

Leadership and Infallibility Part 2

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Is Imamat A Matter Of Inheritance?

According to the Shi'a, Imam is chosen by Allah. It is not the matter of inheritance, for if it was the case, then Imam al-Husayn (as) should not have become Imam after the martyrdom of Imam al-Hasan (as). Imam al-Hasan had many children and descendants, yet non of them became Imam. Rather, his brother, Imam al-Husayn (as), became Imam after him.

Also there have been some heretical sons and grandsons for some of the Imams, non of whom received the position of Imamat. This shows that leadership is not hereditary. Of course, a pure gene is necessary for the Imam, but Imam needs many other qualifications as well. Allah knows who has all such qualifications. It was just Allah's wish to put all the Imams in the Progeny of the Prophet (S).

In fact, if one study the history of the prophets of God, he will find that they were from the same family. Allah, to whom belong Might and Majesty, said:

"And when Abraham was tested by his Lord with certain commands and he fulfilled them. Then He said: Lo! I appoint you an Imam for mankind. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring (will there be Imam)? He said: My covenant does not reach the wrong-doers (among them)."(Qur'an 2: 124).

In the above verse, Allah did not deny leadership from the descendants of Abraham, but He rather limited this position to the qualified progeny of the Prophet Abraham. Allah said that God-assigned leadership does not reach to a person who is a "Dhalim"(wrong-doer), even if such person is the descendant of Abraham. Thus being the descendant of Abraham does not necessarily make the person Imam because there should be other qualifications beside it.

Those among them who were not wrong-doer (free from sin) were qualified, since they not only had pure gene, but they have gained other qualifications through hardship. As Allah had the foreknowledge

of their patience and qualifications, He entrusted them with this position, and preferred them above all His creation:

Lo! Allah preferred Adam and Noah and the Family of Abraham and the Family of 'Imran above (all His) creatures. (3:33)

Prophet Muhammad's lineage goes back to Prophet Ishmael (Isma'il) (as), the son of Prophet Abraham (as). Also Prophet Moses (as) and Prophet Jesus (as) were both from Prophet Isaac (as) who was the other son of Prophet Abraham (as). In fact ALL the prophets after Abraham were from his House. Yet, we do not claim that Prophethood is hereditary. He was Allah who chose them one by one.

In other words, we do not say that the son of the Prophet should always be a prophet. There should be many other qualifications beside it, otherwise Kan'an, the son of Noah (as), would have survived. Prophet Noah (as) had three other sons: Aam, Sam and Yafas who were believers and who with their wives entered the Ark and were saved. They were from different mother than that of Kan'an, however. Therefore being son of a prophet or an Imam does not necessarily make the person prophet or Imam or even righteous. In short, pure gene for the prophets and Imams is necessary but NOT sufficient.

Ulul-Amr/Imam is assigned by Allah, the same way that prophet is assigned by Allah. Look at Holy Qur'an in which Allah frequently stated that He is the one who assigns Imam. (see Qur'an 2:124, 21:73, 32:24, etc.)

There are twelve Imams who are assigned by Allah as the successors of Prophet Muhammad (S). There is a widespread tradition in the Sunni documents which states that the number of Imams after the Prophet are twelve. (See for instance, Sahih al-Bukhari, Arabic-English version, v9, p250, tradition #329; Sahih Muslim, English version, Chapter DCCLIV, v3, p1009, traditions #4477, #4478; Sahih al-Tirmidhi, v4, p501; Sunan Abu Dawud, v2, p421 ; Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v5, p106). There are other Sunni documents in which the Prophet (S) even mentioned these twelve Imams name by name. (see, for instance, "Yanabi' al-Mawadda" by al-Qunduzi al-Hanafi).

Allah assigned these twelve Imams, not just because they were from the House of the Prophet (S), but because they were, in their times, the most knowledgeable, the most illustrious, the most god-fearing, the most pious, the best in personal virtues, and the most honored before Allah; and their knowledge was derived from their ancestor (the Prophet) through their fathers, and also by direct teachings from Allah through inspiration (Ilham).

The successors of the prophets (except the successors of Prophet Muhammad) were also prophets, and thus they were all assigned by Allah. Also Qur'an tells that some prophets, with the order of Allah, assigned Imams (who were not prophets). Let me give you some verses of Qur'an:

Didn't you turn your vision to the chiefs of the children of Israel after Moses? They said to a Prophet (that was) among them: "Appoint for us a king that we may fight in the cause of

Allah.”(Qur’an 2:246)

Anyone who has been specifically assigned by Allah as king is an Imam. A prophet can also be Imam/king but not all the prophets were Imam. If one becomes a divinely appointed king/Imam, it does not necessarily mean that he will physically govern. The above verse of Qur’an is about Talut (as) Below is another verse of Qur’an which provides more details:

Their Prophet(1) said to them: "Allah has appointed Talut (Saul) as king(2) over you."They say: "How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to have authority and he has not been given wealth enough?(3)"He (i.e., their Prophet) said: "Allah has chosen him(4) above you and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge(5) and bodily prowess; Allah grants His authority to whom He pleases.(6) Allah cares for all and He knows all things.”(Qur’an 2:247)

The first part of the above verse (marked 1) proves that the community had a prophet and Talut was among the people of that community, so that their Prophet was the prophet of Talut also. Thus Talut was not a prophet.

The part marked 2, shows that Allah appointed Talut as Imam/leader/king. Part 3 shows that divinely appointed king is not chosen based on wealth. This kingship is primarily spiritual, and of course Talut is the most qualified person to govern physically also, but the latter depends on the adherence of people to them while the former position (spiritual leadership) is always fixed for the Imam.

Electing Imam/king is not the duty of People, and as Part 4 suggests, Allah chooses king/Imam for He knows who is the most qualified for such eminent position. King here means the person who has authority by Allah. This is proved by Part 6 of the above. The person who has this authority is replete with knowledge and wisdom as Part 5 testified. In the next verse, we read:

And (further) their Prophet said to them: "A sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark of the Covenant with (an assurance) therein of security from your Lord and the relics left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron carried by angels. In this is a Symbol for you if you indeed have faith.”(Qur’an 2:248)

Also in another verse, Allah mentions:

Or do they envy mankind for what Allah has given them of His bounty? But We have bestowed the House of Abraham the Book and Wisdom and bestowed upon them a great kingdom. (Qur’an 4:54)

Again this kingdom is Imamatus since only very few members of the House of Abraham physically governed.

Can People Choose Imam?

The Sunnis claim that the issue of successor of the Prophet is resolved by consultation (Shura) for Allah stated in Qur'an that their matter is resolved through Shura.

The claim that the very issue of leadership is to be resolved through consultation is unsupported. such claim is due to misunderstanding the meaning of consultation (Shura). Consultation is different than voting/election, and for that very reason, it can not be used for the issue of Caliphate. Let me explain why:

When a leader wants to decide on a matter, based on the Islamic regulations he may attempt to consult with a group of experts to get their opinion on that specific matter. But he finally decides HIMSELF. He does not take any vote. To prove my point, let us see the following verse:

"... And consult with them (Shawirhum) in the matter, then when thou (Prophet) decided, put thy trust in Allah"(Qur'an 3: 159)

The above verse asks for the Shura, but Allah states "fa itha azamta..." means only Prophet takes the final decision. There is no voting at all. It is just the matter of getting the opinion. The final decision by the Prophet may be different than of the majority of people being consulted (because of "Maslaha"(discretion for the goodness) that the leader realizes and because the leader is supposed to be superior in knowledge, smarter, etc.).

One side remark here is that, due to his supreme knowledge, the Prophet (S) did not even need to get the opinion of any of his people. However, he did in some circumstances just to teach people the importance of consultation.

In the issue of consultation (Shura), the existence of a leader is already assumed who makes the final decision. This clearly proves that, in the issue of succession, consultation is meaningless (unless it is done by the previous leader before his death).

After the death of a leader, there exists no leader who could do consultation, unless such late leader had a deputy (or say vice-president) who could carry out this function. Usually such appointed deputy is the most qualified person for the position of leadership, and even if he decides on somebody else to be the leader, such leader is still appointed by this previously-appointed deputy, and not by people!

Voting, however, is a totally different issue. In a democratic community, all people have a chance to elect the choice of their nominee. Such procedure has no support in Qur'an and Sunna for the issue of leadership of the whole Muslims, because Islam is based on theocracy (kingdom of Allah) and not democracy (government of people over people).

In fact, Qur'an denounces the opinion of the majority of people (see 6: 116, 5:49, 10:92, 30:8) since the

vision of the majority of people is usually impaired due to their tendencies. Also, such popular election did not happen for the first three rulers who came after the Prophet (S), not even among the people of Medina.

Also, what if people choose an unqualified person who seems to be qualified in their eyes, like a hypocrite? How can such corrupt person becomes Ulul-Amr and his obedience becomes necessary? Certainly Allah and His Prophet know better who is more qualified to be successor of the Prophet (S).

Believe In Ulul-Amr

If Qur'an tells us to unconditionally obey a person, it means that we

should believe in him and in his authority over us voluntarily (with satisfaction). Note, however, that one should distinguish between "believing that we should obey Ulul-Amr" and "obeying Ulul-Amr".

If one believes that he should obey Ulul-Amr, yet he sometimes disobeys Ulul-Amr, he is a sinner and a weak believer. However if one does NOT believe that he should obey Ulul-Amr, then such person is unbeliever since he does not believe in a part of the religion of Allah, which is explicitly mentioned in Qur'an.

In fact, both Shi'a and Sunni believe in Ulul-Amr since it is the clear text of Qur'an. However they differ in how to choose Ulul-Amr. According to the Shi'a, leadership of the whole Muslims is not a choice of people so that the leader could be elected by people or selected by a committee, and then is artificially made the Ulul-Amr whom Allah has ordered people to obey!

I also remember a claim by a Sunni brother who mentioned that this verse commands Muslims to obey people in authority (i.e., rulers) as long as they do not interfere with religion!

To answer this claim, we would like to stress that there is no restriction whatsoever given by Qur'an for obeying Ulul-Amr. In fact, in the above verse, Ulul-Amr have been given exactly the same authority over Muslims as that of Messenger, because both the Messenger and the Ulul-Amr have been jointly mentioned (Waw of Atf) under one word "Obey", which shows that the obedience of Ulul-Amr has the same standing as the obedience of the Messenger, and therefore Ulul-Amr is the head of religious affairs also.

He is the one who can properly interpret Qur'anic verses (See 3:7 and 21:7) and is the most knowledgeable to the Sunna of the Prophet (S). Thus claiming that Ulul-Amr should not interfere with the religious affairs is absurd, for he is the most qualified individuals to do exactly such thing.

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