: “You, the assembly of ‘ulema, are in a position of public recognition. Your piety is attested to. Your affiliation with Allah is acknowledged. Your study of the Quran is granted. You have prestige in the public eye. You are honoured in the urban and commercial centers. The most powerful members of society look up to you; while the dispossessed

¹⁴⁹ Taysir al-Mataleb, p 79.

¹⁵⁰ Hidayat al-Raghibeen, Manuscript.

¹⁵¹ Al-Muhit bi-al-Imamat, Manuscript.

¹⁵² An excerpt from Imam Zayd’s Risalah to the ummah.

yearn for you. Even those who are beyond your sphere of influence revere you. You precede other notables on many occasions. You remain distinguished in whatever company you are in. You are sought whenever an appeal is made in the public interest. You are the pace-setters. All of this is because of your knowledge of Allah's right by those who are lesser than you in rank and station.¹⁵³

Imām Zayd was the contemporary of many well-known 'ulema who either were on the progressive side of history or on the regressive side of it. These types are to be found almost anytime, anywhere. They may be put in the following categories:

1- Activist 'ulema who are principled and determined within well defined and well established concepts and paragons. They interact with Allah directly in all their conduct and occupation. They have reached a high standard in their personal lives and they went out to see that standard established in society around them. To reach this goal they endeavored to raise the level of thinking in the public realm and to stimulate a social movement forwards. They did not ask how much that would cost them. These turned out to be the supporters of Imām Zayd and his partisans on all fronts: from the mental to the military.

2- 'Ulema who were satisfied with their personal salvation. They were not very much concerned with "social salvation." Some of them may have feared the consequences; others may have been sluggish, and others may have been irresponsible. Imām Zayd considered this to be a betrayal of the ummah. He addressed these types of 'ulema by saying: "Do not be mindless of Allah's preferential right. Do not waste His directives. If you fail in this regard you are akin to physicians who have collected their money but demented their patients, or like shepherds who get paid to take the flock to pastured lands but wind up taking them to barren lands, or the likes of guards who turn over the fortress to its enemies... By He who sustains Zayd's life, if you were to explain to people what you know and impress them with the truth that you have a grasp of you

¹⁵³ Ibid.

will destabilize the despotic structure and root out the foundations of tyranny.¹⁵⁴”

3- ‘Ulema who are skeptical and pessimistic. These types see the facts of world affairs through the tilts of their ego. They come out and give reality a taint of their subjective and despondent selves. They are known for their self-centeredness and envy, as well as their doubts of others. They take liberty in presenting the issues in their own unobjective way.

4- The court ‘ulema (or the status quo scholars). These are the ones who are all too willing to be the mouthpieces and the instruments of the masters and monarchs. They are used to fabricating accusations and falsifying the facts about activist ‘ulema whose goal it is to change the course of an errant regime. Propaganda that comes out of the man of the cloth is more effective than that coming out of barons and kings.

Imām Zayd spent a good deal of his time and effort confronting these ‘ulema of disrepute. The danger of religious personalities supercedes by leaps and bounds the danger of potentates and royal executives. That is because religious figures have a spell on the conscience of people; they are able to draw them into blind and mindless imitation. They penetrate into the psychology of people and may cause a rational crisis. But a tyrant can only exert “outside” influence. He may use force and clamp down on people. The crisis here is circumstantial and dissipates once the tyrant is no longer in control. Unlike the religious damage that dwells inside a person and is not circumstantial, which means even if a person goes to Mars he will still have a polluted mind and a disturbed conscience to live with! In some instances the official tyranny and oppression becomes the motivation for revolt and resistance, unlike “religious subterfuge” which chips away at every movement for change and renaissance on one side and which reinforces and rationalizes tyranny and oppression on the other side!

“You scholars of disrepute! You have attempted to score out Allah’s Holy Book! You have attempted to deface the deen altogether. Consequently, it

¹⁵⁴ From Imam Zayd’s Risalah to the ummah’s ‘ulema.

escaped in fleeing fashion from you. Due to your shameful acts the blood of the champions of haqq from the Prophet's descendants (P) has been shed. Their heads were raised on the spears, their bodies were chained, they were humiliated, they felt the agony, endured grief, they were mortified, and debilitated and fatigued.¹⁵⁵

Imām Zayd pointed to the opportunistic attitude of these cunning and conniving scholars who were anxious to gain proximity from oppressors. To that he said:

“You scholars of infamy! You have secured your place with tyrants because of your scheming. You have gained worldly possessions by keeping company with overlording kings. In the process you have violated the deen and quashed the Quran. Your knowledge is Allah's evidence against you. But eventually when death approaches and the final hour arrives you will painfully know the extent of what you have been accomplices to.¹⁵⁶”

Needless to say a pioneering Muslim has to know whom to follow. Society has to get together around virtuous and involved ‘ulema while taking issue with other “whimsical” ‘ulema so that the lines are drawn.

Correcting Confused Concepts

When we review the books of Imām Zayd we find that he paid close attention to the “hot” issues of his time and age. He worked on correcting some skewed and lop-sided ideas. The most challenging crisis of any religious momentum is unreliable and error-prone concepts. If everyone understands his ideas in his self centered way he will take a stand and defend his rational position and then begin to judge others through this personalized view. This inevitably will lead to sterile disputes and harsh judgements. What is to follow are some concepts which Imām Zayd commented on:

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

The Truth About Iman

Iman is an application program of convictions and beliefs which glows inside the depths of man with a grip on man's heart, mind, and soul. The further this seeps into man's psychology the more pronounced it is in man's reality. This process leads to internal conscientious crystallization and external material perfection:

[Know that true] committed Muslims are only those who trust Allah and His Apostle and have left all doubt behind, and who strive hard in Allah's cause with their possessions and their lives: it is they, they who are true to their word!

(Q. 49: 15).

For this reason Iman is a sublime goal and a privileged objective that generates glad tidings:

Allah has promised those who commit to Him and do good works [that] theirs shall be forgiveness of sins, and a mighty reward.

(Q. 5: 9).

When people of aggression and disobedience found themselves outside the perimeters of Iman, in the grip of Satan, not concerned with repentance and restitution, when they realized where they are they began to finagle with the concept of Iman so that it may admit them and their shenanigans and chicanery. In doing so they claimed that qibla-praying but oppressively ruling and shari'ah violating kings are still within the sphere of Iman. They constricted Iman to a verbal acknowledgment of deen without physically and practically opposing shirk, and upholding Qur'anic commandments, and abiding by moral conduct becoming of Iman.

To give this slant a religious flavor they clung to extrapolative texts. To this end they claimed that any disobedient man short of shirk is pardonable, and they quoted:

Verily, Allah does not forgive ascribing of divinity to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills.

(Q. 4: 49).

And:

and so I warn you of the raging fire – [the fire] which none shall have to endure but that most hapless wretch who gives the lie to the truth and turns away [from it].

(Q. 92: 14).

These mis-ideas were promoted and publicized in a systematic way that sought to diffuse and deflate the meaning of Iman. And these unsound ideas became a belief that was represented and justified by nitwits and simpletons whose interests and ignorance took precedence over the facts.

Imām Zayd led the charge to correct this anomaly by writing his book *Al-Iman* in which he summarized the Qur’ānic concept of Iman with further explanation of its foundations. The following is a summary of the book:

*Iman is both an expression and a physical exertion: “Iman and good deeds is like the spirit in the body; if you separate the two they perish and if you combine them they flourish”; “Iman is two: an Iman that confirms the truth and an Iman that generates man’s good work and raises his guard against Allah’s retribution and power” and Iman “is founded on substructures and extensions. Iman has a beginning, a center, and an end. Its beginning is the divine duty upon the ummah to acknowledge Allah and His Apostle. That was followed by its [Islamic] religious obligations. Its end is when the spirit exits its sphere of worldly life and obligations in a state of confidence and comfort for having lived a life in the service of Allah.”

*The Quran tells us that the obligations of nations were introduced incrementally as Allah “assigned His prophets (P) to their peoples to bear witness that there is no authority/deity except Allah, and to follow that up by bearing Allah’s covenant. Anyone who follows through with this process in sincerity will have access to paradise.” Then Allah “designated for every prophet a [different] law and way of life,” that was binding on prophets and their respective societies. Musa’s people were vouchsafed the Sabbath. Whoever honoured the Sabbath was rewarded paradise; and whoever violated the Sabbath in principle or in action was condemned to suffer the anguish and the fire that is prepared by Allah for behavioral desecration of the Sabbath.

“Then Allah sent ‘Isa (Jesus) with the eternal word of faith: there is no authority/deity except Allah, and with the Scripture of faith with its particular law and way of life. The concept of the Sabbath was no longer the legal reference of the time. Now ‘Isa had to be acknowledged in his complimentary role to Musa (Moses). Whoever followed the instructions and teachings of ‘Isa would qualify for bliss, and whoever denied ‘Isa and insisted on the obsolete ways of Musa was in disobedience of Allah and incurred His fire.”

“Then Allah sent Muhammad (P). Muhammad was instructed by Allah to have people adhere to Allah alone, to worship, honour, and conform to Him and to no one or nothing else. This was done in Makkah for ten years. Whoever followed Muhammad (P) and his deen would secure paradise. At this time these followers were not duty-bound or required to fight or pray or perform the hajj or fast the month of Ramadan. Up to now anyone who died bearing witness to the facts presented by Muhammad (P) without being guilty of shirk would be a candidate for paradise. Allah will not take to task and punish anyone who follows Muhammad (P) while in Makkah except if he were to equate or associate other(s) with Allah, the Merciful.

To confirm this Allah revealed in Makkah the Scriptural chapter of Bani Israel:

For your Sustainer has ordained that you shall conform to none but Him...Until He says: And walk not on earth with haughty self-conceit: for, verily, you can never rend the earth asunder, nor can you ever grow as tall as the mountains! The evil of all of this is odious in your Sustainer’s sight: this is part of that knowledge of right and wrong with which your Sustainer has inspired you. Hence do not set up any other deity/authority side by side with Allah, lest you be cast into hell, blamed [by yourself] and rejected [by Him]!

(Q. 17: 23-29).

During the time these ayats were revealed in Makkah Allah did not threaten with the fire those who violated these commands until He said: “Hence do not set up any other deity/authority side by side with Allah, lest you be cast into hell, blamed [by yourself] and rejected [by Him]!”

Then Zayd mentions ayats revealed in Makkah which menace the mushriks by having the hell-fire in anticipation of them if they insist on their shirk:

And so I warn you of the raging fire – [the fire] which none shall have to endure but that most hapless wretch who gives the lie to the truth and turns away [from it].

(Q. 92: 14-16).

As well as:

And, verily, on that Day they all will share in their common suffering. Verily, thus shall We deal with all who were lost in sin: for, behold, whenever they were told, “There is no deity/authority save Allah,” they would glory in their arrogance and would say, “Shall we, then, give up our deities at the bidding of a mad poet?”

(Q. 37: 33-36).

*After the first phase of the Muhammadi mission religious obligatory assignments followed “until when Allah ordered Muhammad (P) to seek asylum away from Makkah, in Madinah. Military duty was to become a responsibility. And Islam was then constructed on five pillars: the Shahadah (the oral testimonial that there is no deity/authority except Allah), the established [social standard] of salat, the systemic distribution of money: zakat, the Hajj, and fasting during the month of Ramadan.

Then Allah disclosed via revelation to His Prophet (P) the verdict of adultery:

As for the adulteress and the adulterer – flog each of them with a hundred stripes...

(Q. 24: 2).

Then Allah says concerning an innocent a sacred life that has been killed:

But whoever deliberately kills another committed Muslim, his requital shall be hell, therein to abide; and Allah will condemn him, and will reject him, and will prepare for him awesome suffering.

(Q. 4: 93).

But Allah does not condemn a committed Muslim.

Allah also declared through Scripture:

Behold, those who sinfully devour the possessions of orphans but fill their bellies with fire: for [in the life to come] they will have to endure a blazing flame.

(Q. 4: 10).

*After these divine assignments and duties settled into the social reality of Madinah and when the qualities of Iman were pronounced, at that time whoever failed to fulfill and live up to this standard of life was excluded from the circle of Iman, in His words:

Behold, those who barter away their bond with Allah and their own pledges for a trifling gain – they shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come; and Allah will neither speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them of their sins; and grievous suffering awaits them

(Q. 3: 77).

Zayd pointed to the claim of the Murji'ah (the fatalists – those who believed that they were powerless to change their destiny) who say:

Verily, Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity/authority to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills...

(Q. 4: 48).

By referring them to the unequivocal and clear ayats of the Quran from which the following can be derived: those who commit disobedient acts even if they are qibla folks are not included in [God's] will. For if Allah wanted to forgive the qibla folks altogether He would have said: "Verily, Allah does not forgive the ascribing of divinity/authority to aught beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin." He would not have made an exception and said: "to whomever He wills."

Then he said: for those who have gone astray in understanding this ayat I shall provide its explanation. Although He forgives any lesser sin to whomever He wills...The definition and description of those whom Allah willed to forgive is:

If you avoid the great sins which you have been enjoined to shun, WE shall efface your [minor] bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory

(Q. 4: 31).

Whoever Allah has taken to task for a major sin even if he belongs to the qibla shall suffer the consequences because Allah does not rescind His word. And whoever comes to you with arguments contrary to the Quran do not believe him; rather suspect him. Allah's words are the panacea and not these other misinforming words pertaining to Allah's will.

Allah the Exalted says:

And [both] the Jews and the Christians say, "We are God's children, and His beloved ones." Say: "Why, then, does He cause you to suffer for your sins? No, you are but human beings of His creating, He forgives whom He wills, and He causes to suffer whom He wills..."

(Q. 5: 18).

Whoever wants to be forgiven from these types should abandon Judaism and Christianity. The same is applicable to the folks of qibla: if they want to be forgiven they should abandon their penalty incurring violations.

After this ayat Allah revealed other ayats that indicate there is a punishment for disobeyers even if they are people of the qiblah. Of these ayats:

But whoever deliberately slays another committed Muslim, his requital shall be hell, therein to abide; and Allah will condemn him, and will reject him, and will prepare for him awesome suffering

(Q. 4: 93).

It may not accord with your wishful thinking – nor with the wishful thinking of the followers of earlier revelation – [that] he who does evil shall be requited for it, and shall find none to protect him from Allah, and none to bring him support

(Q. 4: 123).

The Quran has established the fact that the munafiqs are in the deepest pits of the fire while the munafiqs are neither mushriks nor mu'mins. The Extolled and Glorified says:

Behold, the munafiqs seek to deceive Allah – the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. And when they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen and praised by men, only seldomly conscious of Allah, wavering between this and that, [true] neither to these nor those. But for him whom Allah lets go astray you can never find any way

(Q. 4: 142-143).

Allah refuses here to include this segment of people among the mu'mineen (committed Muslims.) He also refuses to include them among the mushriks.

Explaining the Meaning of Qadar (Predestination)

Exploring the unfathomable meanings of predestination or predetermination is tantamount to treading a slippery slope. For this reason Imām 'Ali (AS) said: "Predestination is a deep and incomprehensible sea. It is a path of darkness which you should not pace. It is Allah's secret which you should not attempt."¹⁵⁷

As was the case with other sensitive issues the issue of qadar or predestination or fate was another one of those "controversial" issues that was widely instigated by Umayyad officialdom. Al-Qadar was presented as this inescapable force that has imposed particular rulers who were also by the circular definition of qadar forced to do terrible things. Due to the public-relations definition at that time of qadar these rulers were granted power. By the same twist of logic it is qadar that placed these rulers in a pool of infractions and offences. It was due to this myth-information of qadar that innocent people were killed and truth speaking 'ulema were banished. There was no escaping the tentacles of this qadar! To add insult to injury if you were molded by officially sanctioned

¹⁵⁷ Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah.

opinions you had to believe in this qadar and accept the consequences with a broad vision and a healthy attitude!

The Umayyad royals were very excited about this view of qadar. Their court clergymen did all they could to promote this type of understanding which served as a mental line of defense for the royal class.

Imām Zayd expressed his thoughts on this issue. He did so with caution and perceptual experience. He did not exclude disobedient and violating Muslims from Allah’s [retaliatory] qadar, neither did he exempt them from breaching Allah. He said: “What I say and am convinced is true is that you should read the Quran and mentally focus on its meanings to find out what Allah wants and what He demands and this should be attributable to Allah, but whatever else Allah dislikes should be attributable to its performer... I am satisfied to say that offenders of Allah do not operate beyond the power sphere of Allah. That should not be excused if they defy Allah. And whoever says that he is in possession of his own deeds with Allah is guilty of shirk; and whoever says he is in possession of his own deeds with the exclusion of Allah is guilty of kufr. I tend to believe that the right course in this regard is for a subject of Allah to follow and implement those teachings and instructions coming from Allah. If I do such a thing I am in a position to thank Allah, but if I err and disregard or contravene Allah then I find myself in need of asking Him forgiveness. If you encounter those who insist on their sins and mistakes do so with [at least] facial features of objection so that you gain with Allah. Whoever humiliates people who infringe on Allah will gain His gratification.¹⁵⁸”

Imām Zayd objected to what al-Mujberah had to say when they denied that man has an independent will and capacity. He said: “They claim that Allah did not equip man with an ability to repel intrusive and protruding forces into man’s heart. They claim that He forced them to endure such internal interferences as they were made [by Allah] that way. In such a way they attach moral weakness to Allah, the while they absolve their own selves and all others of this moral failure. They even said that He is responsible for all our movements be they acts of devotion or acts of infraction. He will hold us

¹⁵⁸ Extracted from an answer to a question received by Imam Zayd from al-Madinah (Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd), the section on Imam Zayd’s answers and fatwas.

accountable on the Day of Judgement for things that He did as He created [the acts of] kufr, zina, shirk, thulm, jawr, and sefah (defying Allah, adultery, equating others with Allah, tyranny, oppression, and deceit). Had He not created these things – as they claim – and compelled us to do them we would not on our own be able to deny Him or associate others with Him. We would not have been able to accuse his Prophets of lying, or to abandon His Scriptures, or even to kill His Apostles and saints. But when He created all this and compelled us to do these things we had no choice but to become the performers of His will and fate. For that He was angry with us and He threw us into the fire for ever.

Absolutely not so. By His grace, this is not the way to describe the most prudent Judge. Rather He created them for obligations, with an ability, with reason, with commandments, and with prohibitions. He ordered us to do what is right and good and He never intrudes into this process. He ordered us to withhold from doing what is wrong and evil and He never allured otherwise. He has guided us to the point of seeing and distinguishing between the two intersects: one to virtue and the other to vice, and He said do whatever is in your capacity to do by choosing what is right and rightful and avoiding what is wrong and harmful... The Mujberah and the Mushabbehah (comparisonites) excluded themselves from being responsible for doing what is wrong and unsuitable such as acts of oppression, tyranny, and deceit while attributing all this to Allah in total. They said that Allah created them for this misfortune and created them to do what is incorrect and fallacious. Then He will punish us in the fire and will not do injustice to us.

“How much more ridiculous can you get? How can anyone attribute more injustice to Allah than what they say? By Allah, this is not the description of the Most Merciful, the Mercy-giving who demands justice, perfection, and Who bars insults and systemic evil.¹⁵⁹”

¹⁵⁹ Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd, the section in which he answers the fatalists.

The Many and the Few

To say that more people or the overwhelming majority of people are determinants of the haqq and to follow that up by saying that the small number of people should join the crowd is not an accurate way of getting to know the truth (haqq). Al-Haqq and al-Batel cannot be distinguished by the numbers they command: be they the few or be they the many. These followers have no impact (positive or negative) on a concept.

Unfortunately, this yardstick was imposed on Islamic thought. It gained prominence during the Umayyad reign especially during the years of Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek, which corresponds to the crucial years in the life of Imām Zayd. The fallout of that was a polarized and intense standoff between the proponents of this idea and Imām Zayd. Imām Zayd never considered numbers to be qualifiers for what is haqq and what is batel. Even a few who are obedient to Allah will become the jama‘at of Muslims; while the pronounced majority who are disobedient to Allah become the folks of bida‘(religious improvisations). This conclusion is Qur’anically based. Many promoters of the majority verses minority mental image were opportunists steeped in empty talk who were misleading public opinion, for this reason Imām Zayd took them on strictly from a Qur’anic viewpoint to which no one could object. Imām Zayd chronicled the ayats that refer to a majority to show they were in a bad light, as well as those ayats that refer to a minority to show they were in a good light. This proves that large numbers are not intrinsically indicative of the haqq. Likewise, small numbers are not intrinsically indicative of batel. The jama‘at are the folks of haqq even if they are numerically insignificant. And the furqah are the folks of batel even if they are numerically superior.

To this end Imām Zayd says: “Heretofore, there are people in this ummah who are speaking about jama‘at. They contend that they are the majority; and that they are Allah’s evidence of the truth as opposed to the minority. They say that the minority in the ummah are people of religious improvisations and deviations. But we hear Allah (exalted, extolled, and glorified be He) in His revelation of Scripture to His subject and servant Muhammad (P) inform us of previous nations and peoples pertaining to Nuh, Hud, Saleh, Shu‘aib, Ibrahim, Musa, Dawud, Sulayman, ‘Isa, and Muhammad (P) some of whom are salutary apostles and not just “page-pundits”, we hear Him say that the followers of

haqq, jama'at, and prophets were minorities, while the folks of religious improvisations and expediencies were the majority. We heard Allah speak very highly of these minorities, while assailing the majority for their ignorance, foolishness, lies, and errant ways. He warns righteous people not to be swept by their public statements.¹⁶⁰

Consolidating the Ma'ruf and Dismantling the Munkar

The Quran calls for an ummah that secures haqq and honesty. Of it Allah speaks:

You commit to Allah and the Last Day, and consolidate the ma'ruf and dismantle the munkar

(Q. 3: 114).

This consolidating of the ma'ruf (common sense goodness) and dismantling of the munkar (self-evident systemic vice) guarantees the wholesomeness of Islam as a doctrine and repels the assaults of evil from all directions. This is a method of eternalizing Allah's message and putting the ummah on the right course within which we will have proper Muslim conduct, without man victimizing his fellow man. In this setup man belongs to Allah in a relationship of conformity and abidance.

The well being of this ummah is contingent on it being as Allah says:

You are indeed the best community that has ever been brought forth for [the good of] mankind: you consolidate the ma'ruf and you dismantle the munkar

(Q. 3: 110).

Regrettably, this very central concept of practical Iman became a target of those who tried to void it of its dynamic. Many tyrants deployed their agents and gave them facilities and finances to obliterate the momentous and activist meanings of this concept.

¹⁶⁰ Madh al-Qellah wa Themm al-Kethrah (Hailing the Minority and Assailing the Majority).

But they cannot silence the voice of truth. Its roar will continue. It was Imām Zayd who in that pitch-dark night of tyranny raised the voice of objection and confrontation with all who were trying to undermine the bases of this deen. He reiterated that consolidating the ma‘ruf and dismantling the munkar is a religious duty which cannot be annulled or short-circuited. This concept is not for leisurely purposes to be tended to at someone’s discretion. It also cannot be applied selectively to the average man while excluding the ruler from its scope. Nor is it correct to take the poor to task while looking the other way if the ayat speaks to the rich. Those who are in power are not above this concept and those who are powerless are not to bear the brunt of it. Imām Zayd took on Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek who announced that he speaks for Allah. He tried to delegitimize any opinion coming from an opposition and even sound advice. Hisham said: “If anyone tells me ittaqi-Allah {fear [the power of] Allah} I will chop his head off!” But Imām Zayd said it with dignity and honour: “Ittaqi-Allah ya Hisham [Fear Allah O Hisham!]...” To which Hisham said: “Is someone like you telling someone like me to fear Allah?” Imām Zayd replied: “No one is above being told: Ittaqi-Allah and no one is below being told ittaqi-Allah.”

In his epistle to the ummah Imām Zayd called for actuating the consolidation of the ma‘ruf and the dismantling of the munkar. An excerpt as he addresses the ‘ulema:

“Allah has definitely distinguished you. Your prestige is recognized by all people of thought. In this light Allah says to you:

And [as for] the committed Muslims, both men and women – they are integrants [allies] of each other: they consolidate the ma‘ruf and they dismantle the munkar, and their standard [in life] is salat, and they render the zakat, and pay heed unto Allah and His Apostle. It is they upon whom Allah will bestow His grace: verily, Allah is almighty, wise

(Q. 9: 71).

Allah began by quoting the privilege of consolidating the ma‘ruf and dismantling the munkar, then He followed that up by pointing to the status of those who are involved in this awesome task of His subjects... Be advised that if this injunction were to be active and ma‘ruf is integrated and munkar is

dismembered we would have all our obligations performed honestly, be they undemanding or demanding obligations.¹⁶¹”

When the banners of jihad were over his head he said: “Thank Allah that He has perfected His deen for me. By Allah I would not be satisfied if I were to meet Muhammad (P) while I am amiss of al-amr bi al-ma‘ruf wa al-nahyi ‘an al-munkar.¹⁶²”

The Zaydi school of thought has followed the same course of reinvigorating this principle and advancing it. The Zaydi ‘ulema have even incorporated this principle into the bases of deen (Usul al-Deen).

Cultural Revolution

Islamic Culture: Pro-Active and Re-Active

Islam was ushered into human affairs to salvage peoples and nations from the cesspool of behavioral degeneration. Islam was meant to set man free of all lusts, desires, and the evil concentration of power which causes man to victimize fellow-man. Islam is the way to a higher standard of human life that provides happiness and salvation. The initial course of Islamic struggle and action was initiated by Allah’s Apostle Muhammad (P); who would also outline and explain the future of this affair. He (P) left a blueprint that explains how man should arrange and deal with developments along this line of action.

When we review the consequences of man’s cultures we realize that the Islamic culture did produce unique genius characters. It formulated outstanding missionary personalities who changed the course of life. Pre-Islamic feuding and hostility ridden societies were to become cooperative, brotherly, and virtuous societies. Slaves who were prior to Islam without family lineage and

¹⁶¹ From Imam Zayd’s Risalah (Epistle) to the ummah.

¹⁶² Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd (The Compilation of Imam Zayd’s Epistles).

without tribal affiliation were transformed by Islam to bold communicators of the faith with the sky as limits...

Certainly, the culture that was able to transform human beings at that time is able to do it today and in the future, here and everywhere. That is because Islam's principles are definitive and secure. It responds to the varying stages of life and it is not subject to the mutations of circumstances and the aberrations of worldly conditions. Islam, in a sense, is factually relevant and practically workable. To this end injustice is demonized, guidance is glorified, and morality is beautified. All these are principles that tolerate no alteration whatever the human status is. A mirror reflects the true image, and Islam reflects true values. This would mean that the resultants of Islamic rationale is one and constant from the first generation until the last one, or in the initial legislative age of Muslims and in all ages to follow. If Islam was left to take its human course it would be able to transform mankind today as it did at the start.

The Prophetic model of governance (al-Khilafah) degenerated into an arbitrary monarchy (mulk 'adud), when the Muslim populace became the subjects of an Umayyad clique and their supporters [whose obsession it was to have the Islamic orientation blend into their inner-circle interests and pursuits.] This type of clannish power concentration came out of a process of deception and malice. The Umayyads had no legitimacy for their reign. In the Islamic reference of things their administration was unlawful. More to the point, according to the movement that is generated by an adherence to the principles and ideology of Islam these Umayyad rulers should be toppled. To preserve their seats of power the Umayyad rulers sought to subvert Islamic information that would expose their unlawful conduct and their outlawed governance. This is one of the most dangerous things to do. Because it means that if these rulers are able to have it their way the budding generations of Muslims will not have the mind-set that will sustain an Islamic opposition to injustice and tyranny in the highest office in Muslim lands. That is why the minds of those times were bombarded with information that renders Muslims factions and feuding opinions. Muslims in this course of official entrapment were to spend the rest of their lives looking for illusive answers. To sum up the Umayyad agenda:

1- People [Muslims] should understand that everything that happens in life: justice and injustice, obedience and disobedience, etc. is predestined and there is nothing man can do about it.

2- Redeeming faith has to be understood by the masses of people to be an abstract acknowledgment of Allah by verbalizing al-Shahadatain (the two testimonials); which do not necessarily mean that there are any rights and obligations to follow from this acknowledgment!

3- A Muslim may engage in vice and he has nothing to worry about because the Prophet (P) will intercede for him on the Day of Judgement. And if he does eventually enter hell he will inevitably leave it after having atoned for his sins!

4- The rulers and their accomplices are the people of haqq; and whoever disagrees with them has broken with the jama'at [consensus community] for which he deserves the death sentence or banishment!

5- It is not permissible to oppose an oppressive ruler unless he demonstrates transparent kufr!

6- The human intellect should be marginalized and [questionable hadith] narratives should trump the mindful understanding of Islamic principles!

To this end the Umayyads employed cheap scholars and greedy individuals. A torrent of literature was produced to accommodate the official line. All this was presented with a religious vocabulary and in the form of "hadith" and what amounts to a sacred and sinless first generation of Muslims. All of this was made possible due to government sponsorship; and it became "mainstream" in the ummah. All of this was accompanied by a frenzy official crackdown on the true and sincere bearers of Islam. The Umayyads were able to isolate these free souls from society at large. They calculated that by adhering to this agenda they could withhold the truth and the facts from the peoples' minds.

This official deviation did not prevail. The genuine and faithful Muslims were not about to surrender or evade this travesty of the facts and the shenanigans that go with it. Many competent Muslims took a stand and produced their scholarly opposition to this grand falsification of the state. There in effect was a mental war that was waged by the devotees of Islam to protect Allah's words

and guidance from the machinations of officialdom. This battle of the minds continued until the truth surfaced and the lies sank.

Imām Zayd and Cultural Correctness

We spoke above about the cultural context in which Imām Zayd lived and the type of knowledge he acquired. We realized that he had access to unpolluted sources of information. This made him capable of over-growing and by-passing the officially tainted mental atmosphere of his time. He was able to out-grow the inhibitions and the negativism of his generation. He developed a conviction and a determination that brought his ambitions and goals within reach. Most of his behavior and positions were a result of his trend of thought as he trekked through his cultural milieu undiminished by its distractions and distortions. He felt accountable to his higher principles and convictions and not to material allurements or circumstantial apologies.

Imām Zayd was well aware of the dangerous conspiracy against the Islamic paradigm and master-culture. He took it upon himself to defend and deter with zeal and zest. To this end he was in contact with like-minded ‘ulema. He was at work trying to align and adjust convoluted concepts about Islam at the grassroots level. He was working on many fronts: lecturing, writing, composing poetry, debating, and doing all that is possible to redress and sort out the vital issues of Islam.

The Status of Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet’s Household)

The Prophet’s family is held in high respect by Muslims. Their honour and adulation is overwhelming. Only those who are mentally dense or hold some type of grudge or harbor an obscurity can deny this. Common sense and courtesy would have any sane person acknowledge appreciation and express thanks when it is due. This expression of appreciation and thanks to the articulate Apostle and merciful Messenger (P) is an expression of higher culture and spiritual refinement.

But there are many who ask: But who are Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet’s family)? And why are they privileged? And what are the reflections of that privilege? How does divine justice figure into all this?

These concerns have been expressed more often than not recently. The more research is done in this area the more questions appear and obviously the age of Imām Zayd figures predominantly in this context.

Imām Zayd himself tried to explain this issue; he tried to specify this privilege and its consequences far away from zealotry and hyperbole. A thorough and precise clarification of these issues is enough to arrest some problematic concerns on one hand and some false assertions on the other hand. We may summarize Imām Zayd's opinion as follows:

Who Are Ahl al-Bayt?

There has been a commotion of ideas about the meaning of Ahl al-Bayt; especially as it is found in the ayat:

For Allah only wants to remove from you all that might be loathsome,
O you members of the [Prophet's] household {Ahl al-Bayt}, and to
purify you to utmost purity

(Q. 33: 33).

The most notable comment explaining Ahl al-Bayt is: Allah's Prophet, 'Ali, Fatimeh, al-Hasan, al-Husayn (AS) who are referred to as the five folks of the mantle (Ahl al-Kisa). Or, what is meant is, the five folks of the mantle and the descendents of al-Hasan and al-Husayn. Or it could mean the Prophet's wives (P). Or it could mean the ummah to which the Prophet was sent.

There are those who point to the first two interpretations above and quote the hadith of the mantle (hadith al-Kisa) as well as other evidence to this effect. There are also those who take a zealous position and affirm that what is meant by Ahl al-Bayt are the wives of the Prophet (P). Some paraphrased this enthusiasm in poetic verses saying that the Prophet's household includes all his followers be they Persians, Africans, or Arabs.

Imām Zayd tipped the rational balance in explaining who they are and what the word means. He considered that the word Ahl al-Bayt is inclusive of all three interpretations. Evidence can be quoted to justify each interpretation. Allah says about Musa: And appoint for me, out of my kinsfolk, one who will help me to bear my burden. (Q. 20: 29). The meaning here does not suggest wives.

And then Allah says in the narrative about Prophet Lut: “Thereupon We saved him and all his household – all but an old woman, who was among those who stayed behind” (Q. 26: 171). It appears that the meaning of household here is Lut’s descendants. They were considered to be his family after his wife took herself out of this family company. It also infers that Lut’s wife was one of his family members because she was identified as an exception even though she in a physical sense belonged to Lut’s family.

And in Allah’s words:

[and] after having bound one another by an oath in Allah’s name, they said: “Indeed, we shall suddenly fall upon him and his household by night [and slay them all]; and then we shall boldly say to his next of kin, ‘We did not witness the destruction of his household – and, behold, we are indeed men of truth!’”

(Q. 27: 49).

In this context the word “Ahl” refers to people other than his own people.

In the ayat 33 from Surah al-Ahzab (called ayat al-tat-hir) the meaning vacillates between two indications. The first one is the context indication which suggests that the meaning of Ahl al-Bayt is the Prophet’s wives (P). And the other indication is the change in the form of speech by replacing the antecedent female noun (Prophet’s wives) with a pronoun referring to the plural masculine. Imām Zayd comments on this saying: “He [Allah] said: for Allah only wants to remove from you [i.e. ‘ankum] {in Arabic it is the masculine plural pronoun} O you members of the [Prophet’s] household. He [Allah] did not say for Allah only wants to remove from you: [‘ankunna] (the feminine plural pronoun).¹⁶³” Zayd adds that the privilege gained by the wives of the Prophet (P) is because of their intimate relationship with him; but his family is more privileged because they are more confidential than his wives. This aspect is understood from the ayat:

¹⁶³ Al-Safwah.

O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the [other] women, provided that you remain [truly] conscious of Allah

(Q. 33: 32).

“These wives of the Prophet (P) were not privileged because of their fathers, mothers, or tribe. Rather their status of privilege came from their relationship to Allah’s Prophet (P). How then does not the Prophet’s family precede in status other Muslim families, and his heirs other heirs?!¹⁶⁴”

The Privilege of Ahl al-Bayt

Imām Zayd drew a distinction between what he called creational privilege which man has no access to. Such privileges pertain to a person’s abilities, features, and human provisions. And gainful privileges which man acquires through work and motivation. He considered the former as an indication that people are of varying prerogatives and advantages however common their race or ideological orientation. He said that this is a divine bounty which no one has any control over. “But Allah’s favors are dispensed to people without people having any say in that God-specific process. It is only Allah who chooses and selects [at this level of human initiation].¹⁶⁵” It should be clear at this point that there is no conflict between creational prerogatives and divine justice, especially when we realize that there is no penalty or reward consequences to this.

Zayd views this as insufficient for a person to become an example or a behavioral model. A person needs to acquire other qualifications that render him at the level of emulation. “The most deserving of the Prophet’s family to be admired boundlessly and followed is the one who is entrusted by the Muslims... who they can vouch for in his understanding, knowledge, and expression of the truth, as well as the Prophet’s Sunnah (P). It is he whom Allah guides people with and who passes on to them his most reliable

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

understanding and knowledge. His discourse on the haqq offers Muslims access to the milestones of theirdeen.¹⁶⁶”

Imām Zayd considers the Prophet’s posterity to be the most qualified behavioral models. In expressing this view he relies on historic dynamics and comparative history of nations. To this end he says: “If you are seeking knowledge about a guiding ummah — by Allah’s leave – you should look into the generous Quran. Has Allah ever commissioned a Prophet without denominating his household? Has Allah ever revealed Scripture without appointing a solidarity of folks to uphold it via His Apostle? Then Allah tells you of those who reached salvation from among them and of those of them who perished. I draw your attention to those who were favored by Allah to have been saved by keeping company with His Prophets, and to those who have become the folks of haqq after the Prophets (P). If you realize that in Scripture it is the folks and family of the Prophet and their followers who at the end of the day are saved, and that the residual of Prophetic struggle are the descendants of these Prophets (P), then you should be aware that this ummah will not be saved except as those who were saved afore-time when there was a general breakdown in the understanding their deen and when they went to war because of it.¹⁶⁷”

To avoid having someone go overboard with this concept, turning Allah’s favors into a form of prejudice or racism by claiming that the Prophet’s family are infallible and immune to mistakes, Zayd said: “I assert, they (the Prophet’s posterity) are like other people who are endowed and who err. These prerogatives that we speak about are not the share of everyone, only the selective. Whoever expresses a default is taken to task for it; if his loss is anonymous his affair remains with Allah; if Allah wills, He punishes, and if He wills He forgives; provided he [the behavioral model] does not mislead people. Another proviso is that he not tamper with established meanings of Islam to

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

have people follow suit. If this becomes the case he and his followers bare the full responsibility of deviation.¹⁶⁸”

Zayd also said: “We are like everyone else; we have among us the error prone and the unflawed. Ask us and do not accept from us anything which is contrary or irreconcilable with Allah’s Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet (P).¹⁶⁹”

The Post Prophetic Khilafah

One thing leads to another; speaking about the “khilafah” during the time of Imām Zayd which refers to Umayyad rule leads to speaking about the initial khilafah after the Prophet (P) passed on. How did it actualize, and by what merits? And what is the legal and shar‘i basis for selecting a khalifah? And who was most qualified after the Prophet (P) to succeed him?

The Prophet’s family and their exponents viewed ‘Ali (AS) as the number one candidate to succeed the Prophet (P). His qualifications acceded the others: he was one of the first to accept Islam, he was distinguished by a lionhearted military career, his jihad and taqwa were one of a kind, his knowledge was singularly impressive, he was related to the Prophet’s bloodline. Add to that many of the Prophet’s hadith that nominated him for that position.

Another segment of Muslims thought that Abu Bakr was more deserving of this position. He deserved it through the process of shura (collective consultation); and the circumstances of that time were amenable to his becoming the leader.

Imām Zayd’s opinion agreed with those of his family. He said: “When the lifetime of Allah’s Prophet (P) was adjourned the most deserving of people to lead the people was ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb. When ‘Ali’s lifetime was brought to an end the most deserving of people to lead the people was al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali; and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ The Book of Irshad by Imam Qasem ibn Muhammad, p. 82 (reviewed by the author). All other quotes are from al-Safwah, by Imam Zayd (AS).

when he died the most deserving of people to lead the people was al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali.¹⁷⁰»

He pointed to two references giving Imām ‘Ali (AS) the priority to lead the Muslims. One of them was Tathbeet al-Wasiyah (The Confirmation of the Will), and in it there are statements attributed to the Prophet in which he advises that the khilafah after him should be the responsibility of ‘Ali. The other is Tathbeet al-Imāmat (The Confirmation of the Imāmat). In it there are descriptions and elucidations of who deserves to lead the Muslims after the Prophet (P) and how it all applies to Imām ‘Ali.

Leadership After al-Hasan and al-Husayn

The divine message was represented by both Scripture and Apostle (revelation and prophet). Each had a role to play. Scripture contains the foundations of divine doctrine and the outline of deen, while the Apostle was the receptacle of this Scripture via revelation and inspiration. He communicated its contents to people. He was there to answer to their questions. He also was there to refute and dismiss innuendo and accusations posed by opponents and deniers. This task needed a particular prophetic personality who could perform feats and marvelous events. He should also be free of errors that would be detrimental to his mission and role as a publicizer and communicator of Scripture.

The Prophets’ role ends with their death. But Scripture remains and it remains the responsibility of its adherents within their capacity. They are not expected to be carbon-copies of Prophets: flawless and miraculous. The initial task was initially done: Scripture was revealed and the Prophet publicized and spread it. What is left to be done is to take the process forward. The difference between the role of Prophets and the role of Imāms and activists is well known.

Imām Zayd holds that Ahl al-Bayt are the meritorious to lead. He says: “If they say who is worthy of leadership after al-Husayn? Say: the intimates of Muhammad (P), his children (meaning al-Hasan and al-Husayn). The best is the most steeped in deen, who relates to Allah’s Book, who is armed for the

¹⁷⁰ Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd, the section with Imam Zayd’s commentaries.

cause of Allah. They are the leaders of the Muslims in all their legal and moral affairs, and that includes all devout and pious Muslims.¹⁷¹”

Some particulars of an Imām; He says: “Know that none of us should be promoting himself for this affair until we have gained the following: knowing the particulars of Scripture, being aware of its expanding and vying meanings, knowledge of candid and exclusive meanings, the sequence of revelation, abrogating and abrogated ayats, the knowledge of halal and haram, the abrogating Sunnah – what preceded it, and how to draw analogies with it, knowledge of transgressors is a must as well as the history of shirk. Another qualifying matter is the single minded determination to engage the enemy in jihad, to defend the Muslims, to sacrifice life and limb to this end without any vacillation or abrogation of Allah’s injunctions. These are the qualities that command obedience within the household of the Prophet (P).¹⁷²”

Furat ibn Ibrahim al-Kufi relates a narrative from Abi Hashem al-Rummani who has it on the authority of Imām Zayd (AS) who said in a long discourse: “I avow that none of us – the descendants of both al-Hasan and al-Husayn – never claimed to be imposed leaders on all the Muslims (by this he may be referring to the issue of divine appointment and the Prophetic text). I affirm that my father ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn did not say so as I lived with him until he passed on. Muhammad ibn ‘Ali did not do so either as I also lived with him until he passed away. My nephew did not utter such a claim either, after him. Then he said: An Imām from among us who commands the leadership of the Muslims is he who bears arms and upholds the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His triumphant Prophet (P). How can Muslims have a leader (Imām) who is imposed on all the Muslims, who lives in bedroom comfort, withholding the argument for his legitimacy, with a closed door policy, and with rampant injustice? We know nothing of this behavior!¹⁷³”

¹⁷¹ Ibid, and Tathbeet al-Wasiyah (The Confirmation of the Will).

¹⁷² Ibid, the section on Imam Zayd’s commentaries.

¹⁷³ Tafsir Furat al-Kufi, p. 475.

He is also reported to have said: “Our understanding of an Imām is not someone who sits at home, dressed in his garment, too lazy to be involved in jihad. Our understanding of an Imām is he who defends his turf, and is active in jihad, and is protective of his constituents.”¹⁷⁴

To the best of our knowledge Imām Zayd did not vouch for anyone in the position of Imām except for ‘Ali, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn (AS).

Words of Wisdom¹⁷⁵

Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali said:

*A fair person does not custom make his share [of justice]. And an oppressor cannot even spare himself [of the consequences of injustice].

*Take notice of zealotry and the fanaticism of pre-Islamic times. They both are capable of ruining the deen and generating hypocrisy.

*The absence of a well-established scholar is a fracture to this deen whose replacement is next to impossible.

*Whoever consolidates the ma‘ruf should avoid the munkar; and whoever is on the course of justice should be patient with the bitter truth.

*Each spirit yearns for its distant desire; blessed is he who is content, and woe unto he who has confiscated someone’s right or fabricated a forgery.

*Fear Allah’s power in matters that seem irrelevant when obeying Him, matters that do not decrease His dominion if they became your bases for disobeying Him.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Usul fi al-Kafi, Vol. I, p. 357.

¹⁷⁵ These quotes were taken from Imam Zayd’s books and commentaries. Most come from the book: Majmu‘ Kutub wa Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd, which I reviewed and published.

*I have no second thoughts about upholding Allah's Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet (P) if that means I would have to endure a blazing fire because after that I pass on to Allah's grace and mercy.

*I assert that since I could distinguish my right hand from my left hand I have never told a lie, I have never violated any of Allah's commandments since knowing Allah will take me to task for that.

*An ignorant person has eight characteristics:

- 1- He gets angry for no apparent reason.
- 2- He gives without having the right to give.
- 3-He exhausts his body in the pursuit of batel (fallacies).
- 4-He is shallow on distinguishing his friend from his enemy.
- 5- He misplaces and mismanages things.
- 6-He has confidence in people he has not tried.
- 7- He speaks endlessly without any benefit.
- 8- He gives the benefit of doubt to irresponsible and irrational people.

*Servants of Allah! Do not wage war against your enemy on dubious grounds. This will cause you to go astray. You should establish the facts then go to war. Allah rewards you for the certainty that comes from the facts as He rewards you for adhering to the truth. Anyone who kills anyone else on the basis of doubt it is as if he killed someone without justification.

*He was told that some of his companions were saying we will take the law into our own hands and take revenge against the Umayyads: their lives and their wealth, as we shall do to their citizens. When Zayd heard of this he spoke out and said: People! I am still hearing of someone who is saying: the Umayyads are our spoils of war; we shall shed their blood, we shall plunder their wealth. We shall have the final word, and our public debates shall carry the day! This is a judgement void of evidence, a reckless compulsion. A wrong cannot be corrected by another wrong. I am surprised someone utters such things. Does

he think he is drawing on Allah's Book in what he says, or from the Sunnah of His Prophet (P)? Or is he inclined by false pride, seeing that he is on the right side. My support for such inclinations is at a distance of leaps and bounds.

*Iman and good deeds are like body and soul: if they separate they perish and if they combine they thrive.

*Whoever speaks to you contrary to what the Quran says do not believe him, rather suspect him. Have Allah's words the balsam of your hearts.

*Affairs are adjusted by the hands of 'ulema; they also go wrong by the same hands if these 'ulema barter Allah's commandments for the assistance of oppressors.

*A tongue that is familiar with expressing deceitful language, lies, and fraudulence is a tongue that twists away from haqq. This tongue is no longer useful but rather harmful.

*Hearing is an avenue to the heart. You have to be careful of what goes your heart's way.

*Allah's right concerning your companion: you should be gentle with him, you should be forthcoming. Don't deny him your dialogue; speak to him from your perspective and give him your advice.

*Failure of expression is a slip. Denial after knowledge is a slue. Vacillation in matters of deen is stress.

*I affirm my wish to be in the highest star above and then to fall unto earth to be cut into pieces to make it possible for Muhammad's ummah to regain its correct course.

*Allah has not placed people above being advised to fear His power presence; and He has not unnoted anyone for not deserving to be advised of Allah's power presence.

*No people are aversed to the flaming edges of swords except that they pay for that by being humiliated.

*Do not say: We are on the war path because we need to avenge you. Say we have done so for Allah and His deen.

*Whoever falls in love with life falls down from glory.

We are like other people. Some of us make mistakes and some of us are “perfectionists.” Ask us, and do not accept from us whatever disagrees with the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet (P).

Imām Zayd on Political Terrain

Reasons and Motivations

When justice is the order of the day people live without those mental disturbances associated with tyranny. People become innovative and creative. Life takes on a pleasant air. But when rulers turn nasty and become symbols of adoration while they trample over people’s rights and silence the voices of advice all the while excluding competent and qualified talent from participation and production, at that time life becomes disruptive and unquiet. Society begins to lose its cohesion. The decent quality of life begins to turn acrid. And the social arena is open to chaos and mayhem. These dynamics begin to translate into public discontent and popular disapproval of the authoritarian decision makers. The stage is set for popular motion towards a form of government that will guarantee social justice and the respect and treasure of human rights.

If things get worse and the rulers begin to tighten their noose around their citizens it is only to be expected to have a public explosion that tries to obtain the end of tyrannical rule and all its devices and stratagems for concealment and deceit.

Muslims during the second half of the first hijri century were subjected to a pack of Umayyad rulers who seized power by force; and this power was not just any power it was the Islamic khilafah. Then they steered the affairs of state in the wrong direction. This resulted in the best and brightest in the ummah coming together and working on dismantling the Umayyad power holders and relieving them of their tyranny generating positions.

One of the most outstanding figures to lead the movement against this Umayyad lapse was Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali (AS). He worked on reinstating the right to oppose deviant rulers by the Muslim public, and towards that end he planted the seeds of revolution against oppression.

Referring to Imām Zayd’s writings and epistles we may acquaint ourselves with the main reasons and justifications for his revolt against the Umayyad body politic. And that includes:

1- The Umayyads were in violation of Islamic standards and did not observe the shared Islamic values that all other Muslims adhered to. This was expressed in how the Umayyads played “cut and loose” with Islamic laws and hudud. A feature of Umayyad rule was to kill innocent people. The rulers did not spare themselves indulging in vice and clubhouse pursuits. They had no second thoughts about stifling public expression while working on curtailing freedom of assembly and conscience. They turned Islamic khilafah into hereditary rule, for which any incompetent and bungling son can assume the highest office in the land: not because of his pious heart and enlightened brain but because of his genetic material!

2- The Umayyads assaulted and insulted what Muslims hold dear to them. They went as far as having the Prophet of Allah being maligned and defamed in front of Hisham [ibn ‘Abd al-Melek] who expressed no objection. Imām Zayd said: “I saw Hisham who was in the presence of a person cursing the Prophet of Allah (P). I said to the foul-mouth: Woe to you O kafer! If I were in a position to do so I would send you to your Maker and expedite your blazing penalty.” And then Hisham said to me: Ease off our acquaintance, O Zayd! Zayd said: By Allah [because of that] I was determined even if it is only me and my son Yahya who are going to carry arms against [this tyrant] to perish; and so be it.¹⁷⁶” Imām ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb, Fatimeh the daughter of Allah’s Prophet (P) and Imām Husayn were all anathematized (damned) from the minbars during Jumu‘ah prayers in they years of this Umayyad dynasty.

¹⁷⁶ Taysir al-Mataleb fi Amali al-Sayyed Abi Taleb, p. 83.

3- The Umayyads showed fiscal irresponsibility. The wealth and revenues of the Islamic lands were laundered and pirated by a clan who spent it on their bellies and body parts. Consequently, Islamic society had to endure economic crises and hard times. It has been reported that Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek – who was known for his stinginess – needed six hundred or seven hundred camels to carry his wardrobe¹⁷⁷.

In a letter sent by Imām Zayd to the people of Mosul (Iraq) he says: “I am aware of the plight you are in and the religious persecution you endure as well as your deteriorating livelihood. Your blood has been shed and your resources have been confiscated.”¹⁷⁸

4- There was an official line of jeering and affronting the Prophet’s progeny. Methodical and day-to-day efforts from the royal court attempted to disparage their prestige. The official line was to intimidate and harass the Prophet’s extended family.

The Umayyad kings were known to dismiss any advice and ignore anyone who would try to talk some sense into them [the Umayyads] about this whole issue. Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek exemplified the arrogance and corruption of power when he stood up in the masjid in Makkah once and said that he will hack off the head of anyone who would say to him: *Ittaqi Illah* [Fear God]¹⁷⁹!

Some historians exaggerated the facts as they claimed that Imām Zayd had a personal axe to grind. Had they known that such personal scores are never capable of establishing principles and sustaining methodical opposition to tyranny.

¹⁷⁷ Mentioned by Ibn Daqmaq in *al-Jawhar al-Thameen in Seyar al-Muluk wa al-Salateen*, p.99. Even though the number may be an exaggeration, it demonstrates the ostentatious lifestyle of such rulers. Incidentally, Ibn Daqmaq is an “anti-Shi‘i.”

¹⁷⁸ *Al-Futuh*, Vol. VIII, p. 115.

¹⁷⁹ This was mentioned by [al-sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahman] al-Sharqawi in his book *A’immat al-Fiqh al-Tis‘ah* {The Nine Fiqhi Imams}.

The Start and the Constructive Phases

It was in Madinah that Imām Zayd established his broad movement. Initially it was underground and secretive. Its development was unhurried; that is because the general public was afraid to confront brutal and iron-fisted rulers. Especially if we know that Madinah was still tending to its wounds. The Madinians were suffering that after shock of the pitiless and savage Umayyad military campaign led by Muslim ibn ‘Uqbah. The image of the folks of al-Husayn who had returned from the tragedy of Karbala was still fresh in their minds. The losses were stupefying. As if the verses of the poetry composed by Umm Kulthum bint ‘Ali were ringing in everyone’s ears:

O city of our grandfather could you no longer be ours
To you we have returned accompanied with sorrow and tears
We left and imparted you with family and all who is dear
Now whoever is left is back we have lost our men, sons, and heirs

Until she says:

Our husbands and bread-winners are at al-Taff, dead, no longer near
Their heads have been hacked they butchered our sons without fear

Zayd’s activities were first pronounced within his family structure. They assisted and supported him. They felt for him and were keen on protecting him. Jaber al-Ja‘fi said: I was told by Muhammad ibn ‘Ali: My brother Zayd ibn ‘Ali -it appears- will carry arms in opposition and will be killed. Obviously, he is doing what is right. Woe to anyone who forsakes him, and to anyone who fights him, and to he who kills him. Jaber said: When Zayd was preparing to revolt I said: I heard your brother say you will be killed...

He said to me: O Jaber! I cannot remain silent when the Book of Allah has been violated and when the state has become an evil and a monstrosity¹⁸⁰.

¹⁸⁰ Amali Abi Taleb (Chapter VII), narrated by al-Imam al-Murshid bi-Allah in Al-Amali al-Ithnyniyah (manuscript) and by Imam al-Mansur bi-Allah ‘Abdullah ibn Hamzah in Al-‘Aqd al-Thameen (manuscript).

When Imām Zayd realized that the pace was slow in Madinah he benefitted from Hajj to move on and mobilize the potential in Makkah. There he met many personalities from different lands. He sensed they were supportive of the principles of justice and were longing for freedom. He was thus encouraged to go to other lands and people.

When he arrived at Kufah he found a social ambiance unlike Madinah. People were fed up. In public people were speaking up against Umayyad persecution. This boosted his morale and gave him hope for mobilizing a corrective trend to set the ummah back on track; even though he was aware of how these same people behaved with his grandfather Imām Husayn. His family cautioned him that these people may not honour their word. But deep down inside Zayd had to honour the conscience pulse in him. Something had to be done for these people who were strained and troubled. “I would wish to be hanging from the furthest star in the heavens and then drop and be sliced to pieces if that means that Allah will bring order to the ummah of Muhammad.¹⁸¹” This type of motivated and morally charged young man is rare indeed.

Imām Zayd returned to Madinah with one thing on his mind: how do you redeem the ummah from its condition of mistreatment and subservience?

Imām Zayd Bids Farewell to His Grandfather’s City

Meanwhile, Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Melek was keeping an eye and getting information on Imām Zayd’s activities and writings. The wali [ruler] of Madinah wrote to him saying: “Zayd is turning public opinion in Madinah against you.¹⁸²” Hisham then began to think of ways to entrap Zayd. He instigated some points of contention with Zayd via his cousins the descendants of Imām al-Hasan. This was meant to side-track Imām Zayd from concentrating on his critique of the regime. But then Zayd realized what was really at work and made up with his cousins. Zayd said to the ruler of Madinah

¹⁸¹ Zayd’s words in *Maqatel al-Talebiyeen*, p 129, as well as in *Tayseer al-Mataleb*.

¹⁸² *Al-Kamel fi al-Tarikh*, by Ibn al-Athir, Vol. V, p 85.

who was Hisham's vassal and who was instrumental in trying to drive a wedge between Zayd and his cousins: "You have united the descendants of Allah's Prophet in a way unattainable by Abu Bakr and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab."¹⁸³ At that point Hisham and his functionary knew that they will not be able to sidetrack Zayd into petty issues. Then Hisham decided to try to get Zayd to al-Sham (the Levant) where he can keep a close eye on him. Imām Zayd having received information through different parties felt compelled to go to al-Sham. And he went there reluctantly.

Before he left Madinah he went to pray in the masjid of his grandfather – Allah's Prophet (P) where he stood and expressed the following du'a:

"O Allah! You know I am compelled, constrained, and bound. It is not my choice or wish to do so. O Allah! Spare me his conspiracy. Cloak me with the garment of innocent pride so that I do not give in to the pomp of royalty, and so that I am not afraid of his troops. O Allah! Give me the words and articulation to say the truth and to support it without being apologetic or inferior to "the power of the state." O Allah! Bring my heart to your guidance. Show me Your Sustaining power which will in my eyes make his power petty and his pulse vain. O Allah! Throw trepidation into his heart and quandary in his character. Protect me against his scheme."

Then he said:

"I shall leave my fatherland and the abode of my asylum. I may not return. Then he approached the tomb of Allah's Prophet (P) and prayed beside it. After leaving prayers he said: Peace be to you O Prophet of Allah. Peace be to you O Messenger of Allah. Peace be to you the quintessence of Apostles and the noblest of emissaries. Peace be to you the beloved of Allah. This may be my last day in your city and I may never see your tomb or minbar again. Father! I am leaving with difficulty. I have become a prisoner in this land. I ask you al-shafa'at

¹⁸³ Ibid, Vol. V, p 85.

(intercession) with Allah, the Exalted, the Extolled so that He may support me with the confidence of yaqeen (certitude), and the pride of taqwa. I ask for a final testimonial which will place me in the company of my honourable fathers and my impeccable folks.”

Imām Zayd in al-Sham

Meanwhile the news that Zayd was on his way to Damascus arrived before Zayd did. Pros and cons were anticipating his arrival. Once he did arrive he was put under “house arrest” at a place called al-Rusafah¹⁸⁴. He then became the focal point of scholars and students who went to see and learn from him. Overnight al-Rusafah became a hub of scholarly, fiqhi, and literary activity.

In al-Sham Imām Zayd found people who were genuinely fooled. Deen was not entrenched in its deepest meanings. The Umayyad establishment had employed pseudo-‘ulema who were busy tailoring religion to the diktats of the state. They told the people that the ruler is dispensed to them by Allah; and that he and his partisans are the people of haqq, and if these rulers do things that seem ridiculous or abhorrent it turns out that these things are Allah’s qadar (predetermination) and qada’ (decree). And whatever these ridiculous and abhorrent things are they do not exclude these rulers from the title of Iman. Therefore, there can be no justification for revolting against them. Besides, they are the people of qiblah, aren’t they!? There were other religious concepts that were slanted and angled. To buttress this whole machination, hadiths were concocted and supportive arguments were produced in the form of philosophies. While Imām Zayd was in al-Sham he tried to set the record straight and bring out the lost components of Islam.

Imām Zayd and Hisham Face to Face

Conceited individuals are obsessed with glorifying themselves. Some of them actually begin to believe that nobility originates from their peculiar condition,

¹⁸⁴ Al-Rusafah is an ancient city in the Syrian desert where Hisham ibn ‘Abd al-Malek resided.

sweat and quality. When a brave-heart comes along and destroys this illusion and vaporizes this myth the self-conceited self-destruct. He sees that his vain and glory have been jammed. Thus, he reacts to try to regain his vanity which only exists in his imagination. The ominous part of this whole episode is that this egotist's reaction employs everything at its disposal: power, potential, and politics.

But for this all to happen there has to be an element of adventure and sacrifice from a brave soul and a free mind which is not much concerned with "the consequences" but rather is more concerned with Allah's power presence than any tin pot dictator. In this context Allah's Prophet (P) said: "The superior shahid (martyr) is a man who stands up to an imperious despot and orders him to fear Allah's power and to desist from breaching the commandments of Allah, and follows that up with momentous resistance. If he dies in the process he is a superior shahid.¹⁸⁵"

Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Melek was conceited and thought he had a halo around his head. He imagined himself beyond reproach and rebuke. But Allah would have Imām Zayd bring Hisham to the real world and have his fantasies evaporate.

Hisham ignored the arrival of Imām Zayd to al-Sham for more than a month. After that he had his first encounter with Imām Zayd. Hisham stuffed the room with all his subordinates who were instructed to mingle and socialize and to ignore Imām Zayd. This was Hisham's first psychological shot. He thought that this would contribute to an erosion of Zayd's morale.

When Imām Zayd entered the royal court he greeted everyone with Salam (peace). But Hisham and his underlings ignored him. Imām Zayd immediately sensed an air of scheming. Then he emphatically said: "Peace be to you the cross-eyed; and you merit this description!" The artificial and pre-planned social atmosphere was deflated; and the royal scheming ceased. At this point

¹⁸⁵ This hadith was narrated by the Zaydi al-Hafez Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn al-Husayn in Al-Muheet bi-al-Imamah (manuscript) on the authority of Imam Zayd and his fathers.

Hisham was furious and he sought to put an end to Zayd's courage by intimidations and humiliations.

He said: "You are Zayd who holds hopes for the khilafah. How can you aspire to such a thing when you are a slave-woman's son?!" These are the types of peevish comments that Hisham was best at: he would try to sink a person's virtues and take pride in his own ancestry. He thought that by coming from a lineage of royalty his is automatically entitled to purity, chastity, and majesty. Imām Zayd wanted him to understand that his mode of thought is a residual of jahiliyah (pre-Islamic ages), which Islam came to delete. He said to him: "O Hisham! Mothers are never men's obstacles on their way to their goals. I do know of a Prophet sent by Allah who is a son of a slave-woman and who is so much loved by Allah. He is Isma'il the son of Ibrahim. And in this case Prophethood which was achieved by Isma'il is more important than khilafah. And besides, he being a son of a slave-woman did not exclude him from becoming the father of the Arabs, and the father of the preferential of Prophets: Muhammad (P). If mothers were any consideration in this regard then Allah would not have had him a Prophet."

After that Imām Zayd said to Hisham that he stated the facts for the record and to give virtue its due. Otherwise, Zayd had an ancestral line that cannot be matched. He said: "How do you impugn a man whose grandfather is Allah's Prophet (P) and whose father is 'Ali ibn Abi Taleb?!"

Hisham was flabbergasted. He could not find the right words to speak. Imām Zayd realized this and said to him: "Ittaqi Allah ya Hisham" (Fear Allah, O Hisham).

Hisham uncontrollably and in anger reacted by saying: "Is it someone like you ordering someone like me to fear Allah?" Once again Hisham provides us with a sample of his behavior. He thinks that just because he has some worldly, "religious," and social rank that he is no longer in a position to be assessed and criticized. His head swarms with the false praise and the cheap talk that comes from his subordinates. This places him in a position far beyond reality and away from the facts of life.

Imām Zayd wanted to talk some sense into Hisham and provide him with the bitter truth that usually upsets ego maniacs, so he said to him: "O Hisham!

Allah has not elevated anyone above listening to the word *Ittaqi Allah* (fear [the power of] Allah), nor did Allah denigrate anyone as to be as insignificant and not worthy of counseling [those in power] by saying: *Ittaqi Allah*.” These are words bursting with wisdom and in the best tradition of Muhammad’s (P) eternal teachings.

At this point Hisham realized that Zayd is not someone who will scramble for words or be caught off balance. So Hisham expressed himself like all authoritarians and said to Zayd: “You have just confirmed all the information I have on you... Who told you to place yourself where you do not belong and think of yourself very highly? You should be smarter than that and you should behave appropriately. You should never talk terms with your higher authority and you should not disagree with your leader.”

Imām Zayd replies in a measured and poised way: “Whoever places himself where he does not belong has offended his Lord, and whoever elevates himself beyond his rightful position has forfeited his self identity, and whoever is unable to assess his own self is unable to get to know his Lord, and whoever confers with his leader while disobeying his [legitimate] authority perishes. O Hisham! Do you know who does such things? It is he who disobeys his Sustaining Lord, behaves as if he is his Creator’s superior, and claims to be what he is not. I state emphatically that I have given you my words of advice and tried to have you see the way.”

These words hit Hisham like a thunderbolt. He in a fit and a rage stood up and uttered words to the effect that he is unable to take on Zayd verbally and mentally. He said to his hired hands and minions: “Take him out of my presence and do not let him dwell among my troops.”

Then Zayd said to him: “You will find me where it annoys you most.” Imām Zayd left while stating his well-known expression: “People who dislike the ardor of swords are candidates for humiliation.” It is also reported that he said: “Whoever is cozy with holding on to worldly life shall experience humiliation unendingly.”

Hisham was later told of these words by Zayd. And he realized something that he had been ignoring, he said to his hirelings and assistants: “And you claim

that this [Prophetic] household is a thing of the past? Not so when a person like this [Zayd] is their successor.¹⁸⁶”

A Flagrant Plot

After that heated exchange in the court of Hisham, royalty began to concoct and connive until they figured that Zayd should be preoccupied with travel. This would expose him to dangers. Have him go from al-Sham (Damascus) to Iraq; and then from Iraq to Hijaz (Arabia). And that was pretty much the way it was. This new scheme was as follows:

*Imām Zayd should be made to leave al-Sham where the news of his scholarly status and outspoken eloquence began to spread.

*His exodus should be to Iraq not to settle there but to be on the turf of Yusuf ibn ‘Umar al-Thaqafi one of the Umayyad butchers who was known for his shoot first and ask questions later mentality. This may put some fear into Zayd or it may end his “adventure.” The Umayyads were known to instigate their functionaries against their enemies of the Prophet’s descendants. Contracting gruesome tasks to mercenaries or “hit-men” is a well established course by tyrants by which they escape the condemnation of history.

*And if Zayd survives that he should be led to al-Madinah without respite, for if he were to stay in Iraq (where he had been before) he would become “a national security risk” for the Umayyad regime. This plan was put into effect with all its contingents.

The triggering mechanism was a Khaled ibn ‘Abdullah al-Qasri who was Yusuf ibn ‘Umar’s predecessor as “governor” of Iraq. This Khaled was deposed and thrown into the dungeons of the regime where he “confessed” to Zayd being in possession of money belonging to the state treasury!

¹⁸⁶ See Tarikh Ibn ‘Asaker, Vol VI, p 22, as well as Al-Amali al-Ithninyah (manuscript).

Imām Zayd in Kufah

After a long journey Imām Zayd arrived at Kufah and arriving with him were the functionaries of Hisham who delivered to Yusuf ibn ‘Umar a letter from Hisham with instructions: “to keep the people of Kufah at a distance from [Imām] Zayd as his tongue is razor-sharp and his words are transcendental.¹⁸⁷”

Upon arrival in Kufah Zayd was straightaway escorted to Yusuf ibn ‘Umar who demanded the money [allegedly in Zayd’s possession]. Zayd said: How could Khaled have given me this money when he was maligning my fathers from his pulpit?¹⁸⁸ Then Yusuf began to browbeat and threaten. Then Imām Zayd said to him: “Spare me your eruptions and fury. I am not your accessory against whom you may take vindictive action. Hold me up to the standards of Allah’s Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet and not to yours and Hisham’s guages.¹⁸⁹”

And so Yusuf ibn ‘Umar also came to realize that Zayd is not one who accepts half-measures or a bullying around. So he had Khaled al-Qasri brought in. He said to him: This is Zayd ibn ‘Ali. Tell us what you gave him.

Khaled said: By Allah, beside Whom there is no divinity, I did not give him any amount of money. The only reason you bring him here is to do him wrong.

The plot was exposed. Yusuf ibn ‘Umar approached Imām Zayd and said to him: “The commander in chief [Hisham] ordered me to have you leave al-Kufah upon arrival! Zayd said: Give me three days of relaxation before I

¹⁸⁷ Zahr al-Adaab, by al-Qairawani, Vol I, p 118; also words to this effect in [Tarikh] Al-Ya‘qubi, Vol II, p.255.

¹⁸⁸ Ansab al-Ashraf, p 232. Some historians note that Khaled ibn ‘Abdullah al-Qasri was moved by Imam Zayd and desisted from maligning the Prophet’s descendants and that was why he was thrown into prison and tortured.

¹⁸⁹ Al-Masabih (manuscript).

embark on my journey out of here. He said: But I cannot do that. So Zayd asked for one day, and the reply was not even one more hour.¹⁹⁰”

Zayd left with Yusuf ibn ‘Umar’s escorts.

Supporters and partisans of Imām Zayd in Iraq were aware of these developments. They kept a close eye on events. When they knew he was leaving Kufah they followed him to an area called al-‘Atheeb from where the escorts returned. Then his supporters went to him and told him: Where will you go O son of Allah’s Prophet? Will you leave Kufah where you have one hundred thousand swords ready to fight against the Umayyad clan? We beg Allah that you stay. They insisted until he agreed and returned with them to Kufah¹⁹¹.

Preparing for Armed Confrontation

“O Allah! As we are surrounded by deceptive sedition, and as we are overcome by the fold of confusion, we have been reduced by indignity and deprivation, we have been ruled by those we do not trust with Your deen. Our affairs have been exploited by those who take issue with Your judgement and take-it-out on Your servants. Our revenue has become exclusively theirs, our leadership positions have been usurped, and the trust belonging to us has been turned into a hereditary affair from degenerate groin to degenerate groin. Widows’ and orphans’ shares and allocations are used to buy entertainment places. It is open season by cold and conniving officials on Allah’s wealth. Truly committed Muslims have become subordinate to people under administrative government care (Ahl al-Thimmah). Every deviant has a local civic responsibility. There seems to be no one to protect anyone from ruin, and no one to check the excesses and abuses of state. No one in a position of authority cares. Fellow-feelings and understanding is absent for anyone in need of it. It is an atmosphere of total loss, of an unnerving bondage, and an overall slump and suffering.

¹⁹⁰ Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi, Vol II, p256.

¹⁹¹ Al-Futuh, by Ibn al-A‘tham, Vol VIII, p 111.

O Allah! The fields of injustice are ready for harvest. The season is upon us.

O Allah! Leave no support system or mechanism for injustice. Prepare for the task of uprooting it an able hand that is willing to go beyond the surface and to penetrate the bunch. Let there be no command positions for tyranny and bring down its super and sub structure.

O Allah! Extinguish its false spark, de-brain its head, tackle its troops, and terrorize its droves.

O Allah! Leave injustice with no remnants. Abolish its bogus status, break its chains, take the edge out of its sword and the wind out of its sail.

O Allah! Show us injustice's cohorts far apart rather than their stilted intimacy, show us their division instead of their common cause, and rip the masks off their identities so that they stand exposed to all the ummah.

O Allah! Hasten the daybreak of justice and extend it forever with its young spirits and victorious souls.

O Allah! Revive with social and state justice broken hearts; unite desperate spirits. Bring back with it Your forlorn commandments and Your lurched laws. Have it fill the empty stomachs of the wretched and the poor. Vitalize with it fatigued bodies... do so with Your might and Your Grace, O Sustainer of the worlds. Amen.¹⁹²

Likewise did Imām Zayd pray and plead with Allah every time he looked around and realized people were in agony and distress. In strict secrecy Imām Zayd returned to al-Kufah and began preparing for armed conflict. There were three tasks he had to do:

Dispatching Emissaries and Covert Activities

¹⁹² This is an excerpt of Imam Zayd's du'a after he left al-Sham and a few days before he took up arms. Narrated by al-Murshid bi-Allah in *Al-Amali al-Ithnyniyah*. Ibn 'Asaker refers to a portion of this du'a in *Tarikh Dimashq*, Vol VI, p. 70. But he attributes it to Sadeef ibn Maymun.

Imām Zayd brought together hand-picked ‘ulema, men of arms and chivalry, and patricians. All were of superb moral quality. Their deen and commitment was beyond doubt. He had them “stationed” in different lands as “publicists” for the cause and to try to gain support and allegiance for Imām Zayd. They were to prepare as much as possible public opinion for revolution.

Among his assistants in al-Kufah and al-Basra and surrounding areas were: Abu Khaled al-Waseti, Abu al-Jarud, Mu‘mmar ibn Khuthaym, Nasr ibn Khuzaymah, and Mu‘awiyah ibn Is-haq.

His delegate to al-Riqqah and vicinity (in present day Syria) was Yazid ibn Abi Ziyad. There were many who were won over and gave their allegiance in this area¹⁹³.

Zayd wrote to Helal ibn Khabbab in the area of Mada’en where he was a judge. Consequently the people of Rey (in present day Iran) responded favorably and they also gave their allegiance.

Zayd sent al-Fadl ibn al-Zubayr and Abu al-Jarud to Abu Hafeefah al-Nu‘man. When they reached Abu Hafeefah he was ill. They sought out his support, to which he replied: “He [Zayd] has by all means a just and right cause. He is the most knowledgeable person we know about in our time. Convey to him my greetings and tell him my ailment makes it difficult for me to carry arms with him.” Abu Haneefah gave them thirty thousand dirhams to give to Zayd to be used for the jihad; and he said: “If I recover I will join him in his revolt.” He also said: “Zayd’s combat resembles the combat of Allah’s messenger on the Day of Badr.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Al-Masabeeh, Abu al-‘Abbas al-Hasani (manuscript).

¹⁹⁴ Al-Masabeeh, (manuscript), p 306, see also Zayd ibn al-Imam ‘Ali, by Muhammad ‘Ali al-Dukhayil, p118.

The reknown hafez and the famous narrator Mansur ibn al-Mu‘tamer al-Salami corresponded with the ‘ulema and would approach with tears in his eyes saying: “Answer the call of Allah’s Prophet’s son.¹⁹⁵”

‘Uthman ibn ‘Umair al-Faqih went with Zayd’s call to al-A‘mash and his circle of scholars. After reading Imām Zayd’s letter, al-A‘mash said: “I think no one knows of Zayd’s exceptional quality more than I. Communicate to him my greetings of peace. Say to him that al-A‘mash tells you: ‘I do not trust the people will carry through this with you. Had we found three hundred from us who were willing to carry arms with you we would be the first to endure the responsibilities of war.¹⁹⁶”

Shu‘bah said: I heard al-A‘mash say: ‘Had it not been for an ailment I have I would be on my way [with Zayd]. By Allah! I sense he will be betrayed as was his grandfather and uncle.¹⁹⁷”

After a year long campaign to drum up support for Imām Zayd the number of those who pledged allegiance was more than fifteen thousand warriors¹⁹⁸. Prominent among them were distinguished ‘ulema, huffaz [memorizers of the Quran], and its reciters. They all came from different backgrounds and affiliations. A Shi‘i, a Mu‘tazili, and a Murji’ all were on an equal footing as they hastened to enlist in Imām Zayd’s military campaign. The scholars of his time were very supportive of Zayd’s revolution. Up to this point the momentum was promising.

¹⁹⁵ Ansab al-Ashraf, Al-Balathuri, p134; Seyar A‘lam al-Nubala, by al-Thahabi, Vol V. p298.

¹⁹⁶ Maqatel al-Talibiyeen, p 148.

¹⁹⁷ Wafiyat al-A‘yan, Vol. II, p.400 in the chapter about the second generation Muslims who quoted Imam Zayd. What is meant by his uncle is al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali (AS).

¹⁹⁸ Ansab al-Ashraf, p 237.

Sulayman al-Razi said: “Never have I seen in my life a day filled with manpower support, packed with arms and robust men along with their knowledge of the Quran and fiqh than was the case with the companions of Imām Zayd.¹⁹⁹”

Topping the list of his supporters was his brother Muhammad al-Baqer. Even though he was not yet prepared to enlist, he was, though, a keen observer of Imām Zayd’s movements. He would say to his friends: “He [Zayd] is the “ace” of Bani Hashem. If he calls on you respond to him, and if he asks you for help and victory, then offer him help and victory.²⁰⁰”

His nephew Imām Ja‘far al-Sadeq wanted to accompany his uncle Zayd the last time he left from al-Madinah to al-Kufah. He said to him: “I am with you, uncle.” To which Zayd replied: “Do you not know that we are in complementary positions: one of us has to bear arms and the other has to stay behind, for if we both take up arms, who will tend to our family?” Ja‘far stayed behind on instructions from his uncle Zayd, but he sent his two sons ‘Abdallah and Muhammad with him²⁰¹. He said: “Whoever dies with my uncle Zayd it is as if he died with al-Husayn, and who ever dies with al-Husayn it is as if he died with ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb, and who dies with ‘Ali it is as if he died with the Prophet (P).²⁰²”

Imām Zayd’s revolution had substantial support and considerable popularity.

¹⁹⁹ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy – Sharh Musnad al-Imam Zayd ibn ‘Ali (manuscript).

²⁰⁰ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy, Vol I, p. 3 (manuscript); Al-Hada’eq, Vol I, p 141 (manuscript); Hayat al-Imam al-Baqer, p. 243.

²⁰¹ Majmu‘ al-Imam al-Hadi (manuscript) p. 220 (deluxe edition); al-Jawharah al-Khalisah min al-Shawa’eb, by al-Damighani (manuscript).

²⁰² Al-Muhit bi al-Imamat (manuscript), Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy (manuscript) Vol I, p 5.

Scholarly support may be attributed to two things: First, Imām Zayd’s revered status as they all attested to his knowledge and entitlements. Second, society was in need of change because oppression and injustice were all too prevalent.

The “law” had banned Imām Zayd from being in Kufah so he had to go underground. He would always move from one house to the next and from one neighborhood to the other. If someone sought to pay allegiance to Imām Zayd he would be escorted both ways under deep cover.

His missives (written letters) were carefully carried and delivered across areas and lands to be communicated to distant public opinions. It has been reported that a man with a cane was hastily walking one day. The soldiers deployed by Yusuf ibn ‘Umar who were posted on the through ways to frisk people stopped this man. They asked him: Where are you from? And he said: From al-Sham. They checked him but could not find anything suspicious. Then one of them took his cane and began to look it over. He found a piece of wax glued to it. He took the wax out and discovered that the cane was hollow, and in its chamber were pages of a letter. After extracting it out it turned out to be a letter from Imām Zayd to the inhabitants of Mosul!²⁰³

This story has two observations. First, the extent to which the regime was on alert against its enemies, and especially the potential of Imām Zayd. Second, Imām Zayd was at an advanced stage of underground activities.

Imām Zayd’s revolution was discovered after one year of stealth movements only days before his uprising. This may be attributable to a compact society, an iron handed regime, and the proliferation of mercenaries and the faint hearted.

The Legality of Opposition to Oppressors

Islam is a blue-print for humanity. It defines the direction for mass movements. It also takes note of rulers and citizens in this context. And popular movement contravening Allah’s directives is – sooner or later – doomed. There are

²⁰³ Al-Futuh, Vol VIII, p. 114-115.

procedural issues that have to be watched attentively so as to avoid instability and to secure justice and order.

No doubt deviation by a native is not as consequential as deviation by a sovereign. A sovereign's deviation causes rumbles and ripple-effects throughout society. Sometimes the consequences are denial of human rights and the total disregard for human dignity. Ergo, people yearn for justice, freedom, love, and prosperity.

Due to the fact that this is a crucial fixture of life, Islam provides for an assembly of qualified and experienced advisers whose credentials permit them to monitor the course of the decision making process away from personal interests or dogmatic/fanatic considerations:

Let there be a category of people who publicize the good and who command the [common sense] right and ban the [common sense] wrong-doing.

(Q. 3: 105).

When a sovereign deviates, these qualified and learned individuals render their advice and directives. All peaceful means should be exhausted to correct such political errors. If the sovereign insists on his course of political deviation and proves impervious to any good counsel and office they should force him to abide by Allah's order. This may first take the form of verbal communication. After that there may be ultimatums, threats, and even civil disobedience. The last measure towards this end is the use of arms. An errant tyrant could destroy his own society if he is permitted to get away with breaking Allah's laws: "You will indeed enforce the [common sense] good and you will indeed ban the [common sense] evil or else Allah will impose on you the worst among you; and then your best come calling on Allah but they merit no [divine] response and solace."

In view of the "supreme rulers" this Islamic perspective on corrective political action is the most dangerous component of Islam. They are scared stiff of its implications and possibilities. That is why they have been working overtime to obfuscate this perspective if they are unable to wipe it out altogether. To this end they have an army of opinion makers. They allocate budgets and material incentives to have some hadith(s) circulate that would infer religious immunity

on dictatorships and emperors. The iron-fist ruler's worst nightmare is to see the principle of jihad come alive in the social context of his own citizens and constituency.

Imām Zayd spent long and laborious times trying to resuscitate the principle of political and principled dissent from arbitrary and subjective governance. He lectured and penned on the subject. He substantiated his position with faithful and authentic hadith he heard from his fathers who in turn attributed it to Rasul-Allah (P). One such hadith is quoting the Prophet (P) to have said: "The best of martyrs is he who takes issue with a tyrannical ruler, advises him of taqwa and admonishes him for disobeying Allah. If this jihad is sustained and the person is killed [by the autocratic ruler(s)] he ranks the highest among martyrs."²⁰⁴

It has also been reported on the same authority that Allah's messenger (P) said: "O 'Ali! Nearest to me among the martyrs on the Day of Resurrection and more deserving of my company besides Hamzah and Ja'far is a person who carries arms and opposes a dubious and deviant leader until he dies."²⁰⁵ There are other ayats and hadith pertaining to the legality of breaking with an oppressive head of state.

Persistent Objectives

"People! I still hear what some of you are saying: the Umayyad clan is our spoils of war; we shall shed and spill their blood, do what we want with their wealth, and have the final say on their affair! These are baseless judgements and misplaced motivations. You can fight fire with water. I'm surprised there are people who are rash and heedless. How does anyone entertain such thoughts? Is he basing his words in the Book of Allah? Or the Sunnah of His Prophet (P)? Or is he as covetous as to think I would be inclined to such things? Far from it! Far from it!"²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ Al-Muhit bi al-Imamat.

²⁰⁵ Quotes from Al-Muhit bi al-Imamat (manuscript).

²⁰⁶ Majmu' Rasa'el al-Imam Zayd (the section on his speeches and missives).

This was Imām Zayd’s comment upon hearing that some of his partisans were saying that they will pass judgement on the lives, blood, and wealth of the Umayyad clan and their nationals. This is a clear indication that Imām Zayd did not for once entertain feelings of revenge against the Umayyads with all that they did to him. A person with a divine mission knows that he cannot sugar-coat a vengeful drive with an ideological coating and a religious flavor; any attempt at including personal vendettas in an issue like this will inevitably torpedo it.

The goals of Imām Zayd were of a divine magnitude in which he knew that all his efforts had to be in harmony with heavenly guidelines. Armies will never withstand the heat of the war and sustain its staying power if they are not grounded in noble aims and a higher cause. This can only come from a pure and uncontaminated ideological persuasion. This is ultimately more important than material weapons and physical armaments. A heightened morale and a vibrant understanding of things converts what is few into what is many, and an apparent loss into a prolonged gain, and the love for martyrdom into a demand.

Imām Zayd’s eternal objectives glowed throughout his writings, his allegiance, and his missives. They may be summarized as follows:

*Breathing life into the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger and an upkeep of Islamic sanctuaries.

*A life of integrity within a climate of justice and honesty.

*A fair distribution of the common-wealth and an end to official lavish and ostentatious spending.

*Defending the oppressed and helping the dispossessed.

*Due respect to the Prophet’s offspring (Ahl al-Bayt), fending for and protecting them.

These were the strategic concerns of the time; and for which Imām Zayd gave his precious life.

Imām Zayd understood that some of his supporters and aids may not be able to see this whole affair with the required clarity of vision and purpose. Some may be motivated by feelings of revenge and blind sympathy for the Prophet's responsible family members. Zayd had to reiterate the importance of drawing a line between a holy cause and some transient emotions.

It may be true that we may owe the Prophet's persecuted progeny the intensity of our feelings and even our own lives to protect them; but Imām Zayd wanted that to be a means and not an end. He said to his admirers and supporters: "Do not say we bear arms as an expression of anger for you (Ahl Al-Bayt); rather say: we bear arms to express our anger for Allah and His deen."²⁰⁷

He also knew that there will be people bearing arms with him in opposition to the Umayyad regime not to bring about an eventual victory but only because they calculated that to be the opportune time to settle their score with the Umayyads.

Many of his supporters may have felt elated just to be with him and they expressed such a feeling by saying as long as they are with him they do not care what objective they are fighting for! They may not have been sure whether the enemy they were fighting deserved to be fought! Some people can only see things from their own parochial perspective. People according to their positions in life are bound to fluctuate between knowledge and ignorance, courage and cowardice, and certainty and doubt.

Victory over an enemy is problematic in the absence of a clear vision and a firm belief. In their absence it is questionable whether we have a vital ummah or even hope. For this reason Zayd said to his companions: "Subjects of Allah! Do not kill your enemy while doubting the validity of your positions. If you do you will lose sight of Allah's course and cause. Rather be internally firm on what you are doing... firm on your battlefield. Allah rewards you for your certainty as He would reward you for the truth (al-haqq). Whoever kills another person while doubting the dead person's dalalat (deviation) is like killing someone without haqq (justification and authority). Subjects of Allah! Be sure

²⁰⁷ Ansab al-Ashraf, Vol I, p 238.

of what you are doing... be certain.²⁰⁸” Long-lasting defeat is the share of those who {went forth from their homelands full of self-conceit and a desire to be seen and praised by men.} (Q. 8: 47).

But if they step onto the battlefield for the sake and cause of Allah then they {shall have gardens through which running water flows} (Q. 3: 198).

Armed Confrontation

The Start of the Revolution

Imām Zayd spent fourteen months in Iraq. He moved incognito from and to urban and rural areas. He corresponded with people of insight telling them to break with the heavy-handed regime by joining the ranks of the mujahideen. During that whole time-period Yusuf ibn ‘Umar al-Thaqafi had informers and spies throughout the land trying to gauge what Imām Zayd and his followers were doing.

After the Imām finished the initial preparations for the military encounter he agreed with his companions that the launching day of the revolution should be the first day of the month of Safar (122 HE). Subsequently he sent his emissaries to adjacent lands to prepare for the hour of reckoning.

Hisham had received some information about Imām Zayd. He felt uneasy. He expressed his extreme apprehension towards this movement because he knew how firm, influential, and determined Imām Zayd was. Hisham ordered Yusuf ibn ‘Umar to be in hot pursuit of Imām Zayd.

Yusuf ibn ‘Umar redoubled his efforts and increased the number of his informants and undercover agents. He ordered his security forces to check pedestrians and to interrogate suspects. After long and hard work he managed to identify one of the places in which Imām Zayd used to spend some time. He ordered his men to break in there at night. They found that Imām Zayd had changed his location and was not inside. They apprehended two men and

²⁰⁸ Majmu‘ Rasa’el al-Imam Zayd (the section on Imam Zayd’s missives).

hauled them off to Yusuf ibn ‘Umar who tried to extract some information from them but was unable to do so. He threatened to kill them but still without any results. (A true Muslim on this type of mission is keener on his cause than on his life). When everything else failed they were executed. They were the first two martyrs in this instalment of eternal revolutionary pursuit.

Imām Zayd knew of their execution. He was upset about it. He knew that his program has had been exposed. He had to take control of this situation with courage and wisdom so that the revolution will not be preempted. He moved to the residence of Mu‘awiyah ibn Is-haq on the outskirts of Kufah. He called whomever he could of his companions to a meeting. They, henceforth, began to prepare in earnest for a military stand-off and any surprise attack by the regime. Yusuf ibn ‘Umar realized that he will no longer be able to easily take on Zayd and his companions. He was even afraid of being taken as a prisoner of war or that he may fall into a siege of sorts. He stayed in the city of al-Hirah at a distance of three miles from Kufah. There he was training his soldiers and receiving reinforcements from al-Sham. Both sides now were preparing for the inevitable.

The Battle Flow

At the residence of Mu‘awiyah ibn Is-haq in full military gear Imām Zayd appeared to his companions for the first time on a white mule. His garment was white, it concealed armour. His headdress was black. He had a sword and carried a copy of the Quran. He stood and said: “O People! Help me against the litter of al-Sham. I seek for anyone who does so a secure appearance on the Day of Resurrection until he passes the si-rat and enters paradise.”

Then he said: “Ask me. By Allah, whether it is a question pertaining to halal and haram (the lawful and the unlawful), or to the verses of obvious meanings and the verses of imperceptible meanings, or about proverbs and chronicles, I have an answer for you. I have not reached this position and taken this stand except after having read the Quran, honed the obligations and injunctions, the supererogatory and ethical conduct. I have come to know the revealed word as well as the unrevealed meaning (ta’wil). I came to understand ayats that abrogate and ayats that were abrogated, ayats of clear meaning and ayats of possible meanings, the specific and the general. In my household I am the most

versed on the requirements of the ummah, and I am on a foolproof and certain path to my Sustainer.²⁰⁹”

Then Imām Zayd looked around at his companions and realized that there were only a few of them. So he sent one of his most courageous men al-Qasem ibn Kathir to the streets of Kufah to call out to the public the motto: Ya Mansur amet (O Victorious! court death). People were called to Zayd’s camp. One contingent of Umayyad soldiers interrupted the troops and they fought on until he was wounded and fell to the ground. He was taken to Yusuf ibn ‘Umar who ordered the executioner to cut off his head. He became the first martyr to fall in combat.

Nasr Ibn Khuzaymah and Early Reinforcements

One of Imām Zayd’s outstanding companions was Nasr ibn Khuzaymah. He was known for his enthusiasm and devotion. He was to Imām Zayd what Malek al-Ashtar was to Imām ‘Ali (AS). He, like others, had left Kufah to garner support from adjacent areas and to prepare them for the military task ahead. Extenuating circumstances forced him and those with him to prematurely join Zayd’s detail. When he reached the environs of Kufah he was intercepted by a legion of Umayyad military personnel. He and his men engaged them in battle and routed them. He then proceeded to Imām Zayd’s camp where he raised the spirits of the fighters there.

Hoisting the Banner and Fulfilment of Deen

Imām Zayd began to arrange the military formations and assign military responsibilities to his men. In the first show of force Nasr ibn Khuzaymah stood on Zayd’s right while Mu‘awiyah ibn Is-haq was on his left. The flags of jihad were lifted and strips of cloth were tied to the head. Zayd was at long last happy. For the first time words were choking in his mouth because of his elation and high spirit as his dream is being fulfilled. He finally found himself where he always belonged: in the ranks of jihad practicing the ultimate ‘amr bi

²⁰⁹ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy (manuscript); Taysir al-Mataleb, p 78; Amali al-Saduq, p 286.

al-ma‘ruf and nahy ‘an al-munkar (commanding the good and interdicting the evil). He burst out saying: “Thank Allah that He has accomplished my deen for me. I was ashamed of myself thinking I would approach Rasul Allah while not being able to enjoin the good and forbid the wrong.”

Then he said to his companions: “By Allah! I do not care if in the process of implementing Allah’s Book and the Sunnah of His Prophet I would have to be thrown into a blazing fire after which I go on to Allah’s mercy. No one comes out today in support of me except that he will be in the divine company and in the presence of Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatimeh, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn (P). Folks of fiqh and intellectuals! I am Allah’s evidence against you. I extend my hand to you so that we all together are able to put Allah’s regulations into motion and to work Allah’s will as expressed in His Holy Book. We will share the war booty equally. Ask me about your deen; and if I am not able to answer all your questions then go and have anyone that satisfies you and is more knowledgeable than me to rule over you. By Allah! I have not lied since the time I could distinguish my right from my left hand. And I have never been in violation of Allah since I realized He will take me to task for it.”

Then he said: “O Allah! For You I have taken up arms and opposition. It is You I am seeking; I request your satisfaction with me. I am in pursuit of Your enemy. Be [O Allah] victorious to Yourself, Your Deen, Your Book, Your Prophet, Your Prophet’s household, and to the dearest of Your committed Muslims. O Allah! This is my effort to You and You are the source of help.²¹⁰”

Kufah Under Imām Zayd’s Control

Yusuf ibn ‘Umar sent some of his men to the streets of al-Kufah to terrorize its people. He called people to a meeting at the central masjid (mosque). The city was put under a curfew and people were banned from carrying or possessing arms. Rumors began to circulate about an army soon to arrive from al-Sham.

²¹⁰ Taysir al-Mataleb, p 80; Masabih Abi al-‘Abbas al-Hasani; Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy, Amali al-Murshid bi-Allah al-Ithnyniyah (all manuscripts).

But Imām Zayd along with his supporters went to break the siege imposed on the mosque and to reassure the people of Kufah. On his way to the masjid a fierce battle erupted between him and Umayyad infantry. Zayd scored a military victory there. When he reached the area of the mosque he identified himself by his motto and banners were passed through the windows of the mosque. Nasr ibn Khuzaymah was calling out: “People of Kufah come out of your humiliation to the ‘izzah/glory [of Allah] and from obscurity to the guidance [of Allah]. Come out to the prosperity of this world and the next because as you are you have neither.” But their old propensity was irresistible: treachery and betrayal. They apologized and said that they could not fight because of the [imaginary] siege and sanctions regime clamped on them.

Zayd’s companions spread throughout Kufah. Imām Zayd ordered them to publically declare: Whoever turns in his weapons will be safe. There were mopping up operations against the Umayyad remnants in the city. All of a sudden the Umayyad militia that had come from al-Hirah showed up. The Imām’s companions engaged them, the fighting was ferocious, they fought valiantly until the Umayyads retreated. Then Imām Zayd gathered his companions and said to them: “Fight for victory with me over the folks of al-Sham. By Allah! Anyone who does so I will take him by the hand to paradise. By Allah! If I but knew of anything better to satisfy Allah than to fight against these iniquitous forces from al-Sham I would do so. I remind you of what I said earlier: do not pursue to kill those who are in retreat, do not “finish off” those who are wounded, do not open up new fronts. I heard them cursing ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb. Take them on from all directions.”²¹¹”

The military duels continued between both camps. The Umayyad corps increased but the cavalry of Imām Zayd was decreasing. Imām Zayd turned to Nasr ibn Khuzaymah and told him: O Nasr! I’m afraid that the people of Kufah are repeating what they did with Imām Husayn! Nasr replied: I would give my life for you; by Allah I will continue to strike with my sword with you until I die!

²¹¹ Al-Minhaj al-Jaliy, (manuscript).

The Tragic Infliction

Imām Zayd and his companions fought with chivalry. They fought until the bitter end. None dare do them in. When the Umayyads figured it was useless to continue in this manner they barricaded themselves behind walls and hills. Then they used another type of warfare: they began shooting their arrows at Imām Zayd and his companions.

The sun began to set. And with it the radiating light of forbearance and sacrifice also set. Night fell on the hillsides. It covered the valleys and the plateaus. Voices were silent; weapons have spoken and the smell of death was in the air. Kufah was sad and in a state of sorrow when its inhabitants once again tarnished it with their treason and perfidy.

During those moments of deafening silence at the head of the forces the voice of Imām Zayd could be heard. He was saying: Al-Shahadah... al-Shahadah. I thank Allah that He has blessed me with it. People ran to the source of the voice and they found the epic Imām in a pool of blood. An arrow had penetrated his forehead. When he felt the sting of that arrow he raised his voice with those eternal words. He had expressed it all: his objective and his hopes.

It is noteworthy that Imām Zayd was born at sunrise and he died at sunset.

Imām Zayd's companions withdrew. The Umayyads thought that they did so because of nightfall. The companions gathered around their Imām. A physician came and realized that the arrow was fatal; it had penetrated his brain, a brain that was always thinking about the Muslims' well being and how to rid them of their social and political maladies.

The Eternal Will

Yahya came to his father's corpse crying. Blood was still oozing. The arrow was still embedded in the skull. Yahya took his shirt and wiped the blood off his father's face. He said to him: Glad tidings to you, the grandson of Allah's Prophet. You will be joining Allah's Prophet, 'Ali, Fatimeh, Khadijeh, al-Hasan, and al-Husayn. They will all be pleased with you.

The Imām said: "True my son; but what will you do?"

Yahya said: "I will struggle against them unless I find no support."

He said: "Yes, my son. Do struggle against them. By Allah, you are firmly right, and they are firmly wrong. Your casualties are in paradise and their casualties are in the fire."²¹²

That was the Imām's will. And that was his heritage; to reawaken the reality of this deen by taking on unjust rulers... loving what is good for people... and the ultimate sacrifice for such lofty goals.

He then parted for eternal peace and to the company of his Maker and His true promise:

Behold, Allah has bought of the committed Muslims their lives and their possessions, promising them paradise in return, [and so] they fight in Allah's cause, and slay, and are slain: a promise which in truth He has willed upon Himself in [the words of] the Torah, and the Gospel, and the Quran. And who could be more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Rejoice, then, in the bargain which you have made with Him: for this: this is the triumph supreme!
(Q. 9: 111).

Imām Zayd paid with his life for the Quran and for all the vital elements for the ummahs honour, pride, and dignity. He traded Allah for his soul... by sacrificing, by saying the truth. Nothing can be superior to this trade and this transaction. The Imām advanced and he could not have had anything better. He satisfied his living conscience. He raised the insignia of jihad very high although it bore his and his companions' blood. He raised it for all the peoples of the world as a guide to their freedom and self-respect.

²¹² Al-Masabih, by Abi al-'Abbas al-Hasani (manuscript), p 219; Al-Imam Yahya Ibn Zayd al-Imam al-Tha'er, p 11-12.

In the Aftermath of the Revolution

The Honourable Remains

Imām Zayd's revolution did not end with his death. It had delayed reaction effects as people began to break the chains of political slavery even though they knew this is an uphill struggle. Acts of violence by the regime continued against the followers of Imām Zayd and his ideas of freedom. Monarchs and military dynasties demonstrated vicious and virulent types of persecution beyond any imagination.

The Umayyads had the lion's share of this dreaded sordidness and malevolence. No custom or tradition could tame their vileness. A century and some years prior to Imām Zayd's martyrdom the Umayyad mistress Hind bint Abi Sufyan wanted to eat the liver of Hamzah, the shining shahid, after she had ripped his torso apart. At Karbala they mutilated the body of al-Husayn, the founding father of freedom lovers. They trampled his body with their horses, and now Imām Zayd's body.

These facts were known to the followers of Imām Zayd who paused to think how and where to bury his body lest it be subject to the same insanity. Then they all decided to bury him in a water creek.

Under the cloak of night, they stopped the flow of water. Then they dug the grave and placed the remains in it. After which they opened the water dikes to have it flow in its natural course. They all parted before fajr.

Upon hearing of Imām Zayd's death the Umayyads rejoiced. They were jubilant at a death that would have been mourned by Allah's Prophet (P). The Imām was killed and he no longer was there for them to see. But still they were percolating with hatred; and they would not simmer down until they found the grave and dug up the body and did with it what they did with the bodies of other shahids (martyrs).

The following day an excessive award was announced for anyone who could provide information about Imām Zayd's burial place. Some sick and pathetic individuals divulged the information. The Umayyads dug it up and brought the

body out of its grave. They could care less for any traditional or religious teachings on this matter.

It was not enough for them to have him killed, they had to dig, crucify, burn, and drown him²¹³. The remains were put on a camel taken to and dumped in front of the royal palace. There the head was decapitated.

Yusuf ibn ‘Umar al-Thaqafi had the head sent to al-Sham. After the head arrived and Hisham saw it he ordered that the head be put on display in all the provinces. A ploy by which he thought he would be able to terrorize the people from thinking of doing what Imām Zayd did. In other words, he wanted to kill them psychologically. The head passed through many lands until it reached al-Madinah. And at the grave-site of Allah’s Prophet (P) and in contempt and disrespect to the Prophet (P) the head was raised and posted for the public to see. The people of Madinah were summoned to the masjid (mosque) and told they had to disavow ‘Ali ibn Abi Taleb and Zayd ibn ‘Ali²¹⁴. Then the head was taken to Egypt and posted at the central masjid for days. After that the head was taken away and secretly buried there.

Al-Meqrizi said: His effects are still there between Keiman and Egypt. People go there for the barakah (blessing). At ‘Ashura people are especially keen on going there. Some said adu‘a there is accepted and the place has an air of light to it²¹⁵.

The body is said to have been nailed to a cross in a state of nakedness in Kufah. It is also said that spiders wove a web to cover the private parts of the body. Every time the spider-web was removed the spiders would spin another one.

Al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali ibn Jaber al-Habal the poet of Ahl al-Bayt composed some poetry describing this incident.

²¹³ Al-Saheb Ibn ‘Abbad’s poetry, see Al-Hada’eq al-Wardiyah.

²¹⁴ Tarikh al-Kufah, p. 365.

²¹⁵ Is‘af al-Raghibeen, p 41; Nur al-Absar, p.217; Al-Bahr al-Zakhkhar, Vol I, p 226.

In front of this unclothed body people would remember that devout and lovable personality of Zayd. Their eyes would water and their spirits would soar.

When the Umayyads realized that Zayd's words are reverberating and his positions were being rethought by the public they decided to have his remains obliterated. They ordered that his body be burned and his ashes be scattered on land, the air and the sea. Yusuf ibn 'Umar said: By Allah, O people of Kufah! I will have you eat him in your food and drink him in your water²¹⁶.

They brought down your body and torched it to the fire
They wanted to burn your honourable and pure remains
They in an act of hate threw you into the burning fire
This also expressed their hate for Muhammad (P)
and their hate for you to be given a normal burial²¹⁷.

All attempts at wiping out the effects of Imām Zayd failed. In the place where he was nailed a casket was constructed. People from many parts of the world still go there. Another casket was built at the same place in Egypt where his head was buried. And that also lives on to our present day.

Persecution of Imām Zayd's Supporters

Tyrannical rulers are in the habit of building their reputation on a heap of skulls belonging to their opponents. They go through the routine schedule of killing and banishing their adversaries. A tyrant will do practically anything to remain on his seat of power. And if he is able to capture one of his antagonists he tries to sample him with all types of torture as a deterrent for future potential adversaries. Hisham ibn 'Abd al-Melek and his "federal" employees were no exception. After they killed Imām Zayd they went after his followers. The Umayyad officials did all they could do to end any and all "remnants" of their opponents. They were liberal with their executions and "state terror." They did not spare women and children. They even went beyond the traditions and

²¹⁶ Tarikh al-Ya'qubi, Vol II, p. 256.

²¹⁷ Poetry by al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Jaber al-Habal.

norms of the jahiliyah (pre-Islamic practices). Historians have documented some gruesome and unhappy events. Here are some of them:

*A girl who had advised her mother to shelter a daughter of Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali was called in by the Umayyad authorities. When she arrived she was given one hundred lashes and her house was demolished.

*A woman who had assisted Imām Zayd at one time was arrested. When she came to court the verdict was that her hand and foot should be cut off. She pleaded to have her foot cut off first so that she may manage her clothes before her hand is cut! But they cut both off and did not stop the blood flow and she bled to death. Then her husband was summoned only to have his head cut off²¹⁸.

*Yusuf ibn ‘Umar sent for Imām Zayd’s wife who was from the tribe of Ezd. She was brought to him. When she entered his court he said to her: O enemy of Allah! You married Zayd ibn ‘Ali? She said: yes of course I did. And had he asked for your daughter’s hand I would have given her to him. Yusuf ibn ‘Umar was enraged. He said: take her clothes off and bring me the whip! She said: woe to you the enemy of Allah. I am a woman; how dare you order my clothes be ripped from me? He said: do not mind her; tear her clothes off and then she was lashed repeatedly and mercilessly. She said to Hisham: How do you do this. I am a distant aunt of yours. I am from the tribe of Ezd and so is your mother? Yusuf ibn ‘Umar said: damned is he who is your nephew. She said: Yes, and damned is she who is less a family person than you... your mother. Then Yusuf ibn ‘Umar said to his henchmen: Kill her.

They all began to hit and strike her violently and savagely, while she would say: I cannot believe you are a person attached to freedom; you cannot be an Arab when you want to kill by the sword; you slave of the Thamud clan.

²¹⁸ Ansab al-Ashraf, p. 255.

She was thus tortured until she died; may Allah bless her. Then Hisham gave his orders that her body be dumped onto the street. Her cousins waited for nightfall and went to recover her body and bury it²¹⁹.

A woman having the fragile physical capacity for such persecution, a woman who was created for feminine and family matters even she could not escape the momentum of revolution and thus was exposed to what is characteristically unfeminine. She registered an honourable resistance and a spirit lifting example for jihad for all women everywhere.

These were glimpses that were related to us by historians and there are many more that litter the course of the Umayyad past. But what was not recorded by history may have been even more tragic.

The Consequence of Oppressors

A victim relieves himself of agony and hard-times by releasing warm tears down his cheeks. Some of life's circumstances are unkind. But this universe operates in a larger sphere of divine justice. Allah has promised to take action against totalitarian rulers: And do not think that Allah is unaware of what evildoers are doing: He but grants them respite until the Day when their eyes will stare in horror... (Q. 14: 42).

This divine action may begin in this world before the next: such is their ignominy in this world. But in the life to come [yet more] awesome suffering awaits them... (Q. 5: 33).

Allah expedited his retributive action against those who had a role to play in killing Imām Zayd (AS) and mutilating his body. Historians tell us that the butcher 'Ali ibn Abdullah the Abbasid took Hisham's body out of his grave and ordered that the body be struck until it is shredded. Upon extracting the body from the grave it appeared to have been preserved with some astringent. Then his body was put on a cross and then it was incinerated. After that the

²¹⁹ Al-Futuh, Vol VIII, p. 123.

ashes were thrown to the wind. What was done to Imām Zayd by Hisham, in a twist of events, was then done to Hisham²²⁰.

As for Yusuf ibn ‘Umar al-Thaqafi he was killed. A rope was attached to his corpse and children dragged his body in the streets of Damascus. Then the body was cut to pieces and raised on the city doors of Damascus²²¹. Abu Ghassan al-Thaqafi said: the people of al-Sham told me they saw the corpse of Yusuf ibn ‘Umar with ropes attached to his limbs and being dragged around²²².

Yusuf ibn ‘Umar’s chief of police Kharrash ibn Hawshub (who supervised the burning of Imām Zayd’s body) was lashed a thousand times. His stomach was slit open, and then his body was thrown to the dogs. After that it, too, was incinerated.

Another degenerate and pervert by the name of al-‘Ala’ ibn Zaid who came with a load of wood and sold it to stoke the fire that was burning Imām Zayd’s corpse and who was reported to have said: I came with this load as a service to Allah to have this pervert (meaning Imām Zayd) burned. And it was less than three weeks after that and this same person burned inside a home while having a (homosexual) affair with a lad²²³.

Imām Zayd: A Continuing Revolution

Imām Zayd’s movement was the first spark that fueled a popular explosion which eventually dismantled the oppressive Umayyad dynasty. All the Umayyad pomp and pride were gone forever. The phoney masks were ripped off of that regime. And even though Imām Zayd became a martyr, his movement did not end with his death. Each drop of his blood became a flame that burns Allah’s

²²⁰ Nur al-Absar, p. 215; Ma’ather al-Abrar, (manuscript), Al-Ithninyeh, (manuscript).

²²¹ Amali al-Murshed bi-Allah al-Ithninyeh (manuscript).

²²² Tarikh Dimashq, by Ibn ‘Asaker, 29/99 (abridged).

²²³ Ghurbal al-Zaman, p. 120; Amali al-Murshed bi-Allah al-Ithninyeh, (manuscript).

enemies and glows up showing the rest of us the way. His words still reverberate in the ear of history.

Al-Ya‘qubi said: “When Zayd was killed and the ghastly details followed many supporters of the Prophet’s descendants (Shi‘is) began to agitate in Khurasan. They gradually began to pick up momentum; their numbers began to increase and the facts began to circulate. Many people were now aware of the Umayyad farce and how they harmed and injured the Prophet’s household. News spread far and near.²²⁴”

Several years after Imām Zayd was martyred his son Imām Yahya led the eternal march for justice in Khurasan following his father’s line. He launched his campaign by saying:

“Son of Zayd! Did not Zayd say whoever loves life lives shamefully? Be like Zayd! You are his passion and rest in the shaded shades of bliss.”

The movement had its ripple effects as time passed by until the rise of Imām Muhammad ibn Abdullah, known as al-Nafs al-Zakiyah (the pristine spirit). He revolted in al-Madinah and shook the thrown of the Abbasid state (in Baghdad). He remembers Imām Zayd with these words: “By Allah! Zayd has revived Prophetic concepts that have long been effaced. He worked on correcting what had gone zig-zag of this deen. We cannot but be enlightened by him.²²⁵”

To follow him in revolutionary succession was al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali al-Fakhkhi in al-Madinah. He revolted against the Abbasids also. He remembers Imām Zayd with these words: “One of the virtues of Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali is that he took a stand for Allah and called people to the Book of Allah and to a struggle against tyrannical rulers. By Allah! Zayd ibn ‘Ali has opened the door of paradise for us. Enter therein peacefully and securely.²²⁶”

²²⁴ Tarikh al-Ya‘qubi, Vol. II, p. 256.

²²⁵ Al-Tuhaf Sharh al-Zulaf, p 28.

²²⁶ Al-Rawd al-Nadir, Vol I, p. 105.

The revolutionary fallout reached Yemen. In it Imām al-Hadi stated in revolutionary defiance: “I yearn for a day like the day of Zayd ibn ‘Ali.”²²⁷

The echoes and rumbles of revolution were to be found everywhere. Revolts erupted in Iraq, Yemen, Hejaz, Morocco, northern Persia and central Asia and almost everywhere there is tyranny.

Revolutionaries will never disappear or die. When there is oppression there has to be resistance and opposition.

Zayd’s Legacy

Some Names of Zayd’s Companions and Narrators

Imām Zayd left us with a wealth of enduring ideas. He drew on his blood and he inked them with his pen. His blood traced for us the road to freedom. He also left us with a community of first-rate disciples who went to faraway lands preaching deen as it is: not tainted by officials and not second to the status quo. Some of Zayd’s remarkable disciples and narrators were:

*Abu Khaled al-Waseti who was imprisoned until after Imām Zayd (AS) was killed.

*Abu Haneefah al-Nu‘man ibn Thabet who spent two years in the scholarly circle of Imām Zayd. About these two years Abu Haneefah says: “Had it not been for these two years I would have died down.”

*Shu‘bah ibn al-Hajjaj who used to preface his reference to Imām Zayd by saying: We were told by the incomparable of Hashemites.

*Mansur ibn al-Mu‘tamer an Imām and a hafez. He would go with Imām Zayd to the ‘ulema and call on them to be involved in the jihad with tears and watery eyes.

²²⁷ Al-Ifadah fi Tarikh al-A‘immah al-Sadah.

*‘Uthman ibn ‘Umair Abu al-Yaqthan – the faqih.

*Isma‘il ibn ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Suddi the well known mufasssir (exegesist).

*Abu Hamzah Thabet ibn Dinar al-Thumali, he and his three sons went to the battlefield with Zayd.

*‘Abdullah ibn al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali otherwise known as al-Kamel.

*Harun ibn Sa‘d al-‘Ajali.

*Abu al-Jarud Ziyad ibn al-Munthir al-A‘ma.

*Jaber ibn Yazid al-Ja‘fi.

*Imām Yahya ibn Zayd (AS).

*Ja‘far ibn Muhammad al-Sadeq.

*Isma‘il ibn Abi Khaled al-Ahmasi... and others²²⁸.

His Books and Missives

He left us with a compilation of books and letters which are considered to be the first ever written books in the history of Islamic culture. Following are some of his works:

1- Majmu‘ al-Imām Zayd. In it are Zayd’s quotes and fiqhi discourses. It has been published under the title: Musnad al-Imām Zayd under the supervision of the eminent scholar ‘Abd al-Wase‘ ibn Yahya al-Wase‘i, may Allah bless him. We are in the process of reviewing and reproducing it with a new format.

2- Tafsir Gharib al-Quran, recently published and verified by Dr. Hasan Muhammad al-Hakim.

²²⁸ Two hundred and fifty names appear from bibliographic sources as Imam Zayd’s companions and narrators. Most are well known. They are mentioned in my book: Al-Imam Zayd Dirasatun wa Tahlil (Imam Zayd: A Study and an Analysis).

3- Manasek al-Hajj wa al-‘Umrah, printed in Baghdad.

4- Majmu‘ Rasa’el wa Kutub al-Imām Zayd. I have just finished reviewing and verifying it. It is now being printed. It contains the following:

a.) Resalat al-Iman which explains the meaning of Iman and some details about the offenders who are people of the qiblah.

b.) Resalat al-Safwah: it defines who Allah’s elites are, it also speaks about Ahl al-Bayt and how Allah chose them to guide people.

c.) Resalat Madh al-Qillah wa Thamm al-Kathrah, this is a dialogue between Imām Zayd and people from al-Sham. In it he quotes many ayats from the Quran that hail the “minority” and assail the “majority.”

d.) Resalat Tethbit al-Wasiyah: in it there is evidence that the Prophet (P) willed that ‘Ali (AS) be his successor.

e.) Resalat Tethbit al-Imāmah: in it there are admonitions that ‘Ali (AS) was the most qualified to lead after the Prophet’s death.

f.) Resalat ela ‘ulema al-Ummah which is Zayd’s letter to the scholars of the ummah in which he calls on them to bear their responsibilities and support him in his revolution.

g.) Resalat al-Radd ‘ala al-Mujberah: these are a few pages that express Zayd’s opinion about predetermination, meant to be a respond to extremist fatalists.

h.) An exchange between Zayd and people of al-Sham concerning the death of ‘Uthman and the minority vs. majority affair.

i.) Al-Resalat al-Madaniyah: answers to questions he received from al-Madinah.

j.) A compilation which includes some of Zayd’s dialogues, answers, sermons, poetry, missives, and short presentations.

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- p.) Meanings of some unclear verses in the Quran.
- q.) Manasek al-Hajj wa al-‘Umrah

Closing

That was Imām Zayd ibn ‘Ali. A scholar and a knight, a leader and an ascetic. His lifetime is an open book and a discourse for action and movement. His personality is the prototype for people with an Islamic mission.

His was a life dedicated for the betterment of the ummah, full with honesty and altruism, all combined in one character.

He fell as a martyr for us, future generations. He wanted us to have the values and concepts embedded in true Islam and not the Islam of forgery and contamination. He did not want us to receive a contorted Islam; he saw to it that his blood was shed and his body was mutilated for us to obtain a fresh Islam.

It behooves us to be appreciative of Imām Zayd’s sacrifices by moving forward in the same direction he did, to preserve our impeccable Islam. He was interested in having the Muslims draw from the source of Islamic knowledge and the Islamic model of behavior which Allah’s Prophet (P) offered us all. Be faithful. Keep the faith, and do not disparage their sacrifices and their heritage.

Allah remains our source of inspiration and our guide. All thanks are due to Him the Lord and Sustainer of the universe. And may His peace and blessings be upon Muhammad and his pure and polite progeny.

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