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Part 2: The Shi'ite Point of View

5. The Necessity of Imamate and the Qualifications of an Imam

A. Necessity of Imamate

From the Shi'ite point of view, the institution of *Imamate* is necessary, according to reason. It is *lutf* (grace) of Allah which brings the creature towards obedience and keeps him away from disobedience, without compelling the creature in any way.

It has been proved in the Shi'ite theology that *lutf* is incumbent on Allah. When Allah orders that man to do something yet is aware that man cannot do it or that it is very difficult without His assistance, then if Allah does not provide this assistance, He would be contradicting His own aim. Obviously, such negligence is evil according to reason. Therefore *lutf* is incumbent on Allah.

Imamate is a *lutf*, because as we know when men have a chief (*ra'is*) and guide (*murshid*) whom they obey, who avenges the oppressed of their oppressor and restrains the oppressor, then they draw nearer to righteousness and depart from corruption.

And because it is a *lutf*, it is incumbent on Allah to appoint an Imam to guide and lead the *ummah* after the Prophet.^{[1](#)}

B. Superiority (afdaliyyah)

The Shi'ahs believe that, like the Prophet, an Imam should excel the *ummah* in all virtues, such as knowledge, bravery, piety and charity, and should possess complete knowledge of the Divine Law. If he does not, and this high post is entrusted to a less perfect person when a more perfect one is available, the inferior will have been given preference over the superior, which is wrong in reason and against Divine Justice. Therefore, no inferior person may receive Imamate from Allah when there exists a person superior to him.^{[2](#)}

C. Infallibility

The second qualification is *'ismah* (infallibility). If the Imam is not infallible (*ma'sum*) he would be liable to err and also deceive others.³

Firstly, in such a case, no implicit confidence may be placed in what he says and dictates to us.

Secondly, an Imam is the ruler and head of the *ummah* and the *ummah* should follow him unreservedly in every matter. Now, if he commits a sin the people would be bound to follow him in that sin as well. The undeniability of such a position is self-evident; for obedience in sin is evil, unlawful and forbidden. Moreover, it would mean that he should be obeyed and disobeyed at one and the same time; that is, obedience to him would be obligatory yet forbidden, which is manifestly absurd.

Thirdly, if it would be possible for an Imam to commit sin it would be the duty of other people to prevent him from doing so (because it is obligatory on every Muslim to forbid other people from unlawful acts). In such a case, the Imam will be held in contempt; his prestige will come to an end and instead of being the leader of the *ummah* he will become their follower, and his *Imamate* will be of no use.

Fourthly, the Imam is the defender of the Divine Law and this work cannot be entrusted to fallible hands nor can any such person maintain it properly. For this very reason, infallibility has been admitted to be an indispensable condition to prophethood; and the considerations which make it essential in the case of a prophet make it so in the case of an Imam and caliph as well.

More will be said on this subject in Chapter 13 (*Ulu 'lAmr Must Be Ma'sum*).

D. Appointment by Allah

As in the case of the prophets, the above-mentioned qualifications alone are not enough to automatically make one an Imam. *Imamate* is not an acquired job; it is a 'designation' bestowed by Allah.

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It is for this reason that the Shi'ah Ithna 'Asharis (The Twelvers) believe that only Allah can appoint a successor to the Prophet; that the *ummah* has no choice in this matter—its only duty is to follow such a divinely-appointed Imam or caliph.

The Sunnis, on the other hand, believe that it is the duty of the *ummah* to appoint a caliph.

Verses of the Qur'an

The following verses of the Qur'an confirm the views held by the Shi'ahs:

And thy Lord creates what He wills and chooses; they have no right to choose; glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above what they associate! (28:68).

This clearly shows that man has no right to make any selection; it lies entirely in the hands of Allah.

Before creating Adam (as), Allah informed the angels:

... **"Verily I am going to make a caliph in the earth "**. . . (2: 30).

And when the angels demurred politely at the scheme, their protest was brushed aside by a curt reply: **"Surely I know what you know not" (ibid.)**. If the *ma'sum* (infallible) angels were given no say in the appointment of a caliph, how can fallible humans expect to take the whole authority of such an appointment in their own hands?

Allah Himself appointed Prophet Dawud (as) as caliph on the earth—

"O Dawud ! Verily; We have made thee (Our) caliph on the earth ..." (38:26)

In every case Allah attributes the appointment of the caliph or the Imam exclusively to Himself.

Likewise, the call went to Prophet Ibrahim (as):

(Allah) said: "Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men." (Ibrahim) said: "And of my offspring?" He said: "My covenant will not include the unjust. " (2 : 124)

This verse leads us to the correct answers of many important questions concerning *Imamate*.

a. Allah said: *"Surely I am going to make you an Imam for men."* This shows that *Imamate* is a divinely-appointed status; it is beyond the jurisdiction of the *ummah*.

b. *"My covenant will not include the unjust."* This clearly says that a non-*ma'sum* cannot be an Imam. Logically, we may divide mankind into four groups:

1. Those who remain unjust throughout their lives;
2. those who are never unjust;
3. those who are unjust early in their lives but later become just; and
4. those who are just early in their lives but later become unjust.

Ibrahim (as) had too high a position to request *Imamate* for the first or the fourth group. This leaves two groups (the second and the third) which could be included in the prayer. However, Allah rejects one of them; i. e., those who are unjust early in their lives but later become just. Now there remains only one group which can qualify for *Imamate* —those who are never unjust throughout their lives, i.e., *ma'sum*.

c. The literal translation of the last sentence is as follows: *My covenant will not reach the unjust*. Note that Allah did not say, the unjust will not reach My covenant, because it would have implied that it was

within the power of man—albeit a just one—to attain the status of *Imamate*. The present sentence does not leave room for any such misunderstanding; it clearly shows that receiving *Imamate* is not within human jurisdiction; it is exclusively in the hands of Allah and He gives it to whom He pleases.

Then as a general rule, it is stated:

And We made them Imams who were to guide by Our command ... (21:73)

When Prophet Musa (as) wanted a vizier to help him with his responsibilities, he did not appoint someone by his own authority. He prayed to Allah: "And make for me a vizier from my family, Harun (Aaron) my brother" (20:29–30). And Allah said:

"You are indeed granted your petition, O Musa!" (ibid., 36).

That Divine selection is made known to the *ummah* through the prophet or the preceding Imam. This declaration is called *nass* (specification; determination; designation of the succeeding Imam by the prophet or preceding Imam). An Imam according to Shi'ite belief, must be *mansus min Allah*, i.e., designated by Allah for that status.

E. Miracles

If one has not heard *nass* about a claimant of *Imamate*, then the only way of ascertaining the truth is through a miracle (*mu'jizah*). [5](#)

Generally speaking any man may claim that he is an Imam or a prophet's caliph and infallible, but a miracle is the only unfailing test of truth in such cases. If the claimant proves a miracle also in support of his claim, it would be admissible without hesitation. If he fails to do so, it is evident that he does not possess the qualifications required for *Imamate* and caliphate, and his claim would therefore be false.

Precedent

The universal practice of prophets had been to nominate their successors (on the command of Allah) without any interference from the *ummah*.

The history of these prophets does not offer a single instance of a prophet's successor being elected by a voting of his followers. There is no reason why in the case of the successor of the last Prophet this established Divine Law should be changed. Allah says:

And you shall never find a change in divine practice (33:62).

Logical Reasons

1. The same reasons which prove that the appointment of a prophet is a divine prerogative prove with equal force that the successor of that prophet should also be appointed by Allah. An Imam or Caliph, like

the prophet, is appointed to carry on the work of Allah; he must be responsible to Allah. If he is appointed by the people, his first loyalty will be not for Allah, but for the people who would be 'the basis of his authority'. He will always try to please people, because if they were to withdraw their confidence in him he would lose his position. So he will not discharge the duties of religion without fear or favour; his eyes will always be on political considerations. Thus the work of Allah will suffer.

And the history of Islam provides ample evidence of glaring disregard for the tenets of religion shown by man-appointed caliph's right from the beginning. So this argument is not just academic; there is solid historical evidence behind it.

2. Also, only Allah knows the inner feelings and thoughts of man; no one else can ever know the true nature of another person. Perhaps someone may pose as a pious and god-fearing man merely to impress his Colleagues and gain some worldly benefit. Such examples are not rare in history. Take, for example, the case of 'Abdu 'l Malik ibn Marwan who used to spend all his time in the mosque in prayer and recitation of the Qur'an. He was reciting the Qur'an when news reached him of the death of his father and that people were waiting to pledge their allegiance to him. He closed the Qur'an and said: "This is the parting between me and thee".⁶

Therefore, as the existence of qualifications which are necessary for an Imam or Caliph can only truly be known to Allah, it is only Allah Who can appoint an Imam or Caliph.

6. Infallibility of the Imams

Now, let us note what the Qur'an says about the *Ahl u'l-bayt* (family members) of the Holy Prophet.

According to the Qur'an, the following persons were sinless and infallible at the time of the death of the Holy Prophet 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn. The verse of purity (*tathir*) reads as follows:

... Allah only desires to keep away abomination from you, O People of the House! And to purify you a (thorough) purifying. (33 :33)

It is universally agreed that the above-named four persons are 'People of the House' and are sinless and free from all kinds of abomination.

The sentences before and after this verse are addressed to the wives the Holy Prophet and the pronouns therein are of feminine gender; but the pronouns in this verse are of masculine gender. The reason why this verse has been placed in its present position is not difficult to guess. The late renowned scholar 'Allamah Puya writes in footnote no. 1857 of the translation of the Holy Qur'an by S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali:

"The portion of this verse relating to the divinely effected purity of the Holy *Ahl u'l bayt*—needs a proper explanation commenting with reference to its correct context. This portion of this verse is a separate

ayah or verse by itself revealed separately on particular occasions but placed here as it deals with the wives of the Holy Prophet. The location of this verse here if studied properly makes it obvious that it has its own significant and important purpose behind it. While the address in the beginning of the verse is in the feminine gender—there is the transition here in the address from the feminine to the masculine gender. While referring to the consorts of the Holy Prophet, the pronouns also are consistently feminine. For a mixed assembly of men and women, generally the masculine gender is used. This transition in the grammatical use of the language, makes it quite obvious that this clause is quite a different matter used for a different group other than the previous one, and has been suitably placed here to show a comparative position of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt* in contrast to the wives of the Holy Prophet. 'Amr ibn Abi Salamah who was brought up by the Holy Prophet relates:

"When this verse was revealed the Holy Prophet was in the house of Umm Salamah. At the revelation of (the verse): *Verily willeth God to keep away impurity from you O People of the House! and He purifieth you with the perfect purification*, the Holy Prophet assembled his daughter Fatimah, her sons Hasan and Husayn and her husband, his cousin, 'Ali, and covered the group, including himself, with his own mantle and addressing God said: "O God! These constitute my progeny! Keep them away from every kind of impurity, purified with perfect purification". Umm Salamah, the righteous wife of the Holy Prophet, witnessing this marvellous occasion, humbly submitted to the Holy Prophet, "O Apostle of God! May I also join the group? "to which the Holy Prophet replied, "No, remain thou in thine own place, thou art in goodness"" [7](#)

This is not the place to name the countless references concerning this verse; still, I would like to quote Mawlana Wahidu'z-Zaman, the famous Sunni scholar, whose translation and commentary of the Qur'an as well as his book *Anwaru'l-lughah* (a dictionary of the Qur'an and *ahadith*) are among the recognized references. He writes in his commentary of the Qur'an about this verse: "Some people think that it is especially for those family members who had blood relation with the Prophet, i.e., 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn. The present translator says that the traditions which are correct (*sahih*) and well-connected up to the Prophet, support the same view, because when the Prophet himself has declared that his family members are only these, then to accept it and believe in it becomes obligatory. And one more sign of correctness of this view is that the pronouns used before and after this verse are those for females, while in this verse are those for males . . ." [8](#)

Again he says in his *Anwaru 'l-lughah*: "The correct view is that in this verse of purity only these five persons are included (i.e., the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn), although in Arabic usage, the word *ahlu 'l-bayt* is used for wives also. Some people prove by this verse that these five persons were sinless and *ma'sum* (infallible). But if not *ma'sum*, then of course they were surely *mahfuz* (protected from committing any sin or error)." [9](#)

I have quoted these two references to show that not only the Ithna'Asharis but the learned Sunni scholars also confirm that, according to the rules of Arabic grammar and according to the correct

unbroken traditions of the Prophet, only 'A'li, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn are included in this verse, besides the Prophet himself. Also, it is clear that the view that these persons were sinless is shared by Sunni scholars too. It is apparent that in the least they say that if they were not infallible (theoretically) they were surely protected from sin and error (practically) .

There are many other verses and traditions testifying to the purity (*'ismah*) of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt*, but the limitation of space does not allow me to enumerate them even briefly.

7. Superiority of 'Ali (as)

Afdaliyyah (superiority) in Islam means "to deserve more reward (*thawab*) before Allah because of good deeds".

All Muslims agree that this ' superiority ' cannot be decided by our own views or outlook and that there is no way to know it except through the Qur'an or *hadith*. al-Ghazzali, the famous Sunni scholar, has written: "The reality of superiority is what is before Allah; and that is something which cannot be known except to the Holy Prophet." [10](#)

Most of our Sunni brethren believe that superiority was according to the sequence of the caliphate; i.e., Abu Bakr was more superior, then 'Umar, then 'Uthman, then 'A'li.

But this belief is not based on any proof, nor was it the belief of all the Sunnis of early days. During the time of the Holy Prophet, we find that such respected Companions as Salman al-Farisi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Miqdad al-Kindi, 'Ammar ibn Yasir, Khabbab ibn al-Aratt, Jabir ibn 'Abdillah al-Ansari, Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, Abu Sa'id al-Khudri, Zayd ibn Arqam and many others believed that 'Ali (as) was the most superior amongst all the *Ahlu 'l-bayt* and the Companions. [11](#)²¹

Ahmad ibn Hanbal was once asked by his son about his views on the subject of superiority. He said: "Abu Bakr and 'Umar and 'Uthman." His son asked: "And what about 'Ali ibn Abi Talib?" He replied: "He is from the Ahlu 'l-bayt. Others cannot be compared with him." [12](#)

'Ubaydullah Amritsari writes in his famous book *Arjahu 'l-matalib*: "As superiority means 'having more *thawab*', its proof can only be known from the *ahadith* (traditions) of the Holy Prophet. .. and if there are conflicting traditions, then the authentic traditions should be accepted and strong traditions should be differentiated from the weak ones.

"al-'Allamah Ibn 'Abdi 'l-Barr writes in his book al-Isti'ab [13](#) concerning the *ahadith* which have been narrated about the superiority of Amiru 'l-mu'minin, 'A'li that: 'Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Qadi Isma'il ibn Ishaq, Imam Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Shu'ayb an-Nasa'i and al-Hafiz Abu 'Ali an-Naysaburi have said: [14](#) "There have not come as many *ahadith* with good chains of narrators (*asnad*) about virtues of any of the Companions as have been narrated on the virtues of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) ."

"Furthermore, if we look at the exclusive virtues of Amir u'l-mu'minin, 'Ali (as) and think about those things which caused him to reap great rewards before Allah, we will have to admit that only he was the most superior after the Holy Prophet." [1525](#)

The author himself was a Sunni, and he has discussed this matter in detail in Chapter 3, pages 103–516, of the above-mentioned book.

Obviously, I cannot provide here even a short list of the verses and traditions concerning the *afdaliyyah* of 'A1i (as). It will suffice to say that there are at least 86 verses in the Qur'an extolling the virtues of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as) and the traditions on this subject cannot be counted.

Thus, it should be obvious even to the casual observer that 'Ali (as) was the most superior of the Muslims after the Holy Prophet.

8. Appointment of Ali (as)

After giving a short account of *'ismah* and *afdaliyyah* of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as), now comes the most important question of his appointment by Allah.

On several occasions the Holy Prophet had declared that 'Ali (as) was to be his successor and caliph.

It is a fact that the first open declaration of the prophethood was the very occasion when the first open declaration of 'Ali's caliphate was made. It was at the time of the "Feast of the Clan."

When the verse: "*And warn thy nearest relations* (26:214), was revealed, the Prophet ordered 'Ali to prepare food and invite the sons of 'Abdu'l-Muttalib so that he could convey to them the words of Allah. After the feast, the Prophet intended to talk to them, but Abu Lahab interfered by saying: "Verily, your comrade has entranced you". Upon hearing this statement all of them dispersed.

The next day, the Messenger of Allah again called them for a feast. After they had finished with their food, the Prophet addressed them: "O sons of 'Abdu'l-Muttalib, I have brought for you the good of this world and the next, and I have been appointed by the Lord to call you unto Him. Therefore, who amongst you will administer this cause for me and be my brother, my successor and my caliph?" No one responded to the Prophet's call except 'Ali who was the youngest of the congregation. The Prophet then patted 'Ali's neck and said: "O my people! This 'A1i is my brother, my successor and my caliph amongst you. Listen to him and obey him." [1626](#)

It is interesting to note here that the Leiden edition (1879 A.D., p. 1173) of *at-Tarikh* of at Tabari records the words of the Holy Prophet as "*wasiyyi wa khalifat*" (my successor and my caliph); but in the Cairo edition of 1963 A.D., (which claims to be checked with the Leiden edition) these important words have been changed to "*kadha wa kadha*" (so-and-so) ! How sad it is to see the academic world sacrificing its honesty and integrity on the altar of political expediency!

9. Verses of mastership (wilayah)

After that, on many occasions, many verses and traditions reminded the Muslims that 'Ali was their master after the Holy Prophet. One of the most important verse is as follows:

Verily, your Master is only Allah and His Apostle and those who believe, those who establish prayers, and pay the zakat while bowed (in worship) (5:55) .

The Muslim scholars, Sunni and Shi'ah alike, agree that this verse was revealed in honour of Imam 'Ali (as). It clearly shows that there are only three masters of the believers. Firstly, Allah secondly, His Prophet and thirdly, 'Ali (with the eleven succeeding Imams).

Abu Dharr al-Ghifari says that one day he was praying with the Prophet when a beggar came to the Prophet's mosque. No one responded to his pleas. The beggar raised his hands towards heavens and said, "Allah! be a witness that I came to Thy Prophet's mosque and no one gave me anything". 'Ali (as) was bowing in ruku' at that time. He pointed his little finger, on which was a ring, towards the beggar who came forward and took away the ring. This incident occurred in the Prophet's presence who raised his face towards heaven and prayed: "O Lord! my brother Musa had begged of Thee to open his breast and to make his work easy for him, to loose the knot of his tongue so that people might understand him, and to appoint from among his relations his brother, as his vizier, and to strengthen his back with Harun and to make Harun his partner in his work. O Allah! Thou said to Musa, 'We will strengthen thy arm with thy brother. No one will now have an access to either of you!' O Allah! I am Muhammad and Thou hast given me distinction. Open my breast for me, make my work easy for me, and from my family appoint my brother 'Ali as my vizier. Strengthen my back with him". The Prophet had not yet finished his prayers when Jibril brought the above quoted verse. [1727](#)

Here is not the place to give all the references of this *hadith*. (They run in the hundreds.) This verse and the prayer of the Prophet jointly and separately show that 'Ali (as) was designated to be the Master of the Muslims after the Holy Prophet.

10. The formal declaration of Ghadir Khum

All the previous declarations may be classified as a prelude to the formal declaration of Ghadir Khumm.

This event has been unanimously described by the learned historians and scholars of both sects. Here we give a brief account to show what great arrangements were made to declare 'Ali as the successor to the Holy Prophet.

Ghadir Khumm lies in Juhfa between Mecca and Medina. When the Prophet was on his way home, after performing his last pilgrimage, Jibril brought him this urgent command of Allah:

O Apostle! Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord; and if you do it not, then you

have not delivered His message (at all); and Allah will protect you from the people . . . (5 :67)

The Prophet stopped at once and ordered that all people who had gone ahead should be called back, and he waited for those who were following. When the entire caravan had gathered, a pulpit was set up by piling up camel saddles; the acacia thorns were swept away. The Prophet ascended the pulpit and delivered a long sermon. The day was very hot; people had to stretch their cloaks under their feet and over their heads. The Prophet addressed them as follows: O you people! Know it well that Jibril came down to me several times bringing me orders from the Lord, the Merciful, that I should halt at this place and inform every man, white and black, that 'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, is my brother and my *wasiyy* (successor) and my caliph, and the Imam after me. His position to me is like that of Harun to Musa, except that there is to be no prophet after me, and he is your master next to Allah and His Prophet.

O you people! Verily, Allah has appointed him to be your Imam and ruler. Obedience to him is obligatory alike on all the *muhajirun* (Emigrants) and *ansar* (Helpers) and on those who follow them in virtue, and on the dwellers in cities and the nomads, the Arabs and the non-Arabs, the freeman and the slave, the young and the old, the great and the small, the white and the black. His command is to be obeyed; his word is binding and his orders obligatory on everyone believing in the One God. Cursed is the man who disobeys him and blessed is he who follows him, and he who believes in him is a true believer.

O you people! This is the last time I shall stand in this assembly. Therefore, listen and obey and surrender to the command of your Lord. Verily, Allah, He is your Lord and God; then after Him, His Prophet, Muhammad, who is addressing you, is your Master, then after me 'Ali is your Master and your Imam, according to Allah's command. Then after him the *Imamate* will continue through my descendants begotten by him till the day you meet Allah and His Prophet. O you people! Meditate on the Qur'an and understand its verses; reflect over its clear verses and do not go to the ambiguous ones.

For, by Allah, none will properly explain to you its warnings and expound to you its meanings except this man (i.e., 'Ali) whose hand I am lifting up in front of myself. And I say unto you that ***whoever whose Master I am, 'Ali is his Master***; and he is 'Ali, the son of Abu Talib, my brother and *wasiyy* (successor); and *wilayah* (obedience to him and love for him) has been made obligatory by Allah, the Powerful, the Exalted.

The other Imams have also been briefly referred to in this address; and they are mentioned in precise detail in many other traditions. For example, on one occasion addressing Imam Husayn the Prophet said: "You are an Imam, the son of an Imam, the brother of an Imam, nine of your lineal descendants will be pious Imams; the ninth of them being their Qa'im (he who will rise)." [1828](#)

Even a casual observer would not fail to realize that, it was a matter of vital importance to Islam and that is why the Prophet, under the Divine Command, made all the possible preparations to accomplish it. Exposed to the scorching rays of the midday sun, he mounted the pulpit to make the important pronouncement.

First of all, he informed the audience of his approaching end and then called them to witness that he had faithfully discharged his duties. Then he asked them: "Do I not have more authority upon you than you yourselves have. All of them cried out that he certainly had more right on them than they themselves had. The Prophet then said: "Whoever whose Master I am, 'Ali is his Master." In the end he invoked blessings on 'Ali, saying: "O Allah! Love him who loves 'Ali, and be the enemy of the enemy of 'Ali; help him who helps 'Ali, and forsake him who forsakes 'Ali."

When the ceremony was over, the following verse of the Qur'an was revealed:

This day I have perfected your religion for you and I have completed My bounty upon you and I have approved Islam as your religion (5:3).

This Divine Communication clearly shows that because of 'Ali's appointment to the Imamate the religion was perfected, the bounty; and favour of Allah completed, and Islam approved by Allah. On the arrival of this glad tiding from heaven the believers congratulated 'Ali in the Prophet's presence and many poets composed poems on this event. All these facts stand recorded in books of tradition as will be seen in the following pages.

Hadith of Ghadir: Mutawatir

The following extracts (taken from authentic Sunni books) from the said lecture (*khutbah*) of the Holy Prophet are very important:

I am leaving behind, among you, two most precious things. . . (1) the Book of Allah . . . and (2) my descendants who are my family members. They will not separate from each other until they come to me near Kawthar (a pool in Paradise). Verily Allah is my Master and I am the Master of every believer. Then he took the hand of 'Ali and said:

Whoever whose Master I am, 'Ali is his Master.

These two traditions are referred to as the traditions of 'Two Precious Things' (*Thaqalayn*) and Mastership' (*Wilayah*) . They are singly and Jointly narrated by hundreds of traditionalists.

Nawwab Siddiq Hasan Khan of Bhopal, says: "al-Hakim Abu Sa'id says that the tradition of 'Two Precious Things' and of 'whoever who's Master I am, 'Ali is his Master' are *mutawatir* (i.e., narrated unbrokenly by so many people that no doubt can be entertained about their authenticity), because a great number of the Companions of the Prophet have narrated them. So much so that Muhammad ibn Jarir has written these two traditions through seventy-five different chains (*asnad*); and he has written a separate book which he named *Kitabu 'l-wilayah*; and al-Hafiz adh-Dhahabi also has written a complete book on its *asnad* and has passed the verdict that it is *mutawatir*; and Abu 'l-'Abbas ibn 'Uqdah has narrated the *hadith* of Ghadir Khumm through one hundred and fifty chains and has written a complete book on it." [1929](#)

Some writers have tried to cast doubt on the authenticity of the events of Ghadir Khumm. It is necessary to mention that this *hadith* is *mutawatir*, and the late renowned scholar al'Allamah al-Amini in the first volume of his celebrated book *al-Ghadir* has given (with full references) the names of 110 famous Companions of the Holy Prophet who have narrated this *hadith*. As an example, I am enumerating the names given under letter *alif*.

The years of 1. Abu Layla al-Ansari (37); 2. Abu Zaynab ibn 'Awf al-Ansari; 3. Abu Fadal al-Ansari (38); 4. Abu Qudamah al-Ansari; 5. Abu 'Amrah ibn 'Amr ibn Mutassin al-Ansari; 6. Abu 'l-Haytham ibn at-Tayyihan (37); 7. Abu Rafi' al-Qibt, slave of the Holy Prophet; 8. Abu Dhuwayb Khuwaylid (or Khalid) ibn Khalid al-Hudhali; 9. Usamah ibn Zayd ibn Harithah (54); 10. Ubayy ibn Ka'b al-Ansari (30 or 32); 11. As'ad ibn Zurarah al-Ansari; 12. Asma' bint 'Umays; 13. Umm Salamah, wife of the Holy Prophet; 14. Umm Hani bint Abi Talib; 15. Abu Hamzah Anas ibn Malik al-Ansari; 16. Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah; and 17. Abu Hurayrah. [2030](#)

And there are not less than 84 *tabi'in* (disciples of the Companions) who narrated this *hadith* from the above-mentioned Companions. Again, the list under letter *alif* is given here as an example:

1. Abu Rashid al-Hubrani ash-Shami, 2. Abu Salamah ibn 'Abdi'r-Rahman ibn 'Awf; 3. Abu Sulayman al-Mu'adhdhin; 4. Abu Salih as-Samman, Dhakwan al-Madani; 5. Abu 'Unfuwanah al-Mazini; 6. Abu 'Abdi'r-Rahim al-Kindi; 7. Abu 'l Qasim, Asbagh ibn Nubatah at-Tamimi; 8. Abu Layla al-Kindi; and 9. Iyas ibn Nudhayr. [2131](#)

Traditionists have recorded this *hadith* in their books in every century and every era. For example, the names of those writers and scholars who have narrated this *hadith* in the second century of *hijrah* are:

1. Abu Muhammad, 'Amr ibn Dinar al-Jumahi al-Makki (115 or 116); 2. Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn 'Ubaydillah al-Qurashi az Zuhri (124); 3. 'Abdu'r Rahman ibn Qasim ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Bakr at-Taymi al-Madani (126); 4. Bakr ibn Sawadah ibn Thumamah, Abu Thumamah al-Basri (128); 5. 'Abdullah ibn Abi Najih, Yasar ath-Thaqafi, Abu Yasar al-Makki (131); 6. al-Hafiz Mughirah ibn Muqassim, Abu Hisham ad-Dabbi al-Kufi (133); 7. Abu 'Abdi'r-Rahim Khalid ibn Zayd al-Jurnahi al Misri (139); 8. Hasan ibn al-Hakam an-Nakha'i al-Kufi (ca. 140); 9. Idris ibn Yazid, Abu 'Abdillah al-Awd; al-Kufi; 10. Yahya ibn Sa'id ibn Hayyan at-Taymi al-Kufi;

11. al-Hafiz 'Abdu'l Malik ibn Abi Sulayman al-'Arzami al-Kufi (145); 12. 'Awf ibn Abi Jamilah al'Abdi al Hajar; al-Basri (146); 13. 'Ubaydullah ibn 'Umar ibn Hafs ibn 'Asim ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khattab al-'Adawi al-Madani (147); 14. Nu'aym ibn al Hakim al-Madayini (148); 15. Talhah ibn Yahya ibn Talkah ibn 'Ubaydillah at-Taymi al-Kufi (148); 16. Abu Mukammad Kathir ibn Zayd al-Aslami (ca. 150); 17. al-Hafiz Mukammad ibn Ishaq al-Madani (151 or 152); 18. al-Hafiz Mu'ammam ibn Rashid, Abu 'Urwah al-Azdi al-Basri (153 or 154); 19. al-Hafiz Mis'ar ibn Kidam ibn Zahir al-Hilali ar-Rawasi al-Kufi (153 or 154); 20. Abu 'Isa Hakam ibn Aban al-'Adani (154 or 155);

21. 'Abdullah ibn Shawdhab al Balkhi al-Basri (157); 22. al-Hafiz Shu'bah ibn al-Hajjaj, Abu Bistam al-

Wasit; (160); 23. al-Hafiz Abu'l-'Ala', Kamil ibn al-'Ala' at-Tamimi al-Kufi (ca. 160); 24. al-Hafiz Sufyan ibn Sa'id ath-Thawri, Abu 'Abdillah al-Kufi (161); 25. al-Hafiz. Isra'il ibn Yunus ibn Abi Ishaq as-Sabi' Abu Yusuf al-Kufi (162); 26. Ja'far ibn Ziyad al-Kufi al-Ahmar (165 or 167); 27. Muslim ibn Salim an-Nahdi, Abu Farwah al-Kufi; 28. al-Hafiz Qays ibn ar-Rabi', Abu Mukammad al-Asadi al-Kufi (165); 29. al-Hafiz Hammad ibn Salamah, Abu Salamah al-Basri (167); 30. al-Hafiz 'Abdullah ibn Lahi'ah, Abu 'Abdi'r-Rakman al-Misri (174);

31. al-Hafiz Abu 'Uwanah al-Waddak ibn 'Abdillah al-Yashkuri al-Wasit; al-Bazzaz (175 or 176); 32. Al Qadi Sharik ibn 'Abdillah, Abu 'Abdillah an-Nakha'i al-Kufi (177); 33. al-Hafiz 'Abdullah (or 'Ubaydullah) ibn 'Ubaydu'r-Rahman (or 'Abdu'r-Rahman) al-Kufi, Abu 'Abdi'r-Rahman al-Ashja'i (182); 34. Nuh ibn Qays, Abu Rawh al-Huddani al-Basri (183); 35. al-Muttalib ibn Ziyad ibn Ab; Zuhayr al-Kufi, Abu Talib (185); 36. Al Qadi Hassan ibn Ibrahim al-'Anazi, Abu Hashim (186); 37. al-Hafiz Jarir ibn 'Abdi'l-Hamid, Abu 'Abdillah ad-Dabbi al-Kufi ar-Razi (188); 38. al-Fadl ibn Musa, Abu 'Abdillah al-Marwazi as-Sinani (192); 39. al-Hafiz Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Madani al-Basri (193); 40. al-Hafiz Isma'il ibn 'Uliyyah, Abu Bishr ibn Ibrahim al-Asadi (193);

41. al-Hafiz Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, Abu 'Amr ibn Abi 'Adiyy as-Sulami al-Basri (194); 42. al-Hafiz Muhammad ibn Khazim, Abu Mu'awiyah at-Tamimi ad-Darir (195); 43. al-Hafiz. Muhammad ibn Fudayl, Abu 'Abdi'r-Rahman al-Kufi (195); 44. al-Hafiz al-Waki' ibn al-Jarrah ar-Ru'asi al-Kufi (196); 45. al-Hafiz Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah, Abu Muhammad al-Hilali al-Kufi (198); 46. al-Hafiz 'Abdullah ibn Numayr, Abu Hisham al-Hamdan; al-Kharifi (199); 47. al-Hafiz Hanash ibn al-Marith ibn Laqit an-Nakha'i al-Kufi; 48. Abu Mupammad Musa ibn Ya'qub az-Zama'; al-Madani; 49. al-'Ala' ibn Salim al-'Attar al-Kufi; 50. al-Azraq ibn 'Ali ibn Muslim al-Hanafi, Abu 'l-Jahm al-Kufi;

51. Ham ibn Ayyub al-Hanafi al-Kufi; 52. Fudayl ibn Marzuq al-Agharr ar-Ru'asi al-Kufi (ca. 160); 53. Abu Hamzah Sa'd ibn 'Ubaydah as-Sulami al-Kufi; 54. Musa ibn Muslim al-Hizami ash-Shaybani, Abu 'Isa al-Kufi at-Tahhan (Musa as-Saghir); 55. Ya'qub ibn Ja'far ibn Abi Kathir al-Ansari al-Madani 56. 'Uthman ibn Sa'd ibn Murrah al-Qurashi, Abu 'Abdillah (Abu 'Ali) al-Kufi. [2232](#)

Thus this *hadith* continues to be narrated by so many narrators (*ruwat*) in every era as to make it mutawatir. Coming to the scholars and writers who have narrated this *hadith* in their books of traditions, it is enough to mention that al-'Allamah al-Amini has listed the names of 360 scholars according to fourteenth century. [23](#)

Some people have tried to cast doubts about the asnad of this *hadith*. As every student of Islamic tradition knows, if a *hadith* is *mutawatir* there is no need to look at individual's *asnad* at all. Still to show the hollowness of this charge, I would like to give here the opinions of some of the famous traditionalists (*muhaddithun*).

II. Asnad of Hadith of Ghadir:

a. al-Hafiz Abu 'Isa at-Tirmidhi (d.279 A.H.) has said in his *Sahih* (one of the *as-Sihah as-Sittah*) that "This is a good (*hasan*) and correct (*sahih*) *hadith*." [24](#)³⁴

b. al-Hafiz Abu Ja'far at-Tahawi (d. 321 A.H.) has said in his *Mushkil u'l-athar* that "This *hadith* is *sahih* according to the chains of narrators (*asnad*) and no one has said anything contrary to its narrators." [25](#)³⁵

c. Abu 'Abdillah al-Hakim an-Naysaburi (d. 405 A.H.) has narrated this *hadith* from several chains in his *al-Mustadrak* and has said that this *hadith* is *sahih*. [26](#)

d. Abu Muhammad Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-'Asim; has said: "This *hadith* is accepted by *ummah*, and it is in conformity with the principles.

Likewise, the following traditionalists (among hundreds of others) have quoted that this *hadith* is *sahih*:– [27](#)

1. Abu 'Abdillah al-Mahamili al-Baghdadi in his *Amali*; 2. Ibn 'Abdi 'l-Barr al-Qurtubi in *al-Isti'ab*; 3. Ibnu 'l-Maghazili ash-shafi'i in *al-Manaqib*; 4. Abu Hamid Ghazzali in *Sirru 'l-'alamayn*; 5. Abu'l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzi in *al-Manaqib*; 6. Sibte ibn al-Jawzi in *Tadhkirat khawaissi 'l-ummah*; 7. Ibn Abi'l-Hadid al-Mu'tazili in his *Sharh Nahji 'l-balaighah*;

8. Abu 'Abdillah al-Ganji ash-Shafi'i in *Kifayatu 't-talib*; 9. Abu 'l-Makarim 'Ala'ud-Din as-Simnani in *al-Urwatu'l-wuthqa*; 10. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani in *Tahdhibu'l-tahdhib*; 11. Ibn Kathir ad-Dimashqi in his *Tarikh*; 12. Jalalu'd-Din as-Suyuti; 13. al-Qastalani in *al-Mawahibu 'l-ladunniyyah*; 14. Ibn Hajar al-Makki in *as-Sawa'iqu 'l-muhriqah*; 15. 'Abdu'l-Haqq ad-Dihlawi in *Sharhu 'l-mishkat*; and many others. [28](#)³⁸

It should be noted that all the names mentioned above are of Sunni scholars; and in Sunni usage, a *hadith* is called "*sahih*" when it is uninterruptedly narrated by persons of approved probity (*'adil*) who have perfect memory, does not have any defect, and is not unusual (*shadhdh*). [29](#)³⁹

If the above virtues are found in the *asnad* of a *hadith* but the memory of one or more of its narrators is a degree less than that required for *sahih*, then it is called "*hasan*" [30](#)⁴⁰

So when the Sunni scholars say that the *hadith* of Ghadir is *sahih*, they mean that its narrators are of approved probity (i.e., they do not have any defect in belief and deeds) and have perfect memory, and that this *hadith* has no defect and is not unusual.

III. General Meanings of Mawla:

As the Sunnis cannot deny the authenticity of the *hadith* of Ghadir, they try to downplay its significance

by saying that the word "*mawla*" in this *hadith* means 'friend', and that the Holy Prophet wanted to announce that: "Whoever whose friend I am, 'Ali is his friend!"

The trouble is that not a single person who was present in Ghadir grasped this alleged meaning. Hassan ibn Thabit, the famous poet of the Holy Prophet, composed a poem and recited it before the audience, in which he said:

The Prophet then said to him: "Stand up, O Ali, As I am pleased to make you Imam and Guide after me."

'Umar ibn al-Khattab congratulated 'Ali in these words:

"Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib, this morning you became *mawla* of every believing man and woman." [3141](#)

If *mawla* means 'friend' then why the congratulations? And was 'Ali 'enemy' of all believing men and women before that time, so that 'Umar said that 'this morning' you became friend of them all?

al-Imam 'Ali (a. s.) himself wrote to Mu' awiyah: "And the Messenger of Allah granted to me his authority over you on the day of Ghadir Khumm. [3242](#)

And there are many other Companions of the Holy Prophet who used in their poems the word "*mawla*" in connection with Ghadir Khumm in the sense of "master".

Countless scholars of the Qur'an, Arabic grammar and literature have interpreted the word "*mawla* " as "*awla* " which means "having more authority " . The names of the following scholars may be quoted here as examples:

Ibn 'Abbas (in his *Tafsir*, on the margin of *ad-Durru 'l-manthur*, vol. 5, p. 355); al-Kalbi (as quoted in *at-Tafsiru 'l-kabir* of ar-Razi, vol. 29. p.227; al-Alusi, *Ruhu 'l-ma'ani*, vol. 27, p. 178); al-Farra', (ar-Razi, *ibid.*; al-Alusi, *ibid.*); Abu 'Ubaydah Mu'ammara ibn Muthanna al-Basri (ar-Razi, *ibid.*; and ash-Sharif al-Jurjani, *Sharhu 'l-mawaqif*, vol. 3, p. 271); al-Akhfash al-Awsat (in *Nihayatu 'l-uqul*); al-Bukhari (in *as-Sahih*, vol.7, p. 240); Ibn Qutaybah (in *al-Qurtayn*, vol.2, p. 164); Abu'l-'Abbas Tha'lab (in *Sharhu 'l-sab'ah al-mu'allaqah* of az-Zuzani); at-Tabari (in his *Tafsir*, vol.9, p. 117); al-Wahidi (in *al-Wasit*); ath-Tha'labi (in *al-Kashf wa 'l-bayan*); az-Zamakhshari (in *al-Kashshaf*, vol. 2, p. 435); al-Baydawi (in his *Tafsir*, vol.2, p. 497); an-Nasafi (in his *Tafsir*, vol. 4, p. 229); al-Khazin al-Baghdadi (in his *Tafsir* vol. 4, p. 229); and Muhibbu'd-Din Afandi (in his *Tanzilu 'l-ayat*). [3343](#)

IV. Meaning of "Mawla" in the Context

Now let us examine what meaning can be inferred from the context of this *hadith*. If a word has more than one meaning, the best way to ascertain its true connotation is to look at the association (*qarinah*) and the context. There are scores of "associations" in this *hadith* which clearly show that the only meaning fitting the occasion can be "master". Some of them are as follows:

First: The question which the Holy Prophet asked just before this declaration: He asked them: "Do I Not have more authority upon you than you have yourselves?" When they said: "Yes, surely," then the Prophet proceeded to declare that:

"Whoever whose *mawla* I am. 'Ali is his *mawla*."

Without doubt, the word "*mawla*" in this declaration has the same meaning as: (having more authority upon you) has in the preceding question. At least 64 Sunni traditionalists have quoted that preceding question; among them are Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Majah, an-Nasa'i and at-Tirmidhi.[34](#)

Second: The following prayer which the Holy Prophet uttered just after this declaration:

"O Allah! Love him who loves 'Ali, and be the enemy of the enemy of 'Ali; help him who helps 'Ali, and forsake him who forsakes 'A1i."

This prayer shows that 'A1i, on that day, was entrusted with a responsibility which, by its very nature, would make some people his enemy (and that responsibility could not be that except of a ruler); and in carrying out that responsibility he would need helpers and supporters. Are helpers ever needed to carry on a 'friendship'?

Third: The declaration of the Holy Prophet that: "It seems imminent that I will be called away (by Allah) and I will answer that call." This clearly shows that he was making arrangements for the leadership of the Muslims after his death.

Fourth: The congratulations of the Companions and their expressions of joy do not leave room for doubt concerning the meaning of this declaration.

Fifth: The occasion, place and time: Imagine the Holy Prophet breaking his journey in midday, and detaining nearly one-hundred-thousand travellers under the burning sun of the Arabian desert, making them sit in a thorny place on the burning sand, and making a pulpit of camelsaddles; then imagine him delivering a long lecture and at the end of all those preparations coming out with an announcement that: "Whoover loves me should love 'Ali," or "Whoever whose friend I am, 'Ali is his friend! "

Is such a thing excusable before common sense? No, but some people are ready to accuse the Holy Prophet of such childish behaviour!

11. 'Ali "self" of the Prophet

There are many verses which point to the caliphate of 'A1i ibn Abi Talib (as). It is not possible to enumerate them all here. But the event of *Mubahalah* (malediction, imprecation) which took place in the ninth year of the *hijrah* should be noted.

In this year a delegation consisting of fourteen Christians came from Najran to meet the Prophet. When

they met the Prophet they asked him: "What is your opinion about Jesus?" The Apostle said: "You may take rest today and you will receive the reply afterwards." The next day three verses of the third chapter of the Qur'an (3:59–61) about Jesus were revealed. When the Christians did not accept the words of Allah and insisted on their own beliefs, the Apostle recited the following verse:

But whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: "Come let us call our sons and your-sons, and our women and your women, and our selves and your selves, then let us be earnest in prayer and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars (3:61).

The next day the Christians came out on one side; and on the other side, the Apostle came out of his house carrying Husayn in his arms with Hasan walking by his side holding his hand. Behind him was Fatimah, and behind her, 'A1i. When the Christians saw the five pure souls they abstained from the proposed malediction and submitted to a treaty with the Prophet.

In this verse, according to Jabir ibn 'Abdillah al-Ansari, the word "sons" refers to Hasan and Husayn, the word "women" refers to Fatimah, and the words "our selves" refer to the Prophet and 'A1i . Thus 'A1i ibn Abi Talib (a. s.), has been referred to in the verse of *Mubahalah* as "the self" of the Prophet.^{[35](#)}

It also follows that just as it is unlawful to seek to be superior to the Prophet, similarly it is unlawful to supercede 'Ali he being the "self" of the Prophet according to the words of Allah. Anyone who presumed to supercede him was in essence presuming to supercede the Prophet.

12. Traditions

After the declaration of Ghadir, there is really no need to provide more proofs of the caliphate of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as). Yet, it may be pertinent to quote some *ahadith* in this regard.

In the *Hadithu'th-thaqalayn* the Prophet said:

I am leaving two weighty things among you –the Book of Allah and my *Ahlu 'l-bayt*. If you adhere to them and continue to and obey both of them and forsake neither, you will never be misled. They will not separate from each other till they reach me at Kawthar (the pool in Paradise).

Now, it is admitted on all hands that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib is not only one of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt* but is the head of the *Ahlu 'l-bayt*. Therefore, the obligation of his obedience is proved from this universal accepted tradition. ^{[36](#)}^{[46](#)}

Then there is the *hadith* known as *Hadithu 'l-manzilah*. In the expedition of Tabuk (in the month of Rajab of the ninth year A.H.) the Prophet left 'A1i as his deputy in Medina. 'Ali exclaimed with dismay: "Are you leaving me behind?" The Prophet asked him: "O 'Ali, are you not satisfied that you have the same position in relation to me as Harun had to Musa except that there is no prophet after me? "

The Prophet thereby meant that as Musa had left behind Harun to look after his people when he went to receive the Commandments, in the same way he was leaving 'Ali behind as his deputy to look after the affairs of Islam during his absence. [37](#)⁴⁷

Then there is the occasion of communicating the verses of *surah al-Bara'ah* (ch. 9) to the people of Mecca. First Abu Bakr was sent to proclaim it before the pagans. Later the Prophet sent 'Ali to take the *surah* from Abu Bakr and announce it at Mecca. Abu Bakr returned to Medina from his journey midway en route to

Mecca and asked the Prophet whether any verse or order was received from Allah against him announcing the *surah*. The Prophet said: "Jibril came to me and said that no one shall deliver the message except myself or the person who is from me." [38](#)⁴⁸

The moral principle evident in these declarations of the Prophet is also expressed in the following tradition which has been accepted by all sects.

The Prophet said: "'Ali is with the truth and the truth is with 'Ali; whither soever 'Ali turns, the truth (also) turns with him." [39](#) The rightful caliphate is thus rightly entrusted to 'Ali and to none else.

Another is the *hadith* of "Divine Light" (*Hadithu 'n-nur*). Sayyid 'Ali Hamadani writes in *Mawaddatu'l-qurba*, on the authority of Salman al-Farsi, that the Prophet said: "I and 'Ali were both created from one and the same *nur* (Divine Light) four thousand years before Adam was created, and when Adam was created that *nur* was given a place in his backbone. So we continued to occupy the same place till we were separated in the back of 'Abdu 'l-Muttalib. Therefore in me is the prophethood and in 'Ali is the caliphate." In *Riyadu 'l-fada'il*, the last words of the above *hadith* are written as follows: "Then He made me a prophet and made 'Ali a *wasiyy* (vicegerent)." [40](#)

13. Ulu 'L-Amr must be ma'sum

Allah says in the Qur'an:

O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority from among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle, if you believe in Allah and the last day; this is better and very good in the end (4:59).

This verse obliges the Muslims to two obediences: First, the obedience of Allah; second, the obedience of the Apostle and 'those vested with authority from among you' (*uli'l-amri minkum*). The arrangement of the words shows that the obedience of *ulu 'l-amr* is as much obligatory as is the obedience of the Apostle. Naturally, it means that *ulu 'l-amr* should be of the same caliber as the Apostle; otherwise Allah would not have joined them together in this verse.

Before deciding who the *ulu 'l-amr* are, it will be of help to have a look at the commandment of obeying

the Apostle, to see how all-encompassing and all-pervading this commandment is and how great the authority of the Apostle of Allah is. Allah says in the Qur'an:

And We did not send any Apostle, but that he should be obeyed by Allah's permission (4:64).

The prophets and the apostles were to be obeyed and followed; the followers were not expected to check every action of the prophet to decide what was to be obeyed and what not. Clearly, it shows that the prophets and apostles were free from error and sin; otherwise Allah would not have ordered the people to obey the apostles unconditionally.

There are many verses in which Allah commands us to obey the Prophet:

O ye who believe! Obey Allah, and obey the Apostle. [41](#)

Again, He says:

And whoever obeys Allah and His Apostle. . [42](#)

In the same *surah* it is asserted:

Whoever obeys the Apostle, he indeed obeys Allah (4:80).

In these as well as numerous other verses of the Qur'an, obedience of Allah is synonymous with the obedience of the prophets. Such assertion would have been impossible if the prophets were not *ma'sum* (infallible).

Now, note the following verse:

. . . and obey not from among them a sinner or an ungrateful one (76:26).

The picture is complete. The prophets are to be obeyed; the sinners are not to be obeyed. The only conclusion is that the prophets were not sinners or wrong-doers. In other words, they were *ma'sum*-infallible, sinless.

Just imagine what impossible situation would have been created if any prophet began exhorting his followers to commit a mistake or sin. The wretched followers would have been condemned to the displeasure of Allah in any case. If they obeyed the Prophet and committed that sin they disobeyed the command given by Allah and thus were disgraced. If, on the other hand, they disobeyed the Prophet, they again disobeyed the command of Allah about obeying the Prophet. So, it appears that a non-*ma'sum* prophet could bring nothing but disgrace and condemnation to his people.

Looking especially at the Holy Prophet of Islam, Allah tells us

. . . and whatever the Apostle gives you, take it; and from whatever he forbids you, keep back

(59:7).

This means that the permission or prohibition of the Holy Prophet was always in accordance with the will of Allah and always favoured by Him. It proves that the Holy Prophet was *ma'sum*. No one can be so sure about the commands of a man who is not infallible.

There is another verse: Say:

"If you love Allah, then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you your sins" (3:31).

Here the love of Allah is made contingent on following the Prophet of Islam. Both sides of love are included in it. If you love Allah follow the Prophet; if you love the Prophet, Allah will love you. Does it not show that the Prophet was absolutely free from any type of blemish?

Not only his actions, even his words were the Commands of Allah. Allah says in the Qur'an:

Nor does he speak out of (his own) desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed (53:3-4).

Here we find the highest degree of infallibility which can be imagined. Also, there are several verses in which the following words have been used for the Holy Prophet:

. . . and Apostle from among themselves, who recites to them His communications and purifies them, and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom.[43](#)

How could a prophet purify others of sins and blemishes if he himself were not pure? How could a man teach others wisdom if he had no wisdom to distinguish right from wrong; or worst still, if he had no willpower to resist from doing wrong? The Prophet was to teach people the Book of Allah; this means that he knew the Commandments of Allah. He was to purify them and teach them wisdom. So this means he had wisdom and purity himself.

Witness to the perfection of his character is found in the Qur'an where it says:

And most surely you are on sublime morality (68:4).

A man committing mistakes does not deserve such compliments.

All these verses clearly show two things:

First: The authority of the Holy Prophet upon the believers was unlimited and all-comprehensive. Any order given by him, under any condition, in any place, at any time, was to be obeyed unconditionally.

Second: That supreme authority was given to him because he was *ma'sum* (sinless) and free from all types of error and sin. Otherwise, Allah would not have ordered us to obey him unconditionally.

In this verse, *ulu 'l-amr*, have been given exactly the same authority over the Muslims, because both the

'Apostle' and the *ulu 'l-amr* have been jointly mentioned under one word "obey"; which shows that the obedience of *ulu 'l-amr* has the same standing as the obedience of the Apostle.

It naturally follows that *ulu 'l-amr* must also be *ma'sum* (sinless) and free from any type of error and sin. Otherwise, their obedience would not have been joined with the obedience of the Prophet. Amiru 'l-Mu'minin 'Ali (as), said: "The one who disobeys Allah is not to be obeyed; and verily obedience is of Allah and of His Apostle and those vested with authority. Verily, Allah ordered (the people) to obey the Apostle because he was sinless and clean (pure), who would not tell the people to disobey Allah; and verily He ordered (the people) to obey those vested with authority because they are sinless and clean (pure), and would not tell the people to disobey Allah."⁴⁴

14. Ulu 'l-Amr: does it mean Muslim ruler?

Many of our Sunni brethren tend to interpret "*ulu 'l-amr*" as 'the rulers from among yourselves', i.e., Muslims rulers. This interpretation is not based on any logical reasoning; it is solely based on twists of history. The majority of the Muslims have remained as a vassal of the monarchs and rulers, interpreting and reinterpreting Islam and the Qur'an to please the powers to be.

The history of the Muslims (like any other nation) is replete with the names of rulers whose injustice, debauchery and tyranny have tarnished the name of Islam, as will be mentioned briefly in the latter part of this text. Such rulers have always been and will always be. And we are told that they are the *ulu 'l-amr* mentioned in this verse.

If Allah were to order us to obey such kings and rulers, an impossible situation would be created for the Muslims. The wretched followers would be condemned to the displeasure of Allah, no matter what they did. If they obeyed these rulers, they disobeyed the Command of Allah: "Do not obey a sinner." And if they disobeyed such rulers, they again disobeyed the Command of Allah to "obey the Muslim rulers". So, if we accept this interpretation, the Muslims are condemned to eternal disgrace whether they obey or disobey their non-*ma'sum* Muslim rulers.

Also, there are Muslim rulers of different beliefs and persuasions. There are Shafi'is, Wahhabis, Malikis, Hanafis, as well as Shi'ahs and Ibadis. Now, according to this interpretation the Sunnis residing under an Ibadi Sultan (like in Oman) should follow Ibadi tenets; and those residing under a Shi'ah ruler (like in Iran) should follow Shi'ah beliefs. Do these people have the conviction of courage to follow their professed interpretation to its logical end?

The famous Sunni commentator, Fakhru 'd-Din ar-Razi, concluded in his *Tafsiru 'l-kabir*⁴⁵ that this verse proves that *ulu 'l-amr* must be *ma'sum*. He argues that Allah has commanded the people to obey *ulu 'l-amr* unconditionally; therefore, it is essential for the *ulu 'l-amr* to be *ma'sum*. Because if there is any possibility of their committing sin (and sin is forbidden), it will mean that one has to obey them and also disobey them in that very action. And this is impossible! Then to dissuade his readers from the *Ahlu 'l-*

bayt, he invented the theory that the Muslim *ummah* as a whole is *ma'sum*.

This interpretation is unique, as no Muslim scholar ever subscribed to this theory and it is not based on any tradition. It is quite surprising that ar-Razi accepts that each individual of the Muslim nation is non-*ma'sum*, yet still claims that their sum-total is *ma'sum*. Even a primary school student knows that 200 cows plus 200 cows makes 400 cows and not one horse.

But ar-Razi says that 70 million non *ma'sum* plus 70 million non-*ma'sum* will make one *ma'sum*! Does he want us to believe that if all the patients of a mental hospital joined together they would be equal to one sane person?[46](#)

The poet of the Orient, Iqbal, has said:

The minds of two hundred donkeys cannot produce the thoughts of one man.

Obviously, with his great knowledge he was able to conclude that *ulu 'l-amr* must be *ma'sum*; but it was his prejudice which compelled him to say that the Islamic *ummah* as a whole is *ma'sum*.

Also, he did not pause to see that the verse contains the word "*minkum*" ("from among you") which shows that the said *ulu 'l-amr* shall be part of the Muslim *ummah*, not the whole Muslim nation. And if the whole Muslim nation is to be obeyed, then who is there left to obey?

15. Real meaning of Ulu 'l-Amr

Now we return to the correct interpretation of the above verse.

Al-Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (as) said that this verse was revealed about 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, Hasan and Husayn (as) . Upon hearing this, someone asked the Imam: "People say, 'Why did Allah not mention the names of 'Ali and his family in His Book?'"

The Imam answered: "Tell them that there came the command of *salat* (prayer), but Allah did not mention whether three or four *raka'at* (units) (to be performed); it was the Apostle of Allah who explained all the details. And (the command of) *zakat* was revealed, but Allah did not say that it is one in every forty dirham; it was the Apostle of Allah who explained it; and hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) was ordered but Allah did not say to perform *tawaf* (circumambulation of the Ka'bah) seven times the Apostle of Allah explained it. Likewise, the verse was revealed:

Obey Allah, and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority from among you,

and it was revealed about 'Ali and Hasan and Husayn (as). [47](#)⁵⁷

In *Kifayatu 'l-athar*, there is a tradition from Jabir ibn 'Abdillah al-Ansari, in explanation of this verse. When it was revealed, Jabir said to the Prophet: "We know Allah and the Prophet, but who are those

vested with authority whose obedience has been conjoined to that of Allah and yourself ?" The Prophet said: "They are my caliphs and the Imams of the Muslims after me. The first of them is 'Ali, then Hasan, then Husayn, then 'A1i, son of Husayn; then Muhammad, son of 'A1i, who has been mentioned as al-Baqir in the Torah. O Jabir! You will meet him. When you see him, convey my salam (greetings) to him. He will be succeeded by his son Ja'far as-Sadiq (the Truthful); then Musa, son of Ja'far; then 'A1i, son of Musa; then Muhammad, son of 'A1i; then 'A1i, son of Muhammad; then Hasan, son of 'Ali.

"He will be followed by his son whose name and patronym (*kunyah*) will be the same as mine. He will be *Hujjatu-llah* (Proof of Allah) on the earth and *Baqiyyatu-llah* (the one spared by Allah to maintain the cause of faith) among mankind. He will conquer the whole world from east to west. So long will he remain hidden from the eyes of his followers and friends that the belief in his *imamah* Will remain only in those hearts which have been tested by Allah for faith. "

Jabir said: "O Messenger of Allah! Will his followers benefit from his seclusion?

The Prophet said "Yes! by Him Who sent me with prophethood! They will be guided by his light, and benefit from his *wilaayah* (love; authority) during his seclusions just as people benefit from the sun even when-it is hidden in a cloud O Jabir! This is from the hidden secrets of Allah and the treasured knowledge of-Allah. So guard it except from the people (who deserve to know) . "[48](#)

This *hadith* has been quoted from Shi'ah sources. Sunni traditions do not provide as much detail; still there are many Sunni traditions which refer to the Twelve Imams, as explained in the next chapter.

Now that we know who "*those vested with Authority*" are, it is evident that the question of obeying tyrant and unjust rulers does not arise at all. Muslims are not required by this verse to obey rulers who may be unjust, tyrannical, ignorant, and selfish and sunk in debauchery. They are in fact ordered to obey the specified Twelve Imams, all of whom were sinless and free from evil thoughts and deeds. Obeying them has no risks whatsoever. Nay, it protects from all risks; because they will never give an order against the Will of Allah and will treat all human beings with love, justice and equity.

16. Twelve caliphs or Imams

Now it is advisable to refer to several parts of the 77th chapter of *Yanabi'u l-mawaddah* of al-Hafiz Sulayman ibn Ibrahim al-Qunduzi al-Hanafi.

A well known *hadith* has been quoted that: "There will be twelve caliphs, all from the Quraysh", in many books including those of al Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and at-Tirmidhi .

The author quotes many traditions to the effect that the Holy Prophet said: "I, 'Ali, Hasan, Husayn and nine of the descendants of Husayn are pure and sinless."

He also quotes that the Holy Prophet told al-Imam Husayn: "You are a chief, brother of a chief; you are

an Imam, son of an Imam, brother of an Imam; you are Proof (of Allah), son of a Proof (of Allah), brother of a Proof (of Allah), and father of nine Proofs (of Allah), the ninth of whom will be al-Mahdi. "

After quoting many such traditions, he writes: "Some scholars have said that the traditions (which show that the caliphs after the Holy Prophet would be twelve) are well known, from many *asnad*. Now, with the passage of time and through historical events, we know that in this *hadith* the Holy Prophet has referred to the Twelve Imams from his *Ahlu 'l-bayt* and descendants, because:

"This *hadith* cannot apply to the four *al-khulafa'u 'r-rdshidun* from among his Companions, as they were less than twelve.

"And it cannot apply to the caliphs from the tribe of *Umayyad*, because (a) they were more than twelve; (b) all of them were tyrants and unjust (except 'Umar ibn 'Abdi'l-'Aziz); and (c) they were not from the *Banu Hashim* and the Holy Prophet had said in a *hadith* that: 'all of them will be from the *Banu Hashim*. . ' "And it cannot apply to the caliphs from the *Banu 'Abbas*, because: (a) they were more than twelve; and (b) they did not comply with (the demands of) the verse:

Say. 'I do not ask of you any recompense for it except the love for (my) near relatives' (42:23),

nor with the Tradition of the Mantle (*Hadithu'l-kisa'*); (i.e., they persecuted the descendants of the Prophet).

"Therefore, the only way to interpret this *hadith* is to accept that it refers to the Twelve Imams from the Holy Prophet's Ahlu'l-bayt and descendants, because they were, in their times, the most knowledgeable, the most illustrious, the most god-fearing, the most pious, the highest in their family lineage, the best in personal virtues, and the most honoured before Allah; and their knowledge was derived from their ancestor (the Prophet) through their fathers, and by inheritance and by direct teachings from Allah." [49](#)

17. Few facts about the twelve Imams(a)

First Imam: Amiru 'l-Mu'minin Abu 'l-Hasan 'ALI al-Murtada, son of Abu Talib, was born on 13th *Rajab*, 10 years before the declaration of the Prophethood (600 A.D.), inside the Kabah; became Imam, on the death of the Prophet on 28th *Safar*, 11 /632; was fatally wounded by the poisoned sword of Ibn Muljam while engaged in prayers at the Mosque of Kufah (Iraq), and expired two days later on 21st *Ramadan*, 40/661 and was buried at an-Najaf al-Ashraf (Iraq).

Second Imam: Abu Muhammad AL-HASAN al-Mujtaba, son of 'Ali (as), was born on 15th *Ramadan*, 3/625 at Medina; died of poison on 7th or 28th *Safar*, 50/670 at Medina.

Third Imam: Sayyidu'sh-Shuhada' Abu 'Abdillah AL-HUSAYN, son of 'Ali (as), was born on 3rd *Sha'ban*, 4/626 at Medina, was martyred with his sons, relatives and Companions, on 10th *Muharram*, 61/680, at Karbala' (Iraq). He and his elder brother, al-Hasan, were sons of Fatimah az-Zahra' (as), daughter of the

Holy Prophet.

Fourth Imam: Abu Muhammad 'ALI Zaynu 'l-'Abidin, son of al-Husayn (as), was born on 5th *Sha'ban*, 38/659; died of poison on 25th *Muharram*, 94/712 or 95/713 at Medina.

Fifth Imam: Abu Ja'far MUHAMMAD al-Baqir, son of 'Ali Zayn u'l-'Abidin (as), was born on 1st *Rajab*, 57/677 at Medina; died of poison on 7th *Dhu 'l-hijjah*, 114/733 at Medina.

Sixth Imam: Abu 'Abdillah JAFAR as-Sadiq, son of Muhammad al-Baqir (as), was born on 17th *Rabi u'l-awwal*, 83/702 at Medina; died there of poison on 25th *Shawwal*, 148/765.

Seventh Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan al-Awwal, MUSA al-Kazim, son of Ja'far as-Sadiq (as), was born at al-Abwa' (7 miles from Medina) on 7th *Safar*, 129/746; died of poison on 25th *Rajab*, 183/799 in the prison of Harun ar-Rashid at Baghdad and was buried at al-Kazimiyyah, near Baghdad (Iraq) .

Eighth Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan ath-Thani, 'ALI ar-Rida, son of Musa al-Kazim (as), was born at Medina on 11th *Dhu 'l-qi'dah*, 148/765; died of poison on 17th *Safar*, 203/818 at Mashhad (Khurasan, Iran).

Ninth Imam: Abu Ja'far ath-Thani, MUHAMMAD at-Taqi al-Jawad, son of 'Ali ar-Rida (as), was born on 10th *Rajab*, 195/811 at Medina; died of poison at Baghdad on 30th *Dhu 'l-qi'dah*, 220/835; was buried near his grandfather at al-Kazimiyyah.

Tenth Imam: Abu 'l-Hasan ath-Thalith, 'ALI an-Naqi al-Hadi, son of Muhammad at-Taqi (as), was born on 5th *Rajab*, 212/827 at Medina; died of poison at Samarra' (Iraq) on 3rd *Rajab*, 254/868.

Eleventh Imam: Abu Muhammad, ALHASAN al-'Askari, son of 'Ali an-Naqi (as), was born on 8th *Rabi 'u 'th-thani*, 232/846 at Medina; died of poison at Samarra' (Iraq) on 8th *Rabi'u 'l-awwal*, 260/874.

Twelfth Imam: Abu 'l-Qasim, MUHAMMAD AL-MAHDI, son of al-Hasan al-'Askari (as), was born on 15th *Sha'ban*, 255/869 at Samarra' (Iraq). He is our present Imam; he went into Lesser Occultation in 260/874 which continued until 329/844; then the Greater Occultation began, which still continues. He will reappear when Allah allows him, to establish the Kingdom of Allah on earth, to fill the world with justice and equity, as it would be full of injustice and tyranny. He is *al-Qa'im* (the one who shall stand to establish the rule of Allah); *al-Hujjah* (the Proof of Allah over His creatures); *Sahibu 'z-Zaman* (the Lord of Our Time), and *Sahibu 'l-Amr* (the one vested with Divine authority).

[1.](#) al-'Allamah al-Hilli: al-Babu 'l-hadi 'ashar, Eng. tr W.M. Miller, pp. 50, 62-4.

[2.](#) Ibid. p.69.

[3.](#) Ibidpp.64-8.

[4.](#) Ibid., p. 68.

[5.](#) Ibid., p. 69.

[6.](#) as-Suyuti: Tari'khu 'l-khulafa, p.217.

[7.](#) Holy Qur'an, Eng . tr. S. V. Mir Ahmed Ali, fn. 1857, p.1261

[8.](#) Wahidu 'z-Zaman: Tafsir Wahidi (on the margin of the Qur'an's translation by the same author), para.22fn.7,p.549.

9. Wahidu'z-Zaman: Anwaru 'l-lughah, para.22,P.51.
10. al-Ghazzali: Ihya' 'ulumu 'd-din, vol. I, pt.2, p. 10.
11. Ibn Abdi 'l-Barr: al-Isti'ab, vol.2, p.470.
12. al-Qunduzi: Yanabi'u 'l-mawaddah, p. 253.
13. Ibn 'Abdi 'l-Barr: al-Isti'ab, vol. 3, p. 115.
14. Ibn Hajar al-Haytami: Sawā'iqu 'l-muhriqah, p.72 Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani: Fathu 'l-bari, vol. 8, p.71.
15. Amritsari, Arjahu 'l-matalib, p. 112.
16. Ibnu 'l-Athir: al-Kamil, [vol.5, pp. 62-3]; al-Baghawi: at-Tafsir, [vol. 4, p. 127]; al-Khazin: at-Tafsir, [vol. 4, p. 127]; al-Bayhaqi: Dala'ilu 'n-nubuwwah [vol. I, pp.428-30]; as-Suyuti: ad-Durru 'l-manthur [vol.5, p.97]; al-Muttaqi al-Hindi: Kanzu 'l-ummāl [vol. 15, pp. 100, 113, 115-7]; Abu 'l-Fida': al-Mukhtasar, [vol. I, pp. 116-7]; at-Tabari: at-Tarikh, [vol. I pp. 171-3]; Carlyle, T.: On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History, [p.54]; Gibbon, E.: The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, [vol. 3, p. 94]; Davenport, J.: An Apology for Muhammed and the Koran [p.21]; Irving, W.: Mahomet and His Successors [p.45]. (For further details, see al-Amini: al-Ghadi'r [vol.2, pp.27889])
17. See [at-Tabari; at-Tafsir, vol. 6, p. 186]; as-Suyuti: ad-Durru 'l-manthur, [vol. 2, pp. 293-4]; ar-Razi: at-Tafsiru 'l-kabir, [vol. 12, p. 26]; az-Zamakhshari: at-Tafsir (al-Kashshaf), vol. I, p. 649; [al-Jassas: Ahkamu 'l-Qur'an, vol. 2, pp. 542-3; al-Khazin: at-Tafsir, vol. 2, p. 68]
18. al-Qunduzi: Yanabi'u 'l-mawaddah, [p. 168; Amritsari: Arjahu 'l-matalib, p. 448].
19. Siddiq Hasan Khan: Manhaj 'l-wusul, p. 13. death indicated in parentheses are in A. H.)
20. al-Amini: al-Ghadi'r, vol 1, pp. 14-18
21. Ibid., pp. 62-63.
22. Ibid., pp. 73-81.
23. Ibid., pp. 73-151.
24. at-Tirmidhi: as-Sahih, vol. 2, p. 298
25. at-Tahawi: Mushkilu 'l-athar, vol. 2, p. 308
26. al-Hakim: al-Mustadrak, vol. 3, pp. 109-10.
27. al-Amini: al-Ghadi'r, vol. 1, p. 295.
28. Ibid., pp. 294-313.
29. Subhi' as-Salih: 'Ulumu 'l-hadith wa mustalahatuh, p. 145.
30. Ibid., p. 156.
31. al-Khatib at-Tabrizi: Mishkatu 'l-masabih [p. 557]; Mir Khwand: Habibu 's-siyar, [vol. 1, pt. 3, p. 144]; at-Tabari: [al-Wilayah]; [ar-Razi: at-Tafsiru 'l-kabir, vol. 12, pp. 49-50]; Ahmad: al-Musnad, [vol. 4, p. 281]; Ibn Abi Shaybah: al-Musannaf; Abu Ya'la: al-Musnad; Ahmad ibn 'Uqdah: al-Wilayah, and many others. [See also al-Amini: al-Ghadi'r, vol. 1, pp. 270-83 - for further references.]
32. al-Amini: al-Ghadi'r, vol. I, p. 340.
33. See al-Amini: al-Ghadi'r, pp. 344-50, for detail references.
34. Ibid., pp. 370-371.
35. al-Wahidi: Asbabu 'n-nuzul, p. 40; as-Suyuti: ad-Durru 'l-manthur, vol. 2, p. 38.
36. This hadith can be seen in most books of traditions. See for instance, at-Tirmidhi: as-Sahih, vol. 2, p. 308; Ibnu 'l-Athir: Usdu 'l-ghabah, vol. 2, p. 12; as-Suyuti: ad-Durru 'l-manthur, vol. 6, p. 7; al-Muttaqi al-Hindi: Kanzu 'l-ummāl, (Hyderabad, 1312 A. H.), p. 48.
37. Ibn Majah: as-Sunan, p. 12; Ahmad: al-Musnad, vol. 1, p. 174; an-Nasa'i: al-Khasa'is, pp. 15-16; at-Tahawi: Mushkilu 'l-athar, vol. 2, p. 309; al-Muhibb at-Tabari: Dhakhathu 'l-'uqba, p. 63.
38. as-Suyuti: ad-Durru 'l-manthur, vol. 6, p. 209, at-Tabari: at-Tafsir, vol. 10, p. 47; an-Nasa'i: al-Khasa'is, p. 20.
39. al-Khatib al-Khwarazmi: al-Manaqib, p. 56; al-Hammuyi: Fara'idu 's-simtayn, vol. 1, p. 176; al-Khatib al-Baghdadi: Tari'kh Baghdad, vol. 14, p. 321
40. As quoted in Mafatih 'l-matalib, p. 396; al-Ganji: Kifayatu 't-talib, p. 176.
41. Qur'an, 47:33; see also: 3:32, 132; 5:92; 8:1, 20, 46; 24:54; 58:13; 64:12.
42. Qur'an, 4:13; see also: 4:69; 24:52; 33:71; 48:18.

[43.](#) Qur'an,62:2;seealso:2: 129;3: 164.

[44.](#) as-Saduq: 'Ilalu 'sh shara'i', [vol. I, p . 123]

[45.](#) ar-Razi: at-Tafsiru 'l-kabir, vol. 10, p.144

[46.](#) Though we hold special respect for others' opinions, and particularly for the beliefs of our Sunni brothers, at the same time, the author had no other alternative but to criticize the opinion of ar-Razi with these examples. Of course, we do not regard this opinion of ar-Razi to be the manifesto of all Sunni brothers. (pub.)

[47.](#) al-'Ayyashi: at-Tafsir, vol. 1, pp.249-50; Fayd al-Kashani: at-Tafsir (as-Safi), vol. 1, p.364.

[48.](#) al-Khazzaz: Kifayatu 'l-athar, p. 53

[49.](#) al-Qunduzi; Yanabi 'u 'l-mawaddah, pp.444-7.

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