

The Number of Prophets And Vicegerents

Says the Shaykh Abu Ja'far: Our belief concerning their number is that in all there have been one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets¹ and a like number of *awsiya*². Each *nabi* (prophet) had a *wasi* to whom he gave instructions by the command of Allah. And concerning them we believe that they brought the truth from Allah, that their word is the word of Allah, that their command is the command of Allah, that obedience to them is obedience to Allah and that disobedience to them is disobedience to Allah.

They spoke not except on behalf of Allah, and on being inspired by Him. And verily the leaders of the prophets are five in number round whom the heaven revolves³, and they are the masters of the religious path (*as habu 'sh-shara'i'*), namely Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, on all of whom be peace:

“messengers of inflexible purpose” (Qur'an 46:35)

. Muhammad verily is their leader and the most excellent of them.⁴ He brought the truth and confirmed (the message of) the apostles.

Those who declared him to be a liar will suffer a painful agony. And those who believed in him and honored and helped him⁵, and followed the light⁶ which descended with him they are the successful and the victorious ones.

It is necessary to believe that Allah the Mighty and Glorious did not create any created thing more excellent than Muhammad and the Imams, peace on them, that they are the most loved of creatures in the eyes of Allah, and the most noble and the foremost among them, on account of their acceptance of Him (as their Lord). When Allah took the pledge (*mithaq*) of the prophets and

“required them to bear witness of themselves (saying): Am I not your Lord? and they said: Yes, verily” (Qur'an 7: 172).

And verily Allah sent His Prophet Muhammad (with a message) to the other prophets in the world of atoms (*adh-dharr*)⁷. And verily Allah the Mighty and Glorious gave to each prophet (i.e. knowledge,

power, etc.) according to the extent of his cognition (*ma'rifa*)⁸, while the cognition of our Prophet Muhammad was greater and more sublime⁹, for it took precedence in accepting Allah (as the Supreme Being).

We believe that Allah, Blessed and Exalted is He above all, created the whole of creation for him (the Prophet) and for the People of his House, and that but for them, Allah, Glory be to Him, would not have created the heavens or the earth, Paradise or Hell, Adam or Eve, the angels or (any) created thing (*shay'*) – the Blessings of Allah upon them all.

And our belief is that after His Prophet, the Blessings of Allah upon him, the proofs¹⁰ of Allah for the people are the Twelve Imams,¹¹ the first of them being the Prince of Believers 'Ali bin Abi Talib, then al-Hasan, then al-Husayn, then 'Ali bin al-Husayn, then Muhammad bin 'Ali, then Ja'far bin Muhammad, then Musa bin Ja'far, then 'Ali bin Musa ar-Rida, then Muhammad bin 'Ali, then 'Ali bin Muhammad, then al-Hasan bin 'Ali, then Muhammad bin al-Hasan the Proof (*al-hujja*), who upholds the command of Allah (*al-qa'im bi-amr'il-lah*), the Master of Time (*sahibu'z-zaman*), the Vicegerent of the Beneficent One (*khalifatu'r-Rahman*) in His earth, the one who is present in the earth¹² but invisible (*gha'ib*) to the eyes – the Blessings of Allah on all of them.¹³

Our belief regarding them is that they are in authority (*ulu'l-amr*). It is to them that Allah has ordained obedience,¹⁴ they are the witnesses for the people and they are the gates of Allah (*abwab*) and the road (*sabil*) to Him and the guides (*dalil*, plural *adilla*) thereto, and the repositories¹⁵ of His knowledge and the interpreters of His revelations and the pillars of His unity (*tawhid*). They are immune from sins (*khata'*) and errors (*zalal*); they are those from whom

“Allah has removed all impurity and made them absolutely pure” (Qur'an 33:33).

They are possessed of (the power of) miracles (*mu'jizat*) and of (irrefutable) arguments (*dala'il*); and they are for the protection of the people of this earth just as the stars are for the inhabitants of the heavens. They may be likened, in this community, to the Ark of Noah; he who boards it obtains salvation or reaches the Gate of Repentance (*hitta*).¹⁶

They are the most noble slaves of Allah, who

“speak not until He hath spoken; they act by His command” (Qur'an 21:27).

And we believe that love for them is true belief (*iman*) and hatred for them is unbelief (*kufr*); that their command is the command of Allah, their prohibition is the prohibition of Allah; obedience to them is obedience to Allah, and disobedience to them is disobedience to Allah; their friend (*wali*)¹⁷ is the friend of Allah, and their enemy the enemy of Allah.

We believe that the earth cannot be without the Proof (*hujja*) of Allah to His creatures – a leader either manifest (*zahir*) and well known (*mashhur*)¹⁸, or hidden (*khafi*)¹⁹ and obscure (*maghmur*).

We believe that the Proof of Allah in His earth and His vicegerent (*khalifa*) among His slaves in this age of ours is the Upholder (*al-Qa'im*) (of the law of Allah), the Expected One (*al-Muntazar*), Muhammad bin al-Hasan bin 'Ali bin Muhammad bin 'Ali bin Musa bin Ja'far bin Muhammad bin 'Ali bin al-Husayn bin 'Ali bin Abi Talib, on them be peace.

He it is concerning whose name and descent the Prophet was informed by Allah the Mighty and Glorious, and he it is who will fill the earth with justice and equity, just as now it is full of oppression and wrong.²⁰ And he it is through whom Allah will make His faith manifest

“in order to supersede all religion, though the polytheists may dislike (it)” (Qur'an 9:33, 48:28, 61:9).

He it is whom Allah will make victorious over the whole world until from every place the call to prayer will be heard, and all religion²¹ will belong entirely to Allah, Exalted is He above all. He it is, who is the Rightly Guided (*mahdi*), about whom the Prophet gave information that when he appears, Jesus,²² son of Mary, will descend upon the earth and pray behind him, and he who prays behind him is like one who prays behind the Prophet of Allah, because he is his vicegerent (*khalifa*).

And we believe that there can be no *Qa'im* other than him; he may live in the state of occultation (as long as he likes); and were he to live in the state of occultation for the space of the existence of this world, there would nevertheless be no *Qa'im* other than him. For, the Prophet and the Imams have indicated him by his name and descent; him they appointed as their successor, and of him they gave glad tidings – the Blessings of Allah on all of them.²³

¹. Browne, *Persian Literature*, iv. 387–388; Donaldson, 320. In Sunni dogmatics the numbers differ from 315 apostles (Ibn Sa'd) to 224,000; but Nasafi is non-committal MC, 204; Macdonald, 312. It is also to be observed that here no difference is made between apostle (*rasul*) and prophet (*nabi*). The distinction according to Sunnite doctrine appears to be that the former were sent each with a law and a book, while the latter, only to preach and to warn, MC, loc. cit. For distinction between *risala* and *nubuwwa*, see Affifi, 95 and generally, KP, ch. iv. pp. 52 sqq.

². The word *wasi* is untranslatable in English, except in a legal context, where executor is an exact rendering. "Plenipotentiary" or "vicegerent" may also be used in certain cases. It has in Shi'itic works the following chief attributes: (1) *wasi* is a person who is, by command of Allah, specially instructed and authorized by the *nabi* to perform certain acts. These are considered to be the commands of the *nabi* and the duties of the *wasi*. (2) During the lifetime of the *nabi*, the *wasi* holds a position next after him as vicegerent, FC, no. 31; and for particular religious and political functions, he acts as his plenipotentiary. (3) After the death of the *nabi* the *wasi* is his *khalifa* (successor), his executor and the leader of the community, being the most excellent of men after the Prophet, FC, no. 31. The distinction between him and the Imam is that the latter has not had the advantage of personal intimacy and direct instruction from the *nabi*, KP, 20; although in the absence of the *nabi*, the *wasi* and the imam have similar powers. Thus *wasi* is superior to imam, 'Ali being superior to all Imams, FC, nos. 35, 36. It is for these reasons that the word *wasi* has throughout been retained in the translation. The terms *wasi* has very special association in Isma'ili's thought, FC, nos. 31, 35. *Wisayat* and *nubuwwat* are temporary institutions, but *imamat* is permanent and everlasting, no. 35. The substance of the *nabi* is closely connected with that of the *wasi* and the *wasi* is the truest interpreter of the religion of the *nabi*, no. 31. The *Kalimi Pir* is full of the doctrine of *wisayat* (or *wasayat*?) out of which a few points are worthy of mention. The *nabi* is the *natiq*, teacher of the revealed religion (*tanzil*) and he always prepares *bray* a *wasi*, who is the teacher of the inner meaning (*ta'wil*), pp. 18, 56, 57; every *natiq* has a *wasi*, 57; the *wasi* gives to every one *tanzal* (*zahir*) or *ta'wil* (*batin*) according to his ability, 56. On the meanings of the

word وصية see Fyze, Ismaili Law of Wills, 8.

3. Reading الرحي عليهم الرحي as in D: not الرحي as in N. Cf. MB, s.v. رحا p.37. The expression in ordinary English means "on whom everything depends".

4. Cf. MC, 113 – 115, where it is shown that at first no distinction was made; but later Muhammad's superiority was clearly accepted, Macdonald, 305 (Ghazili), 312 (Nasafi), 345 (Fudali) ; BHA, no. 170; FC, no. 29. In KP there are expressions showing the identity of the substance of 'Ali and Muhammad, 79 sqq., and it is not at all clear whether 'Ali is not superior to the Prophet, cf. especially 74, where we have: "'Ali was the greatest among all the prophets and saints, pious and holy". According to Ibnu'l-'Arabi, the reality of Muhammad is identified with the logos, Affifi, 70; Muhammad is therefore the centre of the Sufi hierarchy – the Qutb, 71 et seq. The question of Prophecy from the Western Ismaili's point of view is dealt with in Abu Hatim ar-Razi's A'lamu 'n-Nubuwwa (W. Ivanow, Guide to Ism. Lit., no, 19) and other works.

5. Reading `azzaruhu.

6. Browne, Lit. His., iv. 388; KP, Intr. xxxviii, 85. Ibnu'l-'Arabi holds that sainthood can only be derived from this "light", and in this he is under the influence of Hallaj, Affifi, 74, 92, 189.

7. Before the atoms were put together by Allah and the mass shaped into different forms. This shows how early the excellence of Muhammad was recognized. This is a reference to the interesting legend regarding the covenant of Adam and his descendants referred to in the Qur'an, 7, 171 –173. ذَرٌّ is obviously used for its affinity with ذَرِيَّتِهِمْ and may mean either "atoms" or "ants". The descendants of Adam, prior to the creation of this physical world, were made to appear to him in the shape of ants: Baydawi, ed. Fleischer, i. 35215–17 (com. to the Qur'an 7,172); MB, s. v. وثق.

– أخذ الله ميثاق شيعتنا بالولاية و هم ذر يوم أخذ الميثاق على الذر – توضيحه: أن الأرواح تعلقت ذلك اليوم بجسد صغير مثل النمل دعاهم إلى الإقرار فأقر بعضهم و أنكر بعضهم

The Thus God took the twofold covenant from mankind: (a) the Unity of Allah, and (b) the priority in excellence of the Prophet Muhammad. In this manner not only mankind, but all the prophets testified to these two dogmas, tawhid and khatamiya. MB goes further and mentions also the wilaya as part of the covenant. Cf. also Wensinck, Handbook, s. v. Adam, 11 b.

It is necessary to emphasize, as is done in the explanations, that all this happened in a spiritual sense and in a spiritual world, not actually and in a physical sense; and this world is the عالم الذر (the world of atoms or ants), and الذر في stands for الذر في عالم الذر whereas على الذر refers to the covenant itself.

The rendering "world of atoms" appears to be more in consonance with the real significance in English than the expression "world of ants". From the traditions it would appear that the descendants of Adam appeared to him as a huge cluster of ants; it may also be suggested – and the metaphor is even more beautiful – that they appeared to him as innumerable particles floating in a beam of light.

The idea of the excellence of the Prophet appears to be of gradual growth; originally no distinction was made between the various apostles, MC, 115,191 (Figh Akbar 11, art. 6), 215. The mithaq was originally between God and man; then it was made to include the Prophet's excellence over all the other prophets, and finally the Shi'a engrafted upon it the doctrine of walaya as well.

8. FC, no. 28. This is clearly in anticipation of the Sufi doctrine, Afifi, 74, 92, 189.

9. Reading as in D كانت أكبر و أعظم و سبقت إلخ

10. FC, no. 38.

11. On the Imamate generally see Browne, iv. 391–395; BHA, nos. 174 –218, esp no. 210; Donaldson, D. M., The Shiite Religion (London, 1933), 305 –338; FC, nos. 30 –42; KP, xxxviii, and idex.

12. Lit. "present in the cities (amsar)."

13. Browne, iv. 394; Donaldson, The Shiite Religion, 277 sqq.; BHA, nos. 210, 211, 217.

14. Ref to Qur'an 4, 62. BHA, no. 211.

15. N عَيْبَةٌ; D مهبط. 'ayba is a leather bag; metaphorically, it is also used for a person who is a repository of one's secret (Lane).

16. Qur'an 2, 58; 7, 161. So Pickthall. The word means "remission laying down the burden of sins" (Palmer); or "forgiveness" (Rodwell).

17. *tiyj* with the kasr of the waw is "authority", "power", "sovereignty"; and with the fatha, is "love", "devotion" – *و بالفتح المَحَبَّة* – MB, s.v. *yj*, 97. This is the general meaning; the theological concept is on p.99;

الوَلَايَة بالفتح محبة أهل البيت و اتِّبَاعِهِمْ فِي الدِّين و امتثال أوامرهم و نواهيهم و التَّاسِّي بِهِمْ فِي الْأَعْمَالِ و الْأَخْلَاق. و أمَّا معرفة حَقِّهِمْ و اعتقاد الإمامة فيهم فذلك من أصول الدين لا من فروع العلمية.

It therefore involves: (1) love and devotion to the People of the House (*ahlu 'l-bayt*) of the Prophet, namely, the Imams; (2) following them in religion; (3) obedience to their commands and absence from their prohibitions; (4) imitation of their actions and conduct; and finally, (5) recognition of their rights and belief in their Imamate, – this being a basic principle of religion, not a mere scholastic deduction. SUNNIS. – There is a hadith that there can be no faith without love of Muhammad's family, Wensinck, Handbook, 169 (citing Tirmidhi 46, 28, etc.). ITHNA `ASHARIYA. – *Walaya* is a basic principle, Browne, iv. 394 – 395; Donaldson, 344–345 (citing Hayatu 'l-Qulub of Majlisi), 247, 346. In BHA, the whole section on Imamate, nos. 179 sqq., necessarily involves this belief and shows the importance given to it. ISMA`ILIS, – The Western (Musta'lian) Isma'ilis regard *walaya* as the first and the most important of the seven pillars (*da`a'im*) of religion. In the *Da'a'imu 'l-Islam*, vol. I, beg., it is related on the authority of Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq:

بُنِيَ الْإِسْلَامُ عَلَى سَبْعِ دَعَائِمٍ، الْوَلَايَة وَ هِيَ أَوْلَاهَا وَ أَفْضَلُهَا، وَ بِهَا وَ بِالْوَلِي يُوَصَّلُ إِلَى مَعْرِفَتِهَا.

Cf. also Fyzee, *Isma'ili Law of Wills*, p. 1, n. 1 and JRAS for 1934, p.22; FC, p.9 and no. 69. The basis of the doctrine appears to be the *wasiya* of 'Ali in the *Da'a'imu 'l-Islam*, vol. II (see Fyzee, *Isma'ili Law of Wills*, no.9). 'Ali first asks for devotion, citing Qur'in 42, 23) (*ibid.*, 70); then before laying down the principles of religion, that is, *tahara*, *salat*, etc., he again mentions *walaya* (p.71); intercession will not be available to those who do not recognize 'Ali's right and the rights of the *ahlu 'l-bayt* (p.72); "I enjoin you to be devoted to us the People of the House, for God has coupled obedience to us with obedience to Him and His Messenger" (p.74). The *wasiya* of 'Ali is cited widely in Isma'ili's works both ancient, like the *'Uyunu 'l-Akhbar* of Sayyidna `Imadud-Din Idris b. Hasan, and modern like *Siraju'l-Huda'l-Munir* by Sardar Sayyidna Tahir Sayfu'd-Din, the present *daa'i* of the *Da'udi Bohoras*, 1352 A.H., pp.85 –95. Among the Eastern (Nizarian) Isma'ilis, the doctrine of *walaya* is extended still further. *Walaya* is an essential part of belief, KP, 36, 89; he who dies without recognizing the Imam of the time dies a *kafir*, 27, 48, 61, 69; calumny of 'Ali means exclusion from grace, 37; closeness of 'Ali and the Prophet, 74; and finally *wilaya* (not *walaya*) as a rank, is superior to *nubuwwa*, for the light of *nubuwwa*, is inferior to the light of *wilaya*, xxxviii, 74, 86.

18. N omits مشهوراً.

19. N خائفاً err. for خائفاً Tajul-Aqa'id, FC, no. 37, does not accept the *ghayba* of the Imam.

20. This phrase is very common in Shi'itic literature and forms part of the *mahdi* tradition in general, cf. Isr. Friedlaender in JAOS, vol. xxix, 30 – 31; Shahrastani, 177, 1331, etc.; BHA, no. 211 (pen). See p.111.

21. Reading with D و يكون الدين كله لله.

22. Reading with D و انه إذا نزل عيسى N; و أنه الذي إذا خرج نزل عيسى إلخ

23. The Twelfth Imam is in some respects similar to the *Mahdi* of the Sunnis, MC, 243, 244. The descent of Jesus is also generally accepted, Wensinck, Handbook, 113, where it is stated that he will descend in Syria, kill the anti-Christ, appear as Imam, destroy the cross, kill the swine, and restore Islam to its pristine purity; he resides miraculously in the Heavens. Cf. also *mahdi*, Wensinck, Handbook, 139. For a full discussion of *mahdi*, as distinguished from Imam, see EI, iii. 111– 115, s. v. *Mahdi*. Among the Shi'a the traditions and books about the 12th Imam are legion; the following are a few general references, Browne, iv. 394; Donaldson, 226 –241; R. Strothmann in EI, ii. 642, s. v. *al-Qa'im* (many references); BHA, nos. 210, 211, 217; in no. 211 the 12th Imam is declared as the greatest (*afdal*) of all the Imams, an-Nafi' yawmi 'l-Hashr, Bombay ed. 587, Najaf ed. 788.

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