

How to Present the Imamiyyah School of Thought to the Wahhabis

In the book “*Rihlati min al-Wahhabiyyah ila al-Ithna ‘Ashariyyah*”, I explained the reason as to why I left Wahhabism even though I used to lead prayers in a Wahhabi mosque myself. In the present book, however, I attempt to clarify the facts and peculiarities of the Twelver Shi‘ah, Imamiyyah, in a manner that will set a Wahhabi’s confused mind right, and give him a clear understanding of the Imamiyyah faith. So long as the confusions are not settled, any discussion with the Wahhabis will be barren.

The Imamiyyah faith, I believe, should be introduced to a Wahhabi at three essential levels, duly sequenced. If done otherwise it will be impossible to treat his mental perplexity or make him understand the relevant facts and peculiarities.

The Wahhabis should also understand that because they have not heeded the three immediately-linked stages (explained below), they have drifted away from the method which the Sunnis follow when investigating the Imamiyyah school. This, in turn, has resulted in an entirely different image from the one the Sunni forerunners had of Shi‘ism.

The present research gains further importance because no scientific framework has yet been offered for the proper method of discussion with the Wahhabis nor has there been one to show why their approach differs from the one the Sunnis followed when confronting other Islamic schools with whom they had sharp differences.

I have no doubt, however, that differences stem from the dissimilarity inherent in these two approaches. There is evidently a close link between the method that the Wahhabis advocate and their conception of the Imamiyyah. Therefore, the application of a non-scientific procedure—one containing invisible errors—will result in a distortion and falsification of the Imamiyyah’s real beliefs.

We cannot grasp how important research methodology is in depicting and presenting the realities of Shi‘ism, unless we take up a scientific method that contrasts the Sunnis’ conception of the Shi‘ahs with

that of the Wahhabis.

It is apt for an objective researcher examining the Imamiyyah school of thought to make a distinction between the school itself and the erroneous methods that lead to the misunderstanding of the realities of Shi'ism. We ought to remember that these two are different. This is the point where "the proper method of doing research on the Imamiyyah school of thought" acquires value.

Our method of framing the peculiarities of the Imamiyyah Shi'ism will move through three stages, the immediate pacing of which ought to be observed if we desire to keep away from the pitfalls into which Wahhabis have fallen while displaying the Shi'ah peculiarities. The three stages that ought to be followed are:

Stage one: an understanding of the Imamiyyah's link

In this stage we examine the reasons why the Wahhabis stick to their study of the Imamiyyah's origin, and the mistake they make in identifying the Imamiyyah with the extremists, the *Ghulat*. The two major factors contributing to the above mistakes are:

1. The Wahhabis' lack of knowledge;
2. The Wahhabi's method of study.

The first factor itself stems from three other causes:

- a) Not understanding what *Ghulat* means;
- b) Not understanding what the Twelver Shi'ism means;
- c) Being unaware of the Imamiyyah's position towards the *Ghulat*.

The second factor, too, stems from two causes:

- a) The Wahhabis' mode of thinking;
- b) The Wahhabi's with the Sunnis' approach of treating the Twelver Shi'ism.

Stage two: a meticulous understanding of the Imamiyyah faith

The four significant facts to be analyzed here are:

1. Divinity and Prophethood as the Imamiyyah views them;
2. The reality of the *shari'ah* and religious injunctions from the Imamiyyah's viewpoint;

3. The reality of the goals of the Imamiyyah faith;
4. The purport of some common expressions used by the Imamiyyah.

Stage three: the Imamiyyah's roots

The points to be studied here are:

- 1 The Shi'ah's source of Jurisprudence;
2. Successorship to the Prophet (S); Imamate;
3. The Imamiyyah's identity;
4. Advent of the Imamiyyah: source and causes.

Having finished these three stages, the reader shall enter the final stage and begin investigating the particularities of the Imamiyyah.

Particularities of the Imamiyyah

These particularities, though a part of stage two, are knowingly raised at this stage since they are the last points the Wahhabis can understand in regard to Shi'ism. There are three particularities which consist of the following:

1. A positive Twelver Shi'ah believes in the members of the Household of the Prophet [*Ahl-al-Bayt* ('a)];
2. The Imamiyyah's realistic view on the Companions of the Prophet (S);
3. The Imamiyyah's views concerning the Twelfth Imam's ('a) occultation.

These are the procedures to conduct research on the Imamiyyah. The methods and their strict sequencing, I repeat, is a must when presenting the Twelver Shi'ah faith to the Wahhabis. [1](#)

The pyramid I have sketched below lucidly expounds all the earlier stages. The pyramid clearly shows our method of introducing Shi'ism; it also requires us to go through the first stage, i.e. the Shi'ah link, before the second one. Stage one is where we attempt to cure the disease of identifying Shi'ism with the *Ghulat*. The first stage has been placed at the top to emphasize its importance. Any miscalculation will bring a downfall. Stage one is what the Wahhabis always have before their eyes.

The Imamiyyah Pyramid

A reconsideration of the pyramid highlights the stage of secondary importance, ranked next to the peak, i.e. a careful examination of the Imamiyyah faith. This stage should not be displaced: it should not come

before the peak nor should it be presented after the third stage.

Then comes stage three, i.e. the roots of the Imamiyyah, the third in importance. Each stage is inclusive of facts that need to be examined in their proper places.

The final stage is the particularities of the Imamiyyah. This denotes that a thorough understanding of the traits and particular features of the Imamiyyah faith is dependent on a survey of the previous stages. This pyramid shows the hierarchy of importance.

We have placed our first stage of discussion at the peak to remind the reader of the strong influence it has over other levels, and “the reality of divinity and prophethood as viewed by the Imamiyyah” at the head of the second level to explain that an understanding of other realities is subject to a thorough and correct understanding of this very fact. This is the stage insisting on a clear separation of the rank of divinity from that of serving God, and the different plane the creatures occupy from the station of the Creator.

The point to be made here is that “the reality of the Imamate” and “the occultation of the twelfth Imam (‘a)” are two issues admittedly transcending the position they have been placed at in the pyramid. This is because my past experience with the Wahhabism has taught me that a Wahhabi is unable to comprehend these two realities, unless he passes through the previous stage of study. As long as he has not, he will not easily understand these delicate truths. This explanation will bar the illusion that I may have desired to downgrade the two issues of the Imamate and the Occultation of the twelfth Imam (‘a).

The vertical lines joining the peak and the base denote that there is a close link between the various stages of investigation and the existing realities, that each layer is generated by the one before it, and that there is a need to conduct a step-by-step research.

The stages depicted above are coherent, pointing to the indivisibility of the Imamiyyah beliefs and realities signifying that the investigator should take all the Imamiyyah realities as a coherent, unified whole, made up of identical constituents.

The realities and the particularities should never be studied individually—separated from other facts—otherwise it will be impossible to appreciate the grand and angular spirit this coherent system embodies. Perhaps the perilous error the Wahhabis commit when investigating the Shi‘ism is that they place the Shi‘ah belief system and realities in isolation.

The pyramid also exhibits a succession and a sequence of the topics of discussion. That is, each stage is both a prelude to the next debate and a conclusion of the preceding one, somehow denoting that only belief in the first reality results in a belief in the second reality.

The horizontal lines of the pyramid also signal that each stage requires a comprehensive study, and it

should not be mingled with the one following it. We cannot expect to enter the second stage and arrive at a proper understanding after having made an imperfect study of the previous level.

The sharp peak and the broad base of the pyramid reminds us that a mistake, or a slip, expands and broadens in scope as it progresses, however slight it may be at the beginning.

1. This is the scheme I have worked out in order for the Wahhābīs to acquire a sound knowledge of the Shī‘ism. My previous experience with Wahhābism clearly showed me that unless the disease of identifying the Shī‘ism with Ghulāt is cured and the issues of divinity, Prophecy, shar‘ah (precepts of religion), Shī‘ah sources of jurisprudence, the occultation of the Twelfth Imām (‘a) are made clear meticulously and in detail, it will be impossible for a Wahhābī to appreciate the reality of the Prophet’s (S) succession and the Imamate. This is why I placed “Imamate” and “Occultation” in the final stage. This explanation will bar the illusion that I may have downgraded the issues of the Imamate and Occultation.

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