

Chapter 10: The Caliphate

The Prophet (S) was the religious as well as the temporal leader of the *Ummah*. The Qur'an quotes with approval instances of such combination of religious and temporal authority in a single individual, namely the Divinely appointed Prophets.¹ Since the office of Prophethood ended with Muhammad (S), both the temporal as well as religious authority ought to have remained with his successor, because the administration of the affairs of the *Ummah* depended upon the interpretation of the Qur'anic Injunctions in the light of the Prophet's traditions. The Prophet's successor should have to be, per force, a person who not only is an able administrator but also a person well versed in the interpretation of the Qur'an in order to administer the Divine Laws as interpreted by the Prophet (S). In the Qur'an, such persons are called the '*Imams*'.

The Qur'an reveals that the '*Imams*' are the sole authority under whom, on the Day of Resurrection, each group will be collected and called forth.² Guidance of humankind in accordance with the Divine Commands is the responsibility of the infallible Imam (a.s.). The Qur'an reveals, "*We have appointed them Imams in order that they might guide in accordance with Our Commands.*"³ At another place, the Qur'an reveals that the reason why they were chosen as *Imams* is their unshakable faith and Divinely endowed Wisdom to enable them to guide mankind: "*We have chosen from among them Imams who at Our Command shall guide men to the right path, for they are patient and steadfast and have certain [definite] knowledge of Our signs.*"⁴ Since the *Imams* are successors to the Prophets, their station is achieved only after the individual has already attained all the high ranks. Thus, Abraham, already a Prophet holding the special status of a 'friend' [*Khaleel*] was conferred the ultimate honorific title of '*Imam*'. The sixth Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said, "*Before appointing Ibrahim as the Prophet, God the Almighty appointed him as his devout servant. Before ennobling him with His friendship, He bestowed on him the rank of Messengerhood. Before granting him the rank of Imamate, He made him His sincere and devoted friend [Khaleel]. It was, therefore, after Ibrahim had attained a whole series of high ranks that he was bestowed the honor of 'Imamate.'*"⁵

Abraham was so pleased with the honor, which he held high in his esteem, that he wanted the blessing to be continued and the *Imamate* continued among his offspring. The answer Abraham got was that *Imamate* would never be granted to a wrongdoer.⁶ In other words, the *Imamate* would be conferred only

upon an Infallible and Immaculate person and that no tyrant can ever be an *Imam*.

Infallibility and Immaculacy is an inseparable ingredient of Prophethood and *Imamate* because in the matter of interpreting and implementing Divine Commands and Ordinances, the *Imam* should not be swayed or influenced by his personal desire, wish, fancy or fear. Imam al-Sadiq (a.s.) said, “*The Imam is designated by God and the Messenger to be God’s proof before people. Through the blessed existence of the Imam (a.s.), a link is established between God’s servants and the supra-sensible realm, and God’s Grace flows down upon them. God will not accept the deeds of his servants unless they are loyal to the Imam. God does not abandon His servants to their own devices after creating them; instead, by means of the Imam, He lays out a path of piety before them and thus establishes His proof.*”⁷

The special favors granted to the Prophets and the Imams brought with them an element of jealousy among people. The Qur’an reveals: “*Are they envious of what We in our generosity bestowed on the progeny of Ibrahim? We gave the Book and Wisdom to the family of Ibrahim, and also gave them kingship and rule.*”⁸ People were ready to concede that the prophets were given Books and Wisdom, but they became jealous and inimical when the kingdom remained with the prophets.

The word *Caliph* literally means ‘deputy’ and it was understood, in Islamic connotations, to be synonymous with the word *Imam*, in the matter of succession to the Prophet (S). However, the word *Caliph* was later segregated to denote political rule by ordinary men instead of guidance in all matters pertaining to Muslims by the Divinely appointed *Imam*. The *Caliph* was no longer required to be Infallible and Immaculate. Any person who claimed he had the majority and could hold out threats to his detractors, was considered a fit person to be the *Caliph* to rule the Muslim *Ummah*.

This extraordinary feat of fallacious reasoning was achieved by a simple distortion of another Qur’anic phrase ‘*Ulil Amr*’⁹ so that it came to denote any person in authority. In doing so, it was purposefully overlooked that the word ‘*ulil Amr*’ is conjointly used while speaking about obedience to the Authority of God and His Prophet (S) both in religious and temporal matters. The Qur’an reveals: “*O Ye believers, obey the commands of God, the Messenger and the Holders of Authority [Ulil Amr]. When you fall into disagreement concerning your affairs, refer to the commands of the Lord and his Messenger, if you believe in God and the Day of Judgement. This will be better for you than anything else you might imagine, and conducive to a far better outcome.*”¹⁰ Thus, the Qur’an makes implicit obedience to the Divinely appointed Holders of Authority [*ulil amr*] to be far superior and beneficial than any contrivance adopted by man, to govern every aspect of an individual’s life, both in this world and in the hereafter.

This is explained by Imam Ali (a.s.) as, “*The only obedience incumbent upon people is to the laws of God and the commandments of the Prophet of God. As for obedience to the Holders of Authority, this has been made incumbent because they are immune from sin, and in the very nature of things they can not issue any order that violates or runs counter to God’s Commands.*”¹¹

The Qur’an brings out the other side of the coin. It reveals: “*Do not follow those who have abandoned Me*

and pursue their own fancies.”¹² Thus, the use of any conjecture in matters pertaining to Islam is strictly ruled out.

Who the Holders of Authority are, is talked about by Imam al-Baqir (a.s.) :*“The Holders of Authority [Ulil Amr] are the leaders of the Ummah, from the progeny of Ali (a.s.) and Fatima (a.s.) who shall remain in existence till the Day of Resurrection.”*¹³

Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari asked the Prophet (S) about the Holders of Authority whose obedience was made obligatory on the *Ummah*, and the Prophet (S) replied, *“O Jabir, the first of them is Ali ibn Abi Talib, followed by his two sons Hasan and Husayn, and then by Ali ibnul Husayn, followed by Muhammad al-Baqir whom you, O Jabir, will live to see. When you meet him, convey my salutations to him. He will be followed by Ja’far as-Sadiq, Musa al-Kadhim, Ali ar-Ridha, Muhammad al-Jawad, Ali al-Hadi, al-Hasan al-Askari, and finally the Hidden One; the Promised Mehdi. These will be the leaders after me.”*¹⁴

To the above effect, there are numerous traditions recorded by both the Sunnis and the Shias with reference to the twelve *Imams* (a.s.) mentioned in *Traditions* and exegesis as successors to the Prophet (S), which are collected in Gulpaigani’s voluminous book ‘The Hidden Imam’.¹⁵

Az-Zuhri relates that the Prophet (S) went to the tribe of Bani Aamir to invite them to accept Islam. A man from the tribe, Bayhara by name, asked, *“If we accept all your commands and you conquer your enemies with our help, do you promise that after your death the leadership will pass on to us?”* The Prophet (S) replied, *“The matter of governance belongs to God; He will appoint whomsoever He wills.”* The man replied, *“Are we to endanger ourselves in helping you against your enemies, only to see the rulership pass on to some one other than us?”*¹⁶ This incident shows what exactly was in the minds as the ultimate aim of a few, if not some well-known companions of the Prophet (S), when they came forward to accept Islam.

At any rate, the question of rulership came to the fore immediately on the death of the Prophet (S). The matter was considered so urgent and important that Abu Bakr, Umar, and ibn al-Jarrah considered it proper to leave the uninterred body of the Prophet (S) and go to *Saqifa*.¹⁷

At *Saqifa*, it was the tribal spirit of the period of *Jahiliyya* that asserted itself in the tribe *Quraysh* seeking to monopolize power in their clan by condemning the *Ansar*, their opponents, as less deserving.¹⁸

At *Saqifa*, neither Divine Wisdom nor Divine appointment was under consideration. The only compelling factor was to wrest power and present a *fait accompli* before the Muslim *Umma*, which could realize that Ali (a.s.) was being deprived of the *Caliphate*. This could be achieved only after severe wrangling which lasted till the second day after the Prophet’s death. Thereafter, the gathering from *Saqifa* headed by Abu Bakr and Umar went to the Prophet’s house. According to the author of *Kanzul ummal*, neither Abu Bakr nor Umar participated in the burial of the Prophet (S).¹⁹

Umar himself later regretted the haste in which the affair was conducted and *the Caliph* chosen at *Saqifa*. He warned: “*It was a hasty accident that Abu Bakr became the leader. No consultation or exchanges of views took place. If anyone in future invites you to do the same again, instantly kill him.*”²⁰

According to some *Sunni* thinkers, all that is required of a *Caliph* is his capacity to govern by implementing the penalties prescribed in Islam and guarding the *Ummah* against foreign intrusion. This means that the *Caliph* has to provide the necessary police and military protection to the *Ummah*. In this view of the matter, they argue that the *Caliph* **needs not be** an infallible or immaculate person. It will make little difference if the *Caliph* had a long history of opposition to Islam because of its prohibiting idol worship. It also did not matter if the *Caliph*, after having professed Islam, had frequently strayed into the sinful alleys prohibited in Islam. All that was required was his capacity to establish and enforce his dominance over Muslims, although it might be through oppression and tyranny by trampling upon the rights of Muslims and shedding their blood in the process. The *Caliph*, according to this view, may flout all norms of Justice and Equity, but he will be considered the leader of the Muslims so long as he is able to hold control over the *Ummah*.

The natural corollary of such a hypothesis leads a well-known *Sunni* scholar to write, “The Caliph can not be removed from office on account of contravening God’s laws and commands, transgressing against the property of individuals or killing them, or suspending the laws God has decreed. In such a case, it is the duty of the Islamic community to set his *misdeeds* and to draw him on to the path of true guidance.”²¹ This theory is against the Qur’anic injunction that lays down: “None has the freedom in the matter of the commands of God and His Messenger. Whoever disobeys the commands of God and His Messenger falls a prey to obvious error.”²²

The hypothesis is invented only to justify the conduct of the *Caliphs* with the exception of Imam Ali (a.s.), as we shall presently see. Before that, we may note the observations of another *Sunni* Scholar Dr. Abdul Aziz ad-Durri who wrote, “At the time the sovereignty of the Caliphate was being established, the political theory of the Sunnis with respect to this institution was not based simply on the Qur’an and Hadith. Rather, it rested on the principle that the Qur’an and Hadith must be understood and explicated in accordance with whatever events subsequently occurred.” Ad-Durri then proceeds to quote and edict from Judge Abul Hasan al-Mawardi’s book *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya* the following passage: “It is permissible for an unfit individual to be the leader even if a fit individual can also be found. Once, someone has been chosen; he can not be removed simply because there is some one better and more fitted available.” Ad-Durri concludes: “He [the Judge] admits and vindicates his principle in order to justify the rule by numerous unfit Caliphs. It is possible, too, that he wished to refute the Shia’s views on the subject. The theological and credal view he puts forth serves no other purpose for the Sunnis, but to justify the political development of the day. The only aim was to justify whatever might be grouped under the heading of *Ijma’* [consensus].”²³

Mujtaba Musavi Lari writes, “*Imamate and Caliphate are inseparable in just the same way that the*

governmental functions of the Messenger of God (S) can not be separated from his prophetic office. Spiritual Islam and Political Islam are two parts of a single whole. However, in the course of Islamic history, political power did become separate from the spiritual Imamate and the political dimension of religion was separated from its religious dimension.”[24](#)

Imamate, which is the succession to the Prophet (S), was always considered by the Shias to be within the exclusive domain of the Divine Will, as much as prophethood was. Man therefore had no choice in the matter of succession to the Prophet (S). According to the Shias, the Prophet (S) followed the same pattern of succession observed by the earlier Prophets who appointed their successors only according to the Divine Will. The Prophet (S) had also declared, nominated and identified, by every means and on every occasion, his succeeding *Imams* to come, until Doomsday. As we have seen earlier, by whatever name he is called; *Imam, Ulil Amr, Khalifa, Ahlul Thiikr, Rasikhoon fil ‘Ilm*, the successor to the Prophet (S) is to possess Divine Wisdom, Infallibility and Immaculacy. Such persons will neither err nor transgress the divine ordinances. Such persons will be most suited to establish a just Divine rule over their subjects. All others will be prone to err, do injustice and to contravene the Divine commandments, thus disqualifying themselves from the right to enforce the very commandment that they themselves flout.

Sheik Sulayman Khanduzi an Indian Sunni scholar of great repute eliminates the possibility of the *Caliphs*, with the exception of Imam Ali (a.s.), from being counted among the *Imams* mentioned by the Prophet (S) as being his successors. He wrote, “*According to scholars, the traditions that specify the successors to the Prophet (S) to be twelve in number are well-known and they have been narrated by different chains of transmission. It became clear with the passage of time that what the Messenger of God was referring to in this tradition were the twelve Imams from his progeny. It is impossible to refer it to the first Caliphs, for, they were four in number; nor could it be applied to the Umayyads who were more than twelve in number; apart from which with the exception of Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, they were all tyrants and oppressors and they did not belong to the Bani Hashim, whereas the Holy Prophet (S) had specified that his twelve successors would be from the Bani Hashim. Jabir bin Samrah mentions that the Prophet (S) spoke this last part of the tradition softly, because not everyone was happy that the Caliphate should go the Bani Hashim. Similarly, the tradition could not have referred to the Abbasids, because their number too is more than twelve; they did not act in accordance with the verse enjoining love for the Ahlul Bayt [Qur’an 42:23] and they ignored the tradition of the Cloak [Kisa]. The tradition must then refer exclusively to the Twelve Imams from the progeny of the Prophet (S), for they were superior to all others with respect to knowledge, moral virtues, piety and lineage. They were a line who inherited their knowledge from the Messenger of God (S), their great ancestor. This is confirmed by the tradition concerning the two weighty trusts and numerous other traditions that have reached us from the Prophet (S).*[25](#)

About the wisdom and knowledge of the *Imams*, the sixth Imam Ja’far as-Sadiq (a.s.) said, “*The one who has the knowledge of the Book is Imam Ali (a.s.), for he himself said, ‘Be aware that the knowledge*

that came to the earth with Adam (a.s.) and all the knowledge with which the prophets were ennobled down to the last Prophet (S), exists in his progeny’.[26](#)

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) also said, *“The sacred Divine Essence has two forms of knowledge: one peculiar to God Himself, inaccessible to his creatures, and the other knowledge which is bestowed on angels and prophets. This second category of knowledge is accessible to us, the Imams, too.”*[27](#)

The fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) said, *“The knowledge that came down with Adam (a.s.), the father of mankind, did not vanish, for it was handed down from one generation to the next. Ali (a.s.) had complete knowledge of religion and shariah, and none of us, the Imams, dies without designating our successor who will inherit his knowledge and what God pleases to impart to him.”*[28](#)

The knowledge of the *Imams* encompasses the corporeal and incorporeal, the spiritual and material, the seen and the unseen, the past, present and future, the lives and philosophies of prophets and guides of bygone times and those who were to come; in fact all that should be known to man. It is thus, the seventh Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.), who was yet a child, debated with Burayd, a Christian scholar, basing his arguments on the Torah and the Gospels. Regarding this knowledge when Burayd asked, the Imam (a.s.) replied, *“This is our inherited knowledge. We recite and pronounce each of those scriptures just as their followers and believers do. God would not place on the earth His proof (authority) who would have to say ‘I do not know’, in answer to any question.”*[29](#)

The eighth *Imam* Ali bin Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.) told his disciple an-Nawfali, *“Al-Ma’mun will regret convening this meeting in which I shall argue with the followers of the Torah by citing the Torah, against the followers of the Gospel by citing the Gospels, against the followers of the Psalms by citing the Psalms, against the Sabians in their own Hebraic language, against the Zoroastrians priests in Persian language, against the Greeks in the Greek language, and against the Arabs in Arabic language. Al-Ma’mun will then realize that the seat, which he occupies, and the authority, on which he rests, are not rightfully his.”*[30](#)

Imam Ali (a.s.) said, *“Ask me (whatever you want) before you miss me, for I know about the ways of the empyrean more than I know about the ways of the earth.”*

Umar told ibn Abbas: *“I swear by Allah that if your friend (Ali) assumes the Caliphate, he will cause the people to act in accordance with the Book of God and the Sunna of the Messenger of God and will lead them to the straight and clear path of Islam, the religion.”*[31](#)

As against this background of the Imam’s knowledge, let us see how the *Caliphs* fare, in their own estimate as well as in the eyes of others. Abu Bakr, on becoming the *Caliph*, made his opening speech from on the pulpit, *“O People, I may fall into grievous error or I may not make any mistake. If you see me deviating from the right path, prevail upon me to return to it. The Prophet was infallible, but I am not. I have a Satan ever drawing me towards error.”*[32](#) Abu Bakr declared that he was not the Divinely appointed *Caliph*. Instead, he claimed to be the *Caliph* of the Prophet (S).[33](#) On the same analogy, Umar

was the *Caliph* of Abu Bakr, Uthman was the *Caliph* of Umar, and so on and so forth *ad nauseam*. However, the institution of the *Caliphate* itself was abolished in 1924 by Mustafa Kamal Pasha of Turkey. It is therefore clear that Abu Bakr was not the successor of Adam the first Divinely appointed *Caliph*.

On several occasions when Umar was rescued by Imam Ali (a.s.) from committing gross error, he declared that 'but for Ali, Umar would have been doomed'.³⁴ Umar, the second *Caliph*, said, "*There were three things that were permissible in the time of the Prophet which I have forbidden on threat of severe punishment. The three things are Mut'ah (temporary) marriage, the Mut'ah during the hajj, and reciting in the Azan 'hasten to the best of all deeds' [Hayya `ala Khairil `amal].*"³⁵ He substituted these words with '*Prayer is better than sleep*' [*as-slaatu khairum minan-naum*] in the dawn prayers.³⁶

Umar's son Abdullah was told about the prohibition imposed by his father on the *Mut'ah* of the hajj and the *Mut'ah* marriage. He replied, "*I am afraid you will incur the wrath of God and a stone will fall on you. Are we to follow the Sunna of the Prophet or the sunna of Umar bin al-Khattab?*"³⁷

During the time of the Prophet (S) and during the time of Abu Bakr's *Caliphate* and the first three years of Umar's *Caliphate*, a triple pronouncement of *Talaq* (divorce) on a single occasion was considered a single repudiation and not as final repudiation. Umar changed and declared, "*I will count a triple pronouncement of Talaq on a single occasion as final repudiation of marriage.*"³⁸ Thus, Umar altered the Divine commandments and the Prophet's *Sunna*.

Mu'awiya did the ultimate when he declared, "*Everything on the earth belongs to God and I am God's deputy (Khalifa). I will deal as I please.*" Nobody had the courage to challenge Mu'awiya's temerity except Sa'sa'ah bin Sowhan.³⁹

Regarding persons like Mu'awiya, the Prophet (S) said, "*When some of my companions are brought before me at the Pond, they will feel ashamed. I will then say, 'Oh God, they are my companions?' I will be told: 'You do not know what they did after your death.'*"⁴⁰

The Qur'an poses this question: "*Is the one who guides to God more fitting to be followed or the one who himself needs guidance? How would you judge this matter?*"⁴¹

On this note, we will leave the question of *Caliphate* for our readers to decide. However, we will have to revert to the historical incident of *Saqifa*, which laid the foundation for the substitution of the Infallible ones by ordinary erring mortals.

[The Saqifa](#)

Some companions realized that the place shortly to be left by the Prophet (S), for succession, had to be grabbed at all cost. They were aware that all earlier Prophets like Abraham, Joseph, Moses...etc., had appointed their kith and kin under Divine Commands. Muslims had witnessed the Prophet (S), on numerous occasions, nominating Imam Ali (a.s.) as his successor. The last pilgrimage of the Prophet

(S), his sermons and advices, particularly his last sermon, addressed to over a million Muslims and several foreign dignitaries assembled at Ghadir Khum nominating Imam Ali (S) as his immediate successor, were fresh in everyone's mind.

A few persons, from the Muhajirin and the Ansar, abandoned the dying Prophet (S) and assembled at a place called Saqifa of Bani Sa'idah, which was some distance from Medina, and was used by the Ansar as a place for holding secret discussion.

A violent dispute arose between the two groups, the Muhajirin⁴² and the Ansar,⁴³ each side claiming supremacy over the other. At that time, Umar shouted asking Abu Bakr to extend his hand. Umar struck the extended palm of Abu Bakr and immediately swore his allegiance to him and shouted in his famous loud voice that Abu Bakr, being the eldest among those present, has been chosen as the Caliph. This sudden move surprised the squabblers. Their own internal dissension contributed to their failure to take up the challenge in an orderly manner.

Even as the squabbles at Saqifa were in full swing, Imam Ali (S) was busy with the burial of the Prophet (S). When he was informed of the activities at Saqifa, he did not deem it proper, like others, to leave the body of the Prophet (S) without performing the burial rites and to rush to stake his claim.

For the whole day, the people from Saqifa went around Medina announcing that Abu Bakr had been chosen as the *Caliph*. When they reached the Prophet's house, they found that Imam Ali (a.s.) had performed the rites and buried the Prophet (S). One of the people returning from *Saqifa* wanted that the Prophet's body should be immediately exhumed. Hearing this, Imam Ali (a.s.) said, "*Are you not ashamed that you deserted the Prophet in several battles and now you abandoned his body to grab the Caliphate? When he is buried, you want to commit the sacrilegious act of exhuming him! Not even Jews and Christians will think of such a horrendous deed. Shamelessly you call yourself Muslims!*" Imam Ali (a.s.) drew his sword and stood greatly enraged. Never had they seen Imam Ali (a.s.) in such temper and they were mortally afraid of his physical prowess. They recollected the saying of the Prophet (S) to beware the day when after the Prophet's death Imam Ali (a.s.) would unsheathe his sword. Thus was prevented the sacrilegious act of exhuming the Prophet's body. But for Imam Ali's intervention, the so called companions of the Prophet (S) would have gladly carried out their ignoble deed of exhuming the Prophet's sacred body.

Observing these incidents, the opportunist Abu Sufyan approached Abbas, the holy Prophet's uncle, and said, "*These people have snatched away the Caliphate from the Banu Hashim. You are the uncle of the Prophet (S) and the eldest among Quraish. The people of Quraish will listen to you and accede to your proposal. Let us swear allegiance to Ali (a.s.). If anybody opposes us, we shall kill him.*" Abu Sufyan and Abbas then approached Ali (a.s.). Abu Sufyan said, "*O Ali, if you agree, I will fill Medina with large contingents of infantry and cavalry. Do accept our proposal and put out your hand so that we may swear our oath of allegiance of Caliphate to you.*" To this, Ali (a.s.) replied, "*O Abu Sufyan, I swear by the Almighty Allah that you, through this proposal, want to create serious dissension and discord among*

Muslims. You have always tried to harm the Prophet (S), and now you plan to harm Islam. I do not need your sympathy or help.”⁴⁴

If really Imam Ali (a.s.) and the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) had any desire for power, this certainly was the best opportunity, and Medina was the right place since that its inhabitants were witnesses to the Prophet’s declaring, on innumerable occasions, the supremacy of knowledge and the moral and ethical character of the Ahlul Bayt (S) and the nomination of Imam Ali (a.s.) as his vicegerent, deputy, and successor.

The fact that the Ahlul Bayt (S) spurned pomp and glory of wealth and power is recorded throughout the history of Islam and in the sermons, sayings and writings of Imam Ali (a.s.) and other members of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

When the first Caliph’s father came to know that his son, Abu Bakr was chosen as the Caliph in preference to Imam Ali (a.s.), he inquired from his grandson Muhammad Bin Abu Bakr as to how Abu Bakr could claim preference over Imam Ali (a.s.) and why Imam Ali (a.s.) was not chosen as the Caliph. He was informed that the choice fell on Abu Bakr because he was the eldest among the contenders to the *Caliphate* while Imam Ali (a.s.) was still a young man. To this, he promptly replied, *“If age is the criteria, then, as Abu Bakr’s father, I would better claim to be the Caliph!”* He thus demonstrated the hollowness of the claim that age was the decisive factor in the matter of the *Caliphate*.

Abul Fida Isma’il ibn Kathir writes regarding the Verses 41–48 of the Chapter ‘Mary’: *“Allah the Almighty mentioned what happened between Abraham (a.s.) and his father Azar, and how Abraham (a.s.) explained to his father the falsehood of idolatry because Allah gave Abraham (a.s.) useful knowledge although he (a.s.) was younger than his father; therefore it was his duty and privilege to guide and point to the right way.”⁴⁵* Then, Ibn Kathir quotes the verse 114 of the Chapter “Tawba”: *“And Abraham prayed for his father’s forgiveness only because of a promise he had made to him. But, when it became clear to him that he was an enemy of Allah, he dissociated himself from him, for Abraham was most tender hearted and forbearing.”*

Though Azar was the father⁴⁶ of Abraham, in matters of faith neither relationship nor age would confer superiority or status on a person. An elderly and experienced person is also required to obey a younger person who is invested with authority by Divine Pleasure. This is evident from the following tradition narrated through Abu Huraira by Al-Bukhari in his *Kitab at-Tafsir*: *“On the Day of Resurrection Ibrahim (a.s.) will meet his father Azar whose face will be dark and covered with dust. Ibrahim (a.s.) will say to him, ‘Did I not tell you to obey me?’ His father will reply, ‘Today I will not disobey you’. Ibrahim will say, ‘O my Lord! You promised me not to disgrace me on the Day of Resurrection; and what will be more disgraceful to me than cursing and dishonoring my father?’ Then, Allah the Almighty will say to him: ‘I have forbidden the Paradise for the disbelievers’. Then, he will be addressed, ‘O Ibrahim! See what is underneath your feet.’ He will look and there he will see a blood-stained animal, which will be caught by its legs and thrown in the Hell-Fire.”⁴⁷*

Imam Ali (a.s.) questioned the election/selection of Abu Bakr as the *Caliph*, but restrained his followers and companions from revolting against the regime for the reason that the Islamic State was yet in its nascent stage and any dispute would have rendered it vulnerable to attacks, both from its internal and external enemies. Therefore, Imam Ali (a.s.) frequently repeated the reply of Aaron (a.s.) when Moses (a.s.) asked, “*What kept you back from following me, when you saw them taking the wrong steps? Did you disobey my instructions?*” Aaron replied, “*O son of my mother! Seize me not by my beard or the hair of my head. I was afraid that you may say that I caused a division among the children of Israel.*”⁴⁸

The earliest recorded version of the incidents found in the Book of Sulaym ibn Qais al-Hilali⁴⁹ and the recorded sermons of Imam Ali (a.s.) in Nahujul Balagha⁵⁰ and Nahujul Asrar clearly show Imam Ali’s predicament and disapproval of the events that took place at *Saqifa* in the matter of succession after the death of the Prophet (S).

History is full of instances where Imam Ali (a.s.) was sought, unsuccessfully, to be compelled to give his allegiance to the *Caliph*. Imam Ali (a.s.) chose to remain aloof, saying that he was busy annotating the Qur’an, which he had already compiled in book form on the personal dictates of the Prophet (S). However, history also records that quite often, Imam Ali (a.s.) could not be ignored and the *Caliphs* were obliged to seek his advice, guidance and judicial acumen, to resolve difficult situations that appeared to shake the very fundamentals and foundation of Islam. His cooperation in this regard, with the sole object of protecting Islam in times of its need as the Imam, would be often mistakenly touted as his approval of the validity of the regime. However, the fact remains that Imam Ali (a.s.) never participated in the political affairs or the military expeditions of the state but he confined himself to advice purely on religious matters or to religious legitimacy of any issue faced by the *Caliphs*.

There was open criticism about the competence of the Caliph in deciding important matters. Often the Caliph had to resort to Imam Ali’s help in solving complicated issues. This reminded the Umma of the various traditions extolling the supremacy and the virtue of Imam Ali (a.s.) over all others. People also recollected the various occasions when the Prophet (S) nominated Imam Ali (a.s.) as his successor. This discussion, initially in whispers became an ominous rumble that could no longer be ignored if the Caliph were to hold on to his seat.

As noted earlier, to avert the consequences of dissent, two measures were adopted. Firstly, the *Caliph* banned the narration of traditions on the grounds that they might create confusion and even make people neglect the Qur’an in favour of traditions. Secondly, wars were declared on neighboring countries.

Having failed to incite Imam Ali (a.s.) to take military action against the first *Caliph*, Abu Sufyan managed and successfully persuaded the first three Caliphs to appoint his son Yazid as the Governor of Syria. On the death of Yazid bin Abu Sufyan, his brother Mu’awiya bin Abu Sufyan was appointed by the *Caliph* as Governor of Syria. Mu’awiya persuaded the third *Caliph* to re-induct the infamous Marwan who in turn removed just and honest officers and brought in avaricious and corrupt Umayyads in all key posts.

During the reign of the first three Caliphs, more particularly the third Caliph, Mu'awiya and his ilk gained free access to the corridors of power and they extracted monetary favors and positions of considerable power and influence. Soon, all the governors appointed by the first two Caliphs were recalled and in their place, Umayyads or their henchmen were appointed as governors by the third Caliph. Marwan was recalled from the exile and he gained a very special status of a trusted advisor of the third Caliph. They systematically harassed, tortured and even banished several noble and trusted companions of the Prophet (S).

Any person who was even suspected to be a friend, well-wisher or even a mere sympathizer of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), was secretly annihilated in order to eliminate dissension and simultaneously consolidate the Umayyads' hold on power. Having gained access to power, they started a lavish and sinful way of life at the cost of the public treasury.

The dreams of Abu Sufyan were realized and the Islamic State was converted into a military empire of pomp and pretensions. The sons of Abu Sofia, Yazid and his brother Mu'awiya, who became successive governors of Syria, misused their position of power to accumulate great wealth for themselves and they built huge palaces full of pompous adornments at the cost of the public money.

The governors were inaccessible to anyone but their own henchmen. This greatly enraged the Muslims who were taught to lead a simple life of austerity. The mounting sufferings and cries of the public against injustice and starvation went unheeded.

Regarding the situation, Justice Sayyid Ameer Ali wrote, *"The choice of electorate fell upon Uthman, a member of the Umayyad family. His election proved, in the end, the ruin of Islam. He fell at once under the influence of his clan. He was guided entirely by his secretary and son-in-law Marwan, who had once been expelled by the Holy Prophet (S) for breach of trust. Uthman displaced most of the lieutenants employed by Umar and in their place, he appointed incompetent and worthless members of his own family. The weakness of the center and the wickedness of the favorites were creating a great ferment among the people. Loud complaints of extraction and oppression by the Governors began pouring into the capital. Ali (a.s.) pleaded and expostulated several times with the Caliph about the manner in which he allowed the government to fall into the hands of the unworthy favorites, but Uthman, under the influence of his evil genius Marwan, paid no heed to these counsels."* [51](#)

The discontent became so rampant that delegations from Syria, Iraq and Egypt arrived to complain to the Caliph about the anarchy and despotism of the governors appointed by him. They held the third Caliph personally responsible for the induction of persons, who were known criminals and open enemies of Islam, into position of power with full access to the public treasury. Historians record that the delegations met the third Caliph and pleaded with him to remove the tyrannical governors of Syria and Egypt. *Caliph* Uthman refused to remove Mu'awiya from the governorship of Syria. After great persuasion, he agreed to appoint Muhammad Bin Abu Bakr [the first Caliph's son] as the Governor of Egypt in place of Abdullah Bin Sa'd. A letter was issued to Abdullah Bin Sa'd, the governor of Egypt,

asking him to hand over the charge of the Egyptian government to Muhammad Bin Abu Bakr.

When the Egyptian delegation carrying the letter, was returning home, they found a man overtaking them on a fast camel. They interrupted him and upon search, they found another letter addressed to Abdullah Bin Sa'd, the Governor of Egypt, directing him to behead Muhammad Bin Abu Bakr and the delegation accompanying him. The second letter was also written by the same scribe [Marwan] who wrote the order appointing Muhammad Bin Abu Bakr as the Governor of Egypt. Both the letters contained the seal of the Caliph. The scribe of both the letters had taken advantage of the dots that are affixed either above or below an Arabic letter. Thus, In the first letter it was written '*lqbal*' which means 'accept', by putting a dot under the third alphabet to read it as '*b*'; whereas in the second letter two dots were put over the third alphabet which then became '*t*' instead of '*b*', to be read as '*Uqtul*' meaning 'behead'. The cunningness and duplicity enraged the members of the delegations who immediately returned to Medina to question the Caliph. It was found on inquiry that Marwan had scribed both the letters and affixed the seal of the Caliphate. The Caliph admitted the seal to be his and the writing in both the letters to be that of Marwan. However, he pleaded ignorance in the matter. The delegation demanded that Marwan should be handed over to them or, alternatively, the Caliph himself should resign. The Caliph rejected both the alternatives, whereupon the excited mob surrounded and attacked his house. The third Caliph was confined within his house for three days. He sent for assistance from Mu'awiya, who cunningly kept himself away, deserting his benefactor and relative. Despite knowing that the delegation was bent on causing harm to the third Caliph. Mu'awiya purposefully did not come to his rescue, for he realized that if anything happened to the Caliph, it would only furnish rich material to foment dissension on clannish lines, which could be used to advantage against any contender to the *Caliphate*, particularly Imam Ali (a.s.). Umar himself, when deliberating about his successor, said this about Uthman: "*If he becomes the Caliph, he will impose Bani Abi Ma'it over the people and then the Arabs will rise against and kill him.*"⁵²

The third Caliph, then, sought Imam Ali's help, but by the time help could reach, the enraged mutineers had slain the third Caliph. The cunning Marwan took the bloodstained clothes of the Caliph and on it, he sewed the severed fingers of the Caliph's wife Na'ila. He, cunningly, propagated false rumors shifting the blame of the murder of the third Caliph to Imam Ali (a.s.). The body of the Caliph was left on the public square and was grossly dishonored and insulted by his enemies. His body was then buried in a Jewish cemetery by the enraged public who prevented his burial in *al-Baqee'*, the Muslim graveyard. However, in later times *al-Baqee'* was expanded several times and Jewish and Christian cemeteries came to be included in the present day within its boundaries. Yet the whereabouts of the third *Caliph's* grave remains a mystery, just as the grave of Aa'isha remains a mystery.

The net result of the administration of the three *Caliphs* was that Islam lost its religious identity and was converted into a worldly power. The result is aptly summarized by a scholar in the literature and history of Muslims, Akhilesh Mitthal who wrote: "*Their [Muslims] history, also written by bards and sycophants, makes out that the religion, Islam, forged the hereto warring tribes into a monolithic coronna or column*

which shattered and overcame all those who came in its path. In the year 681 AD, an Arab general Uqba bin Nafi' plunged his horse into the waves of the Atlantic until the steed was shouldered deep in the waters. Uqba then unsheathed his sword and announced, 'Allaho Akbar. If the ocean had not intervened my victorious westward march, my sword would have killed all who refused to accept Him' ” [53](#)

Conclusion

Islam is the last link in the chain of Divine religions. Similarly, the Qur'an is the last of the Revealed Scriptures. By the time Islam and the Prophet (S) appeared, humanity was ripe and ready to exercise its cognitive powers to seek answers to the unknown and unseen, particularly in the field of religion. Civilizations had developed largely and scientific inquiry replaced blind dogma. The sciences of logical deduction, philosophy and probes into the hitherto unknown fields became almost a passion and a pastime in everyday life.

Islam came to provide answers to unanswered question and to convince that for his actions in this life, man was accountable to his Creator, in an eternal life to come. The Qur'an provided a constitution for a peaceful and harmonious life in this world and the means by which one could hope to achieve salvation and eternal bliss in the life to come.

The Qur'an provided the basic constitution for Muslims. Like all constitutions, the Qur'an also requires expositions and explanations, which could be provided only by the Prophet (S) himself or by his Divinely appointed deputies and successors. That is why the Prophet (S) exhorted men to firmly hold on to the Qur'an and the *Ahlul Bayt* (a.s.) so that men may not go astray and fall into gross error.

Yet, in a systematically planned move, Imam Ali (a.s.) who was nominated by the Prophet (S) was sidestepped and Abu Bakr was made the first *Caliph*.

It is unfortunate that Muslims were ruled for almost half a century, from 632 to 680 A.D, particularly in Syria and Iraq by Mu'awiya, the son of Abu Sufyan the inveterate enemy who forever plotted to kill the Prophet (S) and destroy his Mission. Abu Bakr ruled for about three years from 632 to 634 A.D, Umar ruled for about ten years from 634 – 644 A.D, Uthman for about twelve years from 644 to 656 A.D, and the last of *Caliphs*, Imam Ali (a.s.) was harassed by Mu'awiya and made to engage in wars and skirmishes throughout the period of about five years from 656–661. The total period of governance under the *Rashidun Caliphs* was only 30 years; whereas, Mu'awiya's rule over Syria and Iraq extended to another 18 years after the *four caliphs*. Thus, in a part of the Islamic world from the very early days, what was taught for about half a century was Mu'awiya's brand of Islam.

That Mu'awiya did not create any confusion during the rule of the first three *Caliphs* shows how the threat perception was viewed by both sides, and how mutual concession were given and taken by both sides in order to retain the seat that both sides knew it was not theirs by right but only by mutual courtesy. Both sides also realised that any dispute between them at that stage would have only

strengthened Ali's position, since the companions, who had witnessed the Prophet (S) speaking in favour of Ali, were alive and in a good number.

The fact that Imam Ali (a.s.) could re-establish true Islamic norms within a short span of about five years, that too while he was engaged by Mu'awiya in constant wars, shows that the righteous always win, though their victory may come much later. It is this rule of Imam Ali (a.s.) that we shall examine in the next chapter.

1. Qur'an, 2:247, 4:52, 5:48, 12:22, 38:25, 62:2.
2. Qur'an, 17:71.
3. Qur'an, 2:123.
4. Qur'an, 32:24.
5. Al-Kaafi, vol. 1, p. 180.
6. Qur'an, 2; 123.
7. Al-Hurr al-Aamili's Ithbathul Hudat, vol. 1, p. 247, quoted in Imamate and Leadership by Mujtaba Musavi Lari, p. 161.
8. Qur'an, 4:52.
9. Men of authority.
10. Qur'an, 4:58.
11. Biharul Anwar, Vol. 25, p. 200.
12. Qur'an, 18:27.
13. Al-Hur al-Aamuli's Ithbatul Hudat, vol. 3, p. 131.
14. Ibid., p. 123.
15. Translated by Dr. Shabeeb Rizvi, Abaqat Publications, 2003.
16. At-Tabari's Tarikh, vol. 2, p. 84.
17. Musnad of Ahmed bin Hanbal, vol.4, p.104, Tarikh of at-Tabari, vol. 2, p. 451, Al-Iqd al-Farid of ibn Abd Rabbih, vol. 3, p.61, al-Bidaya of ibn Kathir, vol. 5, p. 260, Tarikh of al-Ya'qubi, vol. 2, p.94.
18. Tarikh of at-Tabari, vol. 5, p.31, al-Kamil of ibn al-Athir, vol. 3, p.3.
19. Kanzul Ummal, vol. 3, p. 140.
20. Seera of ibn Hisham, vol. 4, p.308.
21. At-Tamhid of al-Baqillani, p. 186, quoted in Mujtaba Musavi Lari's Imamate and Leadership, p. 13.
22. Qur'an, 33:36.
23. Ad-Duri's al-Nudhum al-Islamiyya, vol. 1, p.72-84, quoted in Mujtaba Musavi Lari's Imamate and Leadership, p. 14.
24. Mujtaba Musavi Lari's Imamate and Leadership, p. 16
25. Sheik Sulayman Al-Qanduzi's Yanabi'ul Mawaddah, p. 446.
26. Al-Majlisi's Biharul Anwar, vol. 26, p. 160.
27. Al-Kulayni's al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 255.
28. Ibid., p. 222.
29. Al-Kulaini's al Kaafi, vol. 1, p. 225.
30. Al-Hurr al-Aamili's Ithbatul Hudat, vol. 6, p. 45, Sheikh as-Saduq's Kitabut Tawhid p. 427.
31. Ibn Abil Hadid's Sharh Nahjol Balagha vol. 3, p. 107.
32. At-Tabaris's Tarikh vol.2, p.460, Ibn Hisham's al-Seera, vol. 4 P. 34, ibn Kathir's al-Bidaya. vol. 6 p. 303, ibn Athir's al-Kamil, vol. 2, p. 129.
33. Musnad of Ahmad bin Hanbal, vol. 1, p.10, Muqaddima of ibn Khaldun, Tr. Rosenthal, Vol. 1, p.388-89.
34. Ibn Sa'd's Tabaqat, vol. 2, p...
35. Al-Ghadir vol. 6, p. 23.
36. Sahih of Muslim vol. 3, p. 183, Musnad of Ahmad bin Hanbal, vol. 3, p. 408, al-Halabi's Seera vol. 4, p.37; ibn Katjhir's Tarikh, vol. 3, p. 23.

- [37.](#) At-Tirmithi's al-Jami'ul Sahih, vol. 4, p. 38, al-Bidaya of ibn Kathir, vol. 5, p. 141.
- [38.](#) Sihih of Muslim, vol. 4, p. 183.
- [39.](#) Al-Mas'udi's Muruj ath-Thahab.
- [40.](#) Sahih of Al-Bukhari, Kitabal Fitn, Sahih of Muslim, vol. 5, p. 64.
- [41.](#) Qur'an, 10:35.
- [42.](#) Muhajirin were the first Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina. The literal meaning is 'emigrants'.
- [43.](#) Ansars were the residents of Medina who helped and assisted the Prophet [s] and his companions, the Muhajirin, in defending them against their enemies. The literal meaning of the word is 'helpers or assistants'.
- [44.](#) Tarikh al-Khulafa, Vol. 3, p. 202–203, Quoting Kanzul Ummal Vol. 3, p. 140. Nahjul Balagha:Sermon No. 9.
- [45.](#) Qasasul Anbiya, Rightway Publication – [2005] – p. 89.
- [46.](#) In fact, he was his uncle, but because he regarded him too much that he brought him up, he called him as 'father'.
- [47.](#) Qasasul Anbiya, Rightway Publication – [2005] – p. 90.
- [48.](#) Ibn Kathir's Qasasul Ambiya, p. 247
- [49.](#) Kitab Sulaym Ibn Qays al-Hilli, English Translation by Maulana Sayyid Ali Abid Rizvi & Fazela Nilam Rizvi, published by S & N Rizvi, Heston, Hounslow, England [2001].
- [50.](#) Nahjul Balagha – Sermon No. 7; ash-Shaqshaqiyya, Nahjul Asrar, p. 262.
- [51.](#) A short History of the Saracens, p. 47.
- [52.](#) Shibli's al-Faruq, p. 123–124 quoted in MAA Sattar's Caliph's Caliphate.
- [53.](#) The Deccan Chronicle published from Hyderabad, India, dated 20 February 2005.

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