

Letter 26

Thul-Hijjah 17, 1329

I. Clear Texts Recounting Ten of 'Ali's Exclusive Merits

1) Suffices you, besides the hadith of the Household, what Imam Ahmad has indicated in Vol. 1 of his book *Al-Mustadrak*, and al-Thahbi in his Concise, who both admit its authenticity, as well as other authors of the *sunan* from generally accepted avenues. They all quote 'Umar ibn Maymun saying: "I was sitting once in the company of Ibn 'Abbas when nine men came to him and said 'O Ibn 'Abbas! Either come to debate with us, or tell these folks that you prefer a private debate.' He had not lost his eye-sight yet. He said: 'I rather debate with you.' So they started talking, but I was not sure exactly what they were talking about. Then he stood up and angrily said: 'They are debating about a man who has ten merits nobody else ever had. They are arguing about a man whom the holy Prophet (S) has said, 'I shall dispatch a man whom Allah shall never humiliate, one who loves Allah and His Messenger (S) and who is loved by both,' so each one of them thought to him such an honour belonged.

The holy Prophet (S) inquired about 'Ali. When the latter came unto him, with his eyes swelling in ailment, he (S) blew in his eyes, shook the standard thrice and gave it to him. 'Ali came back victorious with Safiyya bint Huyay [al-Akhtab] among his captives." Ibn 'Abbas proceeded to say, "Then the Messenger of Allah (S) sent someone with surat al-Tawbah, but he had to send 'Ali after him to discharge the responsibility, saying: 'Nobody can discharge it except a man who is of me, and I am of him.'" Ibn 'Abbas also said, "The Messenger of Allah (S), with 'Ali sitting beside him, asked his cousins once: 'Who among you elects to be my *wali* in this life and the life hereafter?'

They all declined, but 'Ali said: 'I would like to be your *wali* in this life and the life to come,' whereupon he (S) responded by saying: 'You are, indeed, my *wali* in this life and the life hereafter.'" Ibn 'Abbas continues to say that 'Ali was the first person to accept Islam after Khadija, and that the Messenger of Allah (S) took his own robe and put it over 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husayn, then recited the verse saying:

"Allah wishes to remove all abomination from you, O Ahl al-Bayt [people of my household] and

purify you with a perfect purification (Qur'an, 33:33)."

He has also said: "Ali bought his own soul. He put on the Prophet's garment and slept in his bed when the infidels sought to murder him," till he says: "The Messenger of Allah (S) went on Tabuk expedition accompanied by many people. 'Ali asked him: 'May I join you?' The Messenger of Allah (S) refused, whereupon 'Ali wept. The Prophet (S) then asked him: 'Does it not please you that your status to me is similar to that of Aaron's to Moses, except there is no Prophet after me? It is not proper for me to leave this place before assigning you as my vicegerent.' The Messenger of Allah (S) has also said the following to him: 'You are the *wali* of every believing man and woman.'"

Ibn 'Abbas has said: "The Messenger of Allah closed down all doors leading to his mosque except that of 'Ali who used to enter the mosque on his way out even while in the state of *janaba*. The Messenger of Allah (S) has also said: 'Whoever accepts me as the *wali*, let him/her take 'Ali as the *wali*, too.'"

As a matter of fact, al-Hakim, having counted the sources from which he quoted this hadith, comments by saying, "This is an authentic hadith according to *isnad*, yet both shaykhs did not narrate it this way." Al-Thahbi has quoted it in his *Talkhis* and described it as an authentic hadith.

II. Why Rely Upon it

2) Clear and irrefutable proofs highlight the fact that 'Ali was the Prophet's vicegerent. Have you noticed how the Prophet (S) has named him *wali* in this life and the life to come, thus favouring him over all his kin, and how he regarded his status to himself as similar to that of Aaron to Moses, without any exception other than Prophethood, and exception which reflects generality?

You also know that what distinguished Aaron from Moses was mostly his being the vizier of his brother, his *de facto* participation in his brother's Message, his vicegerency, and the enforcement by Moses of people's obedience to Aaron as his statement, to which references is included in the Holy Qur'an (20:29–32), and which clearly says: "And let my brother Aaron, from among my household, be my vizier, to support me and take part in my affair," and his statement:

"Be my own representative among my people; reform them, and do not follow the path of corrupters (Qur'an 7: 142),"

and the Almighty's response:

"O Moses! Granted is your prayer (Qur'an 20:36)."

According to this text, 'Ali is the Prophet's vicegerent among his people, his vizier among his kin, his partner in his undertaking – not in Prophethood – his successor, the best among his people, and the most worthy of their leadership alive or dead. They owed him obedience during the Prophet's lifetime as the Prophet's vizier, just as Aaron's people had to obey Aaron during the lifetime of Moses.

Whoever becomes familiar with the status hadith will immediately consider its deep implications without casting any doubt at the gist of its context. The Messenger of Allah (S) has made this very clear when he said: "It is not proper for me to leave this place before assigning you as my vicegerent."

It is a clear text regarding his succession; nay, it even suggests that had the Prophet (S) left without doing so, he would have done something he was not supposed to have done. This is so only because he was commanded by the Almighty to assign him as his own successor according to the meaning of the verse saying

"O Messenger! Convey that which has been revealed unto you from your Lord, and if you do not do it, then you have not conveyed His Message at all (Qur'an 5:67)."

Anyone who examines the phrase "then you have not conveyed His Message at all," then examines the Prophet's statement: "It is not proper for me to leave this place before assigning you as my vicegerent," will find them both aiming at the same conclusion, as is quite obvious.

We should also not forget the Prophet's hadith saying: "You are the *wali* of every believer after me." It is a clear reference to the fact that he is the Prophet's *wali* and the one who takes his place, as al-Kumait, may Allah have mercy on his soul, has implied when he said: "A great Vicegerent, a fountain-head of piety, an educator!" And peace be with you.

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