



JA'FAR AL-ŞĀDEQ II. TEACHINGS

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ii. Teachings

Any attempt to summarize Imam Ja'far al-Şādeq's teaching is hampered by the fact that his views are reported in support of a number of contradictory theological and legal positions. These conflicting reports emerged as scholars from different schools of thought used his legacy for their own ends. Particular views are attributed to Ja'far al-Şādeq by one group, often prompting counter-attributions by their rivals. It is clear that nearly all the early intellectual factions of Islam (with the exception perhaps of the Kharijites) wished to incorporate Ja'far al-Şādeq into their history in order to bolster their schools' positions. The use of Ja'far al-Şādeq by conflicting and rival theological and legal traditions, obviously a testimony to his perceived importance, complicates any attempt to describe his teachings with certainty and makes the identification of his actual views difficult.

The potential sources for Ja'far al-Şādeq's teaching fall under a number of categories. First, there is an extensive list of attributed works (both extant and summarized or quoted by later writers), including works of Qur'anic exegesis, so-called "occult sciences" (dream interpretation, divination by other means and hemerology), theology (normally transmitted through "extremist" or *ḡāli*



sources; see *ĠOLĀT*), and reflections on Islamic law (*feqh*). Second, there are a large number of oral reports attributed to him. Many of these are to be found in imami Hadith collections amongst traditions from the other imams constituting legal and theological statements. There are also some accounts of his views found in non-imami Hadith collections (including Prophetic reports in Sunni collections, transmitted through Ja'far al-Şādeq as well as his own legal views). Third, there are works by (or attributed to) his followers who claim to be representing Ja'far al-Şādeq's views, or to have written the work on Ja'far al-Şādeq's orders. In others, Ja'far al-Şādeq is portrayed as dictating a work to a follower. Finally, there are descriptions of his views found in hagiographic and heresiographical sources. It is not always easy to assess the reliability and authenticity of any of these sources, and even if they can be identified as reliable (or even as reliable summaries of his views), there is always the doctrinal problem of *taqiya* (precautionary dissimulation), where an individual is permitted, for the purposes of personal protection, to express outwardly one opinion, while inwardly holding another. According to most Shi'ite groups, Ja'far al-Şādeq is said to have advocated *taqiya*, and therefore even an accurate report of his words may not exactly reflect his real views. Consequently, an account of Ja'far al-Şādeq's teaching is, to a large extent, an account of what others considered his teaching to be within the framework of their own intellectual traditions.

Within what can be described as the Sufi/mystical tradition, Ja'far al-Şādeq's influence can be seen most obviously in Qur'ānic exegesis. His extant writings include a number of exegetical works, all broadly "mystical" in character. There exists a lengthy Qur'ānic commentary entitled *Tafsir al-Qor'ān*, together with shorter works entitled *Manāfe' şowar al-Qor'ān* and *ĶawāsĀsĀ al-Qor'ān al-a'zam* (Āġā Bozorg Ŧehrāni, VII, p. 273; Sezgin, IV, pp. 529-30). Gerhard Bowering considers the attribution of these works to Ja'far al-Şādeq as "suspect" (Shaikh Mofid, *Erşād* II, pp. 174-75) In particular the more extensive *Tafsir al-Qor'ān* is accompanied by what, in his view, is a "cryptic" chain of transmission (*esnād*). The style of these commentaries demonstrate a mastery of the lexicon of Muslim mysticism, in particular Sufi *tafsir*, which might indicate a composition date sometime after Ja'far al-Şādeq's death. There is also an independent tradition of Qur'ānic exegesis attributed to Ja'far al-Şādeq, found first in the two Sufi *tafsirs* of 'Abd-al-Raĥmān Solami and extensively cited by later Sufis. Whether these came from a literary or oral source is not clear, although Ja'far al-Şādeq is identified as one of the master exegetes of the early period of Islam in both of Solami's *tafsirs*. In the *Ĥaqā'eq al-tafsir* and his



Ziādāt Ḥaqā'eq al-tafsir, 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Solami cites Ja'far al-Šādeq as one of his major (if not the major) source of knowledge concerning the meaning of Qur'ānic verses.

Ja'far al-Šādeq's *MesĀbāḥ al-šari'a wa meftāḥ al-ḥaqiqa* is a work on personal conduct, with chapters on a variety of topics. Issues which are of strictly legal interest (such as pilgrimage, alms, ritual purity) are interspersed with general ethical topics (thankfulness, truthfulness, sincerity) and advice on how to lead a spiritual life and thereby purify the soul (fearing God, guarding oneself against evil, remembrance of God). Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesi considered the work to have been written not by Ja'far al-Šādeq but by the famous Sufi Šaqiq b. Ebrāhim Balki (d. 194/810, see Majlesi, I, p. 32; Āgā Bozorg Tehrāni, XXI, pp. 110-11). Majlesi's basis for this claim is one of the *esnāds* of the book, which goes back to Šaqiq al-Balki, who supposedly related it from "one of the people of knowledge," and not explicitly Ja'far al-Šādeq. Majlesi states that the *Mešbāḥ al-šari'a* is full of Sufi terminology and owes much to the ideas of Sufi shaikhs. There is a distinctively Shi'ite chapter on "Recognizing the Imams," in which the names of all the imams are listed (both those before Ja'far al-Šādeq and those after him) during a reported exchange between the Prophet and Salmān Fārsi (d. 33/654). If this passage is seen as a later interpolation, then the work may well have had its origins in a Sufi environment, though not necessarily that of Šaqiq Balki, since he also predates the occultation. For the faithful, of course, the inclusion of such an exchange is evidence of the Prophet's foreknowledge of the names and fates of his successors. Despite Majlesi's doubts as to its authenticity, the work continues to be extremely popular as a manual of personal devotion and has been the subject of a number of commentaries by famous Shi'ite and Sufi scholars. It has also been translated into various languages, the most popular probably being the Persian *Mešbāḥ ul-Šari'a*, a *maṭnawi* by Ne-zām 'Ali-šāh Aḥmad Kermāni (d. 1242/1826-27). The work itself does appear to be in the style of legally-inclined Sufis (the so-called sober Sufis), who advocated adherence to the law, whilst at the same time encouraged spiritual reflection on the performance of religious obligations such as purity law, alms, and the like. In a similar vein, the ethical work entitled *al-Ḥekam al-ja'fariya* consists of a series of sayings by Ja'far al-Šādeq, divided into chapters ("Good manners," "Rebellion," "Avarice," etc.). This, however, is not so much a work by Ja'far al-Šādeq, but a collection of his sayings, transmitted through Mofazzal b. 'Omar Jo'fi (on whom, see below).

An attributed text, also of clear Sunni sectarian leanings, is the *Monāzara Ja'far*



b. Moḥammad al-Şādeq ma'a'l-rāfezi. The text is prefaced by an *esnād* (recording it as having been written down in 435/1043) by 'Abd-al-Raḥmān Anṣāri Boḳāri, a Hanafite scholar of minor importance. The text itself is the record of fourteen question posed by a Shi'ite (the *rāfezi*), with their replies by Ja'far al-Şādeq. Ja'far al-Şādeq dissociates himself from standard Shi'ite doctrines, announces his belief in the superiority of Abu Bakr and rejects the Shi'ite interpretation of numerous Qur'ānic verses. He chastises the Shi'ite *rāfezi* for failing to understand both the words of the Prophet and the proclamations of the previous imams. The text is obviously an element of the Sunni polemic against the Shi'ite, in which Ja'far al-Şādeq is reclaimed as a good Sunni scholar, who was not part of the Shi'a and was not responsible for Shi'ite doctrines of imamate and the illegitimacy of the first three rightly guided caliphs. The general Sunni appraisal of Ja'far al-Şādeq is positive. He is remembered as a transmitter of Hadith and a jurist (*faqih*) of some importance.

Within the tradition of scientific Muslim writings, Ja'far al-Şādeq also holds a central role. There are also a large number of works on the “occult” sciences attributed to him. A work on auspicious and inauspicious days of the year has been edited by Ebied and Young and described as of Persian origin (Ebied and Young, but their characterization of the work has been corrected by Witkam). The editors consider it most likely to be *Eḳtiārāt ayyām al-şahr*. There is also a work on the interpretation of dreams, popularly known as *Taqsim al-ro'yā* and attributed to Ja'far al-Şādeq. It is almost certainly identical with the work attributed to Ja'far al-Şādeq, entitled *Ketāb al-taqsim fi ta'bir al-ḥolm*. In this work, Ja'far al-Şādeq interprets eighty different categories of dream sightings from the religious (dreams of God, angels, the prophets, and imams) to the profane (dreams of meat, fat, and cheese). There are also a large number of attributed books on divination (given the various titles *Fa'l-nāma*, *Ketāb al-jafṛ*, *al-Kāfiya fi'l-jafṛ*, see British Museum, MS 426 and Browne, p. 246). Whether these can be considered works attributed to Ja'far al-Şādeq, or works attributed to Imam 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb and transmitted through Ja'far al-Şādeq is not always clear. From a Shi'ite position, this is unproblematic since there is, religiously, no recognized division between the knowledge of one imam and another. The authenticity of these works, as indicated already, is questionable, but their attribution to Ja'far al-Şādeq demonstrates that he became associated in later Muslim tradition with esoteric knowledge and the means whereby it might be obtained.



Ja'far al-Şādeq's work on medicine (*Ṭebb al-Emām al-Şādeq*) can also be included in this category (see v. below), as can his work of various invocations (*Ketāb al-sa'ādāt*) that are meant to be used as cures. He allegedly had a close relationship with Jāber b. Ḥayyān (d. 2nd/8th cent.); Ja'far al-Şādeq is described in a number of sources as Jāber's master (shaikh). Jāber b. Ḥayyān reports that all his knowledge comes from Ja'far al-Şādeq (though he does mention other masters as well). Jāber is famous as an alchemist, scientist, and natural philosopher. His writings, if authentic, also reveal him to have devised a blend of Neoplatonism and Shi'ism, not dissimilar to that found amongst the Isma'ilis (particularly the Qarāmeṭa) and certain extremist Shi'ite sects (*ḡolāt*, q.v.). He proposes a division of world history into cycles, the most recent witnessing the seven imams of the Muslims. Ja'far al-Şādeq, in line with some Isma'ili views, is counted as the sixth imam in this latest cycle (the seventh being Ja'far al-Şādeq's eldest son, Esmā'i; see Rusca).

Through the writings of Jāber and others, Ja'far al-Şādeq is linked with so-called "extremist" Shi'ism, and figures largely in key texts of the *ḡolāt*. Ja'far al-Şādeq is said to have had a number of extremist Shi'ites among his followers and, thus, a number of works attributed to these followers supposedly record the teaching of Ja'far al-Şādeq (either by the normal citation of reports, or through dictation to the follower by Ja'far al-Şādeq himself). Most famous among these is the *Ketāb al-haft wa'l-azella*, attributed to Mofazzal b. 'Omar Jo'fi. Mofazzal is sometimes described as a follower of the extremist Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb Moḥammad Asadi, though he is also recorded as having direct contact with Ja'far al-Şādeq. According to heresiographical works, Mofazzal and his followers, called Mofazzaliya, considered Ja'far al-Şādeq a god and themselves as his prophets (Aş'ari, p. 13). According to imami tradition, however, he was appointed by Ja'far al-Şādeq to rein in the excesses of the Ḳaṭṭābiya (the followers of Abu'l-Ḳaṭṭāb; Şahrastāni, pp. 136-38, tr. Afzal-al-Din Torca, pp. 140-41, tr. Haarbrücker, I, pp. 206-8; Nawbaḳti, pp. 68 ff.). Mofazzal is also recorded as having aided Imam Musā al-Kāzem after Ja'far's death. Whichever is the case, the principal work attributed to Mofazzal display a clear extremist character. In the *Ketāb al-haft wa'l-azella* (p. 32), Mofazzal records his conversations with Ja'far al-Şādeq, referring to him as "our lord" (*mawlānā*). The conversations are divided into sixty-seven chapters, and cover a range of topics. The emphasis throughout is on the secret knowledge of religion that Ja'far al-Şādeq is passing on to Mofazzal. Mofazzal is, then, charged with establishing the true sect of the Muslims (called *mo'menin* "believers") who hold fast to Ja'far al-Şādeq's doctrines. These include a belief in the



transmigration of souls (*tanāsok*), a commitment to disassociating from the rest of the unbelievers, and the constant need for secrecy with regard to doctrine. Also found in the *Ketāb al-haft* are Ja'far al-Şādeq's supposed views on the cycles of seven Adams and Imams, which demonstrate a certain gnostic and (and possibly Isma'ili) influence upon the text (pp. 160-77). The *Ketāb al-ehlilaja* is also presented as Ja'far al-Şādeq's views transmitted through Mofazzal b. 'Omar (Moḥsen al-Amin, IV/2, p. 53). The work is supposedly a reply to a request of Mofazzal for a refutation of those who deny God. In it, Ja'far al-Şādeq recounts his own debate with an Indian doctor who denied God. The debate occurred whilst the doctor was making medicine from the myrobalan plant (known in Arabic as *ehlilaja*, and hence the title of the work).

The *Ketāb al-tawḥid* (also known as *Ketāb al-fekr*, and *Kanz al-ḥaqā'eq wa'l-ma'āref*), often thought to be identical with the above (see Sezgin, I, p. 530), is presented as Mofazzal's questions with Ja'far al-Şādeq's answers. The work is also more orthodox in doctrine, with Ja'far al-Şādeq giving proofs as to the unity of God. Both these book can be seen as works intended to rehabilitate Mofazzal b. 'Omar as a reliable transmitter of Ja'far al-Şādeq's writings, countering the portrayal of him as an extremist (*ḡāli*) in works such as *Ketāb al-haft wa'l-azella*.

As indicated above, the use of Ja'far al-Şādeq's name as an authority within the Sufi, scientific, Sunni legal, Isma'ili and extremist writings demonstrate his importance as a figure within the development of early Muslim thought in that most groups wished to recruit his legacy for their own cause. Yet, the most extensive source for his teachings is to be found within the imami Shi'ite tradition. For Imami Shi'ites Ja'far al-Şādeq is the sixth imam who established the imamiya as serious intellectual force in the late Umayyad and early 'Abbasid periods. His most important contribution was in the legal sciences, as reports of his sayings and actions form the major source for imami legal scholars. It is for this reason that the imami legal school is often called *al-Madhab al-Ja'fari*. He also continued to develop imami theological doctrine, a task begun by his father, Imam Moḥammad al-Bāqer, who died, by the earliest reckoning, in 114/732.

For the imami theologians, Ja'far al-Şādeq's theological doctrine perfectly accords with later relevant discourses. His scattered statements in imami Hadith collections do not, however, reveal a systematic theological tradition. Sunni commentators (see, for example, Abu Zahrā) aim to portray the imamiya as infected by Mo'tazelite doctrine and, therefore, straying from the



theologically orthodox position (which later became associated with Abu'l-Ḥasan Aš'ari) advocated by Ja'far al-Šādeq (van Ess, I, pp. 274-82). This cleavage, however, is part of a Sunni polemic, and there is inconclusive evidence for both the continuity of imami theological doctrine from the time of the imams onwards, and for a cleavage between the thoughts of Ja'far al-Šādeq and later imami theologians. On the standard questions of *kalām* (theology), Ja'far al-Šādeq's statements are open to interpretation. For example, concerning the question of predestination and free will, Ja'far al-Šādeq is attributed with the statement: "Whoever claims that God has ordered evil (*al-faḥšā*), has lied about God. Whoever claims that both good and evil are attributed to him, has lied about God" (Kolayni, 1994, I, pp.156-57). This would appear to absolve God of the responsibility for evil in the world, in line with general Mu'tazilite (and later imami) theological doctrine. Ja'far al-Šādeq is also credited with the statement that God does not "order created beings to do something without providing for them a means of not doing it, though they do not do it, or not do it without God's permission (Kolayni, 1994, I, p. 160)." This would seem to indicate a more orthodox Sunni (later Aš'ari) position, that God's power is supreme and it is only through His power that human beings perform actions. That Ja'far al-Šādeq's statements can be interpreted as supporting either position is confirmed by the reported exchange between him and an unknown interlocutor. The interlocutor asks if God forces (*ajbara*) his servants to do evil or whether he had delegated (*fawwaḏa*) power to them. Ja'far al-Šādeq answers negatively to both questions. When asked "What then?" he relies, "The blessings of your Lord are between these two" (Kolayni, 1994, I, p. 159). Such doctrinal ambiguity can be found in Ja'far al-Šādeq's statements concerning most of the standard questions of early *kalām* including the nature of creation, God's knowledge, the definition of faith and unbelief, and the created/uncreated nature of speech (and particularly the Qur'ān). The one doctrine in which a reasonably coherent doctrine merges from Ja'far al-Šādeq's statements is on the imamate. The imam for Ja'far al-Šādeq (as portrayed in the imami Hadith collections) is clearly not only a supreme legal authority, but also a means whereby the individual believer can gain knowledge of God. The supremacy of the imam's knowledge is such that the individual believer need not embark on detailed theological argumentation himself, but instead should refer all disputes over theological doctrine to the imam. The manner in which these doctrines are expressed by Ja'far al-Šādeq in the collections are sufficiently vague for them to be cited both by later orthodox imamis and by more extremist Shi'ites. For example, a report of Ja'far al-Šādeq, transmitted through Mofaẓẓal b. 'Omar and found in



the standard imami Hadith collections, claims for the imams all human knowledge: “We have knowledge of the Torah, the Gospel, and the Psalms, and the explanation of all that is on the Tablets.” When asked if this was all of knowledge (*al-‘elm*), he replied, “This is not knowledge. Knowledge is that which happens day after day, and hour after hour” (Kolayni, 1994, I, pp. 224-25). From such a statement it is not clear whether the imam has both knowledge of the past scriptures and of worldly events, or only the former. The extremists (and indeed some more daring imami theologians) interpret the statement as meaning that the imam has both types of knowledge, and hence as further supporting evidence for the divinational knowledge of Ja‘far al-Şādeq found in the pseudographical literature mentioned above. More conservative imamis interpret Ja‘far al-Şādeq as stating that whilst they have knowledge of past scriptures, they do not have knowledge of future events.

In legal matters, the corpus of Ja‘far al-Şādeq’s statements form the major source of imami jurisprudence. He is presented as one who denounces the legal reasoning of his contemporaries. Personal opinion (*ra’y*), personal juristic reasoning (*ejteḥād*), and analogical reasoning (*qiās*) are roundly condemned as human attempts to impose conformity, regularity, and predictability onto the Shari‘a of God. Ja‘far al-Şādeq, in these statements, argues that God’s law is occasional and unpredictable, and that the servants’ duty is not to embark on reasoning in order to discover the law, but to submit to the inscrutable will of God as revealed by the imam. This position is most obviously seen in the various exchanges between Ja‘far al-Şādeq and Abu Ḥanifa (q.v.), after whom the Ḥanafi school of Islamic law is named. Abu Ḥanifa supposedly studied with Ja‘far al-Şādeq, but the reports recorded in imami Hadith collections do not portray him in a positive light. He is recorded as having employed analogical reasoning in his legal judgements, and Ja‘far al-Şādeq is well known as one who rejected this approach. In one exchange Ja‘far asked Abu Ḥanifa whether it is true that he uses *qiās*. Abu Ḥanifa confirms this, to which Ja‘far al-Şādeq replies, “Do not use *qiās* for the first to use *qiās* was the Devil himself” (Kolayni, 1994, I, p. 58). In another exchange, Abu Ḥanifa asked Ja‘far al-Şādeq about temporary marriage (*mot‘a*), and received the reply that this is what is referred to in the Qur’ānic verse “For what you have enjoyed from them, give them their due as a duty” (4:24). Abu Ḥanifa replies “By God, I have never read this verse” (or alternatively “it is as if I had never read this verse”; see Ḥorr Āmeli, *Wasā’el*, XXVIII, p. 8). Reports such as this, where Abu Ḥanifa is bested by Ja‘far al-Şādeq and exposed as of inferior intellect, are extremely common, and clearly function as part of an anti-Sunni (and more specifically, anti-



Ḥanafī) polemic. References in imami literature to the relationships between Jaʿfar al-Šādeq and Mālek b. Anas are less narrative, and Mālek is normally portrayed simply as one who relates Hadith from Jaʿfar al-Šādeq (e.g., Ebn Bābawayh, p. 128). Non-imami Shiʿite sources, especially the *Daʿāʾem al-Eslām* of the Ismaʿīl Qāzi Noʿmān, also contain reports of the legal opinions of Jaʿfar al-Šādeq, along with those of his father Moḥammad al-Bāqer. In general, the reports here agree with those of the imami sources, and, according to Wilferd Madelung, provide a common legal source for the two Shiʿite groupings, and (more tantalizingly) a core of legal teaching which might be more assuredly traced back to Jaʿfar al-Šādeq himself.

Despite Jaʿfar al-Šādeq’s emphasis on the imam’s supreme legal authority in the imami sources, there are also hints at a more devolved system of legal authority. Most famous amongst Jaʿfar al-Šādeq’s saying in this regard is known as the *Maqbula* of ʿOmar b. Ḥanẓala. Ebn Ḥanẓala was a disciple of Jaʿfar al-Šādeq and is cited in the *esnāds* as relating a number of sayings from his master, and through intermediaries from Imam al-Bāqer. In the *Maqbula*, Ebn Ḥanẓala asks how legal disputes within the community should be solved, and whether one should take such cases to the ruler (sultan) and his judges. Jaʿfar al-Šādeq replies in the negative, indicating that he considered at least the Umayyad and ʿAbbasid caliphates illegitimate. He describes the state apparatus as *ṭāḡut* (an idol or demon) in the *Maqbula* and says that those who take their disputes to the rulers and their judges get only *soḥt* (unlawful decision; Ebn Bābawayh, *Man lā yaḥḍoroho al-faqih* III, p. 3). This is a common motif in subsequent imami juridical literature, as most jurists considered any state not led by the imam himself to be illegitimate, citing the *Maqbula* (amongst other reports from the imams) as evidence of this. In place of the state system, Jaʿfar al-Šādeq appears to recommend an informal, and unofficial system of justice for the Shiʿite community. The disputants, he claims, should turn to “those who relate our [i.e., the imams’] Hadiths.” The reason for this is that the imams have “made such a one a judge (*ḥākem*) over you.” Subsequent questions within the report prompt Jaʿfar al-Šādeq to list the means whereby a believer might choose between apparently equally qualified Hadith transmitters (see, for example, Ṭusi, VI, p. 218). The report itself has been variously interpreted by subsequent imami scholars. Some considered it to confer general legal (and for some, political) authority upon the scholars after the occultation (*ḡayba*) of the twelfth imam. Others considered Jaʿfar al-Šādeq to be referring solely to Hadith transmitters and not to the ʿ*olamā* in general. Whichever interpretation one favors, however, it is clear that the ultimate



legal authority of the imam, in this case Ja'far al-Şādeq, is to be tempered through his appointment of judges of the people in his place. While the imam has optimum community legal authority, he also may, when the need arises, appoint certain persons to act as judges in his stead. Whether this delegation applies only to the time of the imams' presence, and whether it refers to all scholars or just one subset of the *'ulamā'* was the subject of much subsequent debate amongst the imamiya. Ja'far al-Şādeq's words may have enabled the imamiya to develop an internal means of dispute resolution (and therefore avoid involvement in the judicial system of the ruling state). They did not, however, describe this alternative system in detail. That task was left to subsequent imami thinkers.

The variety of uses to which Ja'far al-Şādeq's name has been put, and the ideas and teachings which have been attributed to him, are significant not only because they establish him as an important figure in the history of early Islamic thought, but also because they demonstrate the malleability of his legacy. The works attributed to him may be of dubious authenticity, but they do establish his name at least as indicating a mastery of learning generally, and the Islamic sciences in particular. It is the manner in which his contribution has been recast and, at times, re-invented that enables him to be employed by writers in the different Islamic sciences as integral to their development.

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