

# The Coronation of Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Future Sovereign of the Muslims and as Head of the Islamic State

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The Farewell Pilgrimage was over, and Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, and the vast throng of his followers, were now ready to return to their homes. He gave the signal and the pilgrim caravans began to leave Makkah.

At a short distance in the north of Makkah, there is a plain called Khumm, and in Khumm there was a well or pool of water (Ghadeer). Khumm is at the junction of many roads. When the Prophet arrived in the vicinity of Ghadeer, he received a new – the following revelation from Heaven:

***O Apostle! Proclaim the Message which hath been Sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, Thou wouldst not have fulfilled and proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend thee from Men (who mean mischief) for Allah guideth not Those who reject truth. (Chapter 5; verse 67)***

The command of Heaven was seldom, if ever, so peremptory, as in this verse, and related, obviously, to some vitally important matter to which the Apostle had to address himself – there and then. He, therefore, ordered his own caravan to halt, and he recalled all those caravans which had either gone ahead or had gone in other directions. He himself waited until the last caravan that left Makkah, also arrived near the well in Khumm.

The pilgrim were going to break up at Khumm into their separate caravans and were going to disperse, each bound for its own destination. The Apostle had a most important announcement to make before the dispersal of the pilgrims, and he was most anxious that the maximum number of Muslims should hear it from him.

A “pulpit” was improvised with the howdahs of the camels, and the Prophet took his position on it so that everyone in the vast multitude could see him with his own eyes. His cousin, Ali, was standing near him.

Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, was now ready to make the historic announcement in compliance with the divine mandate quoted above. He thanked God for the great Blessing of Islam, and for His Grace and His Mercy, and then he posed the following question to the Muslims:

“Do I have or I do not have a greater right on your souls than you yourselves have on them?”

The Muslims answered with one voice: “The Apostle of God has a greater right on our souls than we ourselves have on them.” “If that is so,” he said, “then I have a very important message to deliver to you,” and he put across the message as follows:

“O Muslims! I am a mortal like any of you, and I may soon be summoned into the presence of my Lord. My most precious legacy to you is the Book of Allah and the members of my family, as I have told you before. Now listen to this with attention that I am the Master of all of you – of all Believers. All those men and women who acknowledge me as their Master, I want them to acknowledge (at this point he held Ali's hand and lifted it high over his head) Ali also as their Master. Ali is the Master of all those men and women whose Master I am.”

Having delivered this message, Muhammad Mustafa lifted his hands toward the sky, and said:

“O Allah! Be Thou a Friend of him who is a friend of Ali, and be Thou an Enemy of him who is his enemy. Help him whoever helps Ali, and forsake him whoever forsakes him (Ali).”

Foregoing is a summary of what Muhammad, the Messenger of God, said in Khumm. The full text and context of his speech is preserved in the famous book *Taudih-ed-Dala'el* by the great Sunni doctor, Allama Shahab-ud-Deen Ahmed. Following is a condensation of the speech as recorded in *Taudih-ed-Dala'el*:

I offer praise and thanks to Allah for all His bounties. I bear witness that there is no God but Allah, and He is One, the Almighty, the Perfect. We all depend upon Him. He has no consort, no son, no partner(s) & c. I am one of His slaves but He chose me as His Messenger for the guidance of all mankind. O people! fear Him at all times and never disobey Him. Do not fight but for Islam, and remember that Allah's knowledge encompasses every thing.

O Muslims! beware that when I am gone, there will arise men who will attribute false statements to me and there will be other men who would believe in them. But I seek Allah's protection that I should ever say anything but the Truth and invite you toward anything but what He has revealed to me. Those who transgress in this matter, will pay the penalty.

At this point Ibada ibn Samit, a companion, rose and asked: “O Messenger of Allah! when that time comes, whom should we look up to for guidance?”

The Messenger of Allah answered as follows:

You should follow and obey “the People of my House (Ahlul-Bait).” They are the heirs of my apostolic and prophetic knowledge. They will save you from going astray, and they will lead you to salvation. They would invite you toward the Book (Al-Qur’an al-Majid) and my Sunnah. Follow them because they are never in doubt about anything. Their faith in Allah is unshakable. They are the rightly-guided ones; they are the Imams, and they alone can save you from misbelief, heresy and innovations.

Allah has commanded you to love my Ahlul-Bait. Devotion to them is made mandatory for you (Al-Qur’an al-Majid: Chapter 42, verse 23). They are the ones who are sanctified (Al-Qur’an al-Majid: Chapter 33, verse 33). They are the ones endowed with virtues and excellence which no one else possesses. They are the Chosen ones of Allah Himself.

Now I have been commanded by Allah to make this announcement:

At this point he held Ali's hand, lifted it high, and said:

“Know ye all, of whomsoever I am the Maula (Master), Ali is his Maula (Master). O Allah! Be Thou a Friend of him who is a friend of Ali, and be Thou an Enemy to him who is an enemy to Ali. O Allah! Help him who helps Ali, and abandon him who abandons him.”

The speech was over. Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of Allah, had formally and officially declared Ali ibn Abi Talib to be the Sovereign of all Muslims, and had appointed him as the head of the State and Government of Islam.

As soon as this announcement was made, another verse, the last one of Al-Qur’an al-Majid, was revealed to Muhammad. It reads as follows:

***This day I have perfected for you, Your Religion and have Completed My Favors on you, and have Chosen for you Islam to be your Religion. (Chapter 5; verse 3)***

It was the 18th day of the 12th month of the 10th year of the Islamic calendar (March 21, 632) when the last verse of Revelation was sent down to this earth. The Revelation had begun in A.D. 610 in the cave of Hira in Makkah, and was brought to a conclusion in A.D. 632 in the plain of Khumm with the proclamation that Ali ibn Abi Talib would be the Chief Executive, after Muhammad himself, of the Government of Medina and the State of Islam.

Ibn Hujr Asqalani writes in *Isaba* that after making this announcement, the Apostle of God placed a turban on the head of Ali ibn Abi Talib, thus completing his coronation.

All the companions congratulated Ali on this glorious occasion when the Apostle of God himself crowned him and proclaimed him his vicegerent and successor. Among those who congratulated him were Umar bin al-Khattab and the wives of the Apostle.

Hassan bin Thabit Ansari was the court poet of the Prophet, and he versified all important events. The coronation of Ali was one of the most historic events that challenged his poetical talents. He composed a paeon on this occasion which he dedicated to Ali. Following is a rough translation of his verses:

On the day of Ghadeer Khumm, the Prophet and the Muslims called them out, and I heard him when he said:

“Who is your Lord, and who is your master?” They all said: “Allah is our Lord, and you are our master, and no one among us can disobey you.”

So he asked Ali to stand up. When Ali rose, he held his hand, and said: “I select you as the leader after me. Therefore, whomsoever's master I am, Ali is his master also. Therefore, all of you become his true friends and supporters.”

The Prophet then prayed, saying: “O Allah! Be Thou a Friend of those who are the friends of Ali; and be Thou an Enemy of those who are his enemies.”

Another poet who composed verses on the occasion of the coronation of Ali, was Qays ibn Ubada Ansari. He said:

When the enemy rebelled against us, I said that our Sustainer, Allah, is sufficient for us, and He is the best Protector that we can have.

Ali is our master and he is the master of all believers. This is borne out by Al-Qur'an al-Majid, and it is so since the day when Allah's Messenger said: “Whomsoever's master I am, Ali is his master also.” This was indeed a most remarkable event.

Whatever the Messenger of Allah said on that day, is final; it's the last word, and there is absolutely no room for any argument in it.

Curiously and most incredibly, even a man like Amr bin Aas was “inspired” to dedicate a poem to Ali at Ghadeer-Khumm. Following is a distich of his composition:

The stroke of Ali's sword is just like that oath of allegiance which everyone took on the Ghadeer, and which made everyone bow himself before his (new) authority.

If the two verses of Qur'an relating to Ali's coronation, are read in their chronological order, and in their historical context, their meaning will become clear. I shall quote them once again in a brief analysis; and for the facility of reference, I shall call them the first and the second verse.

*(1). O Apostle! Proclaim the Message which hath been Sent to thee from thy Lord. If thou didst not, thou wouldst not have Fulfilled And proclaimed His Mission. And Allah will defend thee from men (who mean mischief). For Allah guideth not those who reject Faith.*

*(II). This day I have perfected your Religion for you: Completed My favor upon you, and have chosen For you Islam as your Religion.*

The coronation of Ali took place within the framework of these two verses of Qur'an. His coronation was such a pressing matter that Muhammad Mustafa, the Recipient of Revelation, was ordered, in the first verse, to suspend whatever he was doing, and to give his immediate attention to it. He, therefore, ordered all pilgrims to assemble in the plain of Khumm, and told them that Ali would rule them as his successor in the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

No sooner Muhammad had done so, than the second verse was revealed as a sign of Heaven's endorsement of his action. The proclamation of Ali as his successor was the consummation and the culmination of the lifework of Muhammad. With this proclamation, his mission as God's Messenger, was accomplished. He had declared Ali to be his successor on many occasions in the past but at Ghadeer-Khumm, he formally inaugurated him as the future Head of the Islamic State.

Between these two verses of Qur'an – one so emphatic in demanding action and the other so unequivocal in its approval of the investiture of Ali as the successor of Muhammad – and the latter's statement: "Ali is the master of all those men and women whose master I am," there is a logical and an obvious correlation.

Some casuists have quibbled over the word *Maula* as used by the Prophet when he said: Ali is the *maula* of all those men and women whose *maula* I am. They concede that the statement is authentic but they interpret the word *maula* not as "master" but as "friend." But this was not the intent of the Prophet himself. Did he recall all the caravans and order them to gather in the shadeless plain of Khumm merely to tell them that Ali was their friend? Was it assumed by the pilgrims at the time that Ali was not their friend, and the Prophet had to reassure them that he (Ali) was in fact their friend?

Those people who interpret the word *maula* as "friend," perhaps forget that the Prophet used it in reference to himself before he used it in reference to Ali, and this can admit of only one right interpretation, viz., if Muhammad, the Apostle, is the Master of all Muslims, Ali too is their Master.

The casuists also forget that before proclaiming Ali as his successor and the sovereign of all Muslims, the Prophet asked them the following question:

"Do I have or I do not have a greater right over your souls than you yourselves have on them?"

The answer of the Muslims to this question was an unqualified "yes."

This question was prefatory to the Prophet's announcement that Ali was his successor. The question and the announcement were part of the same context, and if read together, they will leave no doubt in the mind of the reader that the word *maula* means "Master" and not "friend."

Most of the Sunni commentators have conceded that the command of God to His Messenger in the first

verse pertains specifically to the declaration that Ali is the Sovereign of all Muslims. Some of these commentators are:

Wahidi in *Asbab-un-Nazool*

Suyuti in *Tafseer Durr al-Manthoor*

Ibn Kathir

Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal

Abu Ishaq Naishapuri

Ghazali in *Sirrul-Alameen*

Tabari in *Tarikh-ar-Rusul wal-Mulook*

Shaikh Abdul Haq Muhaddith of Delhi, India

Here it should also be pointed out that before the revelation of the first verse (5:70), all commandments relating to the Shari'a (the religious code of Islam), such as the daily Prayers, Fasting, Zakat (poor-tax), Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah), and Jihad – in fact all the laws for the personal, social, economic and political life of the Muslims, had already been given to Muhammad. He had promulgated them, and the Muslims were acting upon them, and they had become an integral part of their lives. He had introduced and implemented every law.

The only thing that the Prophet had not done until then, was to formally introduce to his *umma*, his own successor. The *umma* had a right to know who would be its ruler after his (the Prophet's) death. This is what he did when he was commanded to “proclaim the message.” The commandment of God was most emphatic, and the Prophet could not defer its execution for another moment.

But as soon as the Prophet carried out the heavenly command, with total clarity and absolute finality, the second verse (5:4) was revealed, and it put the seal of approval upon his action.

With the official inauguration of Ali ibn Abi Talib as the successor of Muhammad and as the leader of all Muslims, the last of the revealed verses was written down in the Book of God.

The last verse of the Book of God was revealed and was recorded on March 21, 632, as noted before, and the gate of Revelation was closed forever. Eighty days later, i.e., on June 8, 632, Muhammad Mustafa parted company with his *umma*, and went into the presence of his Lord.

There is no record that he gave his *umma* any new commandments or prohibitions (Awamir wa Nawahi), doctrinal or practical, during these 80-days. Islam was declared to be complete and perfect as soon as its Prophet appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib his successor.

May God overwhelm His slaves, Muhammad and Ali, and the members of their families, with His Grace, with His Mercy and His Blessings.

Muhammad Mustafa could now look back with satisfaction upon his work, and he could look ahead into the future with new hope, confidence and cheer. In designating Ali as his successor, he saw continuity of that mission for which he had labored so unsparingly for 23 years, and which had been fraught with so many perils.

His mission had demanded countless sacrifices on his part. Now it appeared to him that all his labors and sacrifices had at last borne fruit, since he knew that Ali would steer the vessel of Islam to its destination with the same skill as he himself had done.

Muhammad did not pick out Ali to be his successor merely because he was his cousin, his son-in-law, and his favorite disciple; nor did he pick him out because of his (Ali's) personal qualities. Muhammad had very little to do with this choice. The timing of the revelation of the last two verses of Al-Qur'an al-Majid (5:70 and 5:4), the events that transpired during the interval of these two revelations, and their correlation, lead the observer to but one conclusion, viz., the choice of Ali as the successor of the Prophet of Islam, was made in Heaven. God Himself chose Ali.

God could not have chosen the third or the second. He could have chosen only the finest, the best, the unique, such as Ali was. Ali was the symbol and the manifest expression of the Truth of Islam, and he was the first witness of the Truth of its Prophet. May God bless them both and their families.

Mohammed Mustafa, the Messenger of God, availed of every opportunity to call attention of the Muslims to the sublime rank of Ali. In one of his most famous Hadith (statement, tradition), he said that his relationship with Ali was the same as that of his apostolic forerunners – Moses and Aaron – with the difference that Ali was not a prophet.

This Hadith was reported by Saad bin Abi Waqqas, and was recorded by Imam Muslim in his *Sahih* as follows:

Amir b. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas reported on the authority of his father that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) addressing Ali said: "You are in the same position with relation to me as Aaron (Harun) was to Moses (Musa) but with (this explicit difference) that there is no prophet after me." Sa'd said: "I had an earnest desire to hear it directly from Sa'd, so I met him and told him what Amir (his son) had narrated to me, whereupon he said: "Yes, I did hear it." I said: "Did you hear it yourself?" Thereupon he placed his fingers upon his ears and said: "Yes, and if not, let both of my ears become deaf."

Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) left Ali b. Abi Talib behind him (as he proceeded) to Tabuk, whereupon he (Ali) said: "Allah's Messenger, are you leaving me behind with women and children?"

Thereupon he (the Prophet) said: "Aren't you satisfied with being unto me what Aaron was unto Moses but with this exception that there would be no prophet after me?"

This hadith has been narrated on the authority of Shu'ba with the same chain of transmitters. Amir b. Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas reported on the authority of his father that Muawiya b. Abi Sufyan appointed Sa'd as the governor and said: "What prevents you from cursing Abu Turab (Ali)?"

He said: "It is because of three things which I heard Allah's Messenger saying about him that I would not curse him, and if I were to find even one of those three things, it would be dearer to me than red camels. I heard Allah's Messenger say about Ali as he left him (in Medina) when going on a campaign (Tabuk).

Ali said to him: 'Allah's Messenger, are you leaving me behind with women and children.?' Thereupon Allah's Messenger said to him: 'Aren't you satisfied with being unto me what Aaron was unto Moses but with this exception that there is no prophethood after me?'

And I (also) heard him say on the Day of Khayber: 'I would give this banner to a man who loves Allah and His Messenger, and Allah and His Messenger love him.'

He (the narrator) said: We were anxiously waiting for it when he (the Prophet) said: 'Call Ali.' He came and his eyes were inflamed. He applied saliva to his eyes and gave him the banner, and Allah gave him victory.

The third occasion was when the following verse was revealed:

***"Let us summon our children and your children."***

Allah's Messenger called Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain and said: 'O Allah! They are my family.'

The Hadith of the Prophet in which he said that Ali was to him what Aaron was to Moses, dovetails with the following verses of Al-Qur'an al-Majid:

(Moses prayed):

***"O my Lord! Expand me my breast; Ease my task for me; And remove the impediment from my speech; So they may understand what I say; And give me a minister from my family: Aaron my brother, Add to my strength through him, And make him share my task: That we may celebrate Thy praise without stint; And remember Thee without stint; For Thou art He that ever regardeth us." (God) said: "Granted is thy prayer, O Moses!" And indeed We conferred a favor on thee another time before." (Chapter 20; verses 25 to 37)***

The Prophet Moses prayed to God to give him a Minister from his own family. He did not want a minister from among his companions and friends. He prayed that Aaron, his brother, would be his Minister, and would be a source of strength to him.

God answered the prayer of His Apostle Moses, gave him his own brother, Aaron, as his Minister, and made him a source of strength for him.

Muhammad, the Last Messenger of God, also selected his Minister from his own family. His choice was Ali, his brother. Ali added to his strength, and shared his task with him, just as he had promised to do, many years earlier, at the feast of Dhu'l-'Asheera in Makkah in the assembly of the elders of the clans of Hashim and Muttalib.

***(Before this) We sent Moses the Book, and Appointed his brother, Aaron, with him as Minister. (Chapter 21; verse 48)***

God Himself appointed Aaron as Minister. It was not the *umma* (the people) of Moses which appointed his Minister.

***We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed the period with ten more: Thus was completed the term of communion with his Lord, forty nights. And Moses had charged his brother, Aaron (before he went up): Act for me amongst my people: Do right and follow not the way of those who do mischief. (Chapter 7; verse 142)***

Moses put his brother, Aaron, in charge of his *umma* (people), and he did not abandon it (the *umma*) without a leader even though he was going away only for forty days.

Muhammad Mustafa (may God bless him and his family) did not deviate from this practice of the apostles and prophets of God. He too did not leave the Muslims leaderless, and appointed his brother, Ali, as their leader and ruler after him.

Moses prayed:

***“O my Lord! Forgive me and my brother! Admit us to Thy Mercy! For Thou art the Most Merciful of those who show Mercy.” (Chapter 7; verse 151)***

Moses did not pray only for himself; he also prayed for his brother, Aaron. Muhammad Mustafa also prayed for both, himself and his brother, Ali. He invoked God's blessings upon both of themselves and their families.

***Again We bestowed Our favor on Moses and Aaron. Peace and salutation to Moses and Aaron. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right. For they were two of Our believing servants. (Chapter 37; verses 114, 120, 121, 122)***

God bestowed His favor on Moses and Aaron, and He bestowed His favors upon Muhammad and Ali, His believing servants. All four of them did right, and God rewarded them, and sent peace and salutations to them.

Though Aaron was *divinely* chosen to be the heir and successor of Moses, he died within his lifetime, thus necessitating the selection of a new leader. The new leader was Joshua. Like Aaron, he too, was the *divinely commissioned* successor of Moses, and the *umma* had nothing to do with his selection.

After the death of Moses, his successor, Joshua, led the Israelites to victory.

The policy parameters in the matter of selecting and appointing a leader for the Muslim *umma*, after the death of Muhammad Mustafa, the Messenger of God, can clearly be seen in the verses of Qur'an quoted above. Ali ibn Abi Talib was the choice of Heaven. All that Muhammad, had to do, was to make the formal announcement that Ali would be the leader of the Muslims after his own death. It was to make this announcement that he ordered the Muslims to assemble in the plain of Khumm.

A modern Muslim might assume that this historic announcement by the Prophet, must have been followed by universal rejoicing among the Muslims. It seems strange to say that it was not. There were some Muslims who were happy but there were many others who were not.

These latter had entertained other hopes, and had nursed other ambitions, and their hopes and ambitions did not exactly jibe with the proclamation of the Prophet at Ghadeer-Khumm. His proclamation, so forthright and unequivocal, frustrated all their hopes and ambitions.

But they did not give up. They conceived another gambit. They began to whisper in the ears of the Arabs that the designation of Ali as the Sovereign of all Muslims was an act prompted by the desire of the Prophet to monopolize political power in his own family – in the clan of Hashim – to the exclusion of all others, and that it had nothing to do with Revelation.

They figured that if their “argument” appealed to the Arabs, then they would be able to push them into a scramble for power in which they themselves might come on top. From that moment, therefore, they began to work at mapping out a new strategy to meet the new situation.

Who were these people? They have not been identified by their names but their existence and their potential for mischief are recognized in the first verse (5:70). The Prophet, apparently, was hesitating to act, being mindful of the massive opposition of many Arabs to the appointment of Ali as the future head of the Islamic State. But he was reassured that God would protect him from them; that he should overcome his hesitation, and should declare the vicegerency of Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Opposition to the historic announcement at Ghadeer-Khumm was opposition to Muhammad himself. Opposition to him, until that announcement, however, was hidden and inconspicuous; but soon it was to rear its sinister head in his own lifetime. This subject has been dealt with in Chapter 39.

The designation, by Muhammad Mustafa, at Ghadeer-Khumm, of Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor, has been reported by the following of his Companions:

Khuzayma bin Thabit

Sehl bin Sa'ad

Adiy bin Hatim

Aqba bin Aamir

Abu Ayyub Ansari

Abul-Haithum bin Taihan

Abdullah bin Thabit

Abu Ya'la Ansari

Nu'man bin Ajlan Ansari

Thabit bin Wade'a Ansari

Abu Fadhala Ansari

Abdur Rahman bin Abd Rabb

Junaida bin Janada

Zayd bin Arqam

Zayd bin Sherheel

Jabir bin Abdullah

Abdullah bin Abbas

Abu Saeed al-Khudri

Abu Dharr el-Ghiffari

Salman el-Farsi

Jubayr bin Mutim

Hudhayfa bin Yaman

Hudhayfa bin Usayd

Among the historians who have recorded the events of Ghadeer-Khumm are Atheer-ud-Deen in his book *Usudul-Ghaba*; Halabi in his *Seera-tul-Halabiyya*; and Ibn Hajar in his *al-Sawa'iq-al-Muhriqa*.

The traditionalists who have mentioned the events of GhadeerKhummm are Muslim, Nasai, Tirmidhi, Ibn Maja; Ahmad ibn Hanbal and Hakim.

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