

The Third Discussion: Affirmation Represents Choice and Designation

The third hypothetical path is that of affirmation, representing the preparation and investiture of whomever will lead the *Ummah*. This is the only path in keeping with the natural order of things. It is especially reasonable in light of the conditions surrounding the Islamic Call, the people promoting it and the Prophet's own conduct.^{[1](#)}

The third option, then, is that the Prophet had adopted an affirmative stance toward the future of the mission after his death, selecting at God's behest a person for candidate whose presence was intrinsic to the Islamic Mission. Consequently, he would have to prepare this person for an apostolic mission^{[2](#)} and special leadership, so that intellectual authority and political guidance of the experiment may be vested in him...

The purpose was to continue building, after the Prophet's departure, the leadership of the community and its doctrinal edifice, supported by a vigilant popular base composed of *Muhajirin* and *Ansar*. Further, it was to permit the community to draw ever closer to a level qualifying it to shoulder the responsibilities of leadership.

Hence, it appears that this path is the only one likely to secure a healthy future for the Mission and to protect the experiment as it grows.^{[3](#)} Certain widely and continuously-reported traditions about the Prophet indicate that he endeavoured to provide special apostolic preparation and doctrinal instruction to one person working for the Islamic Call; this, at a level suited for intellectual and political authority. To this person he entrusted intellectual and political leadership as well as the future of the Call of the *Ummah* after him.^{[4](#)} This illustrates that the Prophet as leader acted in accordance with the third path, as beckoned to and imposed by the very nature of the circumstances we saw above.

The only propagator of Islam designated for such apostolic preparation, to be handed over the future of the Islamic Call and set up as intellectual and political leader, was 'Ali b. Abi Talib. The Prophet nominated him for this task insofar as his presence was an intrinsic part of the Islamic Mission. He was

the foremost Muslim and fighter for its cause all during the tenacious struggle against its foes. This is not to mention his place in the life of the Prophet himself. For he was a foster son to him, opening his eyes for the first time in the Prophet's lap. He grew up in his care, and had ample opportunity to interact with him and to follow in his footsteps, certainly more than any other human being did.[5](#)

There is a brimful of evidence from the lives of both the Prophet and Imam `Ali that the former had been providing Ali with special apostolic training. The Prophet used to single him out for the concepts and truths he transmitted concerning the Call of Islam. For instance, whenever `Ali exhausted his line of questioning with the Prophet, the latter would anticipate him, thereby contributing further to the cultivation of his mind.[6](#) They would spend long hours, day and night, in private. The Prophet opened `Ali's mind to the ideas of the Mission; he taught him about the problems to be encountered along the way and the practical approach adopted until the last day of his noble life.

In his *al-Mustadrak*, al-Hakim relates the words of Abu Ishaq: "I asked al Qasim b. al-`Abbas, `How is it that `Ali is the heir of the Messenger of God?' He replied, Because among us he is the first to reach him and the closest in clinging to him..."[7](#)

In *Hilyat al-Awliya'* Ibn `Abbas' asserted that "We used to discuss how the Prophet had sworn `Ali in with seventy oaths, which he would never have asked of anyone else."[8](#)

In *al-Khasa'is*, al-Nassa'i relates that Imam `Ali had stated, "I had a status with the Prophet that no other person possessed. I used to call on the Prophet of God every night. If he was praying, he would finish off with praises to God. When not praying, he would admit me in."[9](#)

It is also related that Imam `Ali had said, "My visitations to the Prophet were of two kinds: one by night and another by day..."[10](#) And al Nassa'i recounts that he used to say, "Whenever I questioned the Prophet he obliged; when I remained silent he anticipated me..."[11](#) This is also related by al-Hakim in his *al-Mustadrak*, with a note on its soundness, based on two famous authorities, or *shaykhayn* [12](#) al Bukhari and Muslim. Al-Nassa'i says that Umm Salamah declared the following:

About the one to whom Umm Salamah has sworn allegiance: "Of all people `Ali is closest to God's Messenger ...On the very morning that Gods Messenger was to die, [the Messenger] sent for 'Ali. I believe he had dispatched him for something. Then he asked thrice: Has `Ali arrived yet? The latter returned before sunrise. When he came back we knew that [the Messenger] was in some need of him. So we left the house. And that same day we were with the Messenger at A'ishah's house, which I was the last to leave, sitting behind the door, very near to them. `Ali was leaning over him. He was the last person with him, as far as we know. The Messenger took him in confidence and imparted his secrets."[13](#)

In his famous Qasi`ah Sermon, Imam `Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, described his unique relationship with the Prophet and the meticulous preparation and moral education he enjoyed:

You well know my place of close kinship and special standing with God's Messenger. He put me in his

lap when I was a child, embraced me close to his heart, offered me shelter at his berth. And there, admitted into physical contact with him, I scented his fragrance.

He chewed the food bits to feed me. Never did he find in me a mendacious word nor a patterer's deed. I used to follow him as the weaned young camel does its mother's trail. And every day he would bring up some new teaching in morals, admonishing me to emulate him. Every year he retired to [the Cave of] *Hira'*, where I alone would see him. No single roof then had joined God's Messenger and Khadijah in Islam but that I was its third member.

I witnessed the light of the revelation and the message, and inhaled the scent of prophethood.¹⁴ These and other testimonies give us a picture of the kind of special apostolic preparation that the Prophet was accustomed to giving Imam `Ali as instruction for leadership in the Mission of Islam. There are a great many records about Imam `Ali's life after the death of the Prophet which reveal the special training for leadership whose effects were duly reflected in him.

The Imam excelled, indeed was an authority, in resolving difficult problems for the leaders who governed at the time.¹⁵ But there is not a single occasion known from the Caliphate period when Imam Ali consulted another, either for an opinion in Islam or for a way to rectify a situation. On the other hand, we know of tens of instances in which those leaders felt the need to refer to Imam `Ali, despite certain wariness.

But if there is abundant evidence that the Prophet had been giving special training to the Imam in order to continue the leadership of the Mission after he was gone, the evidence is no less great that the Prophet as leader of the *Ummah* had made known his plan; and that intellectual and political leadership over the Mission was transferred by him to Imam 'Ali. This is observable in the *hadiths* of "al-Dar,"¹⁶ 'al-Thaqalayn' ("the Two Weighty Things"),¹⁷ "al-Manzilah,"¹⁸ al"Ghadir"¹⁹, indeed, of tens of other Prophetic traditions."²⁰

Within the framework of the Islamic Call, Shi'ism is thus embodied in the thesis postulated by the Prophet – at God's behest – aimed at securing the future of the Mission. Accordingly, it is not a phenomenon that was foreign to this stage of events, but a necessary result. It was natural to the Call's genesis, exigencies and initial circumstances, which drove Islam to give birth to "Shi-`ism."

More particularly, it required of the first leader that he prepare the second leader for the experiment²¹ through whose hands and those of his successors this experiment will continue to develop in a revolutionary sense. Only then could it draw closer to its goal of change: tearing out every root and vestige of the pre-Islamic past and constructing a new community in accordance with the exigencies of the Call and its responsibilities.

¹. No doubt, after excluding the two previous suppositions, only this one remains logically acceptable.

². See our explanation in the Appendix about this selection and the whole (intellectual, practical and moral) enterprise of apostolic training.

- [3.](#) Because, as the texts make explicit, the training of the Caliph who happens to lead would be complete and the person actually designated.
- [4.](#) Cf the texts copied in our Appendix concerning our Sunni brethren.
- [5.](#) See Imam `Ali's address known as "al-Qas'iah," as mentioned in the Appendix. Cf. Nahj al-balaghah pp. 300-01, edited by Dr. Subhi al-Salih.
- [6.](#) It is held that Imam `All had said, "Whenever I questioned him – that is, the Prophet – he would oblige. But when I remained silent, he anticipated me..." (al-Nassa'i, al-Sunan al-kubra V: 142; al-Sawa'iq al-muharraqah), p. 127.
- [7.](#) Al-Hakim al-Nisaburi, al-Mustadrak ala al-sahihayn, III: 136, hadith No. 4633 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah).
- [8.](#) Abi Na'im, Hilyat al-awliya' I: 68 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1407 AH).
- [9.](#) Al-Sunan al-kubra, "al-Khasais" V: 140, bath No. I/8499.
- [10.](#) Al-Sunan al-kubra, "al-Khasais" V: 140, bath No. I/8499.
- [11.](#) Ibid. V: 141.
- [12.](#) Al-Mustadrak III: 135, hadith No. 4630, ed. Mustafa `Abd al-Qadir `Ata' (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1411 AH).
- [13.](#) Al-Nasaa'i, al-Sunan al-kubra V: 154, Ch. 54. Cf the story in Mukhtasar Ta'rikh Ibn 'Asakir XVIII: 21.
- [14.](#) Nahj al-balaghah, ed. Dr. Subhi al-Salih, Sermon No. 192.
- [15.](#) See Appendix; cf. al-Suyuti, Tarikh al-khulafa ; pp. 180-82. As `Umar b. al-Khattab said, "God forbid that there be as problem and no Abu al-Hasan to solve it." Ibn Hajar, al-Sawa'iq al-muhriqah, p. 127.
- [16.](#) Hadith al-Dar upon the revelation of these words of the Qur'an: "Warn thy closest kinsfolk" (Qur'an 26:214, "Surat al-Ushara"). Cf. Tafsir al-Kabir III: 371 (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah).
- [17.](#) Hadith al-thaqalayn is provided by the compilers of siyah, sunan and masanid. Cf. Sahih Muslim IV: 1873; Sahih al-Tirmidhi V: 596, edited by Kamal al-Hut (Dar al-Fikr).
- [18.](#) Hadith al-Manzilah: "You have the position with respect to me that Harun had with Musa..." (Sahih al-Bukhari V: 81, Ch. 39).
- [19.](#) For hadith al-Ghadir see Sunan Ibn Majjah, Introduction, Ch. 11 143; Musnad al Imam Ahmad IV: 281 (Beirut: Dar Sadir).
- [20.](#) For elaboration on this theme, see the Appendix.
- [21.](#) For the second Caliph's words to the consultative members, see Mukhtasar Ta'rikh Ibn Asakir XVIII: 35.

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