

## Chapter 4: The Theological Aspects of Ghadir

By: Husein Khimjee

### In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate

All Praise and Glory belong to Allah, Lord of the Universe and the Only True Sovereign. I praise Allah, and from Him do I crave support and guidance. And I seek refuge in Allah from the malice of my *nafs* and from any evil act; whomever Allah guides can never go astray; and whoever is misguided by Allah is truly lost and can never find guidance.

I testify that there is no god but Allah, the Only One, and He has no partner of any sort, and I testify that Muhammad is His Slave and Messenger sent by Allah with total guidance and true faith so that he should proclaim it over all the other ideologies; and in this Allah Himself is the Witness. And peace and blessings of Allah be on our Leader and the Prophet, the Seal of the Prophets, sent as a blessing to mankind, Muhammad (Abul-Qasim).

And peace and blessings of Allah be on his progeny, the purified, just as Allah Himself has revealed in the Qur'an:

***'Verily, Allah intendeth but to keep off from you (every kind of) uncleanness, O ye People of the House, and purify you (with) a thorough purification' (Quran 33:33).***

I thank Allah for making me into a Muslim and for His bounteous help, for indeed without His bounteous help this article would not have been possible. I pray to Allah that He guides us all and increases our faith and knowledge and brings about our death in no other state except as Muslims. Amen.

One of the most unique things in any aspect of Islamic theology is that its truth manifests itself in our daily lives. All that is required to see this is a little pondering. Take, for example, the theology expanded in the Qur'an that all things have their own term appointed. Thus, the Qur'an tells us:

***'What! Reflect they not within themselves; (to see clearly that) created not Allah the heavens and the earth and what is between them two except with truth, and for an appointed term?' (Quran 30:8)***

The principle – *ajal* or more precisely, *fi ajal in musammah* – manifests itself very clearly in our daily lives. Thus we find that everything around us has an appointed term of its own, whether it belongs to the animal, vegetable or mineral kingdom.

With this principle, it becomes very interesting when we note that even prophethood had a life cycle of its own; for it started with Prophet Adam, upon whom be peace, and ended with the Seal of the Prophets, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him and his family. Indeed this aspect of prophethood is popular with many Muslim thinkers and scholars of the past. Thus we are shown in one source<sup>1</sup>.

For example, that a Sufi poet, Mahmud Shabistari, wrote in his book *Gulshan-i-Raz*, the following couplet in Farsi: '*Nabuwwat ra zuhur ra az Adam amad, Kamalash dar wujud Khatam amad*' (The first appearance of prophethood was in Adam and its perfection was in the Seal of the Prophets). We find in this couplet a reference pointing clearly to the lifecycle prophethood went through beginning with Adam and flowering with the Last Prophet.

But this has posed a dilemma for mankind because while prophethood reached its optimum, the history of humanity has outlived the term of prophethood. Therefore, in the absence of future prophets, who should guide mankind? What about Allah's promise in the Qur'an to continue guiding mankind, for example:

***'...And if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.'* (2:38)**

This dilemma for mankind is very serious as well as interesting. It is serious because without the guidance from Allah, the status of mankind would be such that it could not be salvaged. Mankind is already in a state of loss (103:2) and forgetfulness (36:78), most importantly he carries the burden of the trust and covenant with Allah (7:172–173). The dilemma is also interesting because Allah's promise cannot fail and yet we clearly see that the term of prophethood ended with the Last Prophet. The Qur'an itself declares him the 'Seal of the Prophets' (33:40).

The truth of the matter is that the only answer to this dilemma is found in the episode of Ghadir Khumm. Apart from providing a solution to this problem, Ghadir also charts once and for all a clear path for the guidance and salvation of mankind. Ghadir provides once and for all *the usul* of the only acceptable faith to Allah. This is a challenge, the defence of which we find directly from the Qur'an, thus:

***'The (only) faith before Allah is Islam' (Quran 3:19).***

And in another place:

***'If anyone desires (to follow) a faith other than Islam, (fa lan yuqbala minhu) never will it be accepted of him and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who are lost' (3:85).***

Most importantly, the final revelation from Allah to the Prophet took place at Ghadir and the fate of the salvation of mankind is sealed in Islam. The revelation is clear and leaves no doubt about Allah's seal over Islam:

***'This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your faith' (5:3).***

Ghadir's theology is therefore very interesting and must be seen in its true perspective. Islam believes that all prophets were Muslims<sup>2</sup>. By this doctrine, they gave a clear message to worship only One God, Allah. They each proclaimed their prophethood and they each warned about the impending Day of Judgement.

Since the prophethood had not yet ended, they also declared about the advent of the final Prophet<sup>3</sup> with whom not only would end the prophethood but also, as is obvious, the process of revelation. Henceforth, there would be no revelation and no new scripture. The Qur'an, therefore, would be protected by Allah Himself so that no one would ever tamper with it.<sup>4</sup>

One reason for Allah's guarantee of the Qur'an's protection is that together with the 'Itrat of the Prophet, it would act as *al-thaqal al-akbar* (the weightiest or the heaviest) force in guiding mankind in the absence of the Prophet. This is clear also from the hadith of Al-Thaqalayn.<sup>5</sup>

The prime duty of the 'Itrat of the Prophet would be to uphold the injunctions of the Qur'an and disallow any innovations or schisms in the Sunnah of the Prophet.<sup>6</sup> The duty to uphold these would remain in the hands of an Imam who would be endowed with 'ilm and be appointed through the process of nass.

Since humanity henceforth would be guided by the Qur'an and the Sunnah under an Imam and since the immediate Imam after the demise of the Prophet would be Imam Ali, upon whom be peace, the Prophet has shown Imam Ali as his clear successor throughout his mission leading up to the event of Ghadir Khumm. As we shall see, that in doing so, the Prophet was clearly charting the principles of the *Usul-e Din* to be followed.

There are several incidents recorded in all authentic sources – both Shi'i as well as Ahlul Sunnat wa al-Jama'ah (Sunni) – where the Prophet advanced Imam Ali to indicate his wilaya over all others. This began immediately with the very first declaration of his prophethood to his near relatives. The events that led to the invitation to his near relatives are clear from all sources. Allah commanded the Prophet to warn the relatives. We know that he invited his relatives and warned them as commanded by Allah. The Prophet gave at that time, just as he was to do at Ghadir at the end of his mission, an eloquent khutbah (the theology of which we shall look at a little later) at the end of which Imam Ali was advanced as his successor.

It is also a fact that including the above incident, Muslims believe through authentic ahadith that the Prophet regarded Imam Ali as a companion who possessed nine other excellent merits. These are:

- 1) Imam Ali was the first man to believe in Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah
- 2) When the Prophet received the command from Allah to leave Medina, Imam Ali willingly risked his life by sleeping in his bed covered in the blanket used by the Prophet
- 3) Imam Ali together with Lady Fatimah and Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, peace be upon all of them, were under the blanket with the Prophet<sup>7</sup> when Jibreel (Gabriel) brought the news and the Prophet recited the verse:

***'Innama yuridu Allahuliyudhhiba 'ankumu rrijsa Ahlul Bayti was yutahhirukum tathira'***

***'Verily, Allah intendeth but to keep off from you (every kind of) uncleanness, O ye People of the House, and purify you (with) a thorough purification.'* (Quran 33:33)**

- 4) During the battle of Khaybar, the Prophet said that he would send to fight the enemies, the one whom Allah would not put to shame because he loved Allah and His Messenger. The Prophet called Imam Ali, and although Imam Ali had sore eyes, the Prophet applied saliva from his own mouth onto Imam Ali's eyes, prayed for him and handed him the flag. Imam Ali returned from Khaybar victorious.
- 5) The Prophet sent Imam Ali with the revealed verses from *Surat al-Bara'a* (al-Tawbah) to read to the infidels saying that only Imam Ali could convey the revelation because Imam Ali was from him and he was from Imam Ali.
- 6) In Medina, once the Prophet blocked all the doors opening into the Prophet's mosque except the door of Imam Ali. The Prophet also explained later from the pulpit that he did things as commanded by Allah.
- 7) The Prophet told Imam Ali that he (Ali) would be the guardian of all the believers, male and female, after his (the Prophet's) demise.
- 8) When the Prophet was leaving for the expedition of Tabuk, the Prophet asked Imam Ali to remain behind in charge of Medina. When Imam Ali showed a desire to accompany him (so that he should get a chance to attain the status of shaheed (martyr) in the battlefield, the Prophet said to Imam Ali: 'O Ali, you are to me what Harun (Aaron) was to Musa (Moses). (The only difference is that) there will be no prophets after me.'
- 9) At Ghadir, the Prophet said clearly: *'Man kuntu mawlahu fahadho Aliyun mawlahu'* (of whomever I am the mawla (this) Ali is his mawla. There were several other occasions where the Prophet clearly indicated the succession of Imam Ali.<sup>8</sup>

The above incidents leave no doubt that the Prophet was already preparing the Ummah for the concept of imama under whom the Ummah would continue to receive guidance. From the merits discussed above, I shall now briefly discuss the last two (numbers 8 and 9). This is because the article has to be brief (but please see footnotes for additional reading material).

It has been wrongly argued by some Muslims, as our sources show,<sup>9</sup> that it was only once that the Prophet uttered the words indicating the status of Imam Ali as that of Harun (Aaron) except that there would be no prophets after him. The fact of the matter is that it was several times, and indeed at different occasions, the Prophet is shown to have uttered this status of Imam Ali. In fact, even Mu'awiya had reminded this hadith of the Prophet to someone who had asked him a question and Mu'awiya replied by asking him to seek the answer of such problems from Imam Ali because, as Mu'awiya said, even Umar al-Khattab used to ask Ali for solutions to difficult problems.<sup>10</sup>

When the Prophet announced only the door of Imam Ali leading to the inside of the Prophet's mosque be left open to the exclusion of all other doors and explained from the pulpit that it was the command of Allah, the Prophet also added that Ali's position in relation to him was similar to Harun's with Prophet Musa (except that the prophethood will end with Muhammad).

In a heart-rendering occasion when the Prophet was establishing the brotherhood between the Muhajirun: and the Ansar, on both occasions the Prophet reserved Imam Ali's brotherhood only for himself and said to him that his (Ali's) position with the Prophet was the same as Harun's position was with Prophet Musa except that there would certainly be no prophets after the prophethood of Muhammad. Imam Ali asked on that occasion, what then, would he inherit? The Prophet replied: "What the prophets before me left as inheritance: the Book of their Lord and their own Sunnah and you will be with my daughter Fatimah in my castle in Paradise and you are my brother and my associate." Then the Prophet recited this verse from the Qur'an:

***'And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury; (they will be) brothers (joyfully) facing each other on thrones (of dignity)' (15:47).<sup>11</sup>***

The above events, recorded in authentic Islamic sources, should leave no doubt in anyone's mind that the Prophet clearly showed that:

- 1) He was the Seal of the Prophets;
- 2) The guidance of mankind would still continue but in the person of Imam Ali who was endowed with 'ilm<sup>12</sup> and was the foremost in all respects in the matters of faith;
- 3) The Imam would inherit the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet with which he could continue to guide mankind;
- 4) The guidance would continue in his 'Itrat as outlined in the hadith of al-Thaqalayn; and
- 5) The hadith of al-Thaqalayn clearly showed that the Qur'an and the Prophet's 'Itrat are inseparable and the guidance must be derived from both.

In this regard, the Prophet's ahadith are clear and demand upon the believers neither to go ahead of the Imams for otherwise they would perish nor to lag behind the Imams for even then they would perish, and

never to teach the Imams because the Imams would always be ahead in their knowledge (since they are the bearers of 'ilm-e ladunni and the hidden knowledge of the Qur'an).

In this regard, the Prophet also prophesied that there would emerge misguided people who would try to corrupt Islam but there would also be in all generations true believers of his Ahl al-Bayt who would counteract such corruptions. The Prophet warned against choosing such Imams.

The Ahl al-Bayt, the Prophet said, are like the head of the body (the balanced head will always guide correctly) or like the eyes to the face because the face is guided only by the eyes. In another tradition, the Prophet has said that the Ahl al-Bayt are like the Ark of Noah. Those that embark on it are saved and those that reject it are destroyed.

Also, in another tradition, they are like the 'Gate of Repentance'<sup>13</sup> of the Bani Israel; those who entered therein were forgiven by Allah. In this regard, an Imam of the Sunnis, Imam Shafe'i has made a clear point: "When I saw people led astray by their beliefs in the sea of error and ignorance, in the Name of Allah I boarded the ship of salvation, that is the Ahl al-Bayt of Mustafa, the Seal of Prophecy, and I caught hold of the Rope of Allah, that is their love as He commanded us to hold fast to the Rope."<sup>14</sup>

Humanity, therefore, will not be left without guidance. The Qur'an's purity combined with the Imams' infallible guidance through their 'ilm-e ladunni will continue to guide mankind in the 'Itrat of the Prophet. In one of the most extra-ordinary traditions the Prophet has said: "Even if there was only one day left for the world to end, Allah will extend that day until there will emerge a man whose name will be my name and whose family will be my family so that he will fill the earth with justice and equity just as it is filled with tyranny and wickedness."<sup>15</sup>

The above hadith also makes clear that the world itself has a term (ajal) and it will come to an end one day. Until such time the Prophet had left a clear guidance he showed both in the very first khutbah he gave to his relatives and also at Ghadir.

It is interesting to look at both these sermons of the Prophet to see a clear thesis in which the Prophet has charted a path for mankind to follow once and for all. Thus, when the Prophet called his relatives, he clearly established the usul of our faith. These principles manifested beautifully in his sermon at Ghadir as well.

I shall now turn to both these sermons and end my article. Like his khutbah at Ghadir, his first khutbah is also famous and is recorded in many books.

The Prophet said: " (O my relatives, you know that) indeed the leader of the caravan would never betray the people of his own caravan. By Allah, even if I could lie to all mankind I would never lie to you (since you are my very own); and even if I could betray all mankind never would I betray you. I swear by Allah except whom there is no other God (*Tawhid*) that indeed without any doubt, I am the Prophet unto you particularly and to mankind generally (*Nabuwwah*). By Allah you will all die just as you sleep every night.

Then you will get up (from your graves) just as you get up every day (from your beds) (*Qiyamah*); and without any doubt, an account will be taken from you for your deeds and you will be awarded with rewards for the good (you did) and be retributed for the evil you did" (*Adalah*). Then he asked, " So let me know which of you is willing to assist me in this task and to share my burden, so that he may become my brother and the executor of my will and my successor among you?" (*Imama*).

As we know, it was Imam Ali who stood up and said, "O Prophet of Allah, I will share this burden of yours." As we read from the accounts, the Prophet placed his hand on the neck of Imam Ali and said: " This is my brother and the executor of my will and my successor among you. So listen to him and obey him." Thus began the mission of the 'Seal of the Prophets.'

As we have already seen Imam Ali played an important role in the *Seerah* of the Prophet and one day as the Prophet had finished his final Hajj and was returning to Medina, Allah commanded him to proclaim the message. The Prophet must have felt the urgency of it because the command was:

**'... if thou didst it not, thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission...' (Quran 5:67).**

The Prophet halted the caravan. People who were ahead were recalled. The multitude gathered and a quick pulpit was erected. This place was also the junction where people could depart to go to their own towns and therefore was the ideal place for all to listen to what the Prophet had to say for the final time.

The zuhr prayers were performed in congregation, after which the Prophet climbed up the pulpit (some sources say it was made from the saddles of camels). Here the Prophet began his most eloquent khutbah in which we see amazing resemblances of his very first khutbah as far as the usul of our faith are concerned. With this khutbah he asked the multitude to testify that he did deliver the message and thus completed his mission.

The Prophet began by praising Allah and said: "All praise belongs to Allah. In Him do I put my faith and from Him do I crave support. Him do I trust and His protection (do I) seek against the malice of our souls and the evils of our deeds. The misguided have no guide except Him, and those who are guided by Him can never go astray. I bear witness that there is no one worthy of worship except Him and that I, Muhammad, am His Slave and Messenger."

Then he said that Allah had already informed him that the days of his life were coming to an end. He said: "But you and I, each one of us must answer unto Allah for all the things that are due from us. What then do you say?" The multitude witnessed this to be so.

Then the Prophet asked the multitude if they would also witness that Allah is One, and that he is His Apostle who is speaking to them on His command and the Resurrection and Judgement, Heaven and Hell and the Life Hereafter are all certainties. The multitude again witnessed.

The Prophet continued: " Now then, listen to me carefully, for I have been commanded to tell you that I

will be taken away from your midst, but I leave with you as my legacy (for the whole Ummah) two most important things, namely, the Book of Allah (the Qur'an) and my descendants, the Ahl al-Bayt. Never shall they be separated from one another, and so long as you adhere to both of them you will never be led astray after me. Therefore, O people, this is my last will and testament unto you that you should always remain faithful to the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt as true Muslims until death. Do not lag too far behind them and do not walk ahead of them, for either way you will go astray. But follow them and walk in their footsteps and they will guide you along the Straight Path (*Sirat ul-Mustaqim*)."

The Prophet then asked the multitude if he was not more worthy of their obedience than their own souls. And the multitude replied: "Yes verily, yes, O Prophet of Allah." The Prophet then lifted Imam Ali and showing him to all sides he said: "Of whomever I am the mawla (this) Ali is his mawla." Then he asked the O multitude if he had truly and faithfully delivered the message. The multitude replied again: "Yes verily, yes, Prophet of Allah." So then, the Prophet said another important statement: "Let those who are present here convey to those who are absent."

Now if we ponder over this khutbah and compare it with the very first khutbah, we find to our amazement a clear chart of our *usul* and also a clear path for humanity to follow to the end of the term of the human cycle. The Prophet asked the multitude in this khutbah to witness the Unity of Allah (*Tawhid*). Then he told them they will be accountable to Allah (*Adalah*). Then he asked them if he was not the Apostle of Allah (*Nabuwwah*).

Then the Prophet proclaimed Imam Ali as the mawla of all (*Imama*). Then he asked them to witness that the Resurrection, Judgement, Heaven and Hell and the life hereafter are undoubted certainties (*Qiyamah*). And lastly, he asked the multitude to proclaim this message to all. Clearly this is the duty of Muslims in all generations because the Qur'an calls us the *khayr al-Ummah*, that is, the best ones of the Ummah because Muslims are the holders of the truth.

We are the *khayr al-Ummah* so we should guide mankind towards salvation for there will be no more prophets but we have the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt. With these two weights we can balance ourselves perfectly because just as we are the *khayr al-Ummah*, the Qur'an tells us that we are also the *Ummat an Wasatan*, that is, the balanced Ummah. We are the Ummah of the Prophet whom Allah described as the *Rahmatun lil alamin* (Mercy to the worlds). We have yet to bring Ghadir in its proper meaning in our Ummah. The guidance, however, has never stopped.

## [About the Author](#)

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[1.](#) Syed Hosein Nasr, *Ideals and Realities of Islam*, Boston: George Allen & Urwin Beacon Press, 1966, p 68

[2.](#) Our discussion in this article makes this theology very clear. Islam reached its flowering in Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace. All the prophets that preceded him were Muslims. The Qur'an testifies this for each prophet. See for

example the discussion Prophet Yaqub (Jacob) had with his sons in the Qur'an – 2:131–132. Also see 2:130

[3.](#) See for example 61:6 where Prophet Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus) gives glad tidings of an apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad (i.e. the 'Praised one' – Muhammad). It must be said that such prophecies are seen both in the Taurat (Torah) as well as the Injil (Gospel). See for example, Deuteronomy 18:18 and the Gospel of John 14:16, 15:26 and 16:7.

[4.](#) See 15:9 –

'Undoubtedly We (Allah) have sent down the Message (Qur'an) and assuredly We will guard it (forever).'

This guarantee has already withstood the test of time because in the last two hundred years several attempts have been made to distort not only the Qur'an but all revealed scriptures from Allah. The Qur'an is the only scripture that remains totally unaltered and is presented exactly as it was revealed.

[5.](#) The actual wording of this hadith is as follows:

'Inni tarikun fikumu al-thaqalayn, al-thaqal al-akbar wa al-thaqal al-asghar. Faamma al-akbar fa Kitabu Rabbiy wa amma al-thoqal al-asghar fa 'Itrati Ahli Bayti fahfizuni fihima falan tadallu ma tamassaktum bihima.'

I am leaving behind you the two weights, the greater and the lesser. As for the greater, it is the Book of my Lord and as for the lesser it is my progeny, the People of my House. Guard well my memory through the two weights! You will not go astray as long as you hold fast to both of them' (Al-Ayyashi, Abu al-Nasr Muhammad ibn Mas'ud ibn Ayyash al-Sulami al-Samarqandi, Kitab Tafsir, edited by Hashim al-Rasuli al-Mahallati, vol 1, p 5).

[6.](#) We see both these principles clearly applying in the lives of the Twelve Imams. Many of the sermons of Imam Ali in Nahjul blaghah warn about innovations in religion and abandoning the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. We also see that in the shura of Umar al-Khattab, Imam Ali refused to accept the khilafah if it went beyond following the Qur'an and Sunnah We find this was also the first condition Imam Hassan laid in his treaty with Mu'awiya.

[7.](#) In the episode of Hadith-e Kisa' reported widely in authentic Islamic sources of all schools of thought.

[8.](#) One occasion that I am very tempted to include in this article is the revelation of 5:55 recorded in the Qur'an. This was the occasion when Imam Ali gave away a ring from his from his finger to a beggar who had entered the Prophet's Mosque in Medina. The ring was given in the state of occasions (rukuh).

The exegetes tell us that the Prophet, pleased at Imam Ali's action, made a du'a to Allah to strengthen his back and appoint Imam Ali as his successor just as Allah had strengthened the back of Prophet Musa (Moses) by appointing for him Harun (Aaron), his brother. The exegetes tell us that hardly had the Prophet completed this du'a when this revelation descended:

'Verily your wali is (none other except) Allah and His Apostle and those who believe, those who establish prayer and pay zakat (poor-rate), while (even though) they be in occasions.'

For Prophet Musa's du'a please see 20:29–32 and 20:36.

[9.](#) See for example Al-Muraji'at (translated in English as The Right Path), p 171ff.

[10.](#) Allama Sharifuddin quotes this from Ahmad ibn Hanbal's Musnad. Also see The Right Path, p 178ff.

[11.](#) See The Right Path, p 193.

[12.](#) In a popular hadith from the Prophet he said: 'Ana medinatu al 'ilmi Wa 'Aliyyun babuha' ('I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its door').

[13.](#) This is a reference to the Qur'an 2:57–58. The Bani Israel were given security in the town of plenty by Allah. They were asked to enter the gate with humility seeking forgiveness from Allah they would be forgiven. The Bani Israel instead changed the special word given them to ask forgiveness as they passed through the gate. As a result Allah sent plague upon them from heaven because ' they infringed (Allah's commands) repeatedly.'

[14.](#) Allama Sharifuddin has quoted this from Rishfat al-Saadi Imam Abu Bakr ibn Shahabuddin. See also The Right Path, p 40.

[15.](#) Syed Haydar al-Amuli, Jami al-Asrar wa Manba' al-Anwar, p 102. The explanation given to this hadith is that 'filling the earth with justice' means that he (Imam Mahdi) will bring about the rule of Allah (Tawhid) – i.e., the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet – in place of polytheism – i.e. shirk and corruption.

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