

Imam Ali's Reign

After they had overthrown Uthman's government, the mutineers surrounded Imam Ali (a) and declared that they unanimously select him for the leadership of the Islamic ummah. As he anticipated the coming crises, the Imam (a) refused, but the public insisted and declared that they would not opt for anyone else, and that the Islamic ummah would be without leader if he would refuse.

Thus, the Imam (a) had to accept, and the people hurried to pay homage to him. Talhah, al-Zubayr, the military forces, the foremost warriors and authorities of Islam, and the entire public paid homage to the Imam (a).¹ In fact, none of the first three caliphs, or any ruler of the Islamic state, won such a non-compulsory homage except Imam Ali (a).

The tribes of Quraysh received the leadership of Imam Ali (a) in the same way as they had received the prophethood of Prophet Muhammad (S), with discomfort and gloom.² They knew the Imam (a) from another angle; for them it was he who had beheaded their Heads and crushed their pride under the banner of Islam³. They also knew that the Imam (a) would never neglect their plundering the public treasures during the dark reign of Uthman

As soon as he held the position of leadership, Imam Ali (a), the one and only deserver of the epithet of Amir al-Muminin—the commander of the faithful believers, decided to confiscate all the fortunes that Uthman robbed from the public treasure and gave exclusively to his faithless relatives. He then deposed Uthman's officials who spread injustice and persecution throughout the Islamic ummah. As a third step in his program of social justice, the Imam (a) declared equality among people and cancelled any distinction due to social class⁴.

On this righteous plan, Imam Ali (a) educated his sons who raised his slogan of justice, fought for its sake, and challenged all its oppressors and violators.

[Rebellion against the Imam](#)

Imam Ali (a) insisted on applying the instructions of the Holy Quran and the Sunnah honestly and impartially, so many straying powers opposed him in order to safeguard their personal interests that they

had obtained illegally.

The first ones to declare rebellion against Imam Ali's government were Talhah and al-Zubayr. Because the Imam treated them just like any other Muslim and refused to give them privileges at the expense of the others, they mutinied against him and breached the homage that they had paid to him. He also refused to invest in them with any official position because he knew their greediness.

One day, they both asked the Imam's permission to leave for Mecca for performing Umrah⁵. The Imam gazed at them and said:

“By Allah I swear, you do not intend to perform Umrah. You intend to mutiny and breach your homage to me.”

However, the Imam (a) permitted them after he had asked them to pay homage to him again. Without hesitation, they did and swore they would never mutiny.

As soon as they fled to Mecca, they joined Aishah.

Even though she was in the lead of those who revolted against Uthman ibn Affan and decided his apostasy, Aishah could not stand the news of Imam Ali's undertaking the position of the Islamic ummah's leadership, because of her uncontrollable malice towards him.

Thus, Aishah's completely changed her position towards Uthman. She began to mourn for him and betook his assassination as a pretext to overthrow the Imam's government.⁶ Talhah and al-Zubayr, as well as the past profiteers of Uthman's government, joined Aishah and decided to march towards Basra for fighting against the Imam's authorities.

The lawless mutineers seduced Aishah by mounting her on a camel⁷ and calling her their mother. When she arrived in a place, dogs received her companions and her with barking. The barking reminded her of a word she had heard from the Holy Prophet (S). She asked in a terrified tone, “What is this place called?”

“It is called al-Hawab,” she was told.

The moment this name came to her ear, she became panic-stricken and asked them to take her back home. When she was asked for a reason, she answered that she once had heard the Prophet (S) saying to his wives, “I see coming that the dogs of al-Hawab will bark at one of you. Do not be it, little reddish one!”⁸⁹

All the mutineers' efforts to make Aishah change her decision failed; therefore, they, led by Talhah and al-Zubayr, bribed some individuals to come and witness that the place was not called al-Hawab. That was the first perjury in Islam.¹⁰ Unfortunately, Aishah was deceived by that false testimony.

When the lawless mutineers arrived in the suburbs of Basra, Uthman ibn Hanif, the governor of Basra, sent Abu al-Aswad al-Duali to see the matter. The man met Aishah and al-Zubayr and discussed the matter with them so logically. Yet, they did not respond to him.

Abu al-Aswad told the governor that they had decided to fight. So, the two parties agreed on a temporary peace treaty as they waited for Imam Ali's opinion.

Nonetheless, Aishah's party breached the treaty, attacked the governor, arrested and tortured him, robbed the public treasury, and aroused sedition in Basra.

The Imam (a) then led his army to Basra to fight against the mutineers. As soon as he arrived there, he sent Abdullah ibn Abbas and Zayd ibn Sawhan to call them to peace. But their call was not responded to. He then sent a generous boy and ordered him to carry a copy of the Holy Quran and call them to peace and apply the instructions of the Quran.

The mutineers attacked him, severed his both hands, and threw darts at him until he departed life.

The Imam (a) then had to attack the other camp, which was led by Aishah. The mutineers could not resist the Imam's army; as a result, Aishah tried to breathe life in her soldiers' determinations, but they were too weak to face his famous sword. They surrounded their mother's camel, and the Imam (a) ordered Ammar ibn Yasir and Malik al-Ashtar to cut the camel's legs because Aishah's soldiers, according to the Imam's expression, had betaken that camel as center. They did, and thus the fighting ceased with the bitter defeat of the lawless mutineers. That fighting was called 'Battle of the Camel'.

The Imam (a) then issued a general amnesty and released Aishah to go back to Medina. [11](#)

From these events, Lady Zaynab realized, more deeply, the serious hostility that the tribes of Quraysh bore against her grandfather and father. She also understood the factuality of the Islamic ummah and the Muslims' duties to it.

[Muawiyah's sedition](#)

As a matter of fact, Aishah paved the way of mutiny to Muawiyah who, too, betook the issue of Uthman's assassination as pretext to oppose the Imam's impartial government.

The one and only reason beyond Muawiyah's mutiny was that he knew for certain that the Imam would dismiss him from his position, [12](#) divest him of all the fortunes that he usurped from the public treasury, and get even with him concerning his behaviors that violated Islam, such as wearing silk garments, using golden and silver bowls, and wasting huge riches in building palaces. Furthermore, the Imam (a) would not admit Umar's purposeful glorifying and supporting him.

At any rate, Muawiyah rejected the Imam's call to peace and paying homage to him. He gathered a big

army and directed towards a place called Siffin on the Iraqi–Syrian borders. The first thing he did was occupying the two banks of the River Euphrates in order that the Imam’s army would not find water.

On the other side, the Imam (a) readied for meeting the mutinous forces. His armies could not reach the Euphrates for supplying themselves with water. He therefore sent one of his companions to meet Muawiyah and convince him to let the Imam’s army have water. Of course, Muawiyah refused out of his meanness. The Imam (a) then had to give orders of occupying the river and having water from it. The armies did, and the mutineers were defeated and taken away from the river’s banks. Afterwards, the commanders of the Imam’s army found it a good opportunity to make an eye for an eye, by depriving Muawiyah’s army of reaching the river, but the Imam (a), out of his matchless humanity and high morals, refused.

As an attempt to prevent bloodshed, Imam Ali (a) sent messengers of peace to Muawiyah’s camp, but the latter refused and resolved to enter the war against the Imam (a). As a consequence, the Imam had to battle against them. First of all, there were individual campaigns from both parties, because the Imam (a) hoped for Muawiyah’s responding to calls of peace. When the Imam (a) despaired and knew that Muawiyah was preparing for general attack, he had to recruit his soldiers. Thus, a fierce war, during which great figures of Islam such as Ammar ibn Yasir were martyred, broke out. [13](#)

The army of Muawiyah was defeated and their leader was about to flee. As a result of a secret conspiracy between Amr ibn al–As, the counselor of Muawiyah, and some commanders of the Imam’s army, headed by al–Ashath ibn Qays, the Syrian army raised copies of the Holy Quran on spearheads and called for its being the arbiter of the dispute.

Hence, the conspirers in the Imam’s army urged importunately the others to respond to the Syrian army’s call. Event though he had known the reality of that trick, the Imam (a) had nothing to do other than responding to his army’s demanding calls to peace. Before so, he had proven the falsity of Muawiyah’s trick and informed that Muawiyah and his party had never respected or even believed in the Quran, but the soldiers refused the Imam’s words, responded to Muawiyah’s trick, and even threatened to kill him if he would not respond.

That was not all, the Imam’s soldier’s selected Abu Musa al–Ashari to be their representative in the arbitration between Imam Ali and Muawiyah, while the Imam’s nominee was Abdullah ibn Abbas, the great Islamic authority. Once again, the Imam’s soldiers refused his representative and insisted on choosing the mindless Abu Musa. On the other side, the Syrian army selected Amr ibn al–As – the fox.

When the two met for appointing the time of arbitration Amr ibn al–As convinced, delusively, the mindless representative of the Imam’s army that they both should depose the two parties, Muawiyah and Imam Ali, so as to save the Islamic ummah from conflicts. The trick of the sly representative of Muawiyah’s party worked with the mindless representative of the Imam’s. Before the delegates of the two parties, Amr cheated Abu Musa to climb the minbar and declare his decision of deposing the Imam.

After him, Amr climbed the minbar and decided to depose the Imam and nominate Muawiyah as the leader of the ummah.

Thus, Abu Musa al-Ashari had to flee towards Mecca after he had invented sedition and schism in the Imam's party.

The Kharijites sedition

It is ironic that the very individuals who forced the Imam (a) to respond to Muawiyah's trick of the Quran's arbitration mutinied against him claiming that he should not have responded to that trick. They formed a political movement, which was called Khawarij (plural of Kharijite: dissidents). They were extremists; they killed numerous innocent people, such as Abdullah ibn Khabbab, the decent companion of the Prophet (S), and camped in al-Nahrawan.

The Imam (a) intended to direct towards Syria for fighting the mutinous Muawiyah, but his companions consulted him to fight, first, against the Kharijites whose danger on the Islamic ummah had been more serious than Muawiyah's. The Imam (a) hence directed towards al-Nahrawan, fought against the Kharijites, and could kill them all except nine individuals only. [14](#)

Then, the Imam's soldiers wearied of wars; therefore, they did not respond to him when he intended to fight against the disobedient Muawiyah despite urgings.

Decline of the honest government

If truth were told, the Orient has never known the like of Imam Ali's government in honesty, justice, and impartiality. Unfortunately, the evil and opportunist powers of his time spared no efforts for stopping against his political and social plans of reformation. They forced him to enter wars that exhausted his military forces and occupied him from doing the reformative schemes of the state.

By the slowdown of the Imam's soldiers, it was the best opportunity for Muawiyah to strengthen and arm his forces. Moreover, he began to wage campaigns against the Islamic provinces that were under Imam Ali's ruling so as to make the public believe that the Imam (a) lost the ability to protect his people. Meanwhile, all the Imam's attempts to arouse his soldiers' determinations failed. He therefore supplicated to Almighty Allah to save him from such a frozen society whose individuals could not recognize his principles and policies of spreading justice and equality.

The assassination of Imam Ali

Groups of the Kharijites held a secret meeting in Mecca and discussed the current issues of the Islamic ummah. They agreed that Imam Ali (a), Muawiyah ibn Abu Sufyan, and Amr ibn al-As stood behind the catastrophes of the ummah. They therefore decided to assassinate the three.

Abd-al-Rahman ibn Muljim, the cursed, took upon himself the assassination of the Imam (a), while two others took upon themselves the assassination of the others. They specified a definite hour at which they would implement their plans. It was after the Fajr –dawn– Prayer on the nineteenth of Ramadan. Hence, Abd-al-Rahman ibn Muljim, the cursed, returned to Kufa, which was the capital of the Islamic state, to do his mission. There, he met a Kharijite lady whose father and brother were killed during the Battle of al-Nahrawan. As he asked for her hand, she specified as dowry three thousand dirhams, a slave, a bondmaid, and the killing of Imam Ali (a). The cursed Abd-al-Rahman agreed and promised her of arranging for all these things. [15](#)

On the night of the eighteenth of Ramadan, Imam Ali (a) had strange feelings. He anticipated the imminent occurrence of a horrifying matter. It was Friday, and the Imam, that night, did not sleep. He spent it with recitation of the Holy Quran and offering prayers. When dawn was about to fall, he intended to leave for the Masjid, but some swans cried in his face. This happening gave a signal to the Imam (a) who said, “All power and might belong only to Allah. These cries will be followed by wailings.” [16](#)

He then came towards the door, but could difficultly open it. That was another sign he alone could understand. When he reached in the mosque, he, as usual, awoke people for offering the prayer. He then began his prayer. When he sat after the first Sajdah [17](#), the cursed ibn Muljim struck him with the sword so heavily that the Imam’s forehead was cleft and the sword reached his brain. As soon as the Imam felt the stroke, he raised his voice with the statement:

فُزْتُ وَرَبِّ الْكَعْبَةِ.

“By the Lord of the Kaabah, I have triumphed.”

People hurried from every side and began to mourn the Imam (a) with melted hearts. They then carried him to his house and arrested the murderer. He however asked his son, Imam al-Hasan (a), to treat the murderer kindly. When the son wondered, the Imam (a) answered, “O son, we are the household of mercy and forgiveness. Feed him (i.e. your prisoner) from the food you eat and water him from the drink you take. If I will die, you may then retaliate upon him (according to Allah’s law of retaliation) by killing him. But, never do anything to his dead body, for I heard your grandfather the Messenger of Allah (S) say: “Never do anything to the dead body of even biting dogs.” If I will survive, I know what I will do with him. It is however better for me to pardon him, for it is my ethics to forgive. We, the Ahl al-Bayt, return on those who do wrong against us in forgiveness and generosity.

[Lady Zaynab with her father](#)

Lady Zaynab hurried to her injured father with tearful eyes and broken heart. She asked him whether the Prophet’s report, related by the righteous lady Ummu-Ayman, regarding the adversities and misfortunes that the Ahl al-Bayt would have to encounter in the future was true or not.

The Imam (a) said:

الْحَدِيثُ كَمَا حَدَّثْتِكِ أُمُّ أَيْمَانَ. وَكَأَنِّي بِكِ وَبِنِسَاءِ أَهْلِكَ سَبَايَا بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ، أَذْلَاءَ خَاشِعِينَ تَخَافُونَ أَنْ يُنَخَبَطَكُمُ النَّاسُ. فَصَبْرًا صَبْرًا، فَوَالَّذِي فَلَقَ الْحَبَّةَ وَبَرَأَ النَّسَمَةَ مَا لِلَّهِ عَلَى ظَهْرِ الْأَرْضِ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَلِيٌّ غَيْرُكُمْ وَعَيْرٌ مُحِبِّكُمْ وَشَيْعَتِكُمْ. وَلَقَدْ قَالَ لَنَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، حِينَ أَخْبَرَنَا بِهَذَا الْخَبَرِ: إِنَّ إِبْلِيسَ لَعَنَهُ اللَّهُ فِي ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ—أَيَّ يَوْمٍ قُتِلَ الْحُسَيْنُ— يَطِيرُ فَرَحًا فَيَجُولُ الْأَرْضَ كُلَّهَا بِشَيْطَانِيهِ وَعَفَارِيَتِهِ، فَيَقُولُ: يَا مَعَاشِرَ الشَّيَاطِينِ، قَدْ أَدْرَكْنَا مِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ آدَمَ الطَّلِبَةَ وَبَلَّغْنَا فِي هَلَاكِهِمُ الْغَايَةَ وَأُورَثْنَاهُمْ النَّارَ. أَلَا مَنْ اعْتَصَمَ بِهَذِهِ الْعِصَابَةِ فَاجْعَلُوا شُغْلَكُمْ بِتَشْكِيكِ النَّاسِ فِيهِمْ وَحَمَلِهِمْ عَلَى عَدَاوَتِهِمْ وَإِعْرَائِهِمْ بِهِمْ وَأَوْلِيَائِهِمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَحْكِمَ ضَلَالَةَ الْخَلْقِ وَكُفْرَهُمْ وَلَا يَنْجُو مِنْهُمْ نَاجٍ.

“Ummu–Ayman has told the truth. I see it coming that you, as well as your people’s harem, will be captives in this country. You will be submissive and terrified, fearing lest people might carry you off by force. At that time, be patient and adhere to patience, for, on that day, there will be no disciple (of Allah) on the earth except you, your followers, and you partisans. I swear this by Him Who split the grains and created the souls.

When he foretold us of these news, the Messenger of Allah (S) added: “On the same day as al–Husayn will be slain, Iblis¹⁸ the cursed will be overjoyed and will wander about the earth with his devils and afreets¹⁹ to declare: O devils, only today have we revenged ourselves on the descendants of Adam, attained our objective of wiping them out, and led them to the fire of Hell. Now, you must turn all your efforts towards filling people’s minds with doubt towards al–Husayn and his companions, inciting them to bear hostility against them, and provoking them against anybody who shows loyalty to them (i.e. al–Husayn and his companions) in order that people’s straying and atheism would be so guaranteed that none of them would be saved (on the Day of Resurrection).”

Even though he is the biggest liar, Iblis said the truth in that question. It is quite true that the good deeds of anyone who bears hostility against the Ahl al–Bayt are of no avail (no matter how great they are), and the sins, not the grand ones, of anyone who loves them and is loyal to them are of no harm.²⁰

The Imam’s final advice

In his final hours, Imam Ali (a) advised his sons and daughters to cling to the high moral standards and abstinence from the transitory pleasures of this world.

To his two sons, Imam al–Hasan and Imam al–Husayn (a), he said:

I advise you (both) to fear Allah and that you should not hanker after the (pleasures of this) world even though it may run after you. Do not be sorry for anything of this world that you have been denied. Speak the truth and act (in expectation) for reward. Be an enemy of the oppressor and helper of the oppressed.

I advise you (both) and all my children and members of my family and everyone whom my writing

reaches, to fear Allah, to keep your affairs in order, and to maintain good relations among yourselves for I have heard your grandfather (the Holy Prophet) saying, "Improvement of mutual differences is better than general prayers and fastings."

Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of orphans. So, do not allow them to starve and they should not be ruined in your presence.

Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of your neighbors, because they were the subjects of the Prophet's advice. He went on advising in their favor until we thought he would allow them a share in inheritance.

Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of the Quran. No one should excel you in acting upon it.

Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of prayer, because it is the pillar of your religion.

Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of your Lord's House (the Kaabah). Do not forsake it so long as you live, because if it is abandoned you will not be spared (or you will be deprived of your Lord's grace).

Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of jihad with the help of your property, lives, and tongues in the way of Allah.

You should keep to a respect for kinship and spending for others. Avoid turning away from one another and severing mutual relations. Do not give up bidding for good and forbidding from evil lest the mischievous gain positions over you, and then if you will pray, the prayers will not be granted.

Then the Imam (a) said:

O sons of Abd-al-Muttalib, certainly I do not wish to see you plunging harshly into the blood of Muslims shouting that Amir al-Muminin has been killed. Beware; do not kill on account of me except my killer.[21](#)

Wait until I die by his (Abd-al-Rahman ibn Muljim) existing stroke. Then strike him one stroke for his stroke. But, never do anything to his dead body, for I heard your grandfather, the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him and his family, say: Never do anything to the dead body of even the dogs that bite.[22](#)

Lady Zaynab has narrated the final will of Imam Ali (a).

Afterwards, the Imam (a) began to recite Verses of the Holy Quran and suffer death agonies. Then, his pure soul elevated to the Supreme Comrade and joined the endless joy with the prophets, saints, and righteous people. Excellent is the companionship of such ones.

Imam al-Hasan (a), accompanied by his brothers, assumed responsibility for his father's funeral ceremonies, and at the last part of night, they carried Imam Ali's pure body to the final resting-place in al-Najaf.[23](#) Lady Zaynab, while she was shedding tears heavily, participated in that funeral ceremony.

- [1.](#) See Ibn Abd-Rabbuh's, al-Iqd al-Farid; 3:93.
- [2.](#) See Ahmad Husayn Yaqub's The Conception of the Sahaba's Ultimate Decency and the Political Leadership in Islam; translated by Badr Shahin, published by Ansariyan Publications, 1999.
- [3.](#) See al-Yaqubi's al-Tarikh; 2:155
- [4.](#) See Ansab al-Ashraf; 1:160 (part I)
- [5.](#) Umrah is a non-obligatory pilgrimage to the Holy House of Allah in Mecca. It is also called the Minor Hajj.
- [6.](#) See Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk; vol. 3, p, 454.
- [7.](#) See Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Tarikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk; vol. 3, p, 475.
- [8.](#) Aishah was called 'Humayra' – the little reddish one.
- [9.](#) It is recorded in Ibn Abil-Hadid's Sharh(u) Nahj al-Balaghah; 2:497, that Abdullah ibn Abbas narrated that Prophet Muhammad (S) once said to his wives who were all present before him, "Which one of you will be the rider of the giant camel and the dogs of al-Hawab will bark at her? To the right and left of this one will be numerous killed ones. All of them shall be in Hell. She will hardly escape."
- [10.](#) See al-Masudi's Muruj al-Dhahab; 2:342 and al-Yaqubi's al-Tarikh; 2: 181.
- [11.](#) Imam Ali (a) pardoned all his enemies, such as Abdullah ibn al-Zubayr and Marwan ibn al-Hakam, and did not punish anyone of them. For more details, refer to al-Yaqubi's al-Tarikh.
- [12.](#) Since Umar's reign, Muawiyah ibn Abu-Sufyan, the mortal enemy of Islam and the son of the mortal enemy of Islam, was holding the position of governing Syria.
- [13.](#) That war was called 'Battle of Siffin'.
- [14.](#) That conflict was called 'Battle of al-Nahrawan'.
- [15.](#) See al-Hakim's al-Mustadrak; 3:143
- [16.](#) See al-Masudi's Muruj al-Dhahab; 3:291
- [17.](#) Sajdah is the obligatory prostration of the ritual prayers.
- [18.](#) Iblis is the name of the Devil
- [19.](#) Afreet is a powerful, evil jinnee. (See The Oxford Talking Dictionary; item: afreet.)
- [20.](#) See Kamil al-Ziyarat; 266.
- [21.](#) This is an indication to the seditions that Aishah and Muawiyah aroused because of Uthman's assassination.
- [22.](#) See Nahj al-Balaghah; 3:85.
- [23.](#) See Zaynab al-Kubra; 60.

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