

Preamble

The Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) worked in the Muslim community within two major frameworks and in two interlaced spheres:

First: They worked amidst the wide-ranging domain of Muslims and interacted with the community in general and in its broad extremities. Within this scope, the adherents and believers in the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) were not distinguishable from the other individuals of the Muslim community except by the amount of their doctrinal, spiritual, and emotional attachment to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). This was demonstrated by their doctrinal and political loyalty to the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) as well as moral commitment and obedience to their commands and instructions.

Second: They worked privately with special Muslim individuals who interacted with the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) at a higher level and believed in the Ahl al-Bayt’s special role in Islamic ideology based on the principle of Imamate (i.e. leadership of the Muslim community) and the divinely commissioned successorship of the Holy Prophet (S).

It is important to note that those involved in the second circle became a virtuous community of special identity and a righteous entity enjoying its own features and known in the Muslim milieu as *‘the Shi’ah* (adherents) *of the Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a)’. They were not differentiated from the Muslims of the first wider circle solely due to their inclination towards the movement of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Rather, the individuals of this special circle were promoted on account of the responsibilities and instructions directly placed upon them by the Holy Imams of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), whose purpose beyond such promotion was to engender this community and entity.

To sum up, this entity, the Shi’ah of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), did not exist arbitrarily. Such faithful individuals were the outcome of a purposeful and focused plan designed by the Holy Imams (‘a) to build this virtuous community.

The Holy Imams (‘a) had realized that their general goals, one of which was to defend the entity of Islam and to safeguard the existence of the Muslim nation, would not be achieved if they directed their efforts

to the totality of Muslims represented by the first circle. The achievement of this goal, along with its various aspects, depended upon the features of perpetual cognizance, continuous emotional momentum, and presence of a leader who could undertake the mission of enlightenment.

We thus observe that the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a), from the beginning, in addition to undertaking their general responsibilities entrusted to them by Almighty Allah, used to pay special attention to activity within the private circle. For instance, the Holy Prophet (S) took an extraordinary interest in this aspect; he, therefore, founded the practice of following Imam ‘Ali (namely, *tashayyu’*) and promoted it as an ideological and political line that came into existence during his lifetime and under his supervision. Not stopping here, the Holy Prophet (S) directed an elite group of his companions towards this line, causing them to be the virtuous seed of Shi’ism. [1](#)

In addition, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) himself undertook this mission when he built a virtuous community in the holy city of al-Madinah. Thereafter, he expanded this group in al-Kufah through the agency of Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, Salman al-Farisi (the Persian), and ‘Ammar ibn Yasir, and in Lebanon through the agency of Abu-Dharr al-Ghifari, and in the Yemen during the period that he spent there as governor. The same thing can be said about other cities, such as Egypt and al-Basrah.

More light will be shed on this topic later in this book when we present the features of the process of building a virtuous community as led by the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a).

[1.](#) – The reader is advised to refer to my book entitled ‘al-Shi’ah wa’l-Tashayyu’” for evidence on this claim and more details about this topic.

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