

## The Hawzah Islamic Seminary

### Introduction

The elevated position that jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the jurists hold in the sacred shari'ah of Islam clearly shows the deep role this dimension of Islam has in the universal human life and the enlightened path towards a tranquil hereafter and blissfulness.

Jurisprudence and those who carry it have a great position in which can probably not be compared with by any other status.

### A short description of the history of the Hawzah

It is a hard task to relate the founding, history and development of the Hawzah in a concise way because of its depth and vastness, like ocean so deep its base cannot be reached. Without doubt, the primary establishment of the Hawzah started from the major occultation (*al-Ghaibah al-Kubra*) of our Awaited Saviour Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance). The establishment that is meant here is what is now commonly known as the Hawzah structure, as the history of knowledge, jurisprudence and hadith in the Shi'ah School of Thought from the very beginning of Islam is known by all, but it was after the al-Ghaibah al-Kubra that the Hawzah schools started to flourish. The following is a quick glance at history of the Shi'ah jurisprudence schools in its chronological time [In Islamic Hijri dates].

1. The School of the holy city of Medinah: This school continued until the middle of the second century, and this stage was during the life of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (a.s.).
2. The Kufa School: This school appeared in the mid-second century and continued until the fourth century (the major occultation).
3. The Schools of Qom and Ray: These two schools appeared during the first quarter of the fourth century and continued till the first half of the fifth century (during the time of Seyyed al-Murtadha and Sheikh al-Tusi).
4. The School of Baghdad: This school emerged in the first half of the fifth century and continued until the occupation of Baghdad by the Moguls in the year 656.
5. The Hillah School: This school appeared from the occupation of Baghdad and continued until the time of al-Shahid al-Thani Zain al-Din al-'Amili in the year 965.

Each of these schools had their own curriculum and their own particular scientific dimensions pertaining to that era. However, what is important is all of them being united in the one goal, as the Shi'ah schools and ulama` have all one goal, even though their opinions, inclinations and methods or arguments may differ.

This itself is one feature that cannot be found in any other educational circle. It is possible that a student studies in a university or institute, but he/she will not find in them the nature of the Hawzah, which is the environment of in-depth research, discussion and reaching the truth which is the ultimate goal of every human being.

We will confine our study here to the history and development of the Hawzah after the major occultation, which means from the third era of the Islamic Seminary.

The Schools of Qom and Ray:

This era starts from the major occultation in the year 329 until the first half of the fifth century. During this period the movement of teaching, writing and research moved from Kufa to Qom and Ray after a many scholars migrated to these two cities as a result of the constant oppression and despotism of the Abbasid rulers. These two places played a major role in the development of Shi'ah jurisprudence, as Qom was a Shi'ah city since the time of the Imams (a.s.) and one of the important Shi'ah places in which even the Imams (a.s.) paid particular attention to. One tradition says in referring to the virtue of Qom:

Calamities are lifted from Qom and its people, and there will come a time where the city Qom and its people will be a proof (*hujjah*) over all creation. This will be during the occultation of our al-Qa'im and until his appearance (may Allah hasten his reappearance), and if it was not for this the world would subside with its people.

The city Ray was also prosperous with schools and libraries and full of scholars, jurists and narrators. The most important reason for the transferring of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) educational school from Iraq to Iran was because of the extreme pressure the Shi'ah jurists and scholars were facing from the Abbasids, as the latter persecuted anyone who expressed their Shi'ah faith with different forms of accusations and would harm them. The Shi'ah scholars had to seek refuge in Qom and Ray and they found that these two cities were safe abodes that they can trust in spreading the *fiqh* of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and their traditions. It was from that time where the city of Qom from the time of the *ghaybah* became full of Shi'ah scholars and one of the most important capitals of jurisprudential research.

The production of theories in the writing and researching of jurisprudence and the compiling and categorizing of hadith reached its peak in this era, and this stage created for us a valuable heritage so defined and large that it became from among the most important treasures the Shi'ah jurisprudence and hadith schools had produced throughout its history.

In order for us to comprehend the dimensions of this school and its magnanimity, we will mention the names of some of the outstanding jurists and narrators (*muhaddith*) of this seminary who lived during that era.

1. Ali ibn Ibrahim:  
Ali ibn Ibrahim al-Qommi **al-Sheikh al-Kulaini** in hadith. He was trustworthy and reliable and followed the correct faith.
2. Al-Kulaini:  
His name is Muhammad ibn Ya'qub and he lived during the same time of Ali ibn Husain ibn Babawaih who was the father of Sheikh al-Saduq. They both died in the same year in which this year became known by the jurists as 'the year of the death of the jurists'. It was the year 329. The greatest of the works that Kulaini left for those after him was the great hadith encyclopedia *al-Kafi* –both *usul* and *furu'*. This book was the first attempt to compile traditions and categorize and organize them according to the '*usul* and *furu'*'.

### **Features of this School**

Among the most important features of this era of the Hawzah is the compilation of the two hadith encyclopedias *al-Kafi* and *Man la yahdhuruhu al-Faqih*