

A Glimpse Into The Leadership Style Of Imam Al-Hadi

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**Translated by
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The journal looks at different issues and perspectives that Imam Al-Hadi ('a) had in regards how he dealt with various issues when leading the Muslim Ummah from under the radar in a secretive manner. It gives you a glimpse of the knowledge and Akhlaq of Imam Al-Hadi ('a) as-well as showcasing unshakable faith when pressed with unique circumstances.

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Abstract: Imam Ali Ibn Muhammad, known as "al-Hadi" or "the one who guides" was the tenth of the 12 Imams in Shi'a Islam. After his father's assassination at the will of the Abbasid caliph al-Mu'tasim, Imam

alHadi assumed the official role of his father. Known for his knowledge and wisdom, he instructed a vast number of students, predominantly from Egypt, Persia, and Iraq. In the meantime, the new caliph, al-Mutawakkil, kept a close eye on the new leader. The following paper offers a brief account of Imam al-Hadi's exceptional leadership, including his influence in the social spheres given his knowledge and nobility, as well as his struggles against the Abbasids.

Introduction

Imam al-Hadi was born on the 15th of Dhul-Hijjah, 212 A. H. in a place near Medina called Seria¹. His father was the 9th Imam, Imam al-Jawad, and his mother was "Samanah al-Maghribiyyah", a virtuous and pious woman who kept vigil, worshipping God.

He became Imam in the year 220 A.H. at the age of 8 after martyrdom of his father. During his 33 years of Imamate, he was contemporary with several Abbasid caliphs:

1. Mu'tasim, Ma'mun's brother (217– 227);
2. Wathiq, Mu'tasim's son (227–232);
3. Mutawakkil, Wathiq's brother (232–248);
4. Mustansir, Mutawakkil's son (for six months);
5. Mu'tasim, Mustansir's cousin (248–252);
6. Mu'taz, Mustansir's other son (252–255).

In the rule of the last above-mentioned Abbasid caliph, Imam al Hadi was poisoned and martyred by his agents. He was buried in the city of Samarra, in his own house.

In this article, his style of leadership in the dark age of the above mentioned tyrant Abbasid caliphs is reviewed, as well as the measures he took during his Imamate are investigated. Using historical sources and evidence, his decisions and wise stances in illuminating Shi'a thought against deviant domestic groups will be identified as well.

Imam Al-Hadi's Struggle Against The Abbasids

1. His Influence In Court Circles

Imam al-Hadi's wise methods and scientific and spiritual virtues were widespread among governmental agents and politicians of his time. For example, when Harthamah took him to Baghdad, Is-haaq Ibn Ibrahim Tahiri, who was Baghdad's governor, told him, know Mutawakkil (i.e., he is mean and

malicious). If you provoke him to kill Ali Ibn Muhammad, he will do so, and the Prophet will be your enemy on the Day of Judgement." And he said in response, "By God, I have not seen him doing anything but showing good behaviours and doing good deeds.[2](#)

A great Turk emir at the service of the Abbasid Caliphate, Wasif Turki, also threatened that if the Imam is harmed in the slightest, Harthamah would be responsible for it.

Imam al-Hadi was also revered by court men, and the workers were sincerely devoted to him. Upon his arrival in various Islamic countries, slaves and workers in their courts respected the Imam so much that it aroused jealousy in some of the court men.

A. The Problem-Solver

When the Abbasid caliph, Mutawakkil, was on his deathbed due to an abscess on his skin, no doctor dared to perform surgery on him. His mother then made a vow to grant a large sum of her money to Imam al-Hadi if her son were cured.

The Abbasid vizier, Fat-h Ibn Khaqan, then suggested Mutawakkil to send someone to the Imam and ask him about the cure, and Mutawakkil agreed. Mutawakkil's messenger went to the Imam and brought back his response: "Crush the excrement of a sheep excrement under your feet and mix it with rosewater, then put the ointment on the abscess. By God's will, it will work." Upon hearing this, some people started laughing, but Fat-h was adamant about trying the Imam's recommendation. After doing so, and the abscess broke open and the pus in it came out. Mutawakkil's mother became delighted and sent 10,000 dinars sealed with her signature to the Imam.[3](#)

B. His Vast Knowledge

According to Yahya Ibn Harthamah, "One day in the spring when it was sunny, we were surprised when we saw Imam al-Hadi come out wearing a raincoat. However, when we arrived in the plains, it became cloudy and then heavily rainy, rendering Imam Hadi the only one immune to it. He turned to me and said, "I know that you were surprised and assumed I predicted the rain based on my Imamate knowledge, but I have lived in the plains and am aware about the rain clouds. This morning, there blew a gust of wind which I could smell rain from, so I came out prepared for it."[4](#)

His infinite knowledge was known to society and government officials. The Imam took this opportunity to invite people to the divine path when the Abbasid repressed any activity that could be seen by them as a challenge or threat. Of course, this was only possible through his wisdom, persistence, and patience in the way of God.

C. His Noble Conduct

Once Abu-'Abdillah Muhammad Ibn Qasim Batha'i, a descendant of Abu-Talib but a follower of

Abbasids, badmouthed the Imam to Mutawakkil, saying, "You can find a lot of money and weapons in the Ali Ibn Muhammad's house." So Mutawakkil ordered Sa'id Hajib to raid his house at night and bring him all the money and weapons he could find.

Ibrahim Ibn Muhammad told about this event, quoting Hajib: "We went to the Imam's house at night. Climbing a ladder, I went up to the roof and into the yard when suddenly, the Imam called me from a room, saying: "Stay there until they bring you a candle!" Soon after they brought me one, and I went to his room. He was sitting on his prayer mat wearing a coarse cloak and facing the qiblah. He told me, "These are the rooms, go and search them." I did not find anything in the rooms, but the bags of gold coins sealed with the name of Mutawakkil's mother and some other bags with the same seal. Imam al-Hadi said, "And this is the prayer mat." I unrolled it and found a sword without a sheath.

I took that sword and those bags to Mutawakkil. Seeing his mother's seal on the bags, Mutawakkil sent for his mother and asked her about those bags. She said, "When you were sick, I made a vow to give 10,000 dinars to him; these bags are those coins. The Imam did not even open the bags!" Mutawakkil opened the last bag which contained 400 dinars. Then he ordered to take back the bags and the sword to the Imam.

I did so but was ashamed of my behaviour, so I told the Imam, "O' My master! I was very ashamed to enter your house without your permission, but I was ordered to do so. The Imam said:

وَسَيَعْلَمُ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا أَيَّ مُنْقَلِبٍ يَنْقَلِبُونَ

"And the wrongdoers will soon know at what goal they will end up" (26:227).[5](#)

On the surface, Mutawakkil treated the Imam politely, but he constantly watched Imam al-Hadi and could not bear his approval and fame in society. At times ordered his men to imprison the Imam, confiscate his property, and search his house, while plotting to make the Imam decline in popularity.

For example, when Mutawakkil forcefully brought the Imam to Samarra, he did not go to the Imam and instead ordered Imam al-Hadi to come him, after the Imam was kept for a while in "Khan al-Sa'alik", a gathering place of beggars.

A follower of Imam al-Hadi, Salih Ibn Sa'id, went to the Imam and told him, "May I be sacrificed for you! They wanted to turn off your light and steal your majesty by keeping you in this inappropriate place." Using his miraculous power, Imam al-Hadi drew Salih Ibn Sa'id's attention to his holy hand, where Salih saw green gardens and magnificent palaces. He could not believe his eyes at the wondrous scenery. Then Imam al-Hadi told him, "Wherever we are, these places are prepared for us. We are not in the dwelling of poor."[6](#)

This way, Mutawakkil's plots were foiled one after another. Every day new divine and spiritual aspects of

Imam's personality were revealed to all people, including the elite. Thus, Mutawakkil' s anger and resentment increased to the extent that he could not tolerate any more decided to kill the Imam.[7](#)

2. Responses To Legal And Intellectual Questions

Another way in which Imam al-Hadi led the Islamic Ummah was his answers to legal and scientific questions. Two instances are referred to below:

A. In the rule of Mutawakkil, a Christian man committed adultery with a Muslim woman although he accepted Islam and uttered the shahadatayn afterwards. When he was arrested and taken to Mutawakkil, the prominent scholar Yahya Ibn Aktham gave a judgement as follows: "His becoming Muslim cleansed him of the evilness of his disbelief and illegal deed, and it is not necessary to punish him legally." Other jurists said that he should be punished legally three times, while other jurists gave different judgements. Mutawakkil was puzzled and asked the Imam for the correct verdict.

Imam al-Hadi said, "He should be whipped to death". Yahya Ibn Aktham and other jurists protested, saying, "O' emir! There is no such judgment in the Qur'an and Sunnah; ask him for the reasons and evidence for this fatwa." Imam al-Hadi referred to verses 84 and 85 of the chapter al-Ghafir.[8](#)

B. According to Abu-'Abdullah Ziyadi, when Mutawakkil was poisoned, he made a vow that if he recovered, he would give a large sum of money in charity. He became well and asked the jurists about the amount of "a lot of money", which they disagreed on. Hasan, who was the guard of Mutawakkil, told him, "O' Amir-al Mu'minin! What reward will I receive for answering this question?" Mutawakkil said, "If you give the correct answer, I will grant you 10,000 dirhams; otherwise, I will whip you one hundred times."

Hasan accepted this, went to Imam al-Hadi, and asked about the amount of "a lot of money." The Imam replied, "He should give 80 dirhams in charity." Mutawakkil asked, "Why?" Hasan went to Imam al-Hadi again, and the Imam said, "Because God told His Prophet:

لَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ فِي مَوَاطِنَ كَثِيرَةٍ

"Allah has certainly helped you in many situations, [and you triumphed over enemies]" (9:25).

And God helped His Prophet on eighty occasions." Al-Hasan told this Qur'anic reason to Mutawakkil, who accepted it and gave him 10,000 dirhams.[9](#)

3. Secret Struggles

A measure of Imam al-Hadi as the leader was to manage secret struggles against the then dictatorial and totalitarian government.

A. Muhammad Ibn Dawood Qummi and Muhammad Talhi related: From Qum and some areas around it, we were taking some properties including gifts, religious taxes, money vowed to be given to the Imams (*nothoorat*), and jewellery to Imam al-Hadi. On our way, the Imam's messenger met and told us to go back because it was not an appropriate time to hand them in. Hence, we returned and kept those properties. Then the Imam ordered us to send him the properties on the camels he had dispatched to us without a cameleer, and we did so. After a while, when we went to the Imam, he told us, "Look at the properties you have sent me!" We found them intact in the Imam's house.[10](#)

B. According to Muhammad Ibn Sharaf: I was walking with Imam al-Hadi in Medina. The Imam asked me, "Are you Sharaf's son?" I said, "Yes." Then I was going to ask him a question, but he said, "We are walking in the main road and it is not appropriate to raise a question here."[11](#) On numerous similar occasions, the Imam hid his activities and took measures in a way that government agents could notice them.

4. His Struggle Against The Deviant Thoughts

A. Opposing Extremists (Ghullat)

In the time of Imam al-Hadi, the *Ghulat* went to extremes about the 14 Infallibles who considered them having a status as high as God Himself, and misguided others through their false ideologies. Through his wise sayings, strategic behaviours, and insightful letters, the Imam distinguished between the truth and extremism. He warned the true friends of the Ahl ul-Bayt not to incline to these false ideas. Among these deviated people were Ali Ibn Hasakah Qummi, Qasim Yaqtini, Hassan Ibn Muhammad Babaye Qummi, Muhammad Ibn Nasir, Fars Ibn Hatam Qazwini, etc, all of whom Imam al-Hadi was opposed to.

B. His Sayings And Letters

A companion of Imam al-Hadi wrote a letter to him about the false and deviated beliefs of Ali Ibn Hasakah: "May I be sacrificed for you, O' my master! Ali in Hasakah believes that you are the eternal God and considered himself a prophet sent by you to invite people towards you." Imam al-Hadi wrote in response, "Ibn Hasakah is a liar; I do not consider him a friend of mine. By God, He did not send Prophet Muhammad and the other prophets before him but to propagate monotheism, prayer, zakat, hajj, and wilayah. Prophet Muhammad only invited people to One God, and we – his successors – are God's servants who do not associate anyone with Him.

If we obey God, we will be covered by His mercy, and if we disobey His orders, we will be punished. We do not have any authority (*hujjat*) on God; it is He who *hujjat* over us and His creatures. I dissociate from the one who said such words and seek refuge in God from him. You should also keep away from such people, put them under pressure, and refute their views. If you have access to such a person, throw a stone at him and break his head."[12](#)

C. His Measures

At first, Fars Ibn Mahooyeh Qazwini was a close companion and deputy of Imam al-Hadi, but then he was deviated from the path of Islam and Imamate, and then deviated people from Islam and invited them to innovations in it by expressing blasphemous beliefs. He who was known as Imam al-Hadi's deputy by people received religious taxes and spent them contrary to the interests of Islam and Imam al-Hadi's ideas. A reason for his deviation was his love for this world and high positions.

Fars Ibn Hatam went to such great extremes in treading the path of falsehood, preaching seditions, and disuniting the Shi'as to the point where Imam al-Hadi issued a fatwa of his apostasy and heresy: "Fars, may Allah curse him! Call himself my deputy while he is an agitator and mischief-maker, and he calls people to innovations in Islam. It is obligatory to kill him, and whoever kills him, he saves me from Fars' evil, and I will guarantee the killer the heaven."[13](#)

After a while, because no one killed him, Imam al-Hadi assigned a brave, devoted, and reliable Shi'a, Junayd, to this task, and he killed Fars as soon as he found the opportunity.[14](#)

His Struggles Against Sufism

According to Muhammad Ibn Abi-Khattab: "I was at Imam al Hadi's presence in Masjid al-Nabi along with a group of his companions. Suddenly, several Suns came in, made a circle, and chanted "There is no god but Allah." Imam al-Hadi told us, "Do not pay attention to these hypocrite imposters. They are the allies of Satan who ruin the fundamentals of Islam. They pretend to have piety and yet run after worldly comfort and keep a vigil to have access to delicious foods." Then he added, "The one who visits them, dead or alive, it is as if he met Satan and the idolaters."

At this time, a Shi'a asked, "Even if they believe in your Imamate and rights?" Imam al-Hadi firmly looked at him and said, "Give up these incorrect assumptions; the one who has accepted our Imamate does not act contrary to our conduct and satisfaction. Don't you know that these are from the most abject Sufi group?" Then he said, "All Sufis are considered our enemies, and their conduct and ways are different from ours. They are magus and Christian, and they try to turn off the light of God:

يُرِيدُونَ لِيُطْفِئُوا نُورَ اللَّهِ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ مُتَّمٌ نُورِهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْكَافِرُونَ

"They desire to put out the light of Allah with their mouths, but Allah shall perfect His light though the faithless should be averse" (61:8).[15](#)

Imam Al-Hadi And The Waqifiyyah

The Waqifiyyah was a deviant group who stood against the Imam, as they believed Imam al-Kazim was the last Imam, the promised Mahdi. Imam al-Hadi took a firm stance against them. Once a Shi'a wrote in

a letter, "May I be sacrificed for you! Do you know these people? Should we curse them in *qunoot* (supplication) of our daily prayers?" Imam al-Hadi wrote in response, "Yes, curse them in *qunoot*."[16](#)

5. His Reviving Ghadir And Imamate

Imam al-Hadi's also disseminated the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt teachings during that dark age. When Mu'tasim called Imam al Hadi to his court on the day of Ghadir, the Imam rushed to the shrine of his forefather, Imam Ali, and revived his virtues by giving an eloquent speech in the form of a *ziyarah* (salutation) about Ghadir and Imam Ali's life. Imam al-Hadi emphasised many important points in the Ghadir *Ziyarah*:

Imam Ali's virtues in the Qur'an, including the verses of wilayah, the night Imam Ali slept in the Prophet's room when the Prophet he migrated from Mecca to Medina), invitation (*balagh*), and *jihad* (greater struggle) as well as other verses were referred to in this *ziyarah*. Above all, there is a reference to the historic event of Ghadir which is the main concept in Imam al-Hadi's words.

In an excerpt from this *ziyarah*, Imam al-Hadi told his forefather, Imam Ali: "O Amir-al-Mu'minin! I testify that whoever has doubt about you has not believed in the Prophet, who is considered trustworthy by God. And the one who backtracks from your wilayah has backtracked from the religion that God – the Lord of worlds – has chosen for us and has completed with your wilayah on Ghadir. I also testify that you are the meaning of this verse:

وَإِنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ

***"This indeed is my straight path, so follow it, and do not follow [other] ways"* (6: 153).**[17](#)

Ziyarah Al-Jami'a Or The Charter Of Imamate

In addition to *ziyarah* of Ghadir, Imam al-Hadi presented his lasting work, *Ziyarah al-Jami'a*, a salutation like a complete course of Imam studies, to the seekers of the Ahl ul-Bayt to delineate the high status of the infallible Imams. Regarding this *ziyarah*, Allamah Majlisi said, "This *ziyarah* has the most authentic authority and the most comprehensive content about the Imams. It is also the most eloquent and the most important of *ziyarahs*."[18](#)

6. Taking Opportunities

When the spiteful talked behind the Imam's back to Mutawakkil, telling him that there were weapons, letters, and money sent from the Shi'as to the Imam al-Hadi's house, and that the Imam intended to rise against the Abbasid government, Mutawakkil sent his deputies to raid his house although they could not find anything. Rather, they found Imam al-Hadi in a closed room wearing coarse clothes sitting on the

ground, worshipping God and reciting the Qur'an. They arrested him and took him to Mutawakkil, reporting what they had seen there. Impressed by the Imam's grandeur and awe, Mutawakkil involuntarily respected him and seated him beside his own throne.

However, he disrespectfully offered the wine glass in his hand to the Imam. Imam al-Hadi swore, "My flesh and blood were not tainted with such things; exempt me from drinking it!" Mutawakkil accepted his excuse but told the Imam, "Recite a poem!" The Imam said, "I recite poetry very rarely." Mutawakkil said, "You must." At his insistence, the Imam recited a poem by which everybody in that gathering was touched, and they burst into tears. The wine party turned into a mourning session, and they broke the wine glasses. The poem he read was:

[The arrogant defiant people and powerful kings] spent nights on the summits of mountains [at the heights of government] while strong men were guarding them, but the summits could not save from their death.

After living gloriously for a while, they were pulled down from the safe places and placed in the holes [graves]. What a disagreeable abode!

After they had been buried, a caller called out, "Where are those expensive and fancy bracelets, crowns, and clothes? Where are those faces grown affluently and respected by being kept behind curtains? The grave answered instead of them, "Now worms are fighting overeating their faces! They ate and drank for a long time in this world, but now they are being eaten!"¹⁹

1. Seria is a village located near Medina (about 6 kilometres off) and established by Imam al-Kazim.

2. Anwar ul-Bahiyyah, pp.449–450.

3. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, p. 198.

4. Anwar ul-Bahiyyah, pp.288–289.

5. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, pp. 199–200.

6. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, pp. 132–133.

7. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, pp. 194–195.

8. The Verses are the following:

فَمَمَّا رَأَوْا بِأَسْنَانِهِمْ قَاتُلُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَحْدَهُ وَكَفَرُوا بِمَا كُنَّا بِهِ مُشْرِكِينَ

"But when they saw Our punishment, they said: We believe in Allah alone and we deny what we used to associate with Him" (40:84).

فَلَمْ يُكُنْ يَنْفَعُهُمْ إِيمَانُهُمْ لَمَّا رَأَوْا بِأَسْنَانِهِمْ سُنُنَّ اللَّهِ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ فِي عَبَادِهِ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْكَافِرُونَ

"But their belief was not going to profit them when they had seen Our punishment; (this is) Allah's law, which has indeed obtained in the matter of His servants, and there the unbelievers are lost" (40:85).

9. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, pp. 162–163.

- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50. p. 185.
- [11.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, p. 176.
- [12.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 25, p.317; Rijal Kushshi, p. 518.
- [13.](#) Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith, vol. 14, p.259.
- [14.](#) Rijal al-Hadith, vol. 14, p.260: Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 50, p.205.
- [15.](#) Safinat al-Bihar. Vol., 2, p.58; the new ed., vol. 5, pp199–200.
- [16.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 82, p. 203; Rijal Kushshi, p.391.
- [17.](#) Hidayat az-Za'irin, p.176.
- [18.](#) Hidayat az-Za'irin, vol. 99, p.144.
- [19.](#) Hidayat az-Za'irin, vol. 50, pp. 211–212

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