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Question 23: Why do the Shi'ah believe that caliphate {khilafah} is a matter of appointment {tansisi}?

Reply: It is clear that the sacred religion of Islam is a universal and eternal creed and while alive, the Holy Prophet (S) had the responsibility of leading the people, and after his departure, this responsibility had to be delegated to the most appropriate individual of the *ummah*.

There are two views concerning the question whether the station of leadership after the Prophet (S) is a *tansisi* one (in the sense that it is determined by the order of the Lord of the worlds and stipulation of the Messenger of Allah (S)) or it is an electoral position.

The Shi'ah believe that the station of leadership is a *tansisi* position and the successor of the Prophet (S) has to be appointed by God, whereas the Ahl as-Sunnah believe that this station is an electoral position and that the *ummah* should elect the individual who administers the affairs of the country after the Prophet (S).

[Social considerations which testify to the belief that caliphate is a matter of appointment {tansisi}](#)

Social considerations which testify to the belief that caliphate is a matter of appointment {tansisi}

The Shi'ah scholars introduce many reasons in their books of beliefs about the idea of the need for appointment as a condition for holding the position of caliphate. We can, however, make an analysis of the circumstances prevailing during the period of apostleship {*risalah*} in order to testify to the validity of the Shi'ah view.

A study of Islam's foreign and domestic policies in the lifetime of the Prophet (S) will warrant that the

successor of the Prophet (S) had to be designated by God through the Prophet (S) himself because the Muslim society was always under the threat of three challenges (Byzantium Empire, Persian Empire and the hypocrites {*munafiqun*}).

The interests of the *ummah* also dictated that the Prophet (S) would appoint a political leader to ensure the unity of the entire *ummah* and enable it to stand against the foreign enemy and leave no way for the enemy's infiltration and dominance, which might be exacerbated by internal disputes.

Further explanation

The Byzantine Empire represented one side of the dangerous triangle. This great power, which was at the north of the Arabian Peninsula concerned the Prophet (S) till the last moment of his life.

The first military encounter of the Muslims with the Christian army of Byzantine was in 8 AH in Palestine. This encounter ended in a sorrowful defeat of the Muslim army and the killing of three commanders: Ja'far ibn Abi Talib at-Tayyar, Zayd ibn Harithah and 'Abd Allah ibn Rawahah.

The withdrawal of the army of Islam in the fight against the army of *kufr* gave courage to the army of Caesar to think that one day the Islamic capital would be under his control. For this reason, in 9 AH the Prophet (S) moved with a huge and equipped army toward the coasts of Sham¹ so as to personally conduct every military activity. In this journey which was full of difficulties and vicissitudes, the army of Islam was able to regain its former glory and revive its political status.

This victory did not convince the Prophet (S) and a few days after his ailment, he decided to send an army under the command of Usamah ibn Zayd to the coasts of Sham.

The second side of the challenging triangle was the King of Persia. Out of rage, Khosroe of Persia tore the letter sent to him by the Prophet (S) and insultingly dismissed his envoy. Khosroe wrote to his governor in Yemen a letter in which he ordered him to capture the Prophet (S) and threatened to kill him if he refused.

Although Khosroe Pervez, the King of Persia, died in the lifetime of the Prophet (S), the issue of independence of the territory of Yemen, which was one of the Persian colonies for long time, was not away from the perspective of the Persian Sassanid kings. Arrogance and conceit would never allow the Sassanid statesmen to tolerate the existence of such a power.

The third side of the challenging triangle was the threat of the group of hypocrites {*munafiqun*}, who formed a fifth column in the midst of Muslim community, and were always busy creating discord and intended to kill the Prophet (S) en route from Tabuk to Medina. The hypocrites whispered to themselves that the Islamic movement would come to an end and everybody would be relieved.²

The destructive power of the hypocrites was so dangerous that the Qur'an has referred to it in many

surahs such as in *Al 'Imran* (3), *An-Nisa'* (4), *Al-Ma'idah* (5), *Al-Anfal* (8), *At-Tawbah* (9), *Al-'Ankabut* (29), *Al-Ahzab* (33), *Muhammad* (47), *Al-Fath* (48), *Al-Hadid* (57), *Al-Mujadilah* (58), *Al-Hashr* (59), and *Al-Munafiqun* (63).³

With the existence of such enemies who were lying in ambush for Islam, is it appropriate to assume that the Prophet of Islam (S) had not designated a successor for the political and religious leadership of the nascent Islamic community?

Social reckonings indicate that the Prophet (S) must have designated a chief and leader in order to prevent any kind of discord after his death and ensure Islamic unity by creating a firm and strong line of defense. Preventing any bad and unpleasant incident and avoiding the possibility that, after the demise of the Holy Prophet (S), every group would say, "The emir must be from us," would not be without designating a leader.

These social considerations are clear indications to the validity and soundness of the idea that the position of leadership after the Prophet (S) is a matter of appointment.

[The evidence of the sayings of the Messenger of Allah \(S\)](#)

On the basis of this social context and other aspects, the Prophet (S) kept reminding of the idea of succession from the early days of his mission till the last moments of his life. And he (S) designated his successor at the commencement of his mission—on the occasion of publicizing his prophethood to his relatives—as well as at the last days of his life—during the return journey from the Farewell Pilgrimage {*hajj al-wida'*} at Ghadir Khumm—and in different phases of his life.

We have introduced three well-based instances of these sayings in reply to the question: "Why is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) the *wasi* {executor of will} and successor of the Prophet (S)?" along with references from the books of Muslim scholars and *muhaddithun* which confirm this idea.

By taking into account the aforementioned social considerations of the early period of Islam and the sayings of the Messenger of Allah (S) regarding the designation of the Commander of the Faithful ('Ali) ('a) as his successor, we realize the necessity of the idea that the position of caliphate is conditional upon appointment.

- ¹. Sham or Shamat: until five centuries ago, included Syria of today, Lebanon and parts of Jordan and Palestine. {Trans.}
- ². Surah at-Tur 52:30: "Do they say, '{He is} a poet, for whom we await a fatal accident'?"
- ³. Excerpted from Prof. Ja'far Subhani's *Furugh-e Abadiyyat*.

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