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Chapter 6: Main Groupings

6.1 Introduction

The most controversial event in the history of Islam, subsequent to the Prophet Muhammad's (S) death, was his succession. There was a dichotomy of views – one that the Prophet had appointed Ali (a.s.), son of Abu Talib, as his successor; another that the Prophet (S) had left the matter of his succession to the Muslim community.

After the death of the Prophet (S), the first group followed the Islamic teaching of Ali (a.s.) and, because the Prophet is reported to have said, '... Ali (a.s.) and his followers – *hatha wa shiatu* ...' they became known as followers – Shiah. Shiah sources rely upon the reports of the Prophet's sayings and doings relayed via the error–free Imams from his progeny – *Ahl al–Bayt*.

The second group, who followed the caliphs after the Prophet (S) came to be known as Sunni because they identify themselves as being followers of custom – *sunnah*. Sunni sources rely upon reports of the Prophet's sayings and doings relayed by any of the Prophet's 'companions'. The two schools are thus recognized by the following names:

- Shiah School of Ahl al-Bayt
- Sunni School of the Companions and Caliphs

The word Sufi is thought to be derived from the Arabic word for wool -suf – because early ascetics are supposed to have preferred simple rough woolen clothing to finer materials. Sufis may briefly be described as being dedicated to the esoteric aspects of Islam, in much the same way as mystics of other religions are dedicated to the esoteric aspects of their faiths.

Sufi groups – *turuq* (singular *tariqah*) – are organized around spiritual masters who guide the spiritual development and progress of dedicated followers.

6.2 Shiah

There are dozens of valid Shiah arguments to support the view that succession, like prophethood itself, is a matter of Divine decree and not human preference. For brevity, here are three items of valid evidence:

The summoning of his family

In the early days of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad was ordered to invite his kinsfolk to Islam. 1 To this end, he invited approximately 40 of the family's menfolk to dine with him. Those present included his uncles Abu Talib, Hamzah, Abbas and Abu Lahab. At the end of the meal the Holy Prophet (S) addressed his guests: 'O children of Abd al–Mutalib, I do not know any amongst the Arabs, who has given his nation a better gift than that which I now present to you [i.e. Islam]. As Allah has ordered me to invite you to Islam – I now offer you the 'good' of this life and that of the one to come. I will regard whichever one of you is willing to help me convey the faith of Islam to the people as my brother, the executor of my Will and as my successor.'

The only one present to respond was Ali (a.s.), the youngest person present. He immediately arose to announce that he was ready and willing to share the Prophet's burdens. The Messenger of Islam placed his hand on Ali's (a.s.) shoulder and said, 'This is my brother, the executor of my Will and my successor – so listen to what he says and obey him.'

The family considered this outrageous and said to Abu Talib (a.s.), 'Now you are being ordered to listen to and obey your own son.'

It is evident from this event that from the very earliest days of his mission, the Prophet Muhammad had concerned himself with the matter of his succession. As he had made it clear to all his relatives that Ali (a.s.) had been appointed to take over this position, subsequent to that event, all of them were aware that Ali (a.s.) would eventually take charge of the Muslim nation. Hence, their jibe at Abu Talib (a.s.) being ordered to listen to and obey his own son.

The following sources support the content of this report:

- Tabari in his History, Vol. 2, p.216
- Tha'alabi in his Commentary (Qur'an 26:214
- Kanji Shafiei in Kefayat al-Talib, p.89
- Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Vol. 1, p. 159
- Mutaqi Hindi Kanz al-Ummal, Vol. 6, p.391

His appointment of a deputy each time he had to leave Madinah

Meticulous study of the history of Islam shows that the Prophet (S) never left Madinah without leaving an appointed deputy to take charge of Muslim affairs during his absence. This was so even when he planned to be away for a single day or to go on a short journey, such as to Uhud:

- 1. When he left Madinah in the year 2 AH, he appointed Sa'd bin 'Abadah to be in charge in his absence.
- 2. When he left for the Battle of Bowat in year 2 AH, he appointed Sa'd bin Ma'ath.
- 3. When he left for the Battle of Badr, he appointed Ibn Um Maktoum.
- 4. For the Battle of Bani Qaynaga and Sawiq, he appointed Abu Lubabah al-Ansari.
- 5. When he went to Salim and Ghatfan in year 3 AH, he again appointed Ibn Um Maktoum to be in charge.
- 6. He appointed 'Uthman bin Affan when he left for DhiAmr.
- 7. He appointed Ibn Um Maktoum when he left for Uhud, Bani al-Nadir, Dawmat al-Jandal and Azab.
- 8. When he left Madinah for Bani al-Mustalaq, he appointed Zayd bin Harithah.
- 9. He appointed Abu Ruham al-Ghifari when he left for Bani Quray(lah.
- 10. When he left for Khaybar he appointed Sibac bin Arfatah.
- 11. He appointed Abu Ruham al-Ghifari while he took charge of the conquest of Makkah.
- 12. The only occasion that Ali (a.s.) was ordered to take charge in Madinah was when the Prophet (S) left for Tabuk.

The above facts corroborate that the Prophet never neglected to appoint a deputy when he knew he was not going to be present. It would have been contrary to his customary practice, and quite out of character, for him to have left the Muslim nation without having appointed a deputy and successor. It is not logical to imagine that this occurred.

Ghadir Kumm

Ghadir Kumm lies near Jofah between Makkah and Madinah. On the Prophet's journey home from his final pilgrimage, Jibra'il delivered this urgent command from Allah:

O My Messenger, deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord for if you do not, you will have failed to have delivered His message [completely]. Allah will protect you from the

people. (Qur'an 5:67)

The Prophet (S) immediately drew to a halt and ordered those ahead of him to be called back while he waited for the stragglers to arrive. Acacia thorns were swept away, cloaks spread underfoot and overhead as protection from the heat and a platform, constructed of camel saddles, was raised. When all were present, the Prophet ascended this makeshift structure to address them as follows:

O people, know well that Jibra'il has come down to me several times with the Lord Most Merciful's order to halt here to inform all, white or black, that Ali (a.s.), son of Abu Talib (a.s.), is my brother, my successor, my caliph and the Imam that has been appointed to follow me. His position in relation to me is as that of Harlin to Musa (a.s.), except that no prophet is to follow me. Ali (a.s.) is your master after Allah and His Prophet (S).

In most reports, the Prophet, also informed them of his approaching demise and called them to witness that he had faithfully discharged his duties. He then asked, 'Do I not have more authority over you than you have yourselves?' They responded that he certainly had greater rights over them than they themselves had. The Prophet (S) then said: 'Whoever I am master over – mawla –·Ali (a.s.) is also mawla.' He ended with the prayer, 'O Allah, love those who love Ali (a.s.) and oppose those who are Ali's (a.s.) enemies.' When he had finished, the following ayah was revealed:

This day I have perfected your religion for you, granted you my bounties and approved Islam as your faith and way of life. (Qur'an 5:3)

Three important aspects need to be examined regarding the above reports:

- a. Their authenticity.
- b. The general meaning of the word *mawla*.
- c. The specific meaning of the word *mawla* as used in this context.

a. Authenticity

Allamah Amini recorded his comprehensive eleven-volume study of this subject entitled Al-Ghadir. In this he lists the chains of narration throughout the 14 centuries of Islamic history and traces every Arab poet whose work mentions the events at Ghadir.

In his book *Abaqat al–Anwar*, another scholar, Sayyid Hamid Husayn, presents all the chains of narration on Ghadir and includes comprehensive details of each narrator and their reliability that have been confirmed in dozens of Sunni books.

In the first volume of Allamah Amini's *Al–Ghadir*, the names of 110 of the Holy Prophet's companions who narrated *hadith* on this subject are listed.



claims that the word maw/a in this Hadith means 'friend' – that the Holy Prophet simply wanted to announce, 'Whoever's friend I am, Ali (a.s.) is also their friend. 'The problem with this assertion is that not a single person present at Ghadir understood that to be the case. Hassan ibn Thabit, famously regarded as being the Prophet's poet, composed a few lines before the audience present at Ghadir. In these he clearly described the occasion in which the Prophet said, 'Arise O Ali (a.s.), for I am pleased to appoint you Imam and Guide after me.'

The fact that, at that time, no one objected to Hassan's words, confirms that those present had all understood maw/a to denote that Ali (a.s.) was their Master and Guardian. This comprehension is confirmed by the phrase that Umar ibn al–Khattab used to congratulate Ali (a.s.) congratulations O son of Abu Talib. This morning you have become the *mawla* of every believing man and woman.'

Not only was Ali (a.s.) known to be friendly to all – it is clear that no congratulatory declaration would have been apposite if the Prophet had stated, 'Those to whom I am a friend, Ali (a.s.) is also friends with.'

Scholars who recorded the phrase that Umar used include:

- 1. Al Fakhr al-Razi in his *Tafseer*, Vol. 12, p.49
- 2. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Vol.4, p.281
- 3. Al-Tabari in his Tafseer

All references are documented by Alamah Amini in Al-Ghadir, Vol. 1, p.270

While it is true that Arabic lexicons make reference to 22 different meanings for the word *mawla*, what defines the specific meaning of all homonymous words is the context in which they are used. Thus, depending on the context, *mawla* may mean:

Owner Lodger/Guest

Master Partner

Slave Son

The one who frees another Uncle

The one who has been freed Cousin

The benefactor Nephew

The beneficiary Son-in-Law

Friend Relative

Companion Follower

Protector Helper

Neighbor The one in authority

c. Specific meaning of 'mawla' in the above context

To examine the meaning implied by *mawla* in the context of the Ghadir Hadith, we find scores of 'associations' that point clearly towards 'Master' being the only meaning which fits that context. Here are some such 'associations':

1. The question that the Holy Prophet (S) asked prior to his declaration: 'Do I not have more authority over you than you have yourselves?' When they responded in the affirmative, the Prophet declared, 'Whoever I am master over – mawla – "Ali is also mawla.'

The word *mawla* used in this declaration has the same meaning as *awla bikum* – 'having greater authority over you' – in the preceding question. At least 64 Sunni scholars have quoted the above question that the Prophet asked, including Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Majah, Al–Nissari and Al–Timidhi. See Al–Amini, P–344 for detailed references.

- 2. The prayer that the Holy Prophet (S) offered just after this declaration is, 'O Allah, love those who love Ali (a.s.) and oppose those who are Ali's (a.s.) enemies. Help those who help Ali (a.s.) and forsake those who forsake Ali (a.s.). From this it is clear that on that day "Ali (a.s.) was entrusted with a responsibility that by its very nature would arouse the enmity of those eager for that position.
- 3. The Prophet (S) declared, 'I am soon to depart from this world in response to Allah's call.' This points to his making arrangements for the leadership succession after his departure.
- 4. The expressions of joy of the congratulatory companions leave little room to doubt the meaning of the word *mawla* in the context of the Prophet's declaration.
- 5. Consider the ludicrousness of the Holy Prophet halting his, and nearly 100,000 travellers', journey at midday, to assemble together in a thorn-strewn area and erect a platform of camel saddles in the relentless sun of the Arabian desert simply to tell them that Ali (a.s.) is their friend?

Protection from error

As the result of the Prophet's (S) explicit directive, 'I leave behind two precious things – *thaqalain* – the Book of Allah and my progeny that will, while you adhere firmly to both, safeguard you from being led astray,' after the death of the Prophet (S) Shiah Muslims acknowledge the error–free Imams to be the ultimate source of Islamic knowledge, theology, exegesis and law. On the other hand, those who classified themselves as Sunni Muslims elected to accept and support the narrations and interpretations of the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphs.

Despite this, even those who accepted and submitted to the authority of the caliphs acknowledged that, in terms of knowledge, wisdom, righteousness, charisma and leadership, there were marked differences in the qualities and characters of the Imams and the caliphs. Whilst caliphs were observed to indulge

themselves in power and the pleasures of this world, the error-free Imams of AhI al-Bayt (a.s.) are recorded by history to have led pious, humble lives and been primarily concerned with the enlightenment and spiritual enhancement of the Muslim community.

6.2.1 The Twelvers - Ithna Ashariyyah

The majority of Shiahs who follow the progeny of the Holy Prophet are referred to as 'The Twelvers' – *Ithna Ashariyyah* – because they follow the 12 error–free Imams of Ahl al–Bayt (a.s.) who are regarded as being the true spiritual successors of the Prophet .The twelfth Imam is alive but hidden until, on Allah's command, he is to reappear to overcome corruption and tyranny and ensure that justice and truth reign.

The information provided above in this section refers mainly to this group.

6.2.2 Zaydis

After the death of the fourth Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin (a.s.), the majority of Shiah Muslims accepted Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) as his father's appointed successor. The significance of this Imam (a.s.) rests on his enduring focus on the dissemination of knowledge and promotion of education. However, some Shiahs chose instead to support his brother Zayd son of Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.), in his unremitting renunciation of the tyranny of the Umayyad dynasty.

As the result of their confrontational characteristic, anyone seen with a dagger in their cummerbund was assumed to be a *Zaydi*. The *Zaydis* relied for their Islamic teaching on a collection of *ahadith*, called *'Musnad Zayd'*, that incorporated the traditions reported by his predecessors. However, as Abu Hanifa benefited greatly from Zayd's knowledge, later Zaydi jurisprudents adopted Hanafi *fiqh*. Zaydi Imams ruled Yemen for centuries until the revolution led by Abdullah al–Sallal turned Yemen into a republican regime.

6.2.3 Dawoodi Bohras

Another sub-group emerged after the death of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a.s.) Whilst the majority of Shiahs followed Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.), a few believed that his elder brother Ismail should rightfully be the Imam. However, as Ismail had passed away during his father's lifetime, his inheritance of the Imamate did not make any sense to the majority of Shiahs.

The Fatimid dynasty, established by the descendants of Ismail, ruled Egypt until a further division occurred in the time of Al-Mustansir – who died in Cairo in 487 AH/1094 CE – as to which of his two sons, Mustali or Nizar, should succeed him. The group who followed the former have come to be known as Dawoodi Bohras, whilst followers of the latter have come to be known as Aga Khanis or Ismailis.

According to the Dawoodi Bohras, the Imamate starts with Imam Hasan (a.s.), who died in 49 AH/669

CE, and ended with Imam al-Tayyib (who chose complete seclusion in the year 526 AH/1132 CE). Over the years 52 *Dais* have been charged with the group's leadership; the current Dawoodi Bohra *Dai* is Muhammad Burhanuddin.

Whilst the Dawoodi Bohras share all acts of devotion with the Muslim nation, the Agha Khanis, also known as Ismailis, following their leader Agha Khan IV, perform prayer in a different manner.

6.3 Sunni

For a clear understanding of Sunni Islam, three aspects need to be understood – the succession to the Prophet (S), the Principles of Faith and the Four Schools of Law.

Succession to the Prophet (S)

As the Prophet (S) was undisputed leader of both the spiritual and civil aspects of Muslim society, Shiahs believe that the nomination and appointment of the leader to succeed him was made by the Divinely guided Prophet himself. For had not precedent already established religious authority to be the province of Divine determination? Sunnis reject this view in favour of one in which both aspects of leadership are held by an individual whom the majority of a populace are prepared to pay allegiance to.

History records that after the death of the Prophet a meeting was held at *Saqifah*, and after some debate between those who had migrated with the Prophet and their Madinah hosts – the *Muhajerin* – and *Ansar*, Umar and Abu Ubaidah introduced Abu Bakr as the Caliph to whom all Muslims in Madinah were ordered to pay allegiance. This method was later referred to as 'consensus' – despite its non–acceptance and nonapproval by many companions as well as the entire Bani Hashim clan.

Abu Bakr appointed Umar to be the second Caliph Umar selected a consultant committee of six to appoint his successor, that resulted in Uthman becoming the third Caliph. When Uthman was assassinated, Ali (a.s.) the only one ever to have the actual consensus of the people in Madinah, became the fourth of the so-called 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'.

The Umayyad dynasty, that Muawiyah started, ended on the death of Marwan al-Himar. The concession for family control of the caliphate was then taken by the Abbasid dynasty.

Historical evidence thus clearly refutes the caliphs' assertions that their prerogative to hold supreme religious authority was derived from their being the successors to the Prophet Muhammad (S). Notwithstanding this, Sunnis believe the caliphs to have validly held supreme spiritual, as well as temporal, leadership over the Muslim nation.

Sunnis consider ten qualifications necessary for a person to be eligible for appointment as caliph:

1. To be a Muslim.

- 2. To be of age.
- 3. To be male.
- 4. To be of sound mind.
- 5. To be courageous.
- 6. To be a free man (not a slave).
- 7. To be accessible.
- 8. To be able to lead troops in battle.
- 9. To be just.
- 10. To be qualified to pass legal judgments.2

Despite the first eight items being unexceptional, unbiased historic scholarship shows that item numbers 9 and 10 were not met by the vast majority of appointed caliphs.

Principles of faith

From the earliest days of Islam, scholars debated a variety of issues that today form the basis of what we refer to as Islamic Theology, namely: Are Divine attributes part of the 'Essence', or separate from it? Is the Holy Qur'an eternal or created? Do people have free will, or are all things pre-ordained? Is a sinner to be regarded as an unbeliever? Plus a variety of other equally arcane subjects.

The first disagreement that was made public arose between Ashcarites and Muctazilites, who had each established their own Sunni 'school of theology' – *Kalam*. While the former group was known for uncompromising adherence to tradition, the latter were known as 'defenders of the intellect'. Throughout history, various caliphs adopted contradictory stances, e.g. the Abbasid Caliph al–Ma'mun (198–218 AH) supported Muctazilite doctrine, while the Caliph al–Mutawakkil (232–247 AH) endorsed and supported Ashcarite doctrine.

Qadi Abu Bakr Baqillani (d.403 AH), the most influential scholar of his time to spread Ashcarite doctrine, spared no effort in his attempt to establish this belief as the sole presentation of Sunnifaith. He resolutely attacked the Muctazilites, to the extent that few were emboldened to adopt that *mathhab*.

Abul Macali Juwaini (d. 478 AH), who followed in the footsteps of Abul Hasan al-Ashari and Baqillani, contributed to the institutionalization of Ashcarite teaching by his relentless and vociferous refutation of the Muctazilite doctrine on free-will. His view was that all worldly incidents, good or evil, advantageous or disadvantageous, are created by Allah.

The outstanding Sunni theologian Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) put the finishing touches to Sunni belief. He became celebrated as 'The Authority in Islam' – Hujjat al-Islam – when he combined Principles of Jurisprudence with Philosophy and Theology.

Thus, what is today known as Sunni belief is in fact the exclusive view of the Asharite school.

Four Schools of Law

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad (S) Muslims turned to his companions – *Sahabah* – for answers to questions regarding *Shariah*. The next generation of Muslims consulted those who had studied under his companions, known collectively as 'Followers' – *tabi'un*. Both of these groups relied on the *ahadith* of the Holy Prophet, a methodology that is later referred to as 'The School of Tradition'. Another group of scholars of the time, distinguished by their faculty for intellectual reasoning, is later referred to as 'The School of Opinion'.

Malik ibn Anas (93–179 AH) headed the School of Tradition centered in Madinah, and Abu Hanifah (80–150 AH) the School of Opinion centered in Baghdad. Both scholars gained renown as distinguished authorities. While further scholars later emerged within the Islamic world, Kufah and Madinah continued to be the most prestigious centers of excellence.

To control the authority and support for the opinions of other Islamic scholars, in the fifth Islamic century it was decreed that only four schools were to hold official authorization, namely those of Malik, Abu Hanifah, Shafii and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

The Hanafi School

Perhaps the most influential of all the Sunni schools is the rational and liberal Hanafi system of jurisprudence. Despite having been the official school of the Ottoman Empire, India, Egypt and Sudan, it is today followed in Central and South Asia, Europe and America. Abu Hanifah was reluctant to accept the authenticity of any *Hadith* without having first examined its content and those who reported it. To solve problems about which no clear Qur'anic or hadith references are to be found, he relied heavily on analogy– *qiyas*.

In addition to *qiyas*, he cited *istihsan* as being another valuable process by which to deduce law. *Istihsan* enables a jurist to reject *qiyas* in favour of a ruling that he believes will dispel hardship and promote the common good. In invoking *istihsan*, laws that have a bearing on an issue are permitted to be rejected if, in the opinion of the jurist, their enforcement would lead to a legal opinion not being entirely fair. The Hanafi jurist AlSarakhsi (d.483 AH) considered *istihsan* the best method by which to seek facility and ease in legal injunctions.

Abu Hanifah studied under Imam Jafar al-Sadiq (a.s.) for two years and under Zaid, son of Ali ibn Husayn (a.s.) for several more.

The Maliki School

This school – *mathhab* – founded by Malik ibn Anas (d. 179 AH) prevails in Egypt, Sudan, North Africa, West Africa and a variety of areas in different Arab countries. Malik's jurisprudence is based primarily on textual sources

- he did not subscribe to the methodology of analogy - qiyas - favoured by Abu Hanifah.

The Maliki *mathhab* uses narratives of the Prophet's companions as a source of Islamic law. Concern for the public's interest – *Maslahah Mursalah* – permits considerations, in harmony with the objectives of the legislation, to be made in order to secure a benefit or prevent a harm. Such *Maslahah* has to be genuine, general – and not in conflict with a principle or value – and upheld by a clear text or consensus. The Maliki *mathhab* concerns itself more with the application of the spirit of the law rather than with its letter. The consideration of *Maslahah* is propounded by the famous Maliki jurist Shatibi (d. 790 AH) in his book *Al-Muwafaqat*.

The Shafii School

Founded by Muhammad ibn Idris al–Shafii (d. 204 AH), this *mathhab* presents a middle–course between the Hanafi rational system of jurisprudence and the more traditionalist Maliki school. According to Shafii, the textual resources of Islamic Law – the Qur'an and the Sunnah – are paramount. Analogy is only permitted to be employed in circumstances in which neither of these two textual sources is able to provide a solution. Further, it is a Shafii School convention that the consensus of Muslim scholars takes precedence over traditions that are based upon a solitary report. Shafii rejected the Hanafi use of *istihsan*.

This school of law predominates in Southern Egypt, East Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia and some other parts of Central Asia.

The Hanbali School

The Hanbali *mathhab* founded by Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241AH) derives legal authority solely from the Qur'an and *Sunnah*. It entirely rejects consensus as being a valid source of Islamic Law. Ibn Hanbal tired of the use of reason and analogy in the legal coding of Islamic law. However, he developed the Principle of Permissibility, by which all actions that do not contradict the Qur'an and *Sunnah* are presumed to be lawful.

When the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mamun officially supported proponents of the belief that the Qur'an is created and thus eternal, Ahmad ibn Hanbal publicly opposed that view. Despite being imprisoned and tortured he resolutely refused to retract his opposition.

This *mathhab* was promoted by Ibn Taymiyah and later by Muhammad ibn AbdulWahab. The majority of Muslims in Saudi Arabia, Oman and Qatar follow the Hanbali School.

Differences in opinions

The four schools of Ahl al–Sunnah hold different opinions concerning every single matter of Islamic Law. Differences between any two of them are sometimes greater than the differences between Sunnis and Shiahs. For a quick overview, refer to The Five Schools of Islamic Law by Muhammad Jawad Mughniyah (Ansarian Publications, Qum, 2000).3

6.4 Sufi

Most Muslim scholars concentrate on the manifest aspects of *Shariah* – i.e. the Jurisprudential or Islamic Law rulings that relate to an individual's relationship with the Almighty and other human beings.

However, there are Muslim thinkers who focus their attention on the spiritual significance of Islamic teaching. To them, *Shariah* is but the outer shell of its spiritual 'kernel'. The matter that concerns them is the elemental characteristic of Islamic teaching – that this temporary life is but a pathway to humankind's final destination, the hereafter. Neglect of the natural needs of the body and emphasis on the purification of the soul became the hallmark by which they became recognized.

Sufis claim that all acts of worship, rules regarding business and trade, personal law and all other *Shariah* rulings are only concerned with the superficial exterior. The 'way' – tariqah – concerns itself with the most precious pearls in the depths of Islam's 'mercy oceans'. They teach that to act upon *Shariah* and walk the path of *tariqah* leads to the achievement of complete truth – *traiqah*.

Kulayni relates in Al-Kafi that after offering the Dawn Prayer one morning a young man – Harithah ibn Malik ibn Nu'man al-Ansari – caught the Prophet's eye. Lean, pale and sunken-eyed, he appeared unable to maintain his balance and seemed unaware of his own condition. When the Prophet (S) asked him how he felt, he responded by saying that he had attained certainty. When asked what had led him to that conclusion he said that certainty had immersed him in grief, had kept him fasting all day and at worship all night.

This had separated him from the world and its affairs so completely that he felt he could see all humankind raised from the dead, and the Divine Throne on Judgement Day, from which all people's accounts were settled. At that very moment he could see the people of paradise enjoying their bounty, the people of hell suffering their torments, and hear the roar of the flames.

The Holy Prophet told his companions that Allah had illumined his heart with the light of faith and told the young man to preserve his condition and not to let it be taken from him.

The young man asked the Prophet to pray for Allah to grant him martyrdom and his wish was shortly after realized on the battlefield.

Many ayat of the Qur'an emphasize that purification – tazkyah – is the main purpose of this life and the

reason why Allah sent 'Messengers and Warners' to teach humanity how to attain the prosperity that *tazkyah* brings:

By the soul and the power that perfects and inspires it with the ability to distinguish between good and evil, truly it is those who purify [their souls] who realize success. (Qur'an 91:7-9)

Despite their earlier manifest errors, Allah conferred his favors upon believers by sending them – from amongst themselves – His Messenger [Muhammad (S)],in order to familiarize them with His signs, to purify them, to teach them the book [(Qur'an] and wisdom. (Qur'an 3: 164)

Indeed, it is only those who purify themselves who achieve success. (Qur'an 87:14)

Just as bodily infections have to be overwhelmed by medicines for health to be regained; spiritual infections need to be overwhelmed for the soul to regain health. While bacteria and viruses impact upon the body, sins and negative thoughts impact upon the soul. Regrettably, the majority of people stay oblivious to such infection. While the merest intimation of water being polluted is sufficient to drive the public to stockpile bottled water, attention drawn to sources of spiritual pollution is met by indifference.

Most people attend to the cleanliness and attractiveness of the human form, spending billions each year on cosmetics and other aspects of external 'beauty'. However, few give consideration to inner beauty. Imam Ali (a.s.) compared these two aspects of beauty when he said,

Inner adornment is of greater beauty than external adornments. 4

In supplication number 20 of *Al-Sahifah al-Kamilah al-Sajjadiyyah*, Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.) refers to 'Adornment of the Righteous' and 'Ornament of the God-fearing' as practical steps by which to attain purification of the soul.

According to Abu Nasr al-Sarraj (d.378 AH/988 CE) there are ten positions (*ahwal*) and seven stations (*magamat*) within Sufism.

The positions are:

- 1. Vigilance
- 2. Proximity
- 3. Love
- 4. Fear
- 5. Hope
- 6. Spiritual Yearning

9. Contemplation
10. Certainty
And the stations are:
1. Repentance
2. Abstinence
3. Asceticism
4. Poverty
5. Patience
6. Trust in Allah
7. Contentment
Sufi practice is adopted by Shiah and Sunni Muslims alike. However, when the Divine love of Allah settles in His servants' hearts it leads to wilayah – traceable to the error-free Imams of the progeny of the Holy Prophet. It is unsurprising that the 'Chain of Mastership' – silsilah – of many Sufi orders include the name Maruf al-Karkhi, a servant of Imam Ar-Ridha' (a.s.), the eighth Imam of the progeny of

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Muhammad (S).

7. Familiarity

8. Tranquility

1. Distinguished guests invited by a prominent socialite included luminaries such as the Minister of Health, prominent physicians and one Sufi Shaykh renowned for his healing prowess. When the daughter of the house suddenly became pale and faint and had to retire, the host asked the Shaykh to pray for her.

While he did so at some length, the health minister was heard to remark that superstitions no longer had any place in today's society, 'With our efficient health service, specialist medical practitioners and array of scientifically approved medicines to cure all manner of ailments, such old-fashioned nonsense can only stand in the way of effective treatment.'

Then, turning to the Minister, the Shaykh responded by saying that until then, he had been unaware that the government had elevated a donkey to the status of Minister! How could such a foolish and ignorant person be a doctor, much less so a Minister of State?

The Minister's face flushed and he became so utterly apoplectic that he was unable to utter a word. The Shaykh then offered, in a gentle and kindly voice, his profuse apology. He said he had only uttered such insulting words to make a point. If a short secular speech could instantly trigger dramatic physical changes, flood the body with adrenaline, set the heart racing and dilate the blood vessels so as to suffuse the face with color, was it not possible that a few holy words from Allah's Revelation could help bring about physical healing?

2. While a Shaykh, who had been asked about the subject of 'patience', spoke eloquently and at length about it, his foot dislodged a scorpion that repeatedly stung him. Despite being in acute pain he continued his address and did not falter. When someone noticed what was happening and asked why he did not feel it, he replied that before Allah, it was not possible to teach others about patience without displaying any oneself.

It goes without saying that until a person has purified her/his own soul and complied with everything required of a true 'wayfarer', she/he is not in a position to guide others. This is why we so appreciate the error–free Imams whose guidance we follow Sufis are renowned for their focus on spiritual enhancement and disregard of natural urge. However, Islam neither promotes asceticism nor counsels people to abstain from the pleasures of this world. Notwithstanding this, it is evident that those whose sole focus is self–gratification, social standing and the things of this world will not taste the sweetness of closeness to Allah, nor enjoy the light He bestows upon His worthy servants.

To balance the spiritual with the temporal, Imam Ali (a.s.) said,

By Allah, if you cry like a she camel that has lost its calf; coo like a dove; chant like a devoted recluse; or leave your wealth and children to secure nearness and status in His eyes; or forgiveness for the sins recorded by His angels – your effort will be as nothing compared to His reward that I anticipate for you, or His retribution that I fear for you.5

- 1. See Qur'an 26:214.
- 2. Al Taftazani, Sharh al-Maqqid, Vol. 2, p.272.
- 3. Online at: https://www.al-islam.org/five-schools-islamic-law-allamah-muhammad-jawad... [1]
- 4. Ghurar al-Hikam, Maxim No. 5582.
- 5. Nahjul Balaghahh, Sermon 52.

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