

Book Introduction

Kitab al-Irshad: the book of guidance into the lives of the twelve Imams. Written by Shaykh Al – Mofid; translated by I. K. A. Howard; with a preface by Saed Rajai Khorassani.

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Abstract: *Kitab al-irshad* written by Shaykh Al-Mofid and as its title suggests, it is a book of guidance for whole of mankind. It sets out to name the twelve Shi'a Imams and briefly describes the circumstances of the Imamate of each Imam, the miracles performed by which they gave evidences of their Imamate, the virtues of each Imam, and the circumstances of the death of the Imams and the disappearance of the last Imam. It also gives an outline of the texts which the nominate Imams.

The book is written to answer a request for guidance about the lives of the imams. Shaykh Al-Mofid says about the purpose of this book: "I am recording what you have asked for, of the names of the Imams of guidance, the dates of their lives, as well as mentioning the places of their tombs, the names of their children and some of their stories which will be useful for knowledge of their circumstances, so that you may become as thoroughly acquainted with them as one who knows them and so that the difference between various claims and beliefs about them is clear.

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1. About the author

The present book is written by Abdullah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Nu'man al-'Ukbari al-Baghdadi, known as al-Shaykh al-Mofid and Ibn al-Mu'allim, who was an eminent Shi'a theologian. He was born in 'Ukbara, a small town to the north of Baghdad and later migrated to Baghdad, where the Shi'a Bouyids were ruling. At that period the Shi'a scholars enjoyed freedom and hence a blossoming of Shi'a scholarship appeared in Baghdad.

Al-Mofid was a pivotal thinker who contributed to the development of Twelve Shi'a theology by incorporating the methods of theological reasoning common in the Baghdad school of the Mu'tazila. In Shi'a tradition, he studied with the famed tradent al-Shaykh al-Saduq (Ibn Babawayh al-Qummi). Among his Prominent students were al-Sharif al-Murtada, al-Shaykh al-Tusi.

Shaykh al-Mofid wrote nearly 194 books and treatises of which are: Al-Amali, Awa'il al-Maqalat, Ahkam al-Nisa', Khulasat al-Iyjaz, Jawabat Ahl al-Mawsul, Risalat al-Mut'ah, Aqsam al-Mawla, Risalah fi al-Mahr, Iman Abi Talib, Al-Ikhtisas, Al-Ifsah fi al-Imamah Amir al-Mu'minin, Al-Ishraf, Tashih I'tiqadat al-Imamiyah, Tafdhil Amir al-Mu'minin, Risalah fi Ma'na al-Mawla, Al-Jamal, Al-Masa'il al-Sarawiyah, Al-Masa'il al-Saghaniyah, Al-Masa'il al-Tusiyah, Al-Masa'il al-Jarudiyah, Al-Masa'il al-'Ukbariyah, Al-Nukat al-I'tiqadiyah, Al-Masa'il al-'Ashr fi al-Ghaybah, Dhaba'ih Ahl al-Kitab, Al-Mas'hu ala al-Rijlayn, Al-Muqni'yah, Al-I'lam bima ittafaqat alayhi al-Imamiyah min al-Ahkam, Al-Tadhkirah bil Usul al-Fiqh, Masar al-Shi'a, Al-Nukat fi al-

Muqadimat al-Usul and Kitab Al-Irshad which is to be introduced in the present article.

2. A brief explanation of the book

2.1 The book's outline

The book is concerned with the history of the twelve Imams of the Imami shi'a and their relationship with the other shi'a sects. It was translated to English by I.K.A Howard, lecturer in Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh and was originally published in England by Balagha Books in conjunction with The Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain & Northern Ireland. The present copy is reprinted by Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Foundation.

Kitab Al-Irshad consisting 616 pages is in two main parts in addition to two useful introductions, one written by the translator and the other by Ahl al-Bayt Islamic Foundation.

Howard in his introduction provides a brief biography of Shaykh Al-Mofid and counts three main groups of Shi'a: Imamis, Ismailis and Zaydis. He then lays the fundamental difference among them in their conception of the Imamate and explains it with more details. He believes the major difference between Imamis and Ismailis occurs after the Imamate of Jafar Al-Sadiq, the sixth Imam.

The first part of Al-Irshad deals with the first Imam, Ali b. Abi Talib, including 8 chapters which are mainly concerned with the inter-Islamic polemic. The Imamate of 'Ali b. Abi Talib after the Prophet is the cornerstone of the Shi'a view of succession and the Imamate in general. Therefore it is natural that the book devotes considerable space to Ali. Nearly half of the book is about him.

The second part of the present book, in 11 chapters, deals with the lives of the other eleven Imams. At the end of each part, there is the "notes" divided according to each chapter. The book ends with "biographical Index" in alphabetical order.

2.2 A review of the contents presented in the book

2.2.1 Part1: The life of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali b. Abi Talib

There are 8 chapters included in this part which are referred as follows:

The first chapter "Background to the life of the "Commander of the Faithful" gives an account of the first Imam of the believers, the rulers of the Muslims and divine successors in religion after the holy Prophet of God. The author discusses about his Imamate and counts some clear evidences of Ali's nomination for Imamate of which are:

1. God, the exalted says in the Qur'an: Your authority (wali) is God and his Prophet and those believers who perform the prayer and pay alms (zakat) while they are bowing (in prayer).

2. Another reason which supports the "commander of the faithful" was what the prophet said on the day of the assembly at his house: "whoever helps me in this matter will be my brother, my testamentary trustee (wasi), my deputy(wazir), my heir and my successor after me. Then Ali stood up before him and said: "I will help you".

3. A clear statement about his succession after the prophet according to what happened on the day of Ghadir Khumm.

The chapter continues with some reports mentioning the event of his death before its occurrence, reports which have come down of the motive for his murder and reports about the place of the grave of Imam Ali and an explanation of the circumstances of his burial.

Next chapter includes reports about some of the virtues, qualities and achievements of Imam Ali together with some of his words, sermons, some of his miracles, and legal judgments. Also it includes reports of his priority in belief in God and being the first of all men in faith and reports of his outstanding merit over everybody in religious knowledge. Let's provide quote one of the words that the author has related from Abu Bakr Muhammad b. Umar al-Jiabi who informed him: "I heard the Prophet of God (may God bless him and his family), say: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate. Whoever wants knowledge should learn it from Ali."

There are lots of reports in this chapter. Some of them are concerned with the reports of giving title of "Commander of faithful" to Imam Ali by the holy Prophet, reports of "friendship to Ali, being a sign of good birth" and so on.

Next chapter deals with the military acts of the beloved Imam Ali. The battles which he participated, such as the battle of Badr, Uhud, and the campaign against the Bani Nadir, the Allies (Ahzab), the Banu Qurayza, Khaibar and other campaigns with referring to related reports are fully described by the author in this chapter.

The forth chapter provides the reader with the role of Imam Ali in the last year of the Prophet's life in which the

Prophet's farewell pilgrimage and the declaration at Ghadir Khoum and the illness of the prophet are explained as well.

The following chapter includes the reports and also some cases of judgments of Imam Ali during the lifetime of the prophet and during the rule of Abu Bakr, Umar b. Khattab, Uthman b. Affan and after the pledge of allegiance. It is highly recommended to study.

Next chapter is a brief account of some of the words of Imam Ali about God, and the necessity of knowing God. He says the first step in worshipping God is to know Him. The basis of knowledge of Him lies in His Oneness and the support for the acknowledgement of his Oneness is the denial of any comparison of Him and the human qualities. Then a description of God's justice is presented. The words of the Amir al-Momenin in praise of traditional knowledge about the categories of people, the prohibition of accepting the doctrine of determinism (jabr), in addition to establishing the wisdom in the actions of God and denying that there is any futility in them are indicated.

His words about this world and warning against it, his shi'a, his words concerning death, his words before and after "the battle of the camel", his speeches about the campaign against Moavia and "the battle of Siffin" and finally his words about the succession and men's desertion of him are also presented in this chapter.

Next chapter of this part which is the seventh one reports the miracles of Amir al-Mominin which are signs of God to support his Imamate and reveals the duty to obey him and set him apart from all mankind. The miracles of his wisdom while still a boy, military power, the survival of his reputation and

his family despite suppression and oppression, miraculous strength at Khaibar war, sending back the sun, speaking to fish, and some other miracles of the holy Imam have been pointed by the author in this chapter.

The last chapter is an account of the children of the holy Imam, twenty- seven male and female, their names and a selection of reports about them.

2 .2.2 Part 2: The Lives of the Other Imams

The second part of this book belongs to the account of the Imams after the holy Imam (according to their sequence of undertaking Imamate) consisting of 11 chapters, which start from Imam Hasan and ends with Imam Mahdi. Each chapter except the last one, deals with an Imam in which their life are described to some extent by the author through pointing to the dates and places of their birth, the story of their succession to the Imamate and its period, the time and cause of their death, the place of their grave, and the number and names of their children (in some chapters there are an extract of the reports about the children like the fifth one).

Also Al-Mofid presented in every chapter of this book an extract from the reports (Akhbar)is given in accordance to what the circumstances made possible. Mostly he has laid out, as a summary of the proofs of the Imamate of the Imams, and an extract from the reports about them.

In the first chapter reports about Imam Hasan's similarity to the prophet, the story of his succession to the Caliphate and ten years of his Imamate, the cause of his death, and reports of Moaviah poisoning him are presented. As an example, the report of the cause of his death is presented here:

Isa b. Mihran reported: Uthman b. Umar told me: Ibn Awn told us to the authority of Umar b. Ishaq who said:

I was with Hasan and Husain (peace be on them) in the house. Hasan came in from outside and then went out again. He said: "I have been given poison to drink several times but I have never given poison like this. A bit of my liver has come out of my mouth and I began to turn it over with a stick I had"....

Imam Hasan had fifteen children. Umar Qasim and Abdu-llah were his sons who died as martyrs in front of their uncle, Husain Ali, on the banks of the Euphrates.

In the next chapter some narrations of prophet's loving Hasan and Husain, the Imamate of Husain which was confirmed after the death of his brother in the period of Moavia and after his death are given. Then the story of martyrdom of Husain is fully explained through a selection of historical reports, which give reason for his putting forward and of pledge of allegiance which the people gave to strive for him with the brief account of his affair in setting out and of his death.

The chapter continues with the story of refusal of his pledge of allegiance to Yazid b. Moavia and the members of the house who were killed with Husain in Karbala.

There are also many reports in this chapter about the outstanding virtues of Husain and the merit in visiting his grave. It is reported from Imam Sadiq that: "Visiting the grave of Husain is equal to a hundred acceptable pilgrimages and a hundred acceptable lesser pilgrimages (Umra)"

This chapter is the longest one among the other chapters of the same part.

In the third chapter the author refers to several ways which confirms the Imamate of Ali Husain.

1. He was the most knowledgeable and noblest (Afzal) of the creatures of God

2. He was more appropriate for leadership by virtue of his father

3. The necessity according to reason of the Imamate existing in every age.

4. Imamate is established in the offspring of the family of Imam Ali

5. Prophet's designation of him for the Imamate in the tradition. A brief survey of the reports about him is also done at the end of the present chapter.

In the following chapter which deals with the life of Imam Muhammad Baqir, there are some reports and verses which describe him. He is known for his ability in knowledge of religion, traditions, the Sunna, the knowledge of the Qur'an and the practice of the holy prophet. Mofid reports numerous designations of him for the Imamate after his holy father.

He had seven children. The author mentions their names followed by an extract from the reports about his brothers.

In the fifth chapter, there are innumerable reports about Imam Jafar Sadiq, reports which give evidences for his Imamate, and miraculous ability him concerning knowledge, wisdom, asceticism, and exhortation, the necessity of knowing God and his religion, the unity of God, and so on.

This is an example of what has been recorded on his authority urging repentance: He said: "To delay repentance is to be heedless; to lengthen the time of putting off (religious duties) is (to create) confusion (in one's mind); to attempt to

justify oneself before God is (to bring about one's own) destruction; persisting on sin makes a person feel secure from God's devising."

Chapter 6 includes reports about the designation of Imam Mousa Kazim for the Imamate by his father, proofs, signs, indications and miracles which he presented, in addition to his virtues, outstanding qualities, merits by which he was distinguished by others and finally the reports about his martyrdom and a sample of the accounts it, accompanied with reports about his children.

The next two chapters present the life of Imam Ali Riza and Muhammad Jawad in which their nominations, their Imamate by their fathers, a sample of the proofs, their death and the causes, an extract from their miracles etc are reported.

Except for providing the reports of Imam Ali b. Muhammad Hadi's nomination for the Imamate and succession, and a survey of the evidence for him in chapter 9, the account of coming of Imam Hadi from Medina to Samera, his death there and its cause are presented. In this chapter, the text of a letter is pointed which is a response from Mutawakkil to Imam Hadi about Abdullah b. Muhammad's unfair treatment and his lies to Mutawakkil hurt him. It was the reason for Imam Hadi leave Medina. In the letter he summoned Imam Hadi to come to Sumarra.

Chapter 10 is about the life of Imam Hasan Askari. Like other chapters of this part, a survey of the reports put forward concerning nomination by his father and the indication of the Imamate after him, his virtues, signs and miracles and also some reports about his son.

The final chapter of this part and actually the book, is a bit different from other chapters. This chapter deals with the one who undertook the Imamate after Imam Hasan Askari, who was absent from view. The date of his birth, the evidence for his Imamate, an account of those who saw him, an extract from the reports about him, his occultation (ghayba) and his life at the time of his Appearance are fully explained.

In this chapter Shaykh Mofid refers to the point that the narrations about the twelfth Imam are numerous and are compiled in the books. He then introduces the book "Occultation (Ghayba)" compiled by Abdullah Al-No'mani.

Some reports concerning evidences, proofs and signs for the leader of the Age, the signs of Reappearance of the Imam, ... are presented in this chapter. Then there is an extract of what is revealed about his state. Also traditions are reported about the signs for the time of his Appearance and the events which will take place before it among them are: an eclipse of the sun in the middle of the month of Ramazan, an eclipse of the moon at the end of the month of Ramazan, and so on.

The year in which the Reappearance of Imam occurs will arise, the direction from which he will come, the description of the Rise and his Appearance, the actions and laws applicable in the last state, etc are the subjects provided in this chapter.

3. Some noticeable points about the book

3.1. Kitab Al-Irshad represents an important statement of Shi'a belief. It is written more as a defense of the Shi'a view of the Imamate and it takes care to provide believers with the evidences of the Imamate. In establishing the Imamate of Ali,

the doctrine of clear documents (Nass) is shown by the author to be legitimate. Its legitimate use is carried on by Ali and his successors. In the author's view, the proof the Imamate of the Imams is expressed in the miracles performed by each of the Imams.

3.2. Al-Irshad represents a valuable contribution to the history of the Imamate, which has been written by one of the outstanding Shi'a writers, of his time, and must be considered as one of the definitive Shi'a works.

3.3. The book is really a good source for knowing the biographies of Imams particularly all aspects of Imam Ali's life.

3.4. Al-Irshad was not the first work on the subject. Al-Tabari, who died in the second half of the fourth century wrote two volumes on the Imamate; the first, al-Mustarshid, deals with 'Ali b. Abi Talib and the second Dala'il al-imama is an account of Fatima, and the other eleven Imams. However, these two works are not as well-organised as al-Irshad, nor do they use non-Shi'a sources as much al-Mofid does.

3.5. There are numerous books which deal with the biographies of Imams. But the numerous reports given in each chapter distinct this book from similar ones.

3.6. There is another point which is necessary to remind of. There are lots of citations throughout the book that can be considered as the dominant characteristic of this book. They are applied to explaining the issues; provide a better understanding of the issues, as well as enhancing the validity of the book.