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Imamate and Wilayah, Part 6

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This paper is based on lecture 13 of a series of lectures delivered by Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali in summer 2004 in Qum.

Abstract

A leader who draws people nearer to righteousness is a grace of God. Imamate in Shi'i Islam considers it necessary to have a guide who will lead the Muslim society after the Prophet's death to present true Islam. This guide is appointed by God; he possesses qualities of piety, knowledge, wisdom, and infallibility. While Part IV of this series verified that the Shi'a understanding of Imamate is compatible with the Qur'an, Part V studied the group of verses that refer to the profound concept of *witness*, including his roles and merits, and that it is none other than Imam Ali who possessed those qualities. This part offers the authentic hadiths that refer to the legitimacy of Imam Ali's leadership, namely the Hadith of *Manzilah*, Hadith of *D'ar*, Hadith of *Tayr*, Hadith of *Wilaya*, Hadith of *Ghadir*, Hadith of *Safinah*, and the Hadith of the Stars.

Part 3: Hadiths referring to Imam Ali's Leadership

There are many hadiths that refer to the authenticity of Imam Ali's Imamate. Citing all hadiths is beyond the constraints of this paper. We restrict ourselves to the well-known hadiths that are *mutawatir* – successive narrations conveyed by a considerable amount of narrators through multiple chains that its authenticity is unquestionable – such as Hadith of *Manzilah*, Hadith of *D'ar*, Hadith of *Tayr*, Hadith of *Wilaya*, Hadith of *Ghadir*, Hadith of *Safinah*, and the Hadith of the Stars.

The Tradition of Rank (Hadith ul-Manzilah)

The Prophet's strongest declaration of Imam Ali's successorship was revealed in the Tradition of Rank.^{[1](#)}

The Prophet went for the Battle of Tabuk, a military expedition he led against the Romans during the

later years of his life. As the Muslim soldiers prepared themselves for war, the Prophet asked Ali to remain in Medina and take charge of the city during his absence. This saddened Ali since he was eager to have been given an opportunity to go for Jihad. He approached the Prophet and said, “O Prophet, you want me to be responsible for the women and children in the city?” The Prophet replied, “Aren’t you pleased to be in relation to me like Aaron in relation to Musa, except that there is no prophet after me?”

Prophet Aaron held the following positions (except for prophethood) in relation to Prophet Moses:

A vicegerent of Prophet Moses:

وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ فَتَمَّ مِيقَاتُ رَبِّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً ۚ وَقَالَ مُوسَى لِأَخِيهِ هَارُونَ اخْلُفْنِي فِي قَوْمِي وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ

We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten (more): thus was completed the term (of communion) with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up): “Act for me amongst my people: Do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief. (7: 142)

A minister:

وَجْعَلْ لِي وَزِيرًا مِنْ أَهْلِي هَارُونَ أَخِي

And give me a Minister from my family, Aaron, my brother (20:29–30)

An assistant:

اشْدُدْ بِهِ أَزْرِي

Add to my strength through him (20:31)

A partner:

وَأَشْرِكْهُ فِي أَمْرِي

And make him share my task (20:32)

Thus, Imam Ali also holds the positions of being a vicegerent, minister, assistant, and partner to Prophet Muhammad with the exclusion of being a prophet.

To reiterate, when Prophet Muhammad sent for Imam Ali to convey the chapter *The Immunity* to the polytheists and unbelievers, he said, “I was asked by Allah that someone from myself must declare this.”

Thus, Imam Ali was “from” (*minhu*) the Prophet. Similarly, Prophet Aaron was “from”² Prophet Moses.

Although Prophet Aaron died before Prophet Moses, he was his brother’s successor when Prophet Moses left for 40 days to receive the tablets. During his lifetime, he was the closest person to Prophet Moses and the only one eligible enough to be his successor.³

The Tradition of the House (Hadith al-Dar)

The Prophet began his call to Islam individually; he did not publicly invite people to embrace it the first three years of its revelation. Afterwards, verse 214 from the chapter *The Poets (al-Shua’ra)* was revealed, instructing the Prophet to warn his close relatives: “**And admonish thy nearest kinsmen.**” To prepare for this first public invitation to Islam for the family of the Prophet, Imam Ali was asked to prepare a meal and invite all his relatives. During the event and before the Prophet was able to deliver the message, his uncle Abu Lahab repeatedly poked fun at him by calling him a magician to prevent the Prophet from delivering the message. Nonetheless, the Prophet said:

O sons of Abdul Muttalib! I have brought you something that guarantees your goodness in this world and in the hereafter. My Lord has asked me to invite you to believe in this. Who among you is prepared to assist me to be my brother, successor, and caliph?

All kept silent. It was only Imam Ali, the youngest one among them, who said, “O Prophet of Allah. I am your assistant. I am your partner. I am the one who will assist you.” The Prophet placed his hand on Imam Ali’s neck to show that what he is going to say exclusively refers to Imam Ali. The Prophet said, “This is my brother, my successor, and my caliph. Listen to him and obey him.” And this is narrated by generations of Sunni scholars.

Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jareer Tabari both in his tafsir and in his book of history, Razi in his tafsir, Abu Na’im Isfahani, Bayhaqi, and many other people – the author of Kanzul ‘Ummal, all have narrated hadith al-Dar. Some of our ‘ulama have written independent essays and books on just this hadith. Just on a single hadith you have some essays or books. So this is an established thing.

The Tradition of the Roasted Bird (Hadith al-Tayr)

This hadith is about the Prophet and his prayer to Allah to share his ready-to-eat meal – gifted by an Ansari woman – with most beloved person to Him. Different versions of this hadith, with a similar theme yet different phrasings, have been combined for an accurate understanding to draw a conclusion regarding the event.

The original hadith:

A woman gifted the Prophet two ready-to-eat fried birds. Before eating, the Prophet raised his palms and implored, "O Allah! Of your whole creation, send the person who is dearest to you and to me so that he may share this roasted bird with me. This person is the most beloved by Allah and His Messenger and he will be the master and leader and wali after the Prophet." Imam Ali then came in and shared the meal with the Prophet.

A version that includes ambiguous information:

One of the Ansar women gifted two fried birds to the Prophet. When he received them, he prayed, "My Lord, bring the one who is the most beloved people by You and me." – 'He raised his voice.' The Prophet asked, 'Who is the one raising his voice?' Anas replied, 'Ali.' [4](#)

The hadith ends at this point. It is unclear as to who raised his voice, and up until this point, there is no mention of Imam Ali. Readers or listeners may think it was the Prophet who raised his voice, but because he asked, 'Who is this man?' it could not have been the Prophet. Anas then said, 'It's Ali.' Additional details are located in other Sunni sources.

Versions in which either the companions of the Prophet competed with one another as to whom will be chosen to share the meal, or those present desired the person to be chosen from his or her relative or group.

In the full hadith, when Anas heard the Prophet's prayer, he wanted a person from his own people to be chosen, preferably Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah. Thus, Anas prevented Imam Ali from entering, his reason being that the Prophet was busy. The Prophet then prayed a second time, and again, Imam Ali was stopped. The third time, Imam Ali raised his voice, and when the Prophet heard, he told Anas to let him in.

Another version reads:

...As soon as the Prophet received the meal and raised his hands in prayer, someone knocked on his door. Anas said, 'I informed Ali that the Prophet was busy and will not accept visitors at the moment.' The Prophet continued to pray, and when Imam Ali went twice to knock, Anas prevented him. When Imam Ali came once more, this time knocking harder, the Prophet heard it, and asked Anas as to who it was. When Anas informed him, the Prophet invited Ali to enter, and told him, 'I asked Allah three times to send me someone who is most beloved by him and most beloved by me to eat with me.' Imam Ali said that he, too, came three times although Anas asked him to return. When the Prophet asked Anas as to why he refused Ali, Anas said, 'I wanted someone from my own people to respond to your prayer.' [5](#)

Abu Ya'la has two versions of this hadith. The first one reads:

After the Prophet prayed, Aisha invoked Allah to choose her father as the first to knock on the door and share the meal with the Prophet. Hafsa, the daughter of the second caliph, also besought Allah to nominate her father. And Anas desired it to be Sa'd ibn 'Ubadah. Anas then says, 'After we prayed, we

heard someone knocking at the door, and it was Ali. I told him the Prophet is busy, and so Ali left. When I heard another knock, I realized it was Ali again, and he was giving his salam. This time, the Prophet heard Ali's voice and said to me, 'Check to see who is knocking at the door.' When I said it was Ali, the Prophet asked to let him enter.

The second one reports that when Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman walked in one after the other the Prophet sent all of them back. When Ali came afterwards, the Prophet let him in.[6](#)

When considering the abovementioned hadiths, it leaves no doubt that Ali was the most beloved by Allah and the Prophet. Regardless of who was available in the hadith, the one most adored to the Prophet who entered his room to share his meal was none other than Ali.

Anas was not pleased to know that Ali was chosen to enter and eat with the Prophet and attempted to prevent him from being given this privilege. It is worth mentioning that Anas not only displayed his grudge against Imam Ali in Hadith al-Tayr, but in other historical events as well. Although Anas was a close servant to the Prophet, when Imam Ali asked him to bear witness about the Hadith of Ghadir, Anas refused to act as a witness to which he earned Imam Ali's curse. He later suffered from skin disease as a result.

The Tradition of Wilayah

The Prophet's hadith of Wilayah is reported by many Sunnis in various hadith books, including the Sihah. The most relevant phrase in it is: "You are the master, the leader, of all the believers after me." This is significant because the notion of leadership (*wilayah*) – 'You are the master' – is declared.

It is unclear as to why, when, and where this hadith was conveyed since the story behind it has not been given. However, other hadiths give additional details to understand the picture. For example, some hadiths read, "The Prophet said, 'Ali is from me, and I am from Ali; and Ali is the master of all believers after me.' This demonstrates Ali's authority and leadership (*wilayah*) after the Prophet.

In a more detailed version of the event, in preparation for a war, the Prophet sent an army that was divided into two groups and led by two commanders: Imam Ali and Khalid ibn Walid, although if a real battle began, Ali was to lead the entire army. The actual battle was launched, and Imam Ali was the leader. After the Muslim army gained their victory, Imam Ali distributed the booty among the soldiers and took one-fifth (*khums*) to be given to the Prophet, half for the Prophet's offspring, half for conditions in which the Prophet found it appropriate to offer.

When Imam Ali took something as his portion of booty, four men who were unacquainted with Imam Ali's character suspected him of covetousness. Angered by his action, they head to Medina to inform the Prophet. When they arrived, the Prophet ignored the first three men. When the fourth person spoke of Ali's action, the Prophet's face showed anger, and he said:

‘What do you want from Ali? Ali is from me, and I am from Ali. And after me, Ali is the master of all believers. And you have come to complain about him?’⁷

Thus, the Prophet’s description of Ali being from him and he from Ali, and Imam Ali as the master of all believers was triggered during an event. This clearly shows that Ali was the one to be chosen by the Prophet according to the will of Allah.

The Tradition of Ghadir

According to a survey by Allameh Amini, 110 companions of the Prophet have narrated the Tradition of Ghadir.⁸ And among those who have followed the companions of the Prophet, 89 second-generation companions, the Tabi’een – those who have visited the companions of the Prophet, and not the Prophet himself – had the opportunity to hear this news and transfer it to the next generation.

3500 Sunni narrators of hadith and historians have reported the Hadith of Ghadir, and though its interpretation is disputed, its authenticity is irrefutable. Some Sunni scholars have argued that *wali* here does not mean master or leader; rather it merely refers to ‘friend’ although it is still significant why the Prophet asked thousands of Muslims to gather and announce to them that Ali is your friend. Does this not mean that everyone had to love him and not fight him? Did they act as the Prophet had asked? Did they befriend Ali and love him?

The Tradition of Safinah

In a well-known hadith narrated by both Shi’a and Sunni Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad has likened his household to the ship or ark (*safinah*) of Prophet Noah:

Surely the likeness of my Ahl al-Bayt is similar to Noah's Ark; whoever boards it will attain salvation and whoever remains behind is drowned.

Another version reads:

*We serve as the ark of salvation. Whoever holds fast to this ark will reach salvation and whoever deviates from it will be cast into perdition. Whoever wants God to grant him something should resort to the Ahl al-Bayt.*⁹

The Prophets, Imams, and spiritual scholars instruct people to heed to their spiritual life i.e., the life of guidance and faith. This hadith is in harmony with Hadith al-Thaqalayn since the Ahlul Bayt are the ones to be followed and obeyed after the Prophet. Thus, according to the Hadith ul-Safina, whoever refuses to appeal to the Ahlul Bayt is spiritually destroyed as it is hopeless to be alive without following a leader that gives a person guidance and direction.

Though this hadith is more so about the Ahlul Bayt than Imam Ali, it includes Imam Ali and can be used to show and support that he was qualified and eligible to be the successor to the Prophet.

Thus, for one to be saved during difficulties, he or she must refer to the Ahlul Bayt. When the Prophet is unavailable and the Muslims need guidance, we are to refer to them. The actual person among the Ahlul Bayt prepared to act as a leader was Ali. Additionally, during that time Lady Fatima asked people to follow him to achieve guidance and salvation.

The Ahlul Bayt are likened to the Stars

Prophet Muhammad said:

The stars help prevent the inhabitants of the earth from being drowned, and my Ahlul Bayt are the protectors of my community against disputes (in religious matters). Therefore, whichever groups among the Arabs opposes my Ahlul Bayt shall be split up by dissensions and will become (a party of) Satan.

This hadith holds the same idea mentioned in the Hadith of Safina – that the only way to be saved when facing a tribulation or controversy is to refer to the Ahlul Bayt for guidance. The stars are unfailingly accurate in guiding any traveler to his or her destination; two people disagreeing on which path to take cannot be trusted for guidance. When Muslims divide themselves into different sects, we must refer to the Ahlul Bayt since they hold a higher intellectual and spiritual position than we do. Their level of belief and knowledge greatly surpasses ours. Had they been at our level, we could then hold that they have their views and we have ours. And as said in the hadith, if a tribe of Arabs disagrees with the Prophet's household, they will split and eventually become Satan's advocates.

Thus, Imamate is a high position. It is based on reason that an Imam must be appointed by Allah. In this series, it was first studied in general; afterwards, based on the verses of the Qur'an and various authentic traditions, we verified that Imam Ali was the one who was truly appointed to be the Prophet's successor.

[1.](#) Sahih Bukhari, vol. 6, p. 3; Sahih Muslim; also mentioned in Dua al-Nudbah.

[2.](#) 20:29

[3.](#) Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan ibn Majid and Sirah by Ibn Hisham

[4.](#) Musnad of Imam ibn Hanbal

[5.](#) Quoted by Haytham, author of Majmaul Zawa'id.

[6.](#) In Khasa'is by al-Nisa'i, the hadith is the same, although there are important differences in details. Again, Anas narrated that when the Prophet prayed actually Abu Bakr came. Abu Bakr went in first and afterwards Umar yet the Prophet asked each to turn back. Then Ali came and the Prophet let him in.

[7.](#) Kanzul Ummal, vol. 11, p. 608 and Sunan of Tirmidhi

[8.](#) See M. A. Shomali, "Imamate and Wilayah," Part IV in Message of Thaqalayn, Spring 2012, vol. 13, no. 12.

[9.](#) Sunni references: Fadha'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, vol. 2, p. 671, Tradition #1145, Dhakha'ir al-Uqba, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari, p. 14, Manaqib Ahmad, and many more such as al-Tabarani, etc., al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Ch. 11, section 1, p.234, Musnad, Abu Ya'ala, on the authority of Salama Ibn Awka' in which the wording is: "The stars are amnesty for the inhabitants of the heavens, and my Ahlul Bayt are the amnesty for my Ummah." Also in Mustadrak of Hakim, vol. 3 p. 351; Al-Sawa'iq ul Muhrika p. 91; Yanabee'ul Mawadi, Tareekhul Khulafa', and al-Khasasul Kubra.

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