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Chapter 1: Goals Of Building The Virtuous Community

The fundamental objectives of building a virtuous community are generally the same previously mentioned objectives of the Holy Imams ('a). These objectives can be summarized in the following points:

- (1) Establish Proof (of Almighty Allah) for the people
- (2) Lead the Islamic experiment in theory and practice
- (3) Establish ideological and religious authority over Muslims
- (4) Defend Islam and its doctrines
- (5) Guard the political existence of Islam by preserving its Islamic government, society and every individual entity
- (6) Play the role of excellent exemplars

In the upcoming details regarding building a virtuous community many features of these goals will manifest themselves. However, we have to refer to the following points in order to make the manifestation of these features more feasible:

Contribution to the Islamic Leadership (Assuming the Islamic Government)

Without doubt, one of the major objectives of the existence of the Holy Imams ('a) and their presentation of a thesis within the framework of the divine message of Islam is to lead the Islamic mission and take it to a high level of perfection. The Divine planning for the Final Message necessitated the attainment of a

level of perfection compatible with its wide-ranging scope during which rule would be assumed by the Twelve Imams ('a)—a period of about three centuries, at least, if we take into consideration the lowest estimate of the natural age of each of the Holy Imams ('a).

It is also possible to presume that such perfection would cover all aspects of life, including mental, scientific, ethical, governmental, relational, organizational, and financial aspects (economic growth, social security and liability), along with military forces and promulgation of Islam and Islamic culture all over the world. Features would also cover other aspects of human life such that they would, practically and in actuality, be examples of Almighty Allah's Word in the Holy Qur'an:

He it is Who sent His Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth, that He might cause it to prevail over all religions, though the polytheists may be averse. (9:33)

Unfortunately, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) were driven away from playing this vital role due to the deviation of people from the right path, improper choices, misjudgments, and dependence upon personal interests in all fields, especially politics. As a result, Muslims in particular and all human beings in general have had to experience restricted progress, frustration, and adverse conditions.

The one and only part responsible for such consequences is man alone. Human beings are also the parties responsible for all other disappointments and obstacles throughout the history of humanity, beginning the moment Almighty Allah created Adam and chose for him a wife to live with him in Paradise up to the missions of the prophets ('a), when they failed to respond to the divine missions. Referring to this fact, the Holy Qur'an declares:

All people were a single nation; so, Allah raised prophets as bearers of good news and as warners and revealed with them the Book with the truth that it might judge between people in that in which they differed. But those to whom the Scripture was given, after clear arguments had come to them, differed among themselves. Therefore, Allah has guided by His will those who believe the truth about which they differed. Allah guides whom He pleases to the right path. (2/213)

The Holy Imams ('a), however, attempted to return the situation to its proper form. Hence, after being driven away from their mission immediately after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S), they planned to

reassume the mission of guiding to Islam. Building a virtuous community was one of their plans, because it would play a significant role in their contribution to the Islamic leadership.

This fact can be obviously noticed through a survey of the period in which the first three Imams—namely Imam 'Ali, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husayn ('a) 1—lived. These Imams attempted to assume the leadership of the Muslim community through their political discourses with the Muslim community.

In point of fact, Imam 'Ali ('a) did hold the leadership, but this did not last for a long period during Imam Hasan's lifetime. After that, Muslims hoped that the leadership would return to the status quo when Imam Husayn ('a) held it; therefore, they asked him to undertake the mission that resulted in the horrible tragedy of Karbala.

There is no doubt that Imam 'Ali ('a) raised and educated an elite group of people and built up their spiritual and organizational posture so firmly that they fought under his pennon and offered great sacrifices for the sake of Islam to substantiate the ideals and values to which the Imam ('a) had called.

Similarly, Imam Hasan ('a) was able to preserve the same group by specifying their safety as one of the conditions of his peace truce with Mu'awiyah.

As a result, this elite group was able to play a pioneering role during the age of Imam Husayn ('a) when they were able to break through the stagnant states of acquiescence to the Umayyad regime under whose shadows the Muslim nation then lived. They were also able to promulgate the objective of the movement of Imam Husayn ('a) whose slogan was to overthrow the Umayyad ruling regime and prepare a platform on which his uprising could achieve its widest range in the milieu of the Muslim nation, leaving an endless influence on the course of Muslim history. In fact, most of these goals, including the eventual collapse of the Umayyad dynasty, were achieved.

As regards the period of the first three Imams ('a), we can maintain that the leading and most important objective of building a virtuous community during that period was to contribute to the process of guiding others to Islam—an objective corresponding to the activities of the Holy Imams ('a) in the field of preserving the Muslim nation. The first procedure in this process was installing a genuinely Islamic government both externally, which was actually achieved by Imam 'Ali and Imam Hasan ('a), though for a short period, and theoretically. Working towards installing an Islamic government theoretically, the Holy Imams ('a) were able to create in the Muslim nation a trend demanding the installation of such a genuinely Islamic government and forming a pressure group that could correct the course of the Muslim governments throughout history.

The Role of the Elite during the Reign of the First Three Caliphs

As has been previously discussed, this specially chosen group, which represented the virtuous community built by the Holy Imams ('a) and demanded that the political and religious leadership be

entrusted to Imam 'Ali ('a), played a considerable role in guiding the Muslim public during the reign of the second Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab.

However, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab determined that the choice of the leadership following himself would be restricted to six persons through the so-called principle of *shura* (consultation) and that the final decision would be at the discretion of 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf in the case that these six persons disputed the nomination of one among two. This was in fact an organized attempt to absorb the pressure of the demands of the virtuous community.

Despite this attempt, pressure by the masses forced 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf to select Imam 'Ali ('a) and call upon him to hold the leadership of the Muslim nation. However, 'Abd al-Rahman specified a condition, knowing that Imam 'Ali ('a) would certainly reject it, that Imam 'Ali ('a) must conform to the conduct of the two previous caliphs in addition to the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.2

The activity of this pressure group became more obvious when the sedition of 'Uthman's assassination took place. Immediately, the masses hurried to swear allegiance to Imam 'Ali ('a) in an unprecedented way. This fact is one of the distinctive features of Imam 'Ali's leadership for which he excelled all other caliphs who preceded and followed him. The allegiance to Abu–Bakr, on the other hand, was made at a limited meeting held in the court of Banu–Sa'idah (*saqifah*) where attending Muslims disagreed about the issue and many distinguished Muslim personalities were absent.

As for 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, he was given the oath of fealty because Abu-Bakr nominated him as the next caliph and because of the Muslims' silence regarding this nomination after Abu-Bakr rejected the objections of some Muslim personalities, such as Talhah.

'Uthman ibn 'Affan was declared the caliph of Muslims as a result of the aforementioned restricted so-called *shura*.3

As for the rulers who came after Imam 'Ali ('a), all of them held the authority of the Muslim nation through nomination of the previous caliphs, inheritance, power, and suppression of the masses. It is an undeniable fact that the true role of *shura* was totally erased from political life after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S).

The Role of the Elite during Imam 'Ali's Reign

The elite believers played a distinct role during the conflicts that Imam 'Ali ('a) had to encounter against his rivals 'A'ishah, Talhah, Zubayr, and the Umayyads, headed by Mu'awiyah. In these conflicts, Imam 'Ali ('a) demonstrated the importance of 'maintaining Islamic principles and values' against the notion of 'temporary benefits and tangible gains' adopted by the Imam's rivals. Unquestionably, Imam 'Ali ('a)—due to the emotional and historical circumstances of that period—could not have continued in this conflict nor achieved relative success without the existence of an elite group such as the one that he had built in the

milieu of the Muslim nation.

Examples of Notable Men

mam 'Ali's efforts in building a virtuous	s community resulted in role models like:
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- (1) Malik al-Ashtar (2) Hashim al-Mirqal (3) Muhammad ibn Abi-Bakr (4) Qays ibn Sa'd ibn 'Abadah (5) Hijr ibn 'Adi (6) Sa'sa'ah ibn Sawhan (7) Zayd ibn Sawhan (8) Uways al-Qirani (9) Sulayman ibn Surad al-Khuza'i (10) Abu'l-Aswad al-Du'ali (11) 'Abdullah ibn Talhah (12) 'Abdullah ibn Ja'far (13) Khabbab ibn al-Aratt (14) 'Abdullah ibn Khabbab ibn al-Aratt (15) 'Adi ibn Hatam al-Ta'i (16) 'Aqil ibn Abi-Talib (17) 'Amr ibn al-Hamq al-Khuza'i (18) Qanbar, the manumitted slave of Imam 'Ali (19) Muhammad ibn Abi-Hudhayfah
- (21) Al-Asbagh ibn Nubatah

(20) Khuzaymah ibn Thabit al-Ansari (*dhu'l-shahadatayn*)

- (22) Maytham al-Tammar
- (23) Kumayl ibn Ziyad
- (24) Al-Harith al-Hamdani
- (25) Rashid al-Hajari, an
- (26) 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas

In addition to these personalities and many others, we can refer in this regard to some companions of the Holy Prophet (S) (i.e. *sahabah*) such as:

- (1) 'Ammar ibn Yasir
- (2) Ibn al-Tayhan
- (3) 'Uthman ibn Hunayf
- (4) Sahl ibn Hunayf
- (5) Jabir ibn 'Abdullah al-Ansari

The deaths of these people grieved Imam 'Ali ('a), causing him to weep whenever he thought about the tremendous loss that had been left in the progressive movement of Islam. The loss was great because the Imam had met with each of these personalities separately and entrusted them with his secrets.

The effective role of this elite group lasted until the time of Imam Husayn ('a) when the remaining members of the group sacrificed themselves for the sake of his movement, which was an unmistakable effort to regain the leadership of the Islamic nation.4

Preserving the Muslim Community

According to the Holy Imams ('a), the mission of preserving the Muslim community is the second objective of building a virtuous entity.

In fact, this virtuous entity was able to play a vital role in the preservation of the Muslim community in the presence of the Holy Imams ('a) and also after the Major Occultation of Imam al-Mahdi—may Allah hasten his Advent.

Building a virtuous community was not solely aimed at increasing the number of supporters and truly guided individuals whose aid was required in the political activities undertaken by the Holy Imams ('a). There were also other deeper aims connected to the general goals of the Holy Imams ('a) at all levels. These profound goals could only be undertaken by an organized and united virtuous community.

The following points and facts will further clarify the goals and their significance:

Defending the Muslim Society

The virtuous, elite group is required to preserve the power and consistency of the Muslim society by means of defending it against internal and external enemies. In this domain, the followers (Shi'ah) and adherents of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a) played significant roles in driving back foreign invasions against the Muslim world in the late period of the 'Abbasid dynasty. The Hamdanite dynasty in Syria (who were Shi'ah) fought the Crusades, and the Idrisite dynasty in northern Africa (who were also Shi'ah) fought against the enemies of Islam. Similarly, the Shi'ah resisted the Mongol invasion in the east of the Muslim homeland, withstanding its aggressive momentum. They also participated in the eradication of the mutiny of the insurgents in the districts of Tabaristan, and the mutinies of the Turks and the Daylam in the districts of the Caspian Sea as well as other districts.

Under the guidance of the Holy Imams ('a), Shi'ite personalities played diverse roles in defending Islam. They confronted the movements of atheism and agnosticism and the tendencies of moral corruption that spread to major Muslim cities, such as al-Madinah, Makkah, al-Kufah, al-Basrah, Syria, Baghdad, and other Muslim cities. This fact can be easily proven through the debates, discussions, and schools that were established by the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) as well as through the high moral standards they practiced and their resistance against various types of corruption, deviation, and bias.5

Presenting a Righteous Example

In order to build a virtuous community, it was necessary to introduce an example of righteousness in Muslim society, especially in an age when personal interests were preponderant over common benefits and interests of Islam and the Muslim nation. It was easy for the Umayyad regime to overpower the people's consciences and keep them quiet with pay-offs, exploit the religion for financial gain, and forge lies against the Holy Prophet (S) in order to justify the various flagrant acts of misconduct the ruling elite of the regime used to commit.

The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) paid great attention to this matter. Imam al-Sadiq ('a) instructed his adherents to act as exceptional examples in their behavior towards Muslims to preserve the Muslim society and guide the people to the true path.

In this respect, Shaykh al-Kulayni has reported through an authentic chain of authority (*sanad*) that Safwan ibn Yahya reported on the authority of Abu-Usamah Zayd al-Shahham that Imam al-Sadiq ('a) said to him:

إِقْرَأْ عَلَى مَنْ تَرَى أَنَّهُ يُطِيعُنِي مِنْهُمْ وَيَأْخُذُ بِقَوْلِي السَّلاَمَ، وَأُوصِيكُمْ بِتَقْوَى اللهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ، وَالْوَرَعَ فِي دِينِكُمْ، وَالْاجْتِهَادَ للهِ، وَصِدْقَ الْحَدِيثِ، وَأَدَاءَ الأَمَانَةِ، وَطُولَ السُّجُودِ، وَحُسْنَ الْجَوَارِ. فَبِهَذَا جَاءَ مُحَمَّدٌ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ؛ كَانَ يَأْمُرُ بِأَدَاءِ الْخَيْطِ وَالْمَخِيطِ. صِلُوا عَسَائِرَكُمْ، وَاشْهَدُوا جَنَائِزَهُمْ، وَعُودُوا مَرْضَاهُمْ، وَأَدُّوا حُقُوقَهُمْ؛ فَإِنَّ

الرَّجُلَ مِنْكُمْ إِذَا وَرِعَ فِي دِينِهِ وَصَدَقَ الْحَدِيثَ وَأَدَّى الأَمَانَةَ وَحَسَّنَ خُلُقَهُ مَعَ النَّاسِ قِيلَ هَذَا جَعْفَرِيُّ، فَيَسُرُّنِي ذَلِكَ وَيَدْخُلُ عَلَيَّ مِنْهُ السُّرُورَ، وقِيلَ هَذَا أَدَبُ جَعْفَرٍ. وَاللهِ لَحَدَّثَنِي أَبِي عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ أَنَّ الرَّجُلَ كَانَ يَكُونُ فِي القَبِيلَةِ مِنْ شِيعَةِ عَلِيٍّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ لِلْحَدِيثِ، إلَيْهِ وَصَايَاهُمْ وَوَدَائِعُهُمْ، شِيعَةِ عَلِيٍّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ فَيَكُونُ زَيْنَهَا، آدَاهُمْ لِلأَمَانَةِ، وَأَقْضَاهُمْ لِلْحُقُوقِ، وَأَصْدَقَهُمْ لِلْحَدِيثِ، إلَيْهِ وَصَايَاهُمْ وَوَدَائِعُهُمْ، شِيعَةِ عَلِيٍّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ فَيَكُونُ زَيْنَهَا، آدَاهُمْ لِلأَمَانَةِ، وَأَقْضَاهُمْ لِلْحَقُوقِ، وَأَصْدَقَهُمْ لِلْحَدِيثِ، إليَّهِ وَصَايَاهُمْ وَوَدَائِعُهُمْ، لَلْحَديثِ السَّلاَمُ فَيَكُونُ رَيْنَهَا، الْعَشِيرَةُ عَنْهُ فَتَقُولُ: مَنْ مِثْلُ فُلان؟ إِنَّهُ آدَانَا لِلأَمَانَةِ وَأَصِدَقُنَا لِلْحَديثِ

Say to all those you see following my orders: Peace be upon you. I advise you to fear Almighty Allah, act piously with regard to the affairs of your religion, work painstakingly for the sake of Almighty Allah, be honest in speech, safeguard property and securities entrusted to you, prostrate yourselves before Almighty Allah for considerable periods and observe good-neighborliness. Verily, these are the traits with which Prophet Muhammad (S) came. You must give back to their owners that with which you have been entrusted whether the owners are righteous or depraved.

The Messenger of Allah (S) used to order his followers to return everything even if only a thread and a needle. Build good relationships with your clans, attend their funeral processions, visit the sick among them, and carry out your duties towards them. Verily, if one of you shows piety in his religious affairs, speaks nothing but the truth, and behaves politely towards others, he will be referred to as belonging to Ja'far and they will say that this is the way Ja'far educates his followers. This will please me and fill me with delight. If anyone does the opposite, it is I who will be defamed and offended, since the people will then say that Ja'far has trained his followers in this manner.

I swear by Allah that my father ('a) told me that a (true) Shi'ite in a clan would be the best of its individuals, the most trustworthy, the most observant of the rights of others, and the most honest. The other individuals of that clan would always consign their wills and trusts to him. When asked about him, they would answer that he was unmatched among them, since he was the most trustworthy and the most honest.6

The last paragraph of this discourse is clear-cut proof of the expected role of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) as testified by Imam al-Sadiq ('a) who reports it from his father, Imam al-Baqir ('a).7

Islamic Unity

The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) played a remarkable role in the creation of an atmosphere of harmony and unity between their partisans and the followers of other Islamic sects. They practiced *taqiyyah*8 with these parties in order to maintain harmony with them, strengthen the spirit of peaceful coexistence, and establish coherence among the various Muslim groups.

It is true that *taqiyyah* provided the adherents of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a) a means of protection from the persecution practiced against them by the antagonistic rulers, but this was not the only goal of *taqiyyah* as endorsed by the Ahl al–Bayt ('a). In fact, *taqiyyah* was ordained mainly for the achievement of unity and harmony in the Muslim community. Therefore, we can find the Holy Imams ('a) urging their followers

to create a spirit of mutual solidarity, joint liability, and fulfillment of covenants and promises with other constituents of the Muslim community. Likewise, they encouraged their followers to adhere to friendliness and good-neighborliness, participate in social ceremonies, visit public places, and call upon the sick. The Holy Imams ('a) asserted that it was impossible to abandon the populace or survive in isolation.

Abiding by these instructions, the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt practiced the recommendations whether they were powerful or weak and rejected by the ruling authorities. History has not recorded any single event exposing a Shi'ah practice of repression or elimination against the followers of other Muslim sects even when power was in their hands; rather, they always abided by the course of self-defense when encountering vehement attacks.

Following this course, they would cling to patience, silence, and forbearance of various types of harm and prejudice to their inherent natural rights. In the same manner, the Shi'ah had never resorted to terrorism, violence, and methods of assassination, kidnapping, taking hostages, or killing people by means of thirst or starvation. In fact, it is the Shi'ah who had to encounter such inhumane practices that were used against even the innocent and enfeebled, like women, children, and elderly men.

A more detailed discussion of *taqiyyah* will follow in the coming chapter on the security system of the virtuous community. However, let us cite the following text in which Imam al–Sadiq ('a) distinguishes one of the reasons for the legislation on *taqiyyah*:

In *Usul al–Kafi*, Shaykh al–Kulayni has reported through an authenticated chain of authority that Murazim reported Imam al–Sadiq ('a) as having said:

I advise you to offer prayers in the mosques (of the non–Shi'ah Muslims) and show good–neighborliness to people. Testify for the rightful parties and attend their funeral ceremonies. Verily, you can never abandon others. No one can live without others at any time during their lifetimes, since people have an indispensable need for each other.9

Fundamentalism and High Moral Standards

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) established the trend of complying with the spirit of fundamentalism and high moral standards.

They infused the spirit of supporting the rightful party and observing the basic religious laws among the Shi'ah and followers of their school. Having become a distinctive feature of the Shi'ah, compliance with

these principles made the Shi'ah stand out from the opposition throughout history, although they lost numerous material benefits and were exposed to persecution as a result. However, this spirit and course has been a major factor that elucidated the values and ideals of the Muslim community through the lifestyles of the virtuous individuals who held fast to the truth, forsook worldly pleasures, and aspired to the achievement of the supreme ideals and goals.

Many opportunities presented themselves before the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to sink, along with the general trend, towards corruption and achieve limited and transient gains, such as during the early period of 'Abbasid rule. The Holy Imams ('a) did not begin an armed struggle against the 'Abbasid regime in its first days because the 'Abbasids were allies of the Shi'ah in opposing the Umayyad regime and enjoyed a good relationship with the Shi'ah. However, the 'Abbasid regime later expected the Shi'ah to support them in their corrupt use of power and spurn the fundamentals of Islam, which the Shi'ah rejected outright.

The Shi'ah were subsequently offered other seductive opportunities concerning their varying tentative roles during the Mongol invasion and European campaigns against Islamic countries like Iraq, Lebanon, some countries of the Persian Gulf, the Indian subcontinent, Afghanistan, Iran, etc. During these periods, the Shi'ah had many opportunities to cooperate with new political developments that brought about Western dominance over the Islamic world. Nevertheless, in spite of persecution, they did not take advantage of these situations to gain political and social control in spite of the fact that others did take advantage of such situations.

The Shi'ah chose to resist foreign invasions and persist in complying with their fundamentals. They suffered deprivation and persecution because of this fundamentalism even though they formed an overwhelming majority in some of the new districts of the Islamic world. On account of their supreme spirit of fundamentalism, which had already been their distinctive feature, the Shi'ah rejected an opportunistic and deviant way. 10

These sensitive situations have greatly influenced the steadfastness of the Muslim community against invading trends and in their dedication to the maintenance of the community, their persistence in protesting against corruption and oppression, and soaring above all worldly seductions.

Humanity and Internationality

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a) worked towards extinguishing all racial, sectarian, and provincial prejudice—which was common among the Arab people and deeply rooted during the pre–Islamic era—among Muslims in general and the Arab people in particular. Due to the expansive Islamic conquests and intermixture between Arabs and non–Arabs, such feelings resurfaced largely during the Umayyad reign and caused conflicts among the Muslims and discrimination between Arab and non–Arab (*mawali*) Muslims. Unfortunately, this attitude gained royal support from the 'Abbasid and Ottoman dynasties.

The adherents of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) presented the impartial spirit of fraternity among Muslims through their faith-based behavior. They never stirred up national or racial discrimination since they emulated the behavior of the Holy Imams ('a), who provided custody to weak subjects who converted to Islam as a result of conquests and suffered racial, national, and social discrimination because they were considered second-class citizens.

As a consequence, the Shi'ah of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) have been accused of belonging to non-Arab origins. This charge has continued up to the present day because the Shi'ah have always treated all Muslims with the spirit of fraternity and, because of this broad-mindedness, they left sympathetic impressions in the hearts of non-Arab Muslims.

Sacrifice and Readiness for Martyrdom

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) kindled the spirit of self-sacrifice and readiness for martyrdom in the minds of Muslims. In addition, they helped the public persist in objecting to injustice and tyranny. Consequently, the virtuous community created by the Holy Imams ('a) enjoyed a clear-cut role in Muslim history of leading uprisings and liberal and reformative movements against the corrupt conditions of Muslim society. Either directly or indirectly, through the influence they left on the Muslim public, the Shi'ah have led many revolutions and uprisings. 11

This revolutionary trend has always been one of the distinctive features of the Ahl al-Bayt's adherents in their relationship with the Muslims. This mutual influence has manifested itself more obviously in present times.

One of the most significant features that distinguishes the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) from all others is their ultimate abstention from helping oppressors and unjust rulers except in very limited cases and under certain circumstances. 12

Safeguarding Islamic Law Against Distortion

Safeguarding Islamic law against distortion was one of the most important objectives the Holy Imams ('a) intended in building a virtuous community. During their lifetimes, the Holy Imams ('a) worked towards achieving this objective so that Islamic law, after their absence, would not be exposed to distortion and loss because of political circumstances, predominance of personal desires, and other factors causing distortion and loss of beliefs.

The function of the virtuous community would be to continue this mission after the Holy Imams ('a). Islam, being the final Divine Message had to be safeguarded against loss in order to make it possible to observe and develop human interests by total commitment to the factual limits of this message, which needed to be established in all times and ages. Referring to this purpose, the Holy Qur'an states:

(We sent) messengers as givers of good news and warners, so that people should not have any argument against Allah after the coming of messengers. Allah is Mighty, Wise. (4/165)13

The following features of the virtuous community as represented by the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) demonstrate the role that they have played in safeguarding Islamic law against distortion:

Principle of Resistance

The followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) demonstrated their doctrinal and conceptual compliance with the political principle of resisting and confronting wrongdoers. Unfortunately, this Islamic fundament became susceptible to attempts of eradication and extinction either by persecution and pursuit or by deception and distortion. Many false terms and traditions were forged in the name of the Holy Prophet (S) in order to justify surrender to unsuitable ruling authorities and yield to their unjust deeds.

The Muslim masses acted upon such falsities; however, the virtuous community of the Ahl al-Bayt's followers maintained the political trend of resisting unjust authorities. They also transferred this trend to the next generation not only as motto and theory but also as an applied course of action in actual political situations.

In addition, because of such a political attitude the Ahl al-Bayt School ('a) and the virtuous community, which inferred religious laws from their sources (i.e. *ijtihad*), were far above yielding to personal desires and adopting situations that might support unjust ruling authorities. Thus, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) School has shown independency from the ruling authorities at both practical and theoretical levels. One of their distinctive features is that they have separated the issue of ijtihad from the deviating political actions of the ruling authorities.

ljtihad in the frame of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a) guided the virtuous community to keep the door of *ijtihad* wide open yet only within the scope of divine fundaments and criteria. The authentic sources of Islamic legislation are the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Sunnah; however, other Muslim sects, for certain reasons, depended upon other sources—such as analogy (*qiyas*), equitable preference (*Istihsan*), 14 acceptable advantages (*al–Masalih al–Mursalah*), the opinion of any companion of the Holy Prophet (*Qawl al–Sahabi*), 15 and other principles.

They closed the door of *ijtihad* because of the damages that befell *ijtihad* in its capacity of inferring religious laws and applying them on the emerging issues that required religious verdicts. Such inventions caused the Muslim code of law (*shari'ah*) to encounter the peril of distortion. In addition, closing the door of *ijtihad* left perilous, negative effects on the process of inferring religious laws from their sources and

on the competence of the Muslim code of law to deal with the emerging problems facing human society due to major developments in all spheres of life. Once again, owing to difficulties in the milieus of the public, such a procedure has placed Muslim jurisprudents in a state of scholarly poverty and prompted a large number of scholars, throughout the past ages, to aspire to guide their followers after re–opening the door of *ijtihad*, especially in the present time.

On the other hand, the virtuous community among the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) possessed a unique trait: the individuals of this community enriched and controlled the process of *ijtihad*. Hence, this process has convoyed the developments of the human society without leaving a single gap for distortion or yielding before Western concepts and materialistic civilizations that could influence Islamic law. This School has gone on proffering new aspects and maintaining genuineness in its sources and authentic reserves. It has thus been able to sustain Muslim law and heritage.

Freedom of Thought

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) endowed the virtuous community with the power of free thought, reflection, analysis and examination of various issues appertaining to philosophy, theology and politics, unaffected by inactive frames and ideological restraints that might be imposed upon them due to political or sectarian reasons. This made the virtuous community capable of criticizing the history of Islam and progressively understanding philosophic and theological issues as well as confronting foreign ideological and philosophic issues invading the Muslim world through the ages.

It is true that other Muslim groups, such as the *Mu'tazilah* and the *Ikhwan al–Safa*, took important steps in this domain, but all their attempts failed because they were detached from the genuine roots of Muslim ideology and besieged by prevailing sectarian doctrine.

Piety and Decency

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) revived piety, decency, and steadfastness in the human personality and placed them effectively in social practices, causing the virtuous community to play a vital and basic role in social life according to which society would practice applied morality. As a result, the virtuous community never accepted the authority and testimony of indecent people. These two factors, piety and decency, are conditional in the personality of the leaders of collective prayers (*imam al-jama'ah*), the witnesses of divorce and judicial issues, and those who hold judiciary positions. Moreover, a reporter of the traditions of the Holy Prophet (S) and Imams ('a) must be trustworthy regardless of his political affiliation. Hence, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) School might admit the report of a reporter who follows another sect or object to a belief of a Shia depending on one's trustworthiness. This School rejects the report of any liar or untrustworthy person no matter how much loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) he may bear. In plain words, the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) School does not accept any sadith unless it is reported by a trustworthy person.

This principle performed a considerable role in maintaining and transmitting the traditions; therefore, all reports have been subjected to criticism, assessment, and scrutiny in both their chain of authority (*sanad*) and context (*matn*).

Unlike other Muslim groups that have committed themselves to a set of books considering them to be totally authentic despite the fact that these books contain names of some people notorious for fabrication and deviation, it is rare to find any reference book of Hadith being wholly acceptable by the virtuous community. 16

In addition, there is a large number of traditions that the major reference books of Hadith of other Muslim sects (i.e. non–Shi'ah) have not mentioned for no reason other than that their reported narrators belonged to a sect other than that of the authors of these books. This shows that political loyalty was the one and only criterion in accepting a tradition.

Recording and Upholding the Muslim Heritage

The Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) insisted that the individuals of the virtuous community record, uphold, and check the traditions and reported texts about Muslim heritage. They ensured that the virtuous community maintained a considerable number of traditions on various topics, both religious and worldly. In addition, they also possess a tremendous quantity of traditions on topics related to the exegesis of the Holy Qur'an, supplications, instructions, sermons, and history in spite of the crucial circumstances they had to encounter throughout various periods in the history of Islam and the scarcity of potential and opportunities. Thus, the Muslim heritage that is currently in circulation among the descendants of the virtuous community is more comprehensive and extensive than the heritage possessed by all other Muslim groups. This fact has largely contributed to the maintenance of Islamic law and the genuine line of Islam, uncontaminated by personal desires, distortion, and political affiliation.

Preliminary Steps Towards the Advent

All the divine religions, including Islam, have prophesied the advent of a reformer and savior in the last days of this world and human history that will 'fill the earth with justice and fairness, after having been filled with injustice and partiality.'

This prophecy certifies the Qur'anic fact that the earth will be inherited by the virtuous and enfeebled people. In this respect, the Holy Qur'an states:

And certainly We wrote in the Psalms, which came after the Reminder, "My righteous servants shall inherit the earth". (21:105)

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَمَا اسْتَخْلَفَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَلَيُمَكِّنَنَّ لَهُمْ دِينَهُمُ الَّذِي (كُونَ بِي شَيْئًا ١ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ (55:22 (ارْتَضَىٰ لَهُمْ وَلَيُبَدَلَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَعْد خَوْفِهمْ أَمْنًا ١ يَعْبُدُونَنِي لَا يُشْرِكُونَ بِي شَيْئًا ١ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ بَعْدُ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولُئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ (52:24

Allah has promised to those of you who believe and do good that He will most certainly make them rulers in the earth as He made rulers those before them, and that He will most certainly establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them, and that He will most certainly, after their fear, give them security in exchange; they shall serve Me, not associating aught with Me; and whoever disbelieves after this are the transgressors (24:55).

The idea of the advent of a reformer before the end of the world also corresponds with the fact mentioned by the Holy Qur'an that right will always eventually overcome wrong throughout the history of humankind. The method of divine custody and intervention through the sending of prophets and messengers and revealing of Divine Books points to the fact that the movement of history is integrative in the sense that its parts complete each other and, in the end, must achieve the ideal society that has been predicted by prophets and virtuous personalities throughout history.

The final divine message (i.e. Islam) has come to achieve human perfection at a level of cognizance and perception. It has also expressed theoretical perfection intending to systemize human life as well as perfect the progress of various social relationships. However, this perfection has not been fully achieved at levels of application, practice, representation, and practical compliance. This is so because such a level of perfection requires a long period of sufferance, dedication, experiment, analysis and examination.

This necessitates the role of the Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and the virtuous community who undertake the mission of paving the way to the stage of history of the advent of the savior and reformer of humanity.

More than anyone else, the Holy Imams ('a) used to present the concept of the Advent of Imam al-Mahdi—may Allah hasten his relief—as the awaited leader who would save humanity from wrong, persecution, and corruption. The presentation of Imam al-Mahdi's expected advent attained such a high level that the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) believed that the Holy Imam of their age would be the Awaited Mahdi.

When they instituted the virtuous community, the Holy Imams ('a) ensured that this community would play the role of paving the way for the advent of the awaited Imam during the ages of his occultation not only at the levels of ideology and belief but also at practical levels. This is obvious from the following points:

The Advent is a Vital Concept

The Holy Imams ('a) activated the concept of the advent of the Awaited Imam in the milieu of the virtuous community actually connecting them with it and creating the feeling of expectation of the advent 17 by making expectation a lively slogan which was raised in the cultural sphere and the political cognizance.

Although all Muslims believe in this concept, it is noticeable that the virtuous community has had an advantage over other Muslims in adopting and perceiving this concept as well as in their compliance with the details of its features. In the view of the virtuous community, the anticipation of the Awaited Imam is not only anticipation of a futuristic state to which all human beings aspire. The Imam is also an existent person who lives with each Muslim, feels the pains of humanity, and suffers the problems of society. Like all other faithful believers, the Awaited Imam ('a) is in expectation of the Promised Day on which he shall reappear. In other words, he is imperceptible to us but witnesses all that takes place on earth.

Responsibility and Will to Change

The process of paving the way for the advent of the Awaited Imam put into effect by the virtuous community is not just a hypothetical idea or doctrinal duty, as is believed by some Muslims and people of other religions. Moreover, it is not just a psychological and spiritual state, although each of these aspects plays a considerable role in the process of paving the way for the advent.

Most importantly, this process is a practical political movement that exists in the Muslim nation and is present as a feeling of responsibility towards all the events that take place within the nation. This feeling generates a strong willpower to work towards achieving this goal and, at the same time, prevent the nation from surrendering to tyrannical rulers or cultural and educational pressures. This very distinctive feature has singled out the virtuous community throughout the history of Islam.

Return to Genuine Islam

Another feature of the virtuous community is that its individuals actively promote the advent of the Awaited Imam and support it against the material and non-religious cultures that are holding sway over the Western world. This will hold true in the future, as is confirmed by traditions of the Holy Infallibles ('a).

As far as the present is concerned, the role of the virtuous community in introducing Islam to the social, political, and cultural spheres of other societies can be clearly observed in spite of the fact that there have been many attempts to eradicate Islam or to reduce its importance from life, especially in present times. 18

By strengthening this idea in the minds of people, we believe that, we can win the support of the Holy

Imams ('a) in achieving the goals of their existence and maintaining and perpetuating their vital roles in Muslim society through the virtuous community, especially after the occultation of the Awaited Imam—may Allah hasten his reappearance.

In view of the above, it was necessary to create such a virtuous community. Therefore, its creation was not just an issue of guiding people to the right path and establishing the final proof against them, although this purpose did influence the formation of this community whose members believed in the divinely commissioned leadership of the Twelve Imams ('a) and their sacred standing in the Muslim nation.

The text of the following tradition, which is reported by Shaykh al-Kulayni from Imam al-Jawad ('a) on the authority of his forefathers on the authority of the Holy Prophet (S), may shed light on the nature of the purpose behind building this virtuous community:

إِنَّ اللهَ خَلَقَ الإِسْلاَمَ فَجَعَلَ لَهُ عَرَصَةً، وَجَعَلَ لَهُ نُوراً، وَجَعَلَ لَهُ حِصْناً، وَجَعَلَ لَهُ نَاصِراً. فَأَمَّا عَرَصَتُهُ فَالْقُرْآنُ، وَأَمَّا أَنْصَارُهُ فَأَنَا وَأَهْلُ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتُنَا. فَأَحِبُوا أَهْلَ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتَهُمْ وَأَنْصَارَهُمُ الْمُعْرُوفُ، وَأَمَّا أَنْصَارُهُ فَأَنَا وَأَهْلُ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتُنَا. فَأَحِبُوا أَهْلَ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتَهُمْ وَأَنْصَارَهُمْ اللهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلاَمُ لِأَهْلِ السَّمَاءِ اسْتَوْدَعَ اللهُ حُبِّي وَحُبَّ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتِهِمْ فِي قُلُوبِ الْمَلاَئِكَةِ، فَهُو عِنْدَهُمْ وَدِيعَةٌ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ. ثُمَّ هَبَطَ بِي إِلَى أَهْلِ الأَرْضِ فَنَسَبَنِي إِلَى أَهْلِ الأَرْضِ فَنَسَبَنِي إِلَى أَهْلِ الأَرْضِ فَاسْبَنِي إِلَى أَهْلِ الأَرْضِ فَاسَبَنِي إِلَى أَهْلِ الأَرْضِ فَاسْبَنِي إِلَى أَهْلِ الأَرْضِ فَاسْبَوْدَعَ اللهُ عَرَّ وَجَلَّ عُمْرَهُ أَيَّامَ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ لَقِي الْهُلِ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتِي فِي أَهْلِ بَيْتِي وَسُيعَتِي وَعُ اللهُ عَرَّ وَجَلَّ عُمْرَهُ أَيَّامَ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ لَقِيَ اللهُ عَرَّ وَجَلَّ مُرْدُ أَيَّامَ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ لَقِيَ اللهَ عَرَّ وَجَلَّ عَن النِفَاقِ بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتِي مَا فَرَّجَ اللهُ صَدْرَهُ إِلاَ عَن النِفَاقِ . بَيْتِي وَشِيعَتِي مَا فَرَّجَ اللهُ صَدْرَهُ إِلاَّ عَن النِفَاقِ

Verily, Almighty Allah has created Islam and made for it a courtyard, a light, a fortress, and a supporter. The courtyard of Islam is the Qur'an; its light, its wisdom, its fortress, a kind act; and its supporters, I, my Household and our adherents (Shi'ah). You should thus bear love for my Household, their adherents, and their supporters. When I was ascending to the Lowest Sky where Archangel Gabriel introduced me to the inhabitants of the skies, Almighty Allah ordered the angels to maintain love for me, my Household, and their adherents in their hearts. Hence, this love remains a trust with the angels up to the Day of Resurrection.

Then, the Archangel led me down to the earth and introduced me to its inhabitants. There Almighty Allah ordered the believers among the inhabitants of the earth to maintain love in their hearts for me, my Household, and their adherents; therefore, the believers of my nation shall keep this love as a trust and shall consider it in their treatment of my Household, up to the Day of Resurrection. Truly I say, if a man from my nation lives his entire worldly life worshipping Almighty Allah but meets Him bearing malice against my Household and my Shi'ah, Almighty Allah will not judge him but as a hypocrite. 193232

1. – Undoubtedly, Imam al–Husayn ('a) knew that he would not be able to maintain political leadership of the Muslim nation; nevertheless, his declared goal and political speeches and activities were all devoted to retaining political leadership. This was, in fact, required as his religious and humanitarian duty vis–à–vis the circumstances, although the actual purpose behind Imam Husayn's movement was to achieve other matters, which we will mention in a later chapter dedicated to

discussing the history and attitudes of the Holy Imams ('a).

- 2. In specifying this condition, 'Abd al–Rahman ibn 'Awf established a new principle in the Muslim community by which the conduct of Abu–Bakr and 'Umar were raised to a level of sacredness similar to that of the Holy Prophet (S). Of course, Imam 'Ali ('a) would never accept such a stipulation. Neither the Ahl al–Bayt ('a) nor the elite, who believed in the divinely commissioned leadership of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a), accepted the condition.
- 3. Ma'alim al-Madrasatayn, 1:477-484, as quoted from Ibn Abi'l-Hadid's Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah 4:8-9.
- 4. We can understand the role of the virtuous community in assuming the leadership of the Muslim nation at large through comprehension of the Ahl al–Bayt's views on this issue.
- 5. I will devote a book to discussing these details in the future.
- 6. Al-Hurr al-'Amili, Wasa'il al-Shi'ah 8:398 H. 2.
- <u>7.</u> More light will be shed on this role in the coming discussion of the moral aspect of the social relationships of the virtuous community.
- <u>8.</u> Taqiyyah (self–protection or pious dissimulation) is the practice of concealing one's beliefs and foregoing ordinary religious duties when under threat of death or injury to oneself or one's fellow Muslims or when intended for achieving a superior purpose.
- 9. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah: 8:399, ch. 1, H.5.
- 10. More light will be shed on this significant role of the Shi'ah in the seventh book of this series; namely, The Virtuous Community Emulating the Ahl al-Bayt('a).
- 11. Such practices were carried out according to general standards and under the auspices of the Holy Imams ('a) regarding true opposition, which will be presented in the coming book on the general policies of the Holy Imams in this respect.
- 12. In the coming book on the Security System of the Virtuous Community, this point will be discussed in detail.
- 13. I have discussed the topic of establishing Almighty Allah's Proof against the arguments raised by His creatures in the book entitled 'The Argument (al-hujjah)' within this encyclopedia.
- <u>14.</u> In Sunni jurisprudence, istihsan is the use of one's own judgment to determine the best solution to a religious problem that cannot be solved by citing sacred texts.
- <u>15.</u> According to some Sunni jurisprudential schools, Qawl al–Sahabi (the opinion of any companion of the Prophet (S)) is one of the principles and sources upon which these schools depend in the deduction of religious laws from their sources.
- 16. Among the followers of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a), there was a trend claiming the authenticity of the contents of certain reference books of Hadith. This trend is called al–ikhbariyyah. Yet, it was discarded after being accepted for a certain period.
- <u>17.</u> The concept of expecting the advent of the Awaited Imam was significantly stressed by the Holy Prophet (S) as has been reported by Muslims in general. Nevertheless, practical and sentimental emphasis on this concept is one of the distinctive features of the followers of the Ahl al–Bayt ('a).
- 18. In the fifth book of this series when the roles of each of the Holy Imams ('a) will be discussed in detail, another discourse about the concept of the Awaited Imam in its cultural aspect will be presented.
- 19. Shaykh al-Kulayni, al-Kafi 2:46, H.3.

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