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The Countenance of the Imams' (peace be upon them) Conduct

Question:

Why were the conduct, manner, and methods of the Imams (peace be upon them) not the same in regard to performance of their duty?

Answer:

Contrary to what is said, the conduct of the Imams (peace be upon them) in confronting various events that were similar to an extent was not very divergent, since all of their conduct was within the scope of the principles and agenda of Shiaism, which are the original principles of Islam itself. All of their actions and programs demonstrated the truth of Islam and its redemptive teachings. And if we see that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon them) each acted in one way in one important phase of their noble lives and in another way in another phase, this is in entirety a result of the commandments of Islam and the Qur'an.

This is because Islam has both the command;

إِلَّا أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً.

"... except that you protect themselves from them (and practice dissimulation for the sake of more important goals)."¹

and the command

إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ.

“... except one who is compelled while his heart is tranquil with faith.”²

And it also has the command

جَاهِدِ الْكُفَّارَ وَالْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْغُلُظَّ عَلَيْهِمْ.

“Struggle against the disbelievers and hypocrites and be harsh towards them.”³

as well as

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ.

“Act with compassion and accept their excuse, and command towards goodness, and turn away from the ignorant (and fight them not).”⁴

وَلَا تَسْتَوِي الْحَسَنَةُ وَلَا السَّيِّئَةُ ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ.

“Nor are good and evil alike; repel evil with what is most good.”⁵

Likewise, the Qur’an says

فَمَنْ اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ فَاعْتَدُوا عَلَيْهِ بِمِثْلِ مَا اعْتَدَى عَلَيْكُمْ.

“So whoever transgresses with respect to you, transgress with respect to him in a like manner.”⁶

And it also says with regard to executing the punishment for adulterers:

وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ.

“And let not compassion for them overtake you in executing Allah’s command.”⁷

Overall, the conditions and situation of the Imam’s (peace be upon them) era demanded the very same form of conduct for the protection of the Islamic principles and the essence of Shiaism that they in practice adopted, and of course the Shi’a must follow the path of true Islam, which the Imam recognizes better than all else and doesn’t deviate from even an inch.

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1. Surah Ali-Imran (3), Verse 28
 2. Surah al-Nahl (16), Verse 106
 3. Surah al-Tahrim (66), Verse 9
 4. Surah al-A`raf (7), Verse 199
 5. Surah al-Fussilat (41), Verse 34
 6. Surah al-Baqarah (2), Verse 194
 7. Surah al-Nur (24), Verse 2

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