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The Second Discussion: The Preparation and Adaptation of the Ummah to 'Ali's Succession

The task of educating the *Ummah* to receive `Ali's Caliphate and direction over the advance of Islam after the Prophet, began early on –when the Prophet was first commanded (by God) to give admonition and to communicate his Message:

“Divulge what ye have been commanded and turn away from the idol-worshippers” (Qur'an 15:94 “al-Hajar”).

According to al-Tabari, `Before this, in the three years prior to his being sent forth and commanded to come out openly with the call to God, he had been concealing his [God-given] command; then this was revealed to him: ***“And admonish thy nearest kinsfolk” (Qur'an 26:214 “al-Shu'ara”).*** In this connection, al-Tabari transmitted `Abd Allah b. Abbas' statement about `Ali b. Abi Talib, who said:

When that verse was revealed to God's Messenger ...he called upon me, saying, “O `Ali God hath commanded me to admonish my nearest kinsfolk. But I am uneasy, for I know: when I divulge this Command, what I shall face from them will be to my utter dismay.

I held my silence on it, until [the Archangel] Gabriel came to me and said: `O Muhammad, if ye do not make good what you have been ordered to do, your Lord shall punish thee.' So bring forth a bit of nourishment, add to it a cut of leg, fill our jars with milk and bring together Banu `Abd al-Mutallib that I may speak and convey to them what I have been commanded. With that, I shall have done what He has ordered me to do: to call them to God.' On that day they were forty strong, more or less, including his uncles Abu Talib, al-Hamzah, al-`Abbas, Abu Lahab...

So the attempt was made. After they had drunk and eaten, al Tabari goes on,

The Messenger of God spoke: “O Banu `Abd al-Mutallib, I know of no younger man among the Arabs,

who has brought his people something better than what I am bringing to you [now]. I come to you with the best of this world and of the next. God has commanded me to call you to Him. And so, which of you will help me with this matter, becoming a brother, caretaker and successor to me.”

[`Ali explained, “Everyone recoiled from this. Although I was not their equal to age and still the most bleary-eyed of the lot, I called out: I will, O Prophet of God, I shall be your aid in that. He took me by the nape, declaring, ‘This shalt be my brother, caretaker and successor – among ye all. So hearken and obey (‘The people, he continued, then took to laughing, saying to Abu T-alibi “He orders you to hearken and to obey, your son!”

This narrative makes it clear that the first act of mental preparation for the acceptance of `Ali, as Guardian and Successor, occurred in a private milieu (that of the nearest kinsfolk). It took place alongside the announcement of Muhammad's calling and the declaration of his prophethood.

However, the preparation of the *Ummah* had another aim. Barely was the Qur'an being gradually revealed, certainly far from complete, when 'Ali began fighting alongside the Prophet. Qur'anic verses were thus revealed which praised 'Ali's excellence and virtues – all in the same vein. Based on al-Suyuti's account, Ibn `Asakir has written that “Nothing has been revealed in God's Book on a person as much as on `Ali...”¹

He cited Ibn `Abbas as saying that “About `Ali there are 300 [Qur'anic] verses.”² We shall adduce some of the verses, or ayat (sing., *ayah*), which are noted by more than one person as having been revealed about `Ali. Falling within our purview, they mark the reality of the *Ummah's* preparation and education in this respect.

i) There are these words of God:

“To those who have faith and perform deeds of righteousness the All-Merciful shall bring Love” (Qur'an 19:96 “Maryam”).

According to various chains of transmission (*asanid*), several of those who had memorized the Qur'an stated that these verses were revealed about 'Ali, on the grounds that “there is no Muslim who does not have love for `Ali...”³

It is related that al-Barra' b. `Azib has asserted that the Prophet said to `Ali b. Abi Tahb, “O `Ali, say, ‘Grant me, Lord, Thy keep and, in the hearts of the faithful, Love.’ And so God revealed, ‘Truly, those faithful...’ – which is about `Ali.”⁴

ii) God says: “These two adversaries quarrel over their Lord...” 'Ali is recorded as saying, “On the day of Resurrection, I shall be the first to fall on my knees before the All-Merciful on account of the disputes.” Qay s explains that “About them was revealed ‘These two adversaries quarrel over their Lord...’ they being those who disputed on the Day of Badr: 'Ali, Hamzah, `Ubaydah, Shaybah b. Rabi'ah...”⁵

iii) God says:

“And God turned back the faithless, for all their rage; they availed themselves of naught. God suffices for the faithful in their fight” (Qur'an 33:25 “al-Ahzab”).

More than one authority has related that `Abd Allah b. Mas`ud read `Ali into the phrase “God suffices for the faithful in their fight.”[6](#)

iv) God says:

“O ye who have faith, heed God and be amongst those who are true” (Qur'an 9: 119 “al-Tawbah”).

More than one memorizer and traditionist has related Ibn `Abbas' remark that “that was [a reference] especially to 'Ali b. Abi Talib.”[7](#)

v) God says:

“Those who harm the men and women of faith for no reason are wont to bear with clear calumny and offense” (Qur'an 33:58 “al-Ahzab”).

The view transmitted through various channels is that it has to do with `Ali, as a number of “Hypocrites” used to bring harm to and tell lies about him.[8](#)

Thus established is that these verses were revealed in order to show the position of `Ali, the greatness of his personality, his large role in the life of the Prophet and of the Mission. The faithful needed to be adverted of these realities and to comply with them. This is confirmed by Prophetic *hadiths* that proffer these senses. The Companion Sa`d b. Abi Waqqas declared,

Mu'awiyah ordered me to curse Abu al-Turab. I replied that so long as I can recall the three things said to him by the Prophet, I shall not curse him. For me to possess just one of them would be dearer than the rarest of cattle: the Prophet had made him vicegerent during one of his expeditions. `Ali said, “O Prophet of God, you have left me behind with the children and the women.”

I heard God's Messenger answer, “But you do consent to be related to me in the same station that Aaron was to Moses, save that there shalt be no prophethood after me.”[9](#) I heard him say also on the Day of Khaybar, “Truly, I shall give the standard to a man who loves God and His Messenger, and whom ? d and His Messenger love in return.” We strained toward it then.[10](#) [And the Messenger] said, “Bring `Ali to me!” [With this] his eyes were sore; so he put spittle in, them and handed the standard over to [ `Ali]. God then granted him victory.

Then the following verse was revealed,

If anyone disputes with you over this, now that you have received knowledge, say, “Come, let us call upon all our sons and all your sons, all our women and all your women, ourselves and

yourselves; and humbly make our supplication, invoking God's curse upon all those who lie!"
(Qur'an 3:61 `Al `Umraan").

And the Messenger called on 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn, declaring, "Lord, these are my family!" This is related by Muslim¹¹ and Tirmidhi.¹² In this account given by Sa'd, certain things need to be emphasized:

A) The revelation of the verse called ayat al-mubahalab ("Verse of Imprecation"), mentioned in his account above, concerns `Ali, his wife al-Batul, his two sons Hasan and Husayn.

B) These are, exclusively, all the Members of the Household.¹³ Accordingly, it is understood that they are the ones intended by the ayat *al-tathir* ("Verse of Putification") – namely, where God says:

"And God only wishes to remove all sully from thee, ye Members of the Household, to make thee wholly pure" (Qur'an 33:33 "al-Ahzab")

And in this verse `Ali's inculpability, trustworthiness, eminence – indeed, impeccancy (*ismah*) – become evident.

Thus begins the question of entitlement, since `Ali occupies the rank of Successor, Guardian and the one who was to steer the course of the community. As al-Raghib al-Isfahani said,

None is more eligible to be God's Vicegerent nor apt to complete his worship of God and clear His land than the pure of spirit, from whom all defilement has vanished. Just like the body, the soul has its defilement; although the former can be directly seen, whereas that of the soul is perceived only through insight. No one is equal to the Caliphate who is not pure of spirit because to be Caliph is to emulate God according to what is humanly possible. As for the impure in both word and deed, every– vessel that carries him leaks...¹⁴

It is evident from this that, after lauding `Ali's excellence and virtues, the Qur'an elevates him to a chastened level of absolute "purification," and then to a level that is of the greatest consequence, since it likens his soul to that of the Prophet Muhammad, as is clear from the "Verse of Imprecation." It was on this basis that the Prophet had time and again declared, `Ali is of me and I am of `Ali."¹⁵

When certain persons tried to complain about `Ali, hoping to upset his station and position, the Prophet returned, "What do you want with `Ali?" repeating this three times; and then, "Ali is of me and I am of him."¹⁶ In order to thwart those sceptical of the exalted position accorded to 'Ali by the Prophet to ensure his *waliyyah* ("guardianship") and successorship (*khilafah*) in everything of consequence to the Muslims, God declared:

"Your Guardian [wakiyukum] is God, His Messenger and those faithful who establish regular prayer and regular charity – these are wont to bow down [in worship]" (Qur'an 5:58 "al-Ma'idah").

Al Zamakhshari pointed out that this blessed verse was revealed about `Ali when a beggar gestured the Prophet who, though bent over in prayer, surrendered his ring to him.¹⁷ To remove the ambiguity and to preempt all speculation about what was intended by the term *Waliyy* or was meant to be designated in these texts, the Prophet on more than one occasion stated that “Ali-is of me and I am of 'Ali. And after me, he shall be the Guardian [*wali*] of every believer...”¹⁸

In order to confirm `Ali's Guardianship and momentous role in relation to the Call of Islam, the Prophet stated: “`Ali is of me and I am of `Ali. And no one can carry out my task [that is, in his capacity of messenger and prophet] but myself and `Ali...”¹⁹ This notion was finely established in practice, publicly and in the light of day, in connection with the matter concerning the delivery of “*Surat alBara'ah*,”²⁰ Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal transmits in his *Musnad* from Abu Bakr al-Siddiq. Abd Bakr said that,

the Prophet had sent him with *Surat al Baraa'ah* to the Meccans. He had trecked for three days, when the Prophet told `Ali, “Catch up to him!” `Ali returned Abu Bakr and delivered the *surah* himself. When Abu Bakr arrived before the Messenger, he said, “O Messenger, has anything [unseemly] come to light in me? He answered, “I have seen nothing but goodness from you But I was told that no one but myself or someone of my kin shall ...”²¹

In the *Kashsha*, it is related that after Abu Bakr had travelled part of the way – in order to deliver *Surat al-Bara'ah* – Gabriel descended to say: “O Muhammad, only someone of your kin shall deliver thy Message. So send `Ali.”²²

The Qur'an puts the seal on the vitally important theme of intellectual and moral preparation with this last thing revealed in *ayat al-tabligh* (“Verse of the Delivery”), and again with *ayat al-ikmal* (“Verse of Perfection”), which followed the *haidth* of al-Ghadir. With that, there should be no difficulty.

The story of Ghadir handed down by the transmitters, with some differences, is as follows. When the Prophet returned from his Pilgrimage of Farewell, he received this insistent revelation:

“O Messenger, convey what has been revealed unto thee from thy Lord; if not, ye shall fail to deliver His Message. And God will protect thee from men” (Qur'an, 5:70 “al-Ma'idah”)²³

He halted the caravan at Ghadir Khum, gathering the people at midday in the intense heat to address them.

I am about to be summoned [before my Lord], with which I must comply. I leave thee two weighty things one of which is the rater: God's Book and my progeny and (according to Muslim's account, ²⁴“the members of my household”). Ye behold how you do by them after I am gone! They shall separate not to the day when they will be restored to me at the Basin.

He then uttered, “Truly, God is my Guardian and I am guardian for every believer.” He took `Ali's hand and proclaimed:

The one for whom I have been guardian:²⁵ here is his friend, his guardian. Lord, be the Friend of whomever befriends him, foe to whomever is inimical to him, disappoint the one discontented with him, assist the one who assists him,²⁶ and wherever he roams let Truth roam with him...²⁷

This important event was followed by one more revelation:

“This day have I perfected for you thy religion, completed my favour upon you and countenanced Islam [‘the Submission to God] as your religion...” (Qur’an 5:4 “al-Ma’idah”).

In some reports, the Prophet's statement after receiving revelation or, that memorable day of Ghadir – namely, the 18 Dhu al-Hujjah²⁸ – was: “God is Greater! Praise be to God that religion has been perfected and His Favour completed.

He has countenanced my mission and the Guardianship of `Ali after me.”<sup>29</sup> According to Ahmad's account, “Umar b. al-Khattab met him [i.e. Ali] and, after offering his felicitations, said to him, `You are Guardian to every man and woman of faith, morning and night!”³⁰

What is regrettable is that some people begrudged `Ali for being given such rank and distinction. Some became increasingly clamorous and argumentative when the Prophet singled him out for this honour. The Prophet was, therefore, compelled to remind them that he was a Messenger sent by the Lord of all creation, that he must fulfil what he has been commanded to do –

‘ And he does not speak from whim; it is but a revelation revealed” (Qur’an 53:3-4 “al-Najm”).

This is evidenced by what Tirmidhi reported from Jabir b. `Abd Allah: “The 'Messenger called on `Ali on the Day of Ta'if, and whispered to him in secret. People then said, `His whispering to his uncle's son has lasted long.' The Prophet said, `It was not I who whispered to him, but God...”³¹

Maymun, based on Zayd b. Arqam, related that a number of the Prophet's Companions had doors leading to the place of worship [*masjid*]. One day, the Messenger barred them, with the exception of `Ali's. He spoke about all these persons; rose, praised and extolled God. “Now, I have been commanded to bar all these doors except `Ali's.” About this he declared `But I say to you, I have neither barred nor gfned anything. I have been commanded something and complied...”³²

In this manner, whenever the Prophet used to single `Ali out for distinction, thereby excluding others, he made it clear to the *Ummah* that it was by God's command. It took place when `Ali was dispatched, in place of Abu Bakr, to deliver *Surat al-Bara'ah*; and again on the “Day of Whispering” at Ta'if, on the “Day of Ghadir,” and so on.

What is noteworthy about the most decisive moments in Islamic history and in the life of the Prophet – insofar as they helped safeguard the Islamic experience and its future – is that the Prophet used to send off and to call for `Ali as he did no other person. He used to do this on account of the critical nature of these situations, in order to ward off unexpected dangers.

This occurred during the great Battle of Badr, while `Ali carried the standard and slew some leading personalities among the Idolaters. It was repeated on the Day of Uhud, when he slew Talhah b. `Utbman, the banner bearer of the Idolaters.

Al-Tabari reported that, after 'Ali b. Abi Talib had slain the banner beaters [i.e. the "brigade commanders"], the Prophet caught sight of a group of Idolaters, and asked 'Ali to move against them. So he did, dispersing them all and killing `Amr al Jamhi. Then [the Prophet] noticed [another] group of Idolaters, and told 'Ali to move against them. He dispersed them and killed Shaybah b. Malik. Thence, Gabriel asked: "This, O Prophet, is consolation"; whereupon the Prophet announced, "He is of me and I am of him." And Gabriel said: "And I am of both of you."

Al-Tabari adds that they then heard a rejoicing voice, "No sword is there like Dhu al-Fiqar, no vigorous youth like `Ali."³³

Based on al-Bukhari and Muslim, it is sufficient just to refer to what Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas has reported concerning the Day of Khaybar.³⁴ Al-Tabarani and Ibn Abi Hatim related about Ibn `Abbas that he uttered: "God censured the Companions of God's Messenger in places but spoke of `Ali only well."³⁵

¹. Tar'ikh al-khulafa, p. 171; al-Sawaiq al-muhriqah by Ibn Hajar, p. 127.

². Ibid.

³. Cf. Ibn Na'im al-Isbahani, Ma nazala min al Qur'an fi Ali, compiled by Shaykh al-Mahmudi, p. 130ff.

⁴. al-Haskani, Shawahid al-tanzil I:360-61, First Edition.

⁵. al-Tajj al jami lil-usul IV:181. Also related by al-Bukhari and Muslim in Kitab-al tafsir.

⁶. Ibn Na'im, Ma nazala min al Qur'an fi Ali, ed. Mahmudi, p. 172.

⁷. Abu Na'im, Ma nazala min al Qur'an fi Ali, p. 104. Cf the notes where he relates accounts which have different chains of transmission. See also Ibn Hajar, al-Sawaiq al-muhriqah, p. 152.

⁸. Cf. Tafsir al-kashshaf III:559.

⁹. Hadith al-Manzilah, already cited above. Cf. al-Tajj al jami lil-usul III:332 (recounted also by al-Bukhari, Muslim and al-Tirmidhi).

¹⁰. Cf. Abu Hurayrah's account, where `Umar says, "I have never desired to command as I did that day, I leapt toward it" (al-Tajj al jami lil-usul III:331; recounted by al-Bukhari and Muslim).

¹¹. Sahih Muslim, IV: 1873.

¹². Sahih al-Tirmidhi V:596. Cf. Ibn Hajar, al-Sawaiq al-muhriqah, p. 143; cf. the account al-Tajj al jami lil-usul III:333.

¹³. al-Tajj al jami lil-usul IV:207. Two narrators, al-Tirmidhi and Muslim, relate that `Umar b. Umm Salamah, the Prophet's stepson, had said,

When the verse on "purificatio" (tathir) was revealed in the house of Umm Salamah the Prophet called on Fatimah, Hasan, Husayn and `Ali He then draped them in a shroud, saying: "Lord these are the members of my household. So remove all sully and wholly purify them." Umm. Salamah asked, "Am I not among them, O Prophet, He answered, "Do not change your place, as you are fortunate."

¹⁴. Ibn al-Mufaddal al-Raghib al-Isfahani, al-Dhariah ila makarim al-Shariah, First Edition, edited and annotated by Taha `Abd al-Ra'uf Sad (Cairo: Maktabat al Kulliyah al-Azhariyyah, 1393 AI-1), p. 29. For the meaning of al-`ismah ("impeccancy"), see Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim, al-sul al-`Aammah lil-fiqh al-muqarin, p. 174.

¹⁵. Nasif, al-Tajj al jami lil-usul, III:334; see also al-Suyuti's Tarikh al-khulafa ; p. 169.

¹⁶. Sahih al-Tirmidhi V:594.

¹⁷. Al-Kashshaf I:649, where al-Zamakhshari says in a note on the history of the hadith, "It was recounted by Ibn Abi

Hatim through Salamah b. Kahil, who said, 'He gave me his ring in alms while bent over [in prayer], and it was revealed'" – i.e. the Qur'anic verse; similarly related by Ibn Mardawayh, through Sufyan al-Thawri through Ibn Sunan, through al-Dahhak, through Ibn 'Abbas. Cf. also Asbab al-nuzul, p. 134, where al-Wahidi says it was revealed about `Ali

[18.](#) Sahih al-Tirmidhi, Ch. "Fada'il al-Imam Ali"; cf. al-Tajj al jami lil-usul III:335.

[19.](#) Ibid.

[20.](#) The ninth surat, otherwise called Surat al-Tawbah.

[21.](#) Musnad al-Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal I:3 (Dar nadir); Tafsir al-Kashshaf al-Zamakhshari II:243; also the account given in Sahih al-Tirmidhi V:594.

[22.](#) Al-Kashshaf

[23.](#) Al-Wahidi stated that the verse came down at Ghadir Khum (Asbab al nuzul, p. 135).

[24.](#) Sahih Muslim IV: 1874.

[25.](#) al-Tajj al jami lil-usul, III:333. This is reported by Zay d b. Arqam about the Prophet, and is also found in Sahih al-Tirmidhi (V:591).

[26.](#) Musnad al-Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal, IV:271, 368 (Dar Sadir). Cf, Tafsir Ibn Kathir I:22; "Introduction," Sunan Ibn Majah I, Ch. 11. See also the full and satisfactory investigations in Asanid al-Hadith al-Ghadir by al-Allamah al-Amini; and also Ibn Kathirs al-Bidayah wa al-nihayah VII:360–61, where it is reported through several lines of transmission.

[27.](#) al-Tajj al jami lil-usul III:337. It is separated reported here: "May God have mercy on `Ali. Wherever he roams let Truth roam with him..."

[28.](#) On the report concerning the revelation of the Verse of Ghadir and the fact that it was on 18 Dhu al-Hujjah, see al-Suyuti, al-Ittiqan I:75. Cf. also al-Wahidi, Asbab al nuzul, p. 135.

[29.](#) Mananaqib Amir al-muminin I: 119, by al-Hafiz Muhammad b. Salman al-Kufi alQadi (one of the eminent figures of the third century), edited by al-Shaykh al Mahmudi. Majma` ihya' al-thaqafah al-istamiyyah (Qum, 1412 A H).

[30.](#) Musnad al-Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal IV:281. When `Ali called for witnesses from the crowd, thirty persons attested that they heard this utterance from the Prophet. Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wa al-nihayah VII:360.

[31.](#) Cf. Sahih al-Tirmidhi, p. V:597. See also Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wa al-nihayah VII:369; al-Tajj al jami lil-usul , III:336.

[32.](#) Musnad al-Imam Ahmad IV:369; cf. Ta'rikh Ibn Kathir VII:355.

[33.](#) Ta'rikh al-Tabari II:25, 65–6 (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-`ilmiyyah).

[34.](#) Sa`d's account as given by al-Bukhari and Muslim – see ns. 54 and 55 .

[35.](#) Al-Suyuti, Ta'rikh al-khulafa; p. 171.

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