

Chapter 5: Imamate

[There is Always an Imam](#)

We believe that as God has decreed to send His Messengers with divine guidance, for every age or time God has appointed an Imam to look after the people, leading them to the righteous path and to guard the divine law against any deviation. An Imam has to clearly know the necessities of the ages, and lead the people to the true path of God; he invites and teaches the people to obey the prophets and to follow the law. If not so, man will fail to obtain the goal for which he has been created (i.e. prosperity and perfection) and divine law will be abandoned and people will wander astray.

This is why we believe that after our prophet, in any age or time there has always been and there will always be, an Imam to teach and to lead the people. ‘Imam’ primarily means: ‘he who is foremost—hence a religious leader, a model, a pattern or one who leads the congregational prayer’.

"O, You who believe! Fear Allah and be with those who are truthful." (Holy Qur'an, 9: 119)

This verse of Holy Qur'an does not refer to a certain time or a distinct age. It rather unconditionally orders the people to be the followers of the ‘truthful’ Imam. All the famous commentators have taken the word ‘truthful’ to mean an innocent Imam who is free of guilt and sin (infallible).

[The Reality of Imamate](#)

We believe that Imamate is not only the apparent rulership or leadership of a caliph, but rather a high spiritual or religious position. Besides ruling and governing the Islamic society, an Imam has the overall leadership of this mortal life of people as well as that of the hereafter. He guides the soul and mind of people, and guards against any deviation from the law. Meanwhile, he leads at the level of expectations assigned by the prophet.

This is the same high rank that God gave to Abraham after passing the stages and steps of prophethood as well as many other exams. When Abraham asked his Lord to assign the position of Imamate to some of his near kins, he was answered that this title or position will not be given to the oppressors or sinners.

"And remember when Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commandments which he fulfilled, God said to him: 'I will make you an Imam to the people.' He said: 'What about making Imams out of my offspring?' God answered: 'No! My covenant is not within the reach of the oppressors'." (Holy Qur'an, 2: 124)

It is evident that such a high moral and religious position cannot be abridged or lowered to an apparent rulership or leadership, or else the verse will not hand over a reasonable meaning or sense. We believe that all the arch prophets had the dignity and grade of Imamate through their prophethood. This is because whatever they decreed by their prophethood, they put it to work as leaders.. So was the great prophet of Islam, when at the beginning of his mission he conveyed the messages of God to God's servants, and meanwhile he carried out his leadership, teaching people and leading them to the path of truth.

We believe that after the prophet Muhammad, his mission was continued by the infallible Imams who succeeded him from among his nearest kin and their offspring. By the definitions given above, to reach the high rank of an Imam is very difficult and heavy conditions are to be observed, such as piety to the level of innocence, having the highest level of knowledge of religion and the law, and also full acquaintance with the human needs in any age or time.

Imam Must Be Infallible

We believe that an Imam should be free of guilt or sin. As a matter of fact one who is not infallible, cannot be trusted to teach the realities of the law and the tenets of a divine religion. It is for his innocence that we hold an Imam's word or deed as a religious proof.

Imam Is The Guardian of The Law

We believe that an Imam has to know all about the roots and branches, and the commandments of Islam. He has to know the full meanings and the exegesis of Holy Qur'an, and that he takes his knowledge from the prophet or the previous Imam; and it is such a knowledge which is trustworthy among our people (the Shi'a).

Imam Must Be Appointed Openly and Clearly By The Prophet

We believe that an Imam who is the successor of the prophet must be clearly and openly appointed by the Messenger of God. An Imam's appointment also is like that of the prophet and has to be decided by God Himself .This is because the distinction of piety at the level of innocence, and such high level of knowledge required in order to allow someone to be an Imam, is at the power of God and His messenger, and no one else. We therefore do not know our Imams as those elected by the vote or choice of people.

The Shi'a Imams Are Appointed by the Prophet Himself

We believe that the prophet of Islam appointed all the twelve Imams as his successors, one after the other. In Sahih Muslim (a famous reference book of the Ahlul Sunnah Muslims), we read: "In a place between Mecca and Medina which is named Ghadir Khumm, the prophet made a speech to thousands of Muslims, through which he said: "I am about to leave you for good. I am leaving two heavy things among you after me: The Holy Qur'an is the first one in which you may find light and guidance; and my nearest kins are the second. I advise you all not to forget God in relation to my Kins. Not to forget God in relation to My Kins." The prophet then added: "If you grasp the two heavy things that I leave among you; you will never go astray." The same tradition is also written in Sahih Tirmidhi (another famous reference book of the Ahlul Sunnah Muslims).[1](#)

Therefore, no Muslim can deny this tradition which is related by successive witnesses and important writers. We rely also on another famous tradition which is narrated in Sahih Muslim, Sahih Tirmidhi and Sahih Abi Dawood and other famous books that our prophet has said: "Islam will stand up to the resurrection day and until twelve Imams all of whom are from Quraysh rule over you as my successors." We believe that there is no acceptable commentaries for such traditions as mentioned above except that belief which is found among our sect, the Shi'a.

Imam 'Ali's Designation by the Prophet

We believe that the prophet, in several occasions has introduced and designated Imam 'Ali(a.s) as his successor by the decree of God, an instance of which was in the Ghadir Khommm somewhere near Juhfah. When the prophet was returning from his last pilgrimage (Hajj) he made a speech to a great gathering of his companions and followers, saying: "Do I not have priority over your souls? Yes, of course. They all answered. Then all of you know that, continued the prophet. Of whomever I am the Master, 'Ali shall be his master."

Here we do not intend to go deep through reasoning to prove our ideas, we also do not intend to insist upon our assertion. We may only add here that such an important tradition is not something to be ignored easily, or changing what it means, as by taking the 'Master'='Mawla' to mean a friend particularly when we see that the prophet has put so much stress and emphasis upon the word, so as to make it known to all!

Is this not the same case that; Ibni Asir has brought in his important history book saying: "At the beginning off his prophetic mission, the prophet was ordered by God (26:214) to admonish his nearest kindred. He invited some forty men of them to a dinner, and by a miracle, he fed all of them from a single portion of food! He then made a speech and finally said to them: Which of you is willing to give me a truthful hand in this Divine Mission of mine, and become my brother and successor among all? No one answered him there, except Imam 'Ali, who said: I will be your companion and minister: and the prophet

pointed at Imam ‘Ali and said: He is my brother and my successor among you.”

Thus we see the prophet to have designated his vicegerent and Imam, from the beginning of his mission. The same case also happened at the end of his mission when the prophet was at his death bed. He asked those who were round him to get him a pen and paper to write an order which would prevent them from going astray. One of them rejected and refused to provide pen and paper and even accused the prophet of uttering delirious speech! To repeat again, we hereby only declare our belief in brief and with little reasoning.

Each Imam Emphasizes His Successor

We believe that each one of the twelve Imams has been introduced by the previous ones. The first one of them was Imam ‘Ali the son of Abu Talib, who was succeeded by Imam Hassan his first born son, and then Imam Hussain, the Master of Martyrs, his second born son. The third Imam was ‘Ali the son of Imam Hussain, then came his son Muhammad Al-Baqir. Then Jafar Al-Sadiq and then his son Musa Al-Kazim. Then his son ‘Ali bin Musa Al-Reza. The ninth of them was Muhammad Al-Taqi, then his son ‘Ali Al-Naqi. After him, it was his son Imam Hassan Askari, who was the father of Al-Mahdi, the twelfth and the last of them all, whom we believe to be already living.

The idea of a ‘saviour’ who has to come to fill the world with justice, when it has been full of oppressions is accepted almost by all the Muslims of different sects, and many of the Ahlul Sunnah scholars and men of knowledge have declared that in their books few years ago. In answer to a question about the existence of Al-Mahdi, the Islamic World Relations Society issued a pamphlet to emphasize on the surety that he will come. In that pamphlet many evidences and documents were presented to prove that many of the Muslims believe that Al-Mahdi will be born in future, but the Shi’as believe that he has already been born, and so far he has lived a long life, and by the decree of God, he shall appear one day to fill the world with justice.

None of the Prophet's Companions Could Excel Imam ‘Ali

We believe that none of the prophet's companions did, or could excel Imam ‘Ali(a.s) in any respect; and that Imam ‘Ali (a.s) was at the highest religious position other than that of the prophets. Of course we know it to be unlawful to misrepresent the Imam by overstating him and by exaggerations.

Those who prove for him the position of deity or something like that are all heretics in our sight, as are those who undervalue him, and we are absolutely disgusted with their belief, although they might call themselves the Shi’a of Imam ‘Ali(a.s) and mingle their names with ours. The leading Shi’as and the orthodox have always rejected the two groups who either over or under value the Imam, and have called and taken them as heretics.

The Prophet's Companions at the Court of Wisdom and History

We believe that there were many great men of devotion and chastity among the companions of the prophet; but all of them were not so, because the Holy Qur'an declares many among them as being hypocrites! There were also men who, after the prophet, broke their allegiance with the vicegerent of God and made wars and shed the blood of thousands of Muslims only because they have been with the prophet or they carry the title of a 'companion' of the prophet. In other word, how can we judge that both of the two parties who made the battles of Siffin and Jamal were 'rightful' and on the 'righteous path'? How can both of the two groups of combatants be honest and truthful?

Some bring forth the foot of religious researches and self-exegesis on the ground by saying that: 'Surely one of the two parties was wrong and oppressive, but as they were taking their decisions by their exegesis, both parties were on righteousness in the sight of God. This, we cannot accept easily.

How could one with his own exegesis and self-comprehensions break his allegiance and loyalty to the Vicegerent of God, who is entitled to obedience, and create such fearful wars between Muslims, grouping them and shedding streams of their blood. Can this be justified by simply claiming to follow one's exegesis and personal advisors? What else then cannot be justified by such personal comprehensions and self-commentaries? Let us be more frank, that everyone, even the nearest companions of the prophet are held in pledge of their deeds and are responsible for what they have done and have to answer for it:

"The most honored off you in Allah's sight, is he who is the most virtuous (chaste) of you." (Holy Qur'an, 49: 13)

The above holy verse is true for all even for the nearest companions of the prophet. We therefore have to judge them by their deeds, and we should have a reasonable definition for them all. Those who were truthful in the presence of the messenger and in his absence too, did their best to guard the religion and to observe his commandments. They remained faithful to their covenant and respected their promises. On the other hand, those among his companions who were hypocrites and vexed him did the same after him. Whatever they did was against Islam and Muslims.

"You shall find no believer in Allah and the last judgment to love those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they be their father, their sons, their brothers, or their nearest kindred. Allah has inscribed the faith in their hearts and Has strengthened them with a spirit of His, God will admit them to the Gardens of Bliss, beneath which streams flow, wherein they shall live forever. They are the Party of Allah, and Allah's party shall achieve felicity." (Holy Qur'an, 58:22)

We believe that those who harmed the prophet in his presence or absence are not worthy of admiration. Of course we must not forget that some of the companions of the prophet showed the utmost truthfulness and sincerity with the greatest self-sacrifices and have been admired by God Himself and

so were a group who followed them later.

"The vanguard of Islam; the first of those who forsook their homes, and of those who gave them aid; and also those who followed them in good deeds:

“Well pleased is Allah with them and them with Allah. For them prepared Gardens of Bliss, under which streams flow. They dwell there in forever. That’s the Supreme Felicity.” (Holy Qur’an, 9: 100)

This is our belief about the companions of our prophet.

Imam Takes His Knowledge from the Prophet

According to the order of our prophet: “To observe the Holy Qur’an and His Nearest Kins” and also to the innocence of the Imams, our jurisprudence of divine law is also based upon the words, deeds and consents (doing something in front of them without having their objection) of the innocent Imams. The three factors, i.e. words, deeds, and consent of our Imams are accepted proofs for us. We have to note also that whatever an Imam says; it is a narration of the prophet through his fathers. This is to say whatever an Imam says, has indeed been said by the prophet.

Imam Baqir(a.s) told one of his students named Jabir: "That which we convey to you is what we have taken out of a treasure that belongs to our prophet Mohammad." Through another tradition from Imam Jafar Sadiq (a.s) we read: "Someone asked him a question and the Imam answered him. The man began to dispute about the answer. Imam told him: `The answer I gave you was that of the prophet and you have no right to dispute.'"

Another remarkable point to note is about the important books on collected traditions such as: Kaafi, Tahzib Estebzar and Man La Yahzarohol Faghih, that we have and we use. Although these books are much trusted in our view, it does not mean to us that whatever is written in them is true and acceptable by us. Besides the above mentioned tradition books, we also have the books of ‘who is who’ about personalities e.g Al Rijal – The Men. Through such books we investigate the personalities of the narrators of the tradition and also about their chains of documents and references so as to make sure that a tradition is true and correct. Therefore, however important and trustworthy a book might be, to accept a tradition from it has to convince us that it reads and is compatible with our standard, or else we shall reject it. Some Islamic sects have their own collection of traditions (hadith) which they know to be correct (sahih) .The authors have named their books, `The Correct (Sahih)’ and some men of importance might have admitted that these are correct, but in our sight, a tradition only is correct when it is reasonably proved to have been said by the prophet.

¹. This incident is brought and found in so many famous Islamic books such as: Sahih Muslim v. 2, p. 1873, Sahih Tirmidhi v. 5, p. 662, Sunan Darmi v. 2, p. 432, Khasaes Nesaie p. 20 and Musnad Ahmad v. 5, p. 82.

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