

Wilayat and Its Scope

1. What is Wilayat?

"*Wilayat*," derived from *wila'*, means power, authority or a right of certain kind. In Shi'a theology, "*wilayat*" is the authority invested in the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt as representatives of Almighty Allah on this earth.

According to the late Murtaza Mutahhari, *wilayat* has four dimensions:

The right of love and devotion (*wila'-e muhabbat*): This right places the Muslims under the obligation of loving the Ahlul Bayt.

The authority in spiritual guidance (*wila'-e imamat*): This reflects the power and authority of the Ahlul Bayt in guiding their followers in spiritual matters.

The authority in socio-political guidance (*wila'-e zi'amat*): This dimension of *wilayat* reflects the right that the Ahlul Bayt have to lead the Muslims in social and political aspects of life.

The authority of the universal nature (*wila'-e tasarruf*): This dimension reflects universal power over the entire universe that the Prophet and Ahlul Bayt have been vested with by the grace of Almighty Allah. [1](#)

Using this division of *wilayat*'s dimensions, I would like to point out the areas of agreement and disagreement among the various Muslim groups.

The First Dimension: The Right of Love

All Muslims unanimously accept the first dimension of *wilayat* of Ahlul Bayt. Loving the Ahlul Bayt is one of the "*dharuriyyat ad-din*, the essential parts of the Islamic faith." The inclusion of *salawat*[2](#) in the daily ritual prayers is a sufficient proof of this. See the famous anti-Shi'a books like *as-Sawa'iqu l-Muhriqa* of Ibn Hajar al-Makki and *Tuhfa-e Ithna-'Ashariyya* of Shah 'Abdul 'Aziz Dehlawi, and you will realize that the Sunni polemicists labour painfully to explain that they are against the Shi'a people but not against the Shi'a Imams for they know that loving the Ahlul Bayt is an essential part of Islamic faith.

Love for the Ahlul Bayt is enshrined in verse 42:23 that we have already discussed in the last chapter. Here I shall just quote one more hadith from the Sunni sources. Imam 'Ali said, "By Allah the One who has spilt the grain and created the soul, verily the Prophet (a.s.) has promised that none shall love me but the believer and none shall hate me but the hypocrite."³ Actually Jabir bin 'Abdullah al-Ansari and Abu Sa'id al-Khudari, the two famous companions of the Prophet, used to say: "We did not identify the hypocrites but by their hatred for 'Ali."⁴

It is a common view of Shi'a scholars that whoever rejects one of the *dharuriyyat ad-din*, then he is no longer considered a member of the Islamic faith.⁵ It is also based on this principle that the Khawarij and the Nawasib (i.e., those who express hatred or enmity towards the Ahlul Bayt) are considered as non-Muslims by Shi'a jurists.⁶

The Second Dimension: The Spiritual Guidance

The second dimension of the *wilayat* is a commonly held belief of the Shi'as as well as majority of the Sunnis who belong to Sufi orders. Nothing reflects this more than the interpretation given by Maulawi Salamat 'Ali, a Sunni scholar of India, to the hadith of Ghadir. He writes in *at-Tabsira*, "The Ahlu 's-Sunnah do not doubt the Imamate of Amiru 'l-Mu'minin ['Ali]; and that is indeed the essence of faith. It is, however, necessary that the import of the ahadith of Ghadir be the spiritual Imamate and not [the political] khilafat. This is the meaning derived from the statements of the Ahlu 's-Sunnah and the scholars of Sufism, and, consequently, the allegiance of all the [Sufi] orders reach Amiru 'l-Mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib and through him they are connected to the Messenger."⁷

Other than the Naqshbandi order, all Sufis trace the chain of their spiritual masters back to the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt, ending with Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib as the spiritual authority *par excellence* after the Prophet.⁸ The Naqshbandi order traces its spiritual leadership back to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq and then follows the line through his mother to Muhammad bin Abi Bakr and then to Abu Bakr. This diversion from Imam as-Sadiq to Abu Bakr is, however, not valid because Muhammad bin Abi Bakr was raised from a very young age by Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib who married Muhammad's mother, Asma' bint Umayy, after Abu Bakr's death. The only spiritual master that Muhammad bin Abi Bakr knew was Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.).

The Third & Fourth Dimensions: Socio-Political & Universal Authority

The third and fourth dimensions of *wilayat* are unique Shi'i beliefs, and they are considered as part of the "*dharuriyyat al-madhhab*, the essential parts of Shi'a sect." It is the common view of our scholars that anyone who rejects one of the *dharuriyyat al-madhhab*, is not considered a member of the Shi'a sect.

| THE STATUS OF AHLUL BAYT AMONG MUSLIMS | | | |
|--|--------|-------|--------|
| | Sunnis | Sufis | Shi'as |
| Love of Ahlul Bayt | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Spiritual Guidance of the Ahlul Bayt | ✗ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Political Leadership of the Ahlul Bayt | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |
| Universal Authority of the Ahlul Bayt | ✗ | ✗ | ✓ |

It is important to note that whenever the Shi'as use the term "Imamate" or "Imam", it encompasses all the four dimensions of *wilayat*. It excludes neither the spiritual and universal authority nor the social and political leadership.⁹ In this sense, the Shi'i term "Imamate" or "Imam" is more comprehensive than the Sunni term "khilafat" or "khalifa".

In books dealing with the Shi'a–Sunni debate of the leadership after the Prophet, the focus is more on the socio–political leadership but not in the sense of denying the spiritual and universal authority of the Imam. So while reading or discussing the issue of succession of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.), one should not lose the universal import of the status of an Imam from the Shi'a point of view.

2. The Universal Wilayat

It seems necessary to explain the fourth dimension of the *wilayat* in more detail for the benefit of the readers.

The fourth dimension is the universal authority that the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt have been vested with by the Almighty Allah. It is an authority that makes it possible for the *wali* to exercise his power over everything that exists. In the words of Ayatullah al–Khumayni, "It is a vicegerency pertaining to the whole of creation, by virtue of which all the atoms in the universe humble themselves before the holder of authority."¹⁰

This authority of the chosen servants of Allah is totally dependent on His discretion and power. It should not be seen in the horizontal form but in the vertical form vis-à-vis the power of Almighty Allah. As long as we maintain the vertical hierarchy of the power, we have safeguarded the *tawhid* (unity and oneness) of Allah.

For example, all Muslims believe that it is Allah who gives life and death to the people. The Qur'an itself says,

"Allah takes the souls at the time of their death." (39:42)

But at the same time, the Qur'an also attributes death to the angels by saying,

"Say: It is the angel of death (who is given charge of you) who shall cause you to die." (32:11)

If you place the imports of these two verses side-by-side (i.e., horizontal form), then you are guilty of *shirk*, polytheism; but if you place them in the vertical form (with the power of the angels beneath and dependent upon the power of Allah), then you have safeguarded the *tawhid*.

Similarly, if we place the power and authority of the Prophets and the Imams in the vertical form (with the conviction that their power is beneath and dependent upon the power of Allah), then we have safeguarded the *tawhid* as well as the status of the chosen servants of Allah.

The Qur'an gives various examples of the persons who had been given the authority on the universe.

1. Describing the powers that Allah, *subhanahu wa ta'ala*, had given to Prophet 'Isa bin Maryam (a.s.), the Qur'an quotes him as follows:

"I make out of the clay the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a [real, living, flying] bird with Allah's permission;

I heal the blind and the leprous;

and I bring the dead back to life with Allah's permission;

and I inform you of what you are eating and what you store in your houses..." (3:48)

2. Describing the powers given to Prophet Sulayman, the Qur'an says:

"Then We made the wind subservient to him; it blew by his command gently to wherever he desired.

And (We also made subservient to him) the jinn: each (of them as) builder and diver, and others fettered in chains.

This is Our gift, therefore give freely or withhold, without reckoning. Most surely he had a nearness to Us and an excellent resort." (38:36-40) also (21:81-82)

3. Describing the power of Asif bin Barkhiya, the vizier of Prophet Sulayman, the Qur'an describes the scene of the moments before the Queen of Sheba and her entourage came to visit him:

"He (Sulayman) said, 'O Chiefs! which one of you can bring to me her (i.e., Queen of Sheba's) throne before they come to me in submission.'

One audacious among the jinn said, 'I will bring it to you before you rise from your place; and most surely I am strong and trustworthy for it.'

(But) one who had the knowledge of some of the Book said, 'I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.' Then when he saw it (i.e., the throne) settled beside him, he said, 'This is the grace of my Lord that He may try me whether I am grateful or ungrateful...'" (27:38–40)

In these three examples from the Qur'an, we see that Almighty Allah had blessed some of his chosen servants with the power to breathe life to a shape of an animal, to bring the dead back to life, to cure the blind and the leprosy, to subjugate the jinn for their work, to bring an item from far away in the twinkling of an eye, etc. These examples are sufficient to show that such powers can be given and have been given by Allah to those whom He likes. It is this power that is referred to in Shi'a theology as "*al-wilayah at-takwiniyya* – the power over the universe or the universal authority."

Allah has given various ranks to the prophets and messengers (2:253 ; (17:55) , and all Muslims are unanimous in believing that the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad al-Mustafa, is higher in rank than all the prophets and messengers. [11](#) All prophets and messengers had come to prepare their societies for the acceptance of the final and universal Messenger of God, Muhammad (s.a.w.). If prophets like Sulayman, Dawud, 'Isa, and Musa, and also Sulayman's vizier, Asif, were blessed with powers over the nature, then it follows by necessity that Prophet Muhammad must have been blessed with greater power over the universe. Two examples have been clearly mentioned in the Qur'an. The ability of the Prophet of Islam to travel into space and beyond with his human body (17:1 ; 53:5–18), and the parting of the moon by pointing towards it with his finger (54:1). [12](#)

Imam 'Ali and the other Imams of Ahlul Bayt are believed by the Shi'as to be higher in rank than all prophets and messengers except the Prophet of Islam (s.a.w.). [13](#) It follows as a necessity that they also have the powers that the Prophet had been blessed with by Almighty Allah.

At this point, I will only refer to one verse from the holy Qur'an on this issue. During the early days in Mecca, when the idol worshippers were rejecting the claim of the Prophet, Allah revealed a verse to console him by saying:

"And those who disbelieve say, 'You are not a messenger.' Say, 'Allah is sufficient as a witness (between me and you) and the one who has knowledge of the Book.'" (13:43)

Prophet Muhammad is being consoled that it doesn't matter if the idolaters do not believe in your claim; it is sufficient that Allah and 'the one who has knowledge of the Book' are witnesses to the truth of your claim. Whom is Allah referring to as a witness to the truth of the Prophet's claim? Who is this person 'who has knowledge of the Book'? According to Shi'i reports, supported by Sunni sources, it refers to 'Ali bin Abi Talib. [14](#) There was definitely no one among the companions of the Prophet who could claim that he had more knowledge about Islam than 'Ali bin Abi Talib.

How does the description "having knowledge of the Book" prove the universal authority for 'Ali? If you recall, Asif Barkhiya, Sulayman's vizier, had so much power over nature that he could bring the throne of the Queen of Sheba before the "twinkling of an eye". Asif has been described as someone who had "ilmun *min* al-kitab – knowledge of a *portion* of the Book," not "the knowledge of the entire Book." In comparison to this, Imam 'Ali has been described by Allah as someone who had "*ilmu l-kitab* – knowledge of the Book," not just a portion of the Book. Therefore, it is not difficult to conclude that the power of Imam 'Ali over nature must be many degrees greater than that of Asif Barkhiya who brought the throne from far away before the "twinkling of an eye".

Again, as an important reminder, I must state that this belief is to be held in the vertical form vis-à-vis the power of Almighty Allah, and only in that format can we preserve the concept of *tawhid* in which Allah is the Absolute Power and source of all power. It is to remind us of the total dependency of the chosen ones upon Allah's will and power that He commands the Prophet to say,

"I do not control any benefit or harm for myself except as Allah pleases." (7:188)

This is not a denial of having power; it is affirmation of the belief that whatever power he has is according to the wish and pleasure of Almighty Allah.

3. Wilayat: Spiritual vs Political

The learned scholar's article in the *Bio-Ethics Encyclopaedia* (in which he wrote that the Prophet Muhammad "had left no explicit instruction regarding succession to his religious-political authority") generated heated discussion among the community. The responses that the learned scholar wrote to the community and the comments he subsequently made in the majlises of Muharram 1419 at Toronto, portray the confusion about the concept of *wilayat*.

(a) "Spiritual Only, Not Political"

First the learned scholar claimed that the *wilayat* of the Prophet and the Imams was only spiritual and not political. He said:

"By the way, the Prophet (s.a.w.) was never recognized as the political leader. No, that is not correct at all. He was recognized as Rasulullah, the envoy of God, the Messenger of Allah (s.t.). There was no politics, there was no political language attached to it. It isn't that what the moderns are telling us; the way Iran is telling us time and again that the Prophet was a political leader. No. He was recognized fundamentally and essentially as a prophet of God. [15](#)

"Task of prophethood was to lead the society to perfection. And that perfection could not be done individually – it had to be done as members of the community, the ummah. Ummah means a community under the Prophet as prophet, not a political leader.

"Now we know why '*man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu*' meant something very very important. The Prophet (s.a.w.) could have said, '*man kuntu khalifa fa hadha khalifa*'. He could have said, '*man kuntu hakim fa hadha hakim*.' He is not using any of the terminology that we would use in the normal political sense of carrying on the authority of the political leader...

"Look at the word chosen by Allah (s.t.) for guidance. After all the Prophet is '*ma yantiqun anil hawaa in huwa illa wahyun yuhaa*.' He is given instructions. '*Mawla*': what does the word 'mawla' mean? Allah (s.t.) says in the Qur'an '*wal kafirun laysa lahum mawla*.' The disbeliever has no *mawla*. They don't have a *mawla* – they don't have a protector, they don't have a patron, they don't have somebody who cares for them. This is the meaning of *mawla*..."¹⁶

The learned scholar says that *nubuwwat* did not include political leadership, and that the word *mawla* used by the Prophet in Ghadir did not mean *khalifa* (political successor) or *hakim* (ruler). In other words, he is excluding the third dimension of wilayat from the term "mawla" and restricting it to the second dimension (i.e., spiritual guidance).

In his attempt to convince his audience, he makes up hypothetical and grammatically incorrect Arabic sentences which make no sense. For example, the sentence "*man kuntu [lahu] khalifa fa hadha [lahu] khalifa* – for whomsoever I am his successor, this is his successor." Was the Prophet "*khalifa*-successor" of any one from the audience? Of course, not; and that is why he did not use the term "khalifa" in the hadith of Ghadir.

As discussed in one of the previous chapters, to understand the meaning of "*mawla*" as used by the Prophet for Imam 'Ali, one does not have to go far. Just ponder upon the question he asked the Muslims before presenting 'Ali as their "*mawla*": he asked them, "Do I not have more authority over you than you have over yourselves? *A lastu awla bi kum min anfusi kum?*"¹⁷ When they replied by saying, "Certainly, O Messenger of Allah," then he said, "*Man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu* – Of whomsoever I am the master, this 'Ali is his master." Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) is surely talking about a master who has more authority (*awla*) over the people than they have over themselves, and that includes authority in political matters also. And, therefore, there was no need for the Prophet to say, '*Man kuntu [alayhi] hakim, fa hadha [alayhi] hakim*.'

The learned scholar continues his talk:

"The Prophet (s.a.w.) when he introduces Imam 'Ali's authority in the community, what does he say? '*Man kuntu mawlahu fa hadha 'Aliyun mawlahu*.' What he means is that 'whoever regards me as a perfect example to be followed to the ultimate goal of salvation, 'Ali is the man who should be followed.' The question was of obedience. *Mawla*, one who should be obeyed, one who should not be disregarded. In that sense, Allah is *Mawla*. Allah is the *Mawla* of *deen*, that path on which you cannot afford to disobey Allah (s.w.t.)..."¹⁸

Is this following and obedience restricted to spiritual matters and does it not include social-political

issues?

The Hadith of 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud

In order to prove his point that the declaration of Ghadir was not explicit enough to convey the meaning of "khilafat" in the sense of political succession, the learned scholar says:

"The Prophet never forced. After he returned to Medina from Ghadir; one night he was home with 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud. He tells 'Abdullah that the messenger has come and wants me to go; that I have received the news of my death. 'Abdullah says, *by the way this is after Ghadir*, 'Appoint a successor.' Yes, this exactly what he said. 'Why don't you appoint Abu Bakr?' The Prophet shakes his head and says, no.

He mentions one after the other. (I don't know about the value of this hadith; Shaykh Mufid mentions it and I am mentioning it on the authority of Shaykh Mufid. I am not here to examine and judge how authentic is the hadith. But I am telling you it reflects the situation in the community. If it is authentic, it reflects the situation in the community... [19](#))

'Abdullah's hadith goes; and the Prophet is asking, 'What shall I do?' 'Abdullah says, 'Why don't you appoint 'Umar; why don't you appoint 'Uthman?' And finally, 'Abdullah says, 'Why don't you appoint 'Ali?' And the Prophet says, and he is weak by this time, 'O I wish, they would obey. I wish they would obey.'" [20](#)

First, this conversation between the Prophet and 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud did not take place in Medina after the declaration of Ghadir as the learned scholar wants the audience to believe ("by the way, this is after Ghadir"). In the beginning of his narration, 'Abdullah says, "We went out with the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w.) the night of the delegation of jinn until we [reached and] stayed at 'Ula." 'Ula is a place where the Prophet had stopped on his way to Tabuk. [21](#)

Secondly, the event related to the delegation of jinn occurred when the Prophet was on his way to Tabuk in the year 9 A.H. [22](#) And the event of Ghadir Khumm took place in 10 A.H.

Thirdly, according to the methodology of the Western scholars, would not the sequence in the names suggested by 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud itself be an indication that this 'hadith' was a later fabrication? Why is the Western scholarship so quick in rejecting the ahadith quoted by the Shi'as that have the names of the Imams in proper sequence but not treat such hadith of the Sunnis with equal scepticism? I know an easy response will be that "I said that 'I don't know the value of the hadith..." My only question is: Why confuse the people and create doubt in the explicitness of the Prophet's declaration in Ghadir by quoting such a hadith irresponsibly?

Then on such a flimsy basis, the learned scholar concludes by saying:

"So apparently, *there was a big question of the religious role that the Prophet (s.a.w.) was playing in the*

community. The community saw itself organized under the leadership of the Prophet (s.a.w.). When he was gone, someone had to replace him in the same position—in the same authority. And this is where today we are *still* searching for the interpretation."

Al-hamdu lil lah, the true followers of the Prophet understood the real interpretation in Ghadir Khumm itself; and may Almighty Allah help those who are still searching for the true interpretation of the term "*mawla*" and the status of "*wali-ul-lah*".

The Meaning of "Imamate"

In the same speech, the learned scholar further explains the meaning of Imamate by saying:

"The belief system says anybody who had any right to claim obedience after the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) is 'Ali bin Abi Talib. That is the meaning of Imamate; it is nothing more than that. You open any book of *kalam*, you will find theologians describing Imam 'Ali as having the right to become *muta'*, obeyed, one should be obeyed by the people. Why should he be obeyed? Because he is exactly sitting in the place of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)..."

"Imam 'Ali was the Imam from the day the Prophet Muhammad closed his eyes. Regardless whether he became a khalifa or not. How can he become an Imam without becoming a khalifa, without sitting on the throne? That was not the requirement. Because the obedience was to the position of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)."

In order to defend his writing in the *Bio Ethics Encyclopaedia*, the learned scholar has divided "imamate" and "khilafat" into two different realms: "imamate" becomes a spiritual position while "khilafat" becomes a political position. He says, "Imamate is nothing more than that", and even boldly asks the audience to "open any book of *kalam* [theology]..."

Well, we opened the books of *kalam* from different eras and found the statement of the learned scholar to be against the mainstream Shi'a belief on the meaning and scope of "imamate".

Shaykh Mufid (d. 413 A.H./1022 C.E.) defines an "Imam" as follows: "The Imam is the person who has the comprehensive leadership in religious **as well as worldly matters** as the successor of the Prophet (a.s.)."[23](#)

'Allama Hilli (d. 726 A.H./1325 C.E.) defines "Imamate" as follows: "The Imamate is a **universal authority** (*riyasa*) in the things of religion and **of the world** belonging to some person and derived from (*niyaba*) the Prophet."[24](#)

'Abdu'r-Razzaq Lahiji (d. 1072 A.H.) defines "Imamate" as follows: "Know that Imamate is an authority over all those who are of legal age in **worldly** as well as religious matter based on successorship of the Prophet."[25](#)

'Allamah Tabataba'i (d. 1401 A.H. / 1981) writes, "Thus the imamate and religious leadership in Islam may be studied from three different perspectives: from the perspective of Islamic government, of Islamic sciences and injunctions, and of leadership and innovative guidance in the spiritual life. Shi'ism believes that since Islamic society is in dire need of guidance in each of these three aspects, the person who occupies the function of giving that guidance and is the leader of the community in these areas of religious concern must be appointed by God and the Prophet."²⁶ Even Murtaza Mutahhari states that when the Shi'as use the term "Imam", it does not only reflect the spiritual guidance and leadership, it includes the social and political leadership also.²⁷

As you can see, all these theologians and prominent scholars of the Shi'a faith unanimously define Imamate as a position that combines the spiritual/religious leadership as well as the socio-political/wordly leadership. For a Shi'a, 'Ali is the first Imam as well as the first khalifa of the Prophet. A Shi'a would never say that 'Ali is the first Imam but not the *khalifa bila fasl* (immediate successor) of the Prophet. The difference between Shi'as and the Sunnis is not about the spiritual leadership; it is on the socio-political leadership *immediately after* the Prophet. As mentioned earlier, the view that the Ahlul Bayt were "spiritual guides only but not political leaders" is a belief found among the Sunnis in general and the Sufis in particular.²⁸

(b) "Political Also"

Then in the 6th speech of Muharram 1419, the learned scholar, in a way, contradicts his above statement. He says:

"...The fact remains that the Qur'an conceived the Prophet to be the leader of an *ummah*, an *ummah* that was religious, social and political. In other words, it was civil, moral community that was being guided by a person, who had some kind of comprehensive authority, which was not conceivable at that time even, by the Arab tribes. That was also the difficulty during Ghadir.

When Ghadir happened, one of the challenging dimensions of Ghadir was an introduction of the Qur'anic concept of leadership. *Wilayah* means that kind of leadership, which combines the civil and moral authority in one person. That means there is no separation of power. This is no church and state as such, rather the civil and moral authority combines in the person who holds the office of the wilayah. What was new about it?

The new thing about it was this that in the Arab culture, the Arabs were never used to see a young person assuming the leadership. In Arab culture it was impossible for a thirty year old young man to become a leader because the Arabs believed that an older person has to become a leader..."²⁹

Again in the 8th speech, the learned scholar says:

"The whole question is 'Is Islam a political system or it's a religious system?' There are two opinions about it. Many scholars are fighting the battle, including Ayatullah Khui, Ayatullah Mutahhari, Ayatullah

Khumayni, in Egypt, al-Ashmaawi, al-Jaabiri in Morocco...For me there is a very important issue involved here. If we say that Islam is not a political system, and Islam is simply a religion that is concerned with moving humanity towards self-perfection and prepare humanity for the hereafter, then we are denying a very major role played by the Prophet in the establishment of the *ummah* itself...

"Nine-tenth of Islam is *mu'amalat*, how you deal with each other, how you conduct your affairs in this world because whatever you do in this world has an implication for the aakhirat. Now in that kind of religion, to say that Islam is simply a religion without any social system is to deny the fact of *wilayah*.

By the way, if you remember my lecture on the fifth night because *wilayah* means moral, civil authority that can lead you to your ultimate goal of creation, and 'ultimate goal of creation' is not only knowing what is five times a day prayers, fasting, but knowing how to live as human beings in a society.

Otherwise there would not be civil authority, the Prophet could just be what we call *an-nabi ar-ruhi*..."³⁰

This is indeed true. Why then did the learned scholar say in the 2nd speech, "The Prophet was never recognized as the political leader"? It is good that he made it clear that the Prophet was not only a religious leader, he was also a political leader. After WWI, there was an intense debate in Egypt on Westernization versus Islam, and some intellectuals, influenced by Western ideas, tried to secularize Islam by restricting khilafat to spiritual issues and separating it from the ummah's political system. 'Ali 'Abdu 'r-Raziq wrote *al-Islam wa Usulu 'l-Hukm* (1925) proposing the complete separation of religion and state in Islam.³¹ Similar ideas are resurfacing lately in the writings of some Muslim intellectuals influenced by the liberal/secular ideas of the West.

4. Do Najaf & Qum Have Different Views on The Role of the Imams?

Then in the 9th speech, the learned scholar again dwells upon the spiritual vs political role of the Prophet and the Imams. And now surprisingly he claims that even great scholars of Qum and Najaf have different views. He says:

"...Najaf and Qum are divided on the whole debate about the Prophet's political role. Najaf as one of the most important centres of Shi'a learning, and Qum, now the most important centre of Shi'a learning have maintained two different views about the role of the Imam...Najaf has maintained a conservative attitude to the role of the Imam.

They believe that religion has a moral function, an ethical function but not a political one, including Ayatullah Khui, whose opinions are well stated. He does not believe that the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) has any need for manifesting itself politically because the Imam remains the Imam as a spiritual, moral, ethical leader regardless whether people pay allegiance to him or not. That opinion was for the first time contested by Ayatullah Khumayni himself."³²

The learned scholar wants to leave the impression in the minds of his listeners that even the *'ulama* of Qum and Najaf had different opinions concerning the role of the Imam in the sense that Najaf confines it to a spiritual realm whereas Qum expands it to encompass a political sphere as well.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The Shi'a *'ulama*' of Najaf (exemplified by the late al-Khu'i) and Qum (exemplified by the late al-Khumayni) have identical views about the *wilayat* of the Prophet and the Imams. The difference between them is not about the *wilayat* of the Imams, it is about the extent of the *wilayat-e faqih*, the authority of a jurist. Moreover, on the issue of *wilayat-e faqih*, the division is not between Qum and Najaf; there are *'ulama*' on both sides of the issue in Qum as well as in Najaf.

As discussed earlier, all four dimensions of *wilayat* for the Prophet and the Imams are among the *dharuriyyat al-madhab* (the essentials of Shi'a faith), so how could such great leaders of the Shi'a world have differences on them?

As for the views of the late Ayatullah al-Khumayni on the *wilayat* of the Prophet and his Ahlul Bayt, I quote from his lecture on *wilayat-e faqih*. He says:

"To prove that government and authority belong to the Imam is not to imply that the Imam has no spiritual status. The Imam does indeed possess certain spiritual dimensions that are unconnected with his function as ruler. The spiritual status of the Imam is the universal divine viceregency that is sometimes mentioned by the Imams (peace be upon them). It is a viceregency pertaining to the whole of creation, by virtue of which all the atoms in the universe humble themselves before the holder of authority.

It is one of the essential beliefs of our Shi'i school that no one can attain the spiritual status of the Imams, not even the cherubim or the prophets. In fact, according to the traditions that have been handed down to us, the Most Noble Messenger and the Imams existed before the creation of the world in the form of lights situated beneath the divine throne; they were superior to other men even in the sperm from which they grew and in their physical composition. Their exalted station is limited only by the divine will, as indicated by the saying of Jibra'il recorded in the traditions on the *mi'raj*: 'Were I to draw closer by as much as the breadth of a finger, surely I would burn.'" [33](#)

Ayatullah al-Khumayni, while affirming the political leadership of the Prophet and the Imams, does not deny or "de-mystify" their universal *wilayat*.

Coming to the views of the late Ayatullah al-Khu'i on the *wilayat* of the Prophet and the Ahlul Bayt, I quote from the transcribe of his lectures in which he says:

"As for the first type of *wilayat* [*takviniya*, universal], obviously there is no doubt in their authority over the entire creation as is clear from the ahadith because they are the link in creation, through them [continues] the existence, and they are reason for creation [of the universe]; if it had not been for them, Allah would not have created the people altogether, the people have been created for them, through

them the people exist, and they are the means of the pouring forth [of the Divine grace].

"Actually, they have the universal authority just below that of the Creator Himself; this authority [of theirs] is like the authority of Almighty Allah on the creation, however, it is weaker compared to the authority of Almighty Allah on the creation."[34](#)

Then al-Khu'i also talks about the civil/political authority of the Prophet and the Imams, and says,

"As for the second dimension of their legislative wilayat (*at-tashri'iyya*) in the sense that they possess the authority to independently administer the properties and the lives of the people—obviously, there is no dispute on their authority of this kind...This is proven from well attested ahadith, and in the farewell sermon [the Prophet said], 'Whomsoever's master I am, this 'Ali is his master. Do I not have more authority over the believers than they have themselves?' They said, 'Yes.'..."[35](#)

Ayatullah al-Khu'i, while affirming the universal wilayat of the Prophet and the Imams, does not deny their political authority. Actually, he goes further to say that,

"And the presumption that the history is contrary to that [in the sense that the Imams did not historically exercise their political authority]...is invalid."

Thus he concludes,

"So not exercising [the authority in the historical sense] does not prove the non-existence of the authority as is obvious."[36](#)

In essence, the two great jurists of the contemporary Shi'a world representing Qum and Najaf have identical views about the *wilayat* of the Imams of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). They both believe in all dimensions of *wilayat* –spiritual, socio-political, and universal– of the Prophet and the Imams. The difference that existed between the two was only on the limits of the authority of a *faqih* (mujtahid, jurist) during the Occultation of the Present Imam (a.s.). How could the learned scholar, who has written *The Just Ruler* on the authority of the jurist, not know the difference between *wilayat* of the Imams (unanimously accepted by the Shi'a jurists) and the *wilayat* of the *faqih* (with dispute over its limits among the Shi'a jurists)?

[5. Is Not Wilayat Part of the Faith?](#)

Referring to the controversy surrounding his article in the *Bio Ethics Encyclopaedia*, the learned scholar made the following comment in his 4th speech of Muharram 1419:

"How can such a thing divide the community when it is such a trivial part, and it is not even part of the faith."

Referring to the event of Ghadir Khumm, he says: "That historical event: what does it have any

connection with our belief system? So if I said in my article that the Prophet (s.a.w.) did not leave any explicit instruction about his successor, am I treading the path which is dangerous to the survival of the religion of the Ahlul Bayt? Or am exercising my right as a researcher to see what the documents say?"

Is the issue of *wilayat* and imamate a "trivial part" and "not even part of the faith"?

As we have explained earlier in this chapter, in Islam there is a term called "*dharuriy*, pl. *dharuriyyat*" which refers to those issues that are essential parts of our religion. The "*dharuriyyat*" are divided into two: "*dharuriyyat ad-din* – the essential parts of the Islamic faith" and "*dharuriyyat al-madhab* – the essential parts of the Shi'a sect". It is a common view of our scholars that whoever rejects one of the *dharuriyyat ad-din*, then he is no longer considered a member of the Islamic faith; and whoever rejects one of the *dharuriyyat al-madhab*, then he is no longer considered a member of the Shi'a Ithna-'Ashari sect.

What is the status of the belief in the *wilayat* of the Ahlul Bayt: is it one of the *dharuriyyat* or not? While discussing the status of the Muslims who are not Shi'a, Ayatullah al-Khu'i has defined *wilayat* (in the sense of love for the Ahlul Bayt) as one of the *dharuriyyat ad-din*, and *wilayat* (in the sense of khilafat and political leadership) as one of the *dharuriyyat al-madhab*. The late Ayatullah says:

"The dimension of *wilayat* that is essential [for *din*] is the *wilayat* in the meaning of love and devotion, and they [the Sunnis] do not deny it in this sense rather they actually express their love for the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.)...

"Of course, the *wilayat* in the meaning of succession (khilafat) is one of the essential parts of the *madhab* [of Shi'ism], but not from the essential parts of the *din*."³⁷

So according to Ayatullah al-Khu'i, the *wilayat* and *imamate* in the meaning of succession (*khilafat*) is an essential part (*dharuriy*) of Shi'ism; anyone who rejects this dimension of the *wilayat* would not be considered as a Shi'a. He would still be a Muslim but not a Shi'a.

As for the question that by denying the explicitness of the appointment of Imam 'Ali (a.s.), is the learned scholar "treading the path which is dangerous to the survival of the religion of the Ahlul Bayt?"

Well, the religion of the Ahlul Bayt will surely survive because it has an Imam protecting it even though he is in Occultation; but such statements will surely weaken the faith of our common people and youths in the explicit *wilayat* of the Imams. You have to see where such a statement will lead: it minimises the wrong done against the Ahlul Bayt and it gives a semblance of legitimacy to Sunni view of khilafat.

A Sunni would extend this argument further that since the Prophet had not made things clear enough, the companions did what they thought was best for Islam! A Shi'a who had attended speeches of the learned scholar was saying that 'what is the problem if we believe that 'Ali is the first Imam (in the spiritual sense) and the fourth caliph (in the socio-political sense)!' With such friends we do not need an enemy.

6. The Final Correction

Just before he came to Toronto in 1998 for Muharram (1419), the learned scholar sent the following correction to the publishers of the *Bio-Ethics Encyclopaedia*:

"Muhammad died in 632 C.E., having brought the whole of Arabia under the Medina government. However, although he had explicitly designated his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, to succeed him, he had left no written guidelines about the political process."

This he had faxed to some members of our community in Toronto and had also mentioned in one of his speeches in Muharram 1419.

We have the following comments regarding the correction: Firstly, even his correction is problematic. The learned scholar has tried to divide the succession into two: religious and political. On the issue of religious succession, he writes that the Prophet explicitly designated 'Ali to succeed him. Then he immediately qualifies the explicit designation and excludes political succession from it by writing, "he left no written guidelines on the political process." In the 4th speech of Muharram 1419, he says: "Yes, al-Ghadir is an explicit *designation*, it does not mean explicit *instruction* about the political process. No history supports that."

Since when did "written guidelines" become important in establishing Islamic teachings? Is not the entire structure of Islamic system based on spoken words: the Qur'an and the sunnah? There is absolutely no "written" guidelines left by the Prophet for anything at all, so why create a new cushion for the Sunnis in their defence against the Shi'as by expecting a "written" guideline on the issue of caliphate? What about all the sayings of the Prophet on the appointment of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.) as his caliph?

Would the value of the Prophet's "spoken" guidelines be less than the "written" guidelines? Is disobeying his "spoken" guidelines less severe than his "written" guidelines? Almighty Allah says,

"O you who believe! Do not raise your voices over the voice of the Prophet..." (49:2)

If the learned scholar wanted to mention the story of Qirtas in which the Prophet asked for a pen and paper, then he should have written the whole story and pointed out the person responsible for not letting the Prophet leave anything in writing.

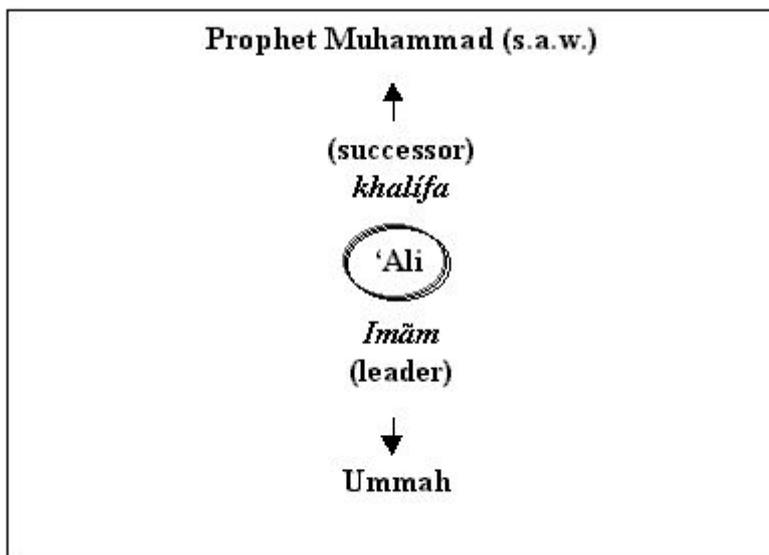
Secondly, the play with words like "designation" and "instruction" is disturbing. In Ghadir, the Prophet talks about his approaching death and then gets an acknowledgement from the Muslims about the level of his authority over them, and then he declares that "Whosoever's master am I, this 'Ali is master." Then he says that "I am leaving two things behind: the Book of Allah and my Progeny, as long as you hold fast to them both, you will not go astray." And then he instructs the companions to come and greet Imam 'Ali (a.s.) by addressing him as the "Amir – Leader". When you see the whole context of the event of Ghadir, is it not a clear instruction, designation, indication, inclination, appointment –or what you would like to call

it- for the leadership of Imam 'Ali after the death of the Prophet?

To believe that the Prophet did not leave explicit instructions about his political successor gives semblance of legitimacy to the Sunni caliphate. If the Prophet had not clearly said anything about this matter, then how can the Shi'as claim that Sunni caliphs usurped the right of 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a.s.)? Such a statement helps no one but the Sunnis.

Thirdly, in light of the learned scholar's statement, one can say that 'Ali is the "Imam" (religious/spiritual successor) but not the "Caliph" (political successor)! I do not know what the learned scholar would say about the declaration of the Prophet in Da'wat Dhul 'Ashira that 'Ali is "my successor – *khalifati*".

In Shi'a theology, as mentioned earlier, there is no difference between "imamate" and "khilafat". The implication of these two titles is simple: 'Ali, in relation to the Prophet, is his khalifa and successor; and 'Ali, in relation to the ummah, is their Imam and leader. So defining "imamate" as a religious succession and "khilafat" as a political succession goes against the implications of "Imam" and "Khalifa". 'Ali is the Imam of the Muslim ummah in religious as well as political matters, and likewise 'Ali is the Khalifa of the Prophet in religious as well as political matters. Being wrongfully deprived of his political position does not diminish the reality of the truth. In the words of Sayyid al-Khu'i, "Not exercising [the authority] does not prove non-existence of the *wilayat*."



Division of leadership into religious and political has actually happened in the Sunni version of Muslim history. The first four caliphs assumed the political and the religious leadership which is why that era is described as "*al-khilafatu 'r-rashida* – the rightly guided caliphate". After that, the caliphs assumed the political leadership but the religious leadership was assumed by others. In jurisprudence (*fiqh*), for example, the four Imams emerged as the leaders even while there were caliphs who ruled in their times. In theology, Abu 'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi emerged as the leader. In spiritualism, various masters (and even some Shi'a Imams) were accepted as guides and leaders by Sufi orders.

The Shi'as did not subscribe to the division of leadership in political and religious realms; the Imams are their ultimate guides and leaders in all spheres of life: religious and political, legal and theological. Therefore, Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) for example, is not just a legal guide for the Shi'as, he is their ultimate leader in the fullest sense of the word, even if some dimensions of his leadership was not manifest.

1. See, Murtaza Mutahhari, *Wilayah: the Station of the Master (Wala' ha wa wilayat ha)*, tr. Yahya Cooper, Tehran: World Organisation for Islamic Services, 1982. [Also see *Master and Mastership*]
2. Salawat means praying for Allah's blessings on Prophet Muhammad and his Ahlul Bayt. This is included in the daily ritual prayers by all Muslims.
3. An authentic and sahih hadith narrated by an-Nasa'i, *Khasa'is Amiri 'l-Mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib* (Beirut: Daru 'l-Kitab, 1987) p. 101-102; the annotator, al-Athari, has given many more quotations like Sahih of Muslim, Sahih of at-Tirmidhi, and others.
4. Narrated by Ahmad bin Hanbal and at-Tirmidhi, both in the section of al-manaqib, as quoted in Muhibbu 'd-Din at-Tabari, *Dhakha'iru 'l-'Uqba fi Manaqib Dhawi 'l-Qurba*, ed. Akram al-Bushi (Jeddah: Maktabatu 's-Sahaba, 1995) p. 165.
5. On the rejection of the dharuriyyat, see al-Majlisi, "Risalah fi 'l-'Itiqadat," *Manahiju 'l-Haqq wa 'n-Najat*, ed. Sayyid Hasan Bani Taba (Qum: Markaz-e Athar Shi'a, 1372 solar AH) p. 308-309; Sayyid Muhammad Kadhim al-Yazdi, *al-'Urwatu 'l-Wuthqa* (Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyya, 1392) p. 24.
6. As-Saduq, *'Itiqadatu 'l-Imamiyya*, p. 94; in its English translation, *The Shi'ite Creed*, see p. 85. Also see any standard text on Shi'a jurisprudence in the section on "najasat" under "kafir".
7. As quoted by the late 'Allamah Mir Hamid Husayn al-Musawi who then refutes it to prove the universal Imamate of Imam 'Ali through hadith of Ghadir. See al-Milani, *Nafahatu 'l-Azhar fi Khulasati 'Abaqati 'l-Anwar*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Daru 'l-Mu'arrikhi 'l-'Arabi, 1995) p. 311.
8. Sayyid Hussain Nasr, "Shi'ism and Sufism," p. 103.
9. See Mutahhari, *Wilayah*, p. 72; also see Mutahhari's *Imamat wa Rahbari*, p. 163 as quoted by our teacher Sayyid Muhsin al-Kharrazi, *Bidayatu 'l-Ma'arifi 'l-Ilahiyya* vol. 2, p. 12-16.
10. The full quotation will come later on in this chapter.
11. As-Saduq, *'Itiqadat*, p. 92-93; in its English translation, *The Shi'ite Creed*, p. 84-85; al-Majlisi, "Risala fi 'l-'Itiqadat," p. 310.
12. On parting of the moon, see in Shi'a sources, at-Tabrasi, *Majma'u 'l-Bayan*, vol. 5, p. 186; at-Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan fi Tafsiri 'l-Qur'an*, vol. 19, p. 60-72 who also refutes the objections raised by the materialist minded Muslims who like to interpret all such verses in metaphorical sense. In Sunni sources, see al-Fakhr ar-Razi, *at-Tafsiru 'l-Kabir*, vol. 15, p. 26; as-Suyuti, *ad-Durru 'l-Manthur*, vol. 6, p. 133; Mawdudi, *Tafhimu 'l-Qur'an*, vol. 5, p. 230-231.
13. As-Saduq, *'Itiqadat*, p. 92-93; in its English translation, *The Shi'ite Creed*, p. 84-85; al-Majlisi, "Risala fi 'l-'Itiqadat," p. 310.
14. Among Sunni references, see Ibn al-Maghazili ash-Shafi'i, *Manaqib al-Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib*, p. 313 (hadith # 358); as-Suyuti, *ad-Durru 'l-Manthur*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.) p. 669; al-Qanduzi, *Yanabi'u 'l-Muwaddah* (Beirut, 1390/1970) p. 121. For further references, see ash-Shahid at-Tustari, *Ihqaqu 'l-Haqq*, vol. 3, p. 280, vol. 14, p. 362-365, vol. 20, p. 75-77. For a critical review of the counter reports cited by some Sunni scholars, see at-Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan*, vol. 11, p. 423-428.
15. This is again an example of saying one thing in his academic work and saying something else when talking to the Shi'a community. Dr. Sachedina, as mentioned earlier, has written in *Islamic Messianism* that Islam began as a political movement and later on acquired religious emphasis; now he is saying that the Prophet was recognized fundamentally as a prophet of God and was never recognized as a political leader.
16. Dr. Sachedina's 2nd speech of Muharram 1419 in Toronto. He has inadvertently quoted the Qur'anic verse incorrectly, it is not 'wal kafirun laysa lahum mawla', it is 'wa anna 'l-kafirin la mawla lahum.' (47:11)
17. This question of the Prophet is based on the verse 33:6 of the Qur'an.

- [18.](#) 2nd speech in Toronto, Muharram 1419.
- [19.](#) Although this sentence is cushioned in "if it is authentic" escape clause, it creates more questions: During the last days of Ramadhan 1418, Dr. Sachedina made the following declaration on the Internet: "I am taking this opportunity to state in the most ABSOLUTE terms that not only do I believe in the unequivocal authenticity of the event of al-Ghadir..., I believe that the statement by the Prophet 'Everyone whose master I am, also has 'Ali as a master,' to be the explicit designation of the Imam 'Ali to the office of the Leadership of Muslim Community, as upheld by the Twelver Shi'a faith." Then less than four months later, in Muharram 1419, he makes such statements that cast doubt in the explicitness of the declaration of Ghadir Khumm.
- [20.](#) The 2nd speech of Muharram 1419 at Toronto.
- [21.](#) At-Turayhi, al-Majma'u 'l-Bahrayn, ed. Mahmud 'Adil, vol. 3 (Tehran: Daftar-e Nashr-e Farhang-e Islami, 1408) p. 242.
- [22.](#) Al-Mufid, Amali, vol. 13 (Musannafat Shaykh al-Mufid) p. 35.
- [23.](#) Al-Mufid, an-Nukatu 'l-'I'tiqadiyya in vol. 10 of Musannafat ash-Shaykh al-Mufid (Qum: Mu'assasa Ali 'l-Bayt, 1413 AH) p. 39.
- [24.](#) Al-Hilli, al-Babu 'l-Hadi 'Ashar [Qum: Nashr Nawid, 1368 AH solar] p. 184; also see its English translation A Treatise on the Principles of Shi'ite Thought, tr. William Miller (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1958) p. 62.
- [25.](#) Lahiji, Sarmaya-e Iman (Qum: Intisharat-e az-Zahra, 1372 AH solar) p. 107.
- [26.](#) Tabataba'i, Shi'a Islam, tr. Nasr (Qum: Ansariyan, 1989) p. 173.
- [27.](#) Mutahhari, Wilaya, p. 72.
- [28.](#) See p. 90-91.
- [29.](#) In the 6th speech in Muharram 1419 at Toronto.
- [30.](#) In the 8th speech in Muharram 1419 at Toronto.
- [31.](#) On 'Abdu 'r-Raziq's book and al-Bakhit's response to it, see Hourani, Arabic Thought, pp. 184-192; on Rashid Radha's response, see Kerr, Islamic Reform, pp. 179-185.
- [32.](#) The 9th speech in Muharram 1419 in Toronto.
- [33.](#) Khomeini, Islam and Revolution, tr. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981) p. 64-65.
- [34.](#) At-Tawhidi, Muhammad 'Ali, Misbahu 'l-Faqahah, vol. 5 (Qum: Intisharat-e Wijdani, 1368 A.H. solar) p. 35.
- [35.](#) Ibid, p. 38-39.
- [36.](#) Ibid, p. 39.
- [37.](#) Al-Gharawi, Mirza 'Ali, at-Tanqih fi Sharhi 'l-'Urwati 'l-Wuthqa, vol. 2 (Qum: Dar al-Hadi, 1410 AH) p. 86.

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