

Part 2: The Emergence of the Shi'ites

Preliminary Remarks

So far we have learned how “Shi'ism” emerged. But whence did the “Shiites” themselves and the attendant division within—the Islamic *Ummah* originate? This is what we shall now try to answer.

If we observe closely the first stage of the *Ummah's* existence, the Prophet's lifetime, we shall find from the very outset of the Islamic experience two distinct currents. They coexisted within the same community newly brought to life by the Prophet. Their disaccord led to a doctrinal division immediately following the Prophet's death, one which sundered the *Ummah* into two sections.

One section was fated to rule, and thus to encompass the majority of Muslims; while the other was shunned from rule, destined to become a minority opposition within the general fold of Islam. Shi'ism was this minority. Herein lie three areas of discussion.

The First Discussion: The Genesis of Two Main Currents during the Prophet's Lifetime

The two chief tendencies closely associated, from the start, with the emergence of the Islamic *Ummah* during the Prophet's lifetime are:

One, the current representing a belief in the devotional acts of religion, its arbitral power and the unconditional acceptance of religious stipulations for every aspect of life.^{[1](#)}

The second is a current which sees religious faith as eliciting devotional deed only within the special scope of overt and covert acts of worship. It believes in the possibility of independent legal Judgement

(*ijtihad*) and free discretion for the amendment and improvement of religious stipulations according to benefits (*masalih*) which might accrue in other domains of life.²

The Companions, being foremost in faith and enlightenment, were the best fit to create an apostolic community (*Ummah risaliyyah*); so much so that in all of human history no doctrinally-cohesive generation has been nobler, more magnificent or unsullied than the one brought up by the Prophet. Despite this, one must accept the existence of a wider tendency – beginning while the Prophet was still alive – proffering independent legal judgement as a way of determining “benefit” and inferring it from the circumstances. It emphasized, on the other hand, devotional acts in strict accordance with the letter, religiously stipulated.

The Prophet on many occasions suffered indignation on account of this tendency, even in his last hours, as he lay on his deathbed (as we shall see).³ But there is the other tendency, which consists in a belief in and acceptance of the arbitral power of religion, such that devotional acts accord with both the religious stipulations and every aspect of life.

One of the reasons behind the spread among Muslims of the tendency toward independent legal judgement is that it seemed to cohere with man's natural inclination to exercise his discretion, especially in view of a perceived or valued benefit rather than of some resolution whose significance he can hardly fathom.

This current counted several bold representatives from among the more well-placed Companions. One case in point is `Umar b. al-Khattab, who used to argue with the Prophet and to exercise independent legal judgement on a number of issues in a way that was at variance with the provisions of the law. He believed this to be permissible so long as he thought his judgement did not impugn “benefit.” In this respect, one may note his position regarding the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah and his protestations against it.⁴

It is observable in regard to several other issues, including the call to ritual prayer (*al-adhan*), where he exercised his free discretion by omitting the phrase, “Come to the best of deeds” (*hayya `ala khayr amal*)⁵; his position concerning the Prophet's legalization of *mut'at al-hajj* (“marriage during the pilgrimage”)⁶; and other positions on independent legal judgement.⁷

These two currents were both reflected in the assembly called by the Prophet on the last day of his life. Al-Bukhari related in his *Sahih* the words of Ibn `Abbas:

When death was upon God's Messenger, and at [his] house were men who included `Umar b. al-Khattab, the Prophet said, “Come! let me write you an epistle by which you will never go astray...” `Umar then said, “The Prophet is overcome with pain, but we [still] have the *Qur'an*. We count on God's Book.” Those present at the house disagreed and quarreled with each other. And one of them said, “Approach that the Prophet may write you a letter by which you shall never go astray.” Another repeated what `Umar had said. When the inanities and the disputing persisted, the Prophet told them, “Leave!”⁸

This event alone suffices to show the chasm that separated the two currents, the true extent of their incompatibility and rivalry. In order to depict the deeprootedness of independent legal judgement as a current, one may compare this event to the disagreement that erupted among the Companions over Usamah b. Zayd's installation as army commander, despite the Prophet's explicit ordinance to that effect.

The Prophet finally stepped outside to address the crowd: "O People! what is this talk surrounding my appointment of Usamah as commander. You contest his appointment now just as you previously did his father's. But by God, the latter was as fit to command then as his son surely is now!"⁹

The two currents, whose rivalry began in earnest during the Prophet's own lifetime, were reflected in the Muslims' position regarding the thesis of the Imam's preeminence in the Mission after the Prophet. Those representing the devotional tendency (as opposed to the one for independent legal judgement) found in the Prophet's stipulation the reason for accepting this thesis without hesitation or readjustment.

The advocacy of independent legal judgement was viewed as offering the possibility of release from the pattern established by the Prophet, whenever a judgement imagined to be more harmonious with the circumstances was called for. By the same token, one observes that Shi'ites arose immediately after the Prophet's death, representing the Muslims who adhered in practice to the thesis of the Imam's preeminence and leadership, the first steps of whose implementation the Prophet had declared obligatory right after his departure. The Shi'ite current embodied, from the first, a repudiation of the Saqifah Council's attempt to paralyze the thesis for Imam `Ali's preeminence and to transfer authority to someone else.

In his *Ihtijaj*, Tabarsi related Aban b. Taghlab's words:

I told Ja`far b. Muhammad al-Sadiq, "May I be offered in sacrifice for you! Is there anyone among the Companions of God's Messenger who disclaims Abu Bakr's action?" He replied "Indeed. Twelve men repudiated it. Among the *Muhajirin* were Khalid b. Said, Ibn Abi al`Asi, Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari al-Miqdad b. al-Aswad, `Ammar b. Yasir and Buraydah al-Aslami. Among the *Ansar* were Abu al-Haytham b. al-Tayhan, `Uthman b. Hanif, Khuzayma b. Thabit Dhu al-Shahadatayn, Ubayy b. Ka'b, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari.¹⁰

It may be argued that the Shi'ite current stood for religious devotion according to the text, while the tendency that opposed it represented independent legal judgement, with the implication that the Shi'ites had rejected independent legal judgement and did not allow themselves any right to exercise it. Yet observably, Shi'ites do make use of it constantly in legal practice.

The answer is that the kind of independent legal judgement practised by Shi'ites, and which they deem permissible – indeed, obligatory in a collective sense (*wajiban kifa'iyyan*) – is the one used to derive a juridical ruling from the legal text. It is not judgement applied to the legal text by virtue of either an opinion held by the practitioner or some conjectured benefit." That is not permissible.

The Shi'ite current disallowed the exercise of independent legal judgement in any such sense. Whenever we speak of the rise of two currents at the beginning of Islam, one often intends the following. One, where the devotion act is based on the explicit text; two, a tendency toward independent legal judgement. But by independent legal judgement one could mean either the rejection or the acceptance of the explicit text.¹¹

The rise of these two tendencies is natural to every mission of comprehensive change seeking alteration at the root, where corruption prevails. It can have various kinds of effects, depending on the surviving vestiges of the past; and it may vary according to the extent to which the individual becomes immersed in the moral values of the new Message and according to his attachment to it.

Hence, we know that the current which stood for the devotional act based on the explicit text represented the greatest degree of adherence to, and the most complete acceptance of, the Divine Message. But it did not reject independent legal judgment within the framework of the text nor the effort to derive a legal ruling (*hukm*) there from.¹²

What is important to note in this regard also is that the devotional act based on the explicit text does not imply a rigidity or inflexibility incompatible with the exigencies of evolution or any kind of initiative for renewal in the life of man. Devotion so based means, rather, as we now know, devotion through religion. It means embracing it in its entirety without leaving anything out. Such a religion carries within it all the elements that make for resilience and the ability to adjust to the times. It embraces all kinds of change and evolution. Devotion through religion based on the stipulated text is devotion through all these elements, but with every fiber of one's ability to create, invent and renew.¹³

These are general features aimed at expounding Shi'ism in its definition as a "natural phenomenon" within the fold of the Islamic Call and of its appearance as a (self-conscious) response to this natural phenomenon.

¹. This is the tendency of the school of those who uphold the rights of the Prophetic Household and of Shi'ism.

². This is the tendency of the remaining, Sunni schools. For details see al-'Allamah al-Sayyid Murtada al-'Askari, *Ma'allim al-madrasatayn*; cf. Dr. Muhammad Salam Madkur, *Manahij al-ijtihad* (Kuwait: Matba'at jami'ah).

³. *Sahih al-Bukhari* VIII:161 ("Kitab al-i'tisam") Note the situations where their devotional acts do not accord with the text. For example, upon failing to send Usamah's detachment and their objection to it; or the time when a letter was intended to be written, as the Prophet was uttering, "Come! Let me write you a letter that you may never go astray after I am gone..." Observe also the situation surrounding the Hudaibiyyah Treaty. See the books in history and hadiths referred to so far. For a more detailed discussion, see al-Sayyid al-'Allamah 'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din, *al-Muraja'at*, edited and annotated by Husayn al-Radi and introduced by Dr. Hamid al-Hafni and Shaykh Muhammad Fikri Abu al-Nasr (*Mu'assasat Dar al-Kitab al-Islami*)

⁴. Cf. Ibn Hashim, *al-Sirah al-nabawiyah*, Second Part, ed. Mustafa al-Saqqa et al. (Beirut: Dar al-Kunuz al-Adabiyyah), pp. 316-17. See also *Tarikh al-Tabari* II:122.

⁵. See al-Qawshaji, *Sharh al-tajrid*, towards the end of the discussion on the "imamah," where he contends that "The tasks of those in charge were devoted to spreading the Call of Islam, and triumph over East and West. But triumphing over kingdoms cannot be done without motivating the soldiery to endure peril on the way, that they might drink deep of the struggle for Islam, until they believe that theirs is that best of deeds they shall look to on the Day of Judgement. The

omission of this part of the adhan [i.e. “hayya`ala khayr al-`amal], in their view, had to do with giving priority to the benefit of those tasks over and above devotion in the manner foreseen by the Holiest Law. The second Caliph thus declared from his minbar that “Three things existed at the time of the Prophet which I interdicted, forbade and punished: temporary marriage [mutat al-nisa], marriage during the pilgrimage [mutat al-hajj] and ‘Come to the best of deeds!’.”

[6.](#) See al-Tajj al-jami lil-usul fi ahadith al-Rasul by Shaykh Mansur 'Ali Nasif (a noted `alim from al-Azhar University) II:124, “Kit-al hajj” on Abi jamrah al-Dab`i, who said: “I entered a temporary marriage but was forbidden by some people. And so I asked Ibn `Abbas, who sanctioned it. I went to the Ka`bah to sleep, whereupon a protagonist came to me. He said, ‘May the minor pilgrimage [umrah] be accepted and the greater one [hajj] valid’ [Abu Jamrah al-Dab`i] went on: So I went to Ibn `Abbas to inform him about what I had dreamed. ‘God is Great! God is Great!’ he said, ‘It is the practice of Abu al-Qasim’s [i.e. the Prophet].” It is equally narrated by Muslim and Bukhari. It is said of `Umar b. Husayn that he stated, “A verse [ayah] on the temporary marriage was sent down in God’s Book, and so we acted upon it with His Messenger. The Qur’an did not prohibit it, and the [Messenger] did not forbid it to the day he died. Likewise with the two Shaykhs: Shaykh Nasif says on the margins that “The mutah was interdicted by `Umar, `Uthman and Mu`awiyah.”

[7.](#) For more details, see al Allamah `Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din, al-Nass wal ijihad, pp. 169, 243.

[8.](#) Cf Sahih al-Bukhari (“Kirab al-ilm”) I:37 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981); cf. also Ibn Sa`d, al-Tabaqat al- al-kubra II:242.

[9.](#) Cf. Ibn Sa`d, al-Tabaqat al-kubra II:248; see also Ibn Athir, al-Kamil fi al-ta`rikh II:318–19.

[10.](#) Tabarsi, al-Ihtijaj I:75 (Beirut: Nashr Mu assasah al-A`lami, 1983) – Imam. Cf. Tarikh al-Yaqub`i II:103.

[11.](#) Cf Imam Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, al-Ma`alim al jadidah lil-usul, p. 23ff. It contains ample details concerning the evolution of the master concept of independent legal judgement. The latter had been avoided because it used to mean: “Mat principle of jurisprudence which takes individual reasoning as one of the sources for arriving at judgements. But there was a concerted drive against this jurisprudential principle at the phase when traditions were being collected in the time of the Imams and those who transmitted their deeds (to posterity)...” The kind of independent legal judgement enunciated by many Sunni schools of jurisprudence (like that of Abu Hanifah) regarded as one of the jurist’s proofs and sources for inferences where there is not plenty of textual support, stands rejected. As Tusi said: “Neither the syllogism nor independent legal judgment for me is a proof. In fact, they are not to be used in legal matters.” Nevertheless, as the concept of independent legal judgement developed and came to consist in the inference of a juridical decision (al-hukm) from the text – that is, synonymously with the inferential operation – it was accepted and put to use. For the divisions, types and scope of independent legal judgement, see `Allamah Muhammad Taqi al-Haki’s al-Usul al-`ammah lil-fiqh al-muqaran, p. 56ff

[12.](#) Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim, al-Usul al-`ammah lil-fiqh al-muqaran, p. 563.

[13.](#) Cf. al-Ma`alim al jadidah lil-usul, p. 40.

The Second Discussion

The leadership belonging to the Prophetic Household and to Imam Ali, played out in the “natural phenomenon” so far alluded to consists of two types of authority.

The first is intellectual authority; the second, authority associated with governing and societal activity. Both were embodied in the person of the Prophet. In the light of what we have learned with respect to circumstances, the Prophet had had to determine the most fitting extension of his rule which could sustain each of these two authorities, in order that intellectual authority might fill any lacunae to be faced by the Muslim mind. A proper notion needs to be advanced – i.e. the Islamic viewpoint – on any intellectual or life issues evoked. It must explicate what appears ambiguous and obscure in the Holy

Book. [1](#)

The Qur'an constitutes the primary source for intellectual authority in Islam. Finally, the purpose is for socio-political authority to resume its course and to lead the trek of Islam along a societal path.

These two types of authority are combined within the Household of the Prophet by force of those circumstances we considered earlier. Prophetic traditions have always confirmed this. The prime example of a tradition dealing with intellectual authority is the *hadith* of the "Two Weights" (*hadith al-thaqalayn*), where the Prophet proclaims:

I am about to be summoned [before my Lord], and must comply. I leave with ye two weighty things: God's Book, a rope from Heaven to Earth; and my progeny, the members of my Household. God the Gracious, the All-Knowing has informed me that they shall separate not to the day when they will be restored to me at the Basin. You behold how, you do by them after I am gone![2](#)

The chief example of a Prophetic stipulation concerning authority in the exercise of leadership over society is *hadith al-Ghadir*. It is presented by Tabarani, on the grounds of its universally-accepted soundness, through Zayd b. Arqam's words:

The Messenger of God gave his sermon at Ghadir Khum beneath some trees, declaring. "O People, I am about to be summoned [before my Lord], and must comply. I shall be held to account and ye shall be held to account. But what will you say?" They replied, "We shall testify that you have delivered [the Message], striven and counseled. May God reward you for it!"

He then told them, "Would you not testify that there is no god but God [*Allah*], and that Muhammad is his Servant and Messenger that His Paradise is real and His Hell-Fire real; that death is real; that the resurrection after death is real; that the Hour shall without a doubt come; that God resurrects all those who lie in their graves?" They said: "Nay, we shall testify to all this!" To which he replied, "O God be Thee Witness! O People God is my Guardian and I guardian of the faithful. I am more so than their own selves. For whomsoever I am a guardian, he too [i.e. `Ali] is his guardian. Lord, guard over the one who guards over him, and be a foe to his foe."[3](#)

Thus, of a considerable number of like traditions, these two outstanding Prophetic *hadiths* provide for the embodiment of both kinds of authority in the Prophet's Household. The Islamic current upholding the devotional act based on the Prophet's full stipulations believed in these authorities, and comprised those Muslims who were the benevolent friends of the Household.

But whereas the socio-political authority belonging to every Imam implies the exercise of power while he lives, intellectual authority is a permanent, unconditional reality unconfined to the period of his lifetime. Therefore, it has a living, practical meaning for every period. So long as the Muslims needed a definitive understanding of Islam, an acquaintance with its provisions, legality, prohibitions, concepts and moral values, there will be need for an intellectual Divinely-defined authority epitomized, firstly, by the Book of

God; secondly, by the Prophet's Tradition (*sunnat rasulih*) and that of the immaculate descendents, if the Household, who never have and never would diverge from the Books as indeed the Prophet himself has stipulated.⁴

From the very outset, the second tendency, which upholds independent legal judgement rather than the devotional act according to the text, had decided. With the death of the Prophet on transferring the authority for exercising political power to some leading personalities of the *Muhajirin*, thereby conforming with shifting and rather maleable considerations.

Immediately following the Prophet's death, the transfer of power to Abu Bakr was based on what came out of the limited discussions at the Saqifah session.⁵ `Umar later ascended to the Caliphate after being appointed by Abu Bakr⁶; `Uthman followed suit through an undesignated appointment by `Umar.⁷ Accommodation, a third of a century after the Prophet's passing, led to the infiltration to positions of power by the offspring of all those Meccans who had held out to the last (*al-Tulaqa*)⁸ and who just yesterday had been fighting Islam.

All that relates to political authority in its exercise of power. Intellectual authority, on the other hand, was difficult to institute in the members of the Household. Independent legal judgement therewith led to dispossession of their political authority, since the latter's institution entailed the creation of objective conditions for a transfer of power to them and a merging of the two kinds of authority.

However, it was equally difficult to acknowledge intellectual authority in a power-wielding Caliph, the requirements of intellectual authority being different from those of the exercise of power. The feeling that a person is qualified to exercise power did not automatically imply that his installation as intellectual leader – the highest authority after the Qur'an and Prophetic Tradition in matters of theoretical understanding – was thought feasible. This kind of leadership required a high degree of refinement and theoretical comprehension, and clearly none of the Companions was more adequately endowed with it than the rest, if the members of the Household are excluded.⁹

The result was that the balance of intellectual authority continued to swing for some time. The Caliphs, in many instances, dealt with Imam `Ali on the basis of his intellectual authority, or something approaching that. So much so that the Second Caliph repeated many times that "If not for `Ali, `Umar would surely have perished.

God forbid that there be a problem and no Abu Hasan to [solve] it..."¹⁰ Nevertheless, after the Prophet's passing, the Muslims in time became accustomed to see Imam `Ali and the Household as ordinary subjects, whose intellectual authority was not indispensable, but transferable to some reasonable substitute. That substitute was not to be the Caliph himself, but the Prophet's Companions.

The principle of the Companions' collective authority was gradually postulated thus, in place of the authority of the Household. The substitute became palatable once the properly appointed authority was passed over, because the Companions' generation was said to have kept close company with the

Prophet, thrived while he lived, embraced his experience, heeded his words and practice. [11](#)

For all practical purposes, the members of the Household lost their God-given distinction to form part of the intellectual authority merely as Companions. But the Companions themselves were apt to experience sharp differences and conflicts, which sometimes reached the point of hostilities, with each party drawing the other's blood, impugning his honour, hurling accusations of deviation and betrayal. [12](#)

These differences and accusations, occurring as they did inside the intellectual leadership and doctrinal authority itself, engendered all manner of intellectual and doctrinal conflict [13](#) within the body of the Islamic community. The latter reflected the conflictual dimensions of the intellectual leadership established by independent judgement.

[1.](#) Please refer to what we have tried to establish in the Appendix concerning this question: that is, the scope of Imam `Ali's power; his comprehension of God's Book; his grasp of the "particular" and the "general" (of its various applications); of the abrogating and abrogated verses, its provisions and laws, the text's explicit and implicit senses. See, for example, Suyuti's *al-Ittiqan* IV:234.

[2.](#) Al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, *al-Mustadrak `ala al-Sahih* III:119, where the author says, "It was corrected according to conditions set by al-Shaykhayn [i.e. al-Bukhari and Muslim] and presented by al-Muslim accordingly (cf. IV:1874. See *Sahih al-Tirmidhi*'s I:130 ; al-Nassa'i, *al-Sunan al-kubra* V:622; Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal's *Musnad* IV:217, III:14-7 - Imam. See also *Sunan al-Darimi* II:432 (Ch. "Fazial'il al Qur'an"? (Dar Ihya al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah).

[3.](#) On the margins, Imam Baqir al-Sadr points out the following:

Hadith al-Ghadir is widely reported in books on traditions by both Shiites and Sunnis. The experts reckon the number of Companions who reported this hadith to be over a hundred. Those belonging to the following generation [al-*tabi'in*] who relate it number over eighty; those in the second century Hijri who committed the Qur'an and the traditions to memory nearly sixty individuals.

Cf al-`Allamah al-Amini, *Kitab al-Ghadir*. In this book, the `Allamah al-Amini offers a number of hadiths reported by Zayd b. Arqam in their different version. It appears that Imam al-Sadr collected these accounts in exactly the same form. (Cf. "al-Ghadir" I:31-6; also, in the Appendix, see how the hadith in question was presented, including in *Sunan Ibn Majah* I:11 (of the Introduction)). See *Musnad Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal* IV:281, 368 (Dar Sadir).

[4.](#) The famous hadith al-thaqalayn, about which we have already given explanation.

[5.](#) Cf *Tarikh al-Tabari*, "Nusus al-Saqifah" II:234.

[6.](#) Ibid; see the description of `Umar's investiture.

[7.](#) See the description of the six consultative members involved in `Uthman's investiture, see *Ta'rikh al-Tabari* II:580. Cf Imam Ali's "Shaqshaqiyyah Address," Sermon No. 3, *Nahj al-balaghah*, edited by Dr. Subhi al-Salih, p. 48. Also, Ibn Abi al Hadid's commentary on it I:151 ff (ed. Abu al-Fadl Ibrahim; and `Abd al-Fattah `Abd al-Maqsud), *al-Saqifah wal khilafah*, p. 264.

[8.](#) Al-tulaqa is a term used to describe those who embraced Islam only at the moment when Mecca was gained over, including Abu Sufyan and his son Muawiyah (*Tarikh al-Tabari* II:161), this with the knowledge that they were both among those referred to as "al-muallafat qullubuhum" (cf. *Tarikh al-Tabari* II:175).

[9.](#) Their need for Imam `Ali's authority, according to many textual sources showing their open admission to this effect (cf. Suyuti's *Tarikh al-khulafa*, p. 171); whereas Imam 'Ali never had to seek the authority of any one of them in matters of law or its provisions.

[10.](#) *Al-Tabaqat al-kubra* II:339.

[11.](#) Imam Baqir al-Sadr's appraisal of the first generation of Companions reveals the extent of objectivity maintained in his treatment of both the Muslims' history and the role of those who began teaming around Islam. Secondly, substituting the

Companions for the Household was hardly accepted by many prominent Companions, such as Salman, `Ammar, Abu Dharr, al-Miqdad and others – they all remained loyal to the Household. Thirdly, although the ways of the Companions or their utterances prevailed, there was not complete acceptance that their views were defensible. It suffices to say that the way of the two Elders (i.e. Caliphs) was proposed to Imam `Ali the day of consultation, but was not accepted. See the knowledgeable and quite satisfactory discussion in al-`Allamah Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim, al-Usul al-`ammah lil fiqh al-muqaran, pp. 133–42.

[12.](#) Note the accusation by `Umar b. al-Khattab, the second Caliph, against Khalid b. al-Walid of having killed a Muslim and then turned on his wife (Ta'rikh al-Tabar'i II:274 [Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyyah]).

[13.](#) Cf Dr. Muhammad Salaam Madkur, Manahij al-ijtihad concerning the emergence of theological (kalamiyyah) and legal (fihiyyah) factions and schools in Islam, along with the disputes that erupted among them. See also Shahrastani, al-Milal wal-nihal I: 15ff.

The Third Discussion: Spiritual Shi'ism and Political Shi'ism

Here I would like to draw attention to a point whose clarification I consider to be of the utmost importance. Some investigators try to distinguish between two aspects of Shi'ism, the first Spiritual Shi'ism and the second Political Shi'ism. Spiritual Shi'ism is believed to be the earlier of the two.¹ It is also thought that the religious heads, or imams, of Imamate Shi'ism (descended from Husayn) had retreated from politics after the massacre of Karbala', devoting themselves only to guidance and worship, keeping aloof of worldly affairs.

The reality, though, is that Shi'ism has never at any time since its birth been a purely spiritual tendency. Rather, it was born in the midst of Islam as a thesis for the continuation by Imam 'Ali of intellectual, social and poetical leadership alike after the Prophet, in the manner illustrated above with respect to the conditions that had given rise to Shi'ism. Because of those conditions, it is not possible to isolate the spiritual from the political side in this thesis, certainly no more than it is to isolate it in Islam itself.

Therefore, Shi'ism cannot be subdivided in this way except in the event where it no longer implies defending the future of the Call after the Prophet, a future that is in equal need of intellectual authority as it is of political leadership over the Islamic experiment. And here there existed a wide range of allegiances to Imam `Ali among the Muslims, inasmuch as he was considered to be just the person fit to resume the role of governing arrogated by the three Caliphs.

This is precisely the loyalty that brought him to power after the Caliph `Uthman's murder.² But it was neither spiritual nor political Shi'ism, since Shiites believe `Ali to be an alternative to the three Caliphs, the Prophet's direct successor (*khalifah*). The allegiance extended by Muslims to the Imam had a wider range than Shi'ism proper, taken as a whole. But although spiritual and political Shi'ism developed within the broad limits of this loyalty, it cannot be regarded as an instance of a compartmentalized

Shi'ism.

Imam `Ali commanded spiritual and intellectual loyalty from the most prominent Companions at the time of Abu Bakr and `Umar – as illustrated by Sahnun, Abu Dharr, 'Ammar and others. But this hardly means that it was a spiritual Shi'ism divorced from the political side. It was an expression of faith by the Companions in Imam `Ali's political as well as intellectual leadership of the Islamic Mission after the Prophet. On the one hand, their faith in the intellectual side of his leadership was reflected in the spiritual fidelity alluded to above; on the other, their faith in the political was reflected in their struggle with the Caliph Abu Bakr, and against the attempt to divert power away from Imam `Ali toward another figure.³

In fact, the compartmental view of spiritual Shi'ism was not unrelated to the emergence of political Shi'ism. Nor did it arise in the mind of Shi'ite man except in resignation to a fait *accompli*.

As a definite formula for continuing the Islamic leadership in the hope of building the *Ummah* – a way of implementing the great drive for change begun by the Prophet – the embers of Shi'ism were all but put out inside and transformed into pure belief ensconced in the heart of man for solace and hope.

We now come to what is alleged to be the abandonment of politics and the withdrawal from worldly affairs by the Imams of the Household descended from Husayn. In the light of the foregoing, we might reiterate that Shi'ism made for the continuation of Islamic leadership, and that Islamic leadership simply meant pursuing that project of change which the Prophet had begun, in order to complete the construction of the *Ummah* on the basis of Islam.

It is not possible, therefore, to imagine the Imams relinquishing the political aspect without renouncing Shi'ism altogether. What contributed to the idea that they had abandoned the political aspect of their leadership was their seeming failure to mount military action to overturn the prevailing situation, the political aspect of leadership being taken strictly in its narrow military sense.

But there are many explicit utterances by the Imams which make it plain that an Imam is always ready to take the military course, provided he found enough assistance and the capacity to realize the Islamic objectives beyond the military campaign itself.⁴ When we trace the course of the Shi'ite movement, we notice that its leadership, comprised of the Imams of the Household, believed the transference of power alone to be insufficient.

The realization of change in an Islamic sense is impossible so long as this power was not shored up by a popular base conscious of the goals of power, believing in its theory of governance, acting to defend it, explaining its stances to the larger populace and braving the storms.

Midway through the first century after the Prophet's death, the Shiite leadership, shunned from power, sought constantly to return to rule in the ways it deemed proper. It was convinced of the existence of popular bases of consciousness, or vigilant *Muhajirin*, *Ansar* and all those who emulated their best actions.

However, half-a-century later, when little remained of these popular bases, and with indecisive generations⁵ newly emerging under the influence of deviationism, the accession to power by the Shiite movement would never have achieved the larger goal; the popular bases that reinforced consciousness and sacrifice no longer existed. In the face of this situation, there were only two possible avenues for action:

One, action for the sake of rebuilding the popular and conscious bases that could properly pave the way to a transfer of power.

Two, stirring the Islamic *Ummah's* conscience and will; safeguarding some degree of life and stalwartness to fortify the *Ummah* against abdicating unconditionally its identity and honour to deviationist rulers.

The first option was the one chosen by the Imams themselves; whereas the second was taken by the revolutionary partisans of 'Ali as they sought through fearless sacrifice to sustain the Islamic conscience and will. The Imams used to support the more sincere among them. Imam `Ali b. Musa al-Rida once said to Caliph Ma'mun, in reference to Zayd b. `Ali al-Shahid, that he was one of the learned from the House of Muhammad.

He was angered for the sake of God, fought enemies until he was killed in God's way. Abu Mus'a b. Ja'far has related to me that he heard his father Ja'far b. Muhammad say: "May God have mercy on my uncle Zayd. He made summons on behalf of al-Rida, of the House of Muhammad. Had he triumphed, he would have fulfilled his promise. Zayd b. `Ali did not call what was not in his right to do so. He was more heedful toward God than that. He simply) said: I summon you to al-Rida, of the House of Muhammad."⁶

In one account, those of the House of Muhammad who ventured forth were mentioned before Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq, who then answered, "I and my partisans will always be well so long as there is someone from the House of Muhammad who ventures forth. How I long for him to venture forth! And incumbent upon me is the maintenance of his dependents."⁷

In sum, the Imams' abandonment of direct military action against the deviationist rulers did not imply that they had foresaken the political aspect of their leadership and devoted themselves solely to worship. It expressed merely a difference in the form of social action, and was limited by the actual conditions. It also expressed a profound grasp of the nature of reform activity and the method by which to achieve it.

¹. See Dr. Shaybi, *al-Silah bayna al-tasawwuf wal-tashayyu* I:12; Dr. `Abd al-`Aziz al Duri, *Muqaddamah fi tar'ikh al-Islam*, p. 72.

². Cf. *Ta'rikh al-Tabari* II:696ff See also the description of the situation in Imam `Ali's Address, where he states, "Nothing was more delightful to me than people swarming around me, as hyenas do, from every side ...and gathered round like a resting herd of sheep (*Nahj al-balaghah*, ed. Dr. Subhi al-Salih, p. 48 ("al-Shaqshaqiyyah")

³. See what Tabarsi relates in his *al-Ihtijaj* I:75.

⁴. Cf. *Usul al-Kafi* II:190 (Ch. "Fi qillat `adad al-mu'minin") (Tehran: al-Matba`ah al Islaamiyyah, 1388 AH).

5. Consider what Umayyid policy visited upon the Ummah in pastimes, buffoonery, wine drinking, and brutality and repression against all opponents. On this question, see al-Mas`udi, *Muruj al-dhahab* III:214ff; Ibn `Abd Rabbuh, *al-Aqd al farid* V:200-02; Abu al-Faraj al-Asfahani, *al-Aghani* First Edition 7:6ff (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1407 AH). Concerning the Umayyids' frivolous use of wealth, see Sayyid Qutb, *al-Adalah al ijtimaiyah fi al-Islam*.
6. A1-Hurr al- Amili, *Wasa'il al-Shiah*, Fifth Edition, ed. `Abd al-Karim al-Shirazi XII:39 (Tehran: al-Maktabah al-Islamiyah 1401 - Imam. See the edited version, *Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt* (Qum) XV:54 ("Kitab al jihad")
7. Cf Ibn Idris, *al-Sara'ir* III:569 (Qum: Mu'assasah al-Nashr al-Islami), for `Abd Allah al-Sayyari's narration of words by someone from the Companions.

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