

The Social Dimensions of Wilayah

Abstract: The concept of wilayah plays an important role within Shia doctrine. While much focus has been placed on its vertical dimension—i.e., the connection between the wali and those who fall under his wilayah—the horizontal dimension is often neglected or misunderstood.

This speech by Muhammad ‘Ali Shomali given on the death anniversary of Imam Khumayni (r) analyzes the horizontal and social/communal dimensions of wilayah as understood through some of the common ziyarah and du’as as taught by the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a).

Though unity between the Shias is emphasized, a more essential form of unity between all those who are working for Imam al-Mahdi—regardless of their doctrinal school of thought—has been touched upon.

Keywords: wilayah, Imam al-Mahdi, community and society, du’a, ziyarah, Imam Khumayni, unity

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

First of all, I offer my condolences to our beloved Imam Mahdi for the demise of one of his devotees [i.e., Ayatullah Bahjat (r)], and one of the most successful and most sincere deputies of our beloved Imam. May Allah subhanahu wa ta’ala enable us to say and listen to the things that may be beneficial insha-Allah (God-willing) for ourselves and for the future of the Shia community worldwide.

One of the things that we—the Talabah (students of the Islamic seminary)—should think about, and actually do think about when we come to Qom or any other seminary is this: why is it that some people come with the same beginnings but end up very differently? Every year, we count perhaps hundreds of thousands of people who come here, and over the years we have had some forty- or fifty-thousand people in the seminary.

When they first enter, they are not much different from each other, but when they graduate or when they pass away, you see amongst them the likes of Imam Khumayni, Ayatullah Bahjat, and the Supreme Leader; then there are people who are second or third [after them]; and finally, among them, regrettably,

there are people you wish had never entered the hawzah (Islamic seminary).

So why is this the case? Is it that these people really are different from the beginning or is it that they just end up with different results?

One of the factors, which I believe to be the main one, is this: When people enter, their aims are generally fair. I'm not saying all, but most people enter with sincerity. (The late Ayatullah Shahid Quddusi used to say that we, who are responsible for training the Talabah, should do our best so that the level of their sincerity when they enter the hawzah remains intact [throughout their stay].

We do not need to make them more sincere—only that their sincerity and purity of intention remains intact.) So, these students enter with sincerity. But, depending on the direction that they take in their academic life, in their tabligh life, and in their personal life, they end up on paths towards different directions. And this direction is very much based on the vision that they have on what a proper Talib al-din (seminary student), a proper Muslim scholar, and a proper Muslim leader has to do.

So I think one of the main things, though not the only one, that made Imam Khumayni distinct and different from many other people was that from the beginning, he had a special orientation in his life. He knew what he is going to do. In fact, once, the Supreme Leader, Ayatullah Khamenei, mentioned a very good point: it was not necessary for Imam Khumayni to know all the details of what he was going to do or what is going to happen for the revolution right from the beginning.

But when you have taqwa (God-consciousness) and when you do your best to please Allah (swt) in a wise and educated way, then step by step, your way and path becomes clear. So, I am not claiming that right from the beginning of his entry into the hawzah Imam Khumayni had the idea of establishing an Islamic government in Iran and an Islamic awakening. But what I am saying is that he definitely had some type of understanding of Islam which was there, and over time, grew ...

From the beginning, Imam Khumayni knew that Islam—and in particular, the school of the Ahl al-Bayt—is not based on one's individual relation with the masters or with the awliya that Allah has provided us with. Many people think [along the following lines]: “okay, I've come to the hawzah and insha-Allah I want to become close to Imam az-Zaman (the Imam of the Age) as much as possible; I want to devote myself to Imam az-Zaman; I want to work for Imam az-Zaman.

What happens to the rest of the people and what happens to the community is a secondary issue, if at all; it is mostly a matter of working hard to make myself closer to Imam az-Zaman. And if I can achieve to become very close to the Imam—especially if I can see him or have some correspondence with him—then that is the end [or goal] of my life and that is the ultimate achievement.”

However, I think there is another understanding of what we need to do: we want to make a community around Imam az-Zaman, and not just a personal relation between me and the Imam, which would be totally different from your experience and the experience of any other person.

We want to establish a community which is built around the idea of wilayah that is embodied in Imam az-Zaman; but this wilayah penetrates into all the cells and organs of the body—a body composed of the community of the faithful.

So, insha-Allah with the time that we have, I'd like to share some of the points that you may already know [regarding this concept of wilayah] ... through passages that we have always been reciting and perhaps reflecting on, but maybe not with this kind of understanding. For example, we have many profound ideas in Ziyarat 'Ashura' which are really formative for the mind and a vision for whoever believes in such ziyarat and such teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt.

Some of the things that I have found in Ziyarat 'Ashura', I have hardly found in any other place (perhaps they are there but they did not come to my mind). Very profound ideas for the first time drew my attention to Ziyarat 'Ashura'. For example, in Ziyarat 'Ashura', there are two places in which we address Imam Husayn ('a) by saying:

إِنِّي سَلِمٌ لِّمَن سَأَلَكَمُ وَ حَرْبٌ لِّمَن حَارَبَكَمُ

I am at peace with whoever is at peace with you; I am at war with whoever is at war with you

[Based on this statement] to be at peace with Imam Husayn is not something important. Unfortunately many of us are only at peace with Imam Husayn and not at peace with his Shias. This is why we easily ruin each other, attack each other, and damage the reputation of each other.

Why? Because I think I love Imam Husayn even though I do not consider as important my relation with the Shias of Imam Husayn—i.e., the followers of Husayn. But here [in Ziyarat 'Ashura'] we say Inni silmun li man salamakum (“I am at peace with whoever is at peace with you”) and not just silmun lak (“I am at peace with you”) or silmun lakum (“I am peace with you all”).

We say, “I am at peace with whoever is at peace with you.” Are we really at peace with each other? Is our society and community the type in which we feel safe from the attacks from each other and from ourselves? No.

Moreover, the second time [in the ziyarah] when this phrase is repeated, it has an addition:

إِنِّي سَلِمٌ لِّمَن سَأَلَكَمُ وَ حَرْبٌ لِّمَن حَارَبَكَمُ وَ وَلِيٌّ لِّمَن وَالَاكُمْ وَ عَدُوٌّ لِّمَن عَادَاكُمْ

I am at peace with whoever is at peace with you; I am at war with whoever is at war with you; I am a wali for whoever befriends you; and I am an enemy for whoever is hostile towards you.

Not only am I at peace with whoever is at peace with you; not only am I at war with whoever is at war

with you; rather I feel a deep sense of wilayah between me and whoever has your wilayah. Not only am I your wali—though of course, ana waliyun lakum (“I am a wali for you”) as we have in many ahadith or du’as—but I feel a deep sense of wilayah between me and whoever has your wilayah.

So wilayah is not only between me and Imam az-Zaman; there must be wilayah between me and you—i.e., you are my wali and I am your wali.

... وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ

But the faithful, men and women, are awliya' of one another ... (9:71)

We must have this comprehensive and far-reaching notion of wilayah. With any person who has this understanding of Islam and who has this faith in the Ahl al-Bayt, I must feel that he is my wali. One of the requirements of being a wali is that you must love that person. How can you be a wali of a person without loving him?

And the second condition is that there must be a sense of obedience. There must be a right for obedience. This is why Ayatullah Mutahhari says—in commenting on the aforementioned ayah—that Allah has given some type of authority to each mu'min (believer) over another mu'min. This is why Allah says [in continuation of the same verse]:

.... بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ...

... they bid what is right and forbid what is wrong ... (9:71)

Why can you direct me, guide me, and indeed ask me to do something which is good? It is because you have this right of obedience [over me]. I cannot say, “it is none of your business”, because it is Allah Who has given this wilayah to you. But this [wilayah] is mutual. I have this wilayah [over you] as well. I must love you and obey you, and you must love me and obey me—all for the betterment of the community. This is the meaning of waliyun liman walakum wa ‘aduwwun li man ‘adakum.

In another place in Ziyarat ‘Ashura’, we say:

أَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ إِلَى رَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ إِلَى أَمِيرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ثُمَّ إِلَى فَاطِمَةَ ثُمَّ إِلَى الْحَسَنِ وَ الْحُسَيْنِ بِمُؤَالَاتِكُمْ وَ الْبَرَاءَةِ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ

I seek closeness to Allah, then to His Prophet, then to the Leader of believers, then to Fatimah, then to Hasan and Husayn through your wilayah and through disassociating (myself) from your enemies.

Then in the subsequent text, or passage, we say:

أَتَقَرَّبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْكُمْ بِمُؤَالَاتِكُمْ وَبِالْبَرَاءَةِ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ

I seek closeness to Allah and then to you through your wilayah and the wilayah of your friends and through disassociating (myself) from your enemies.

This is very important because here something extra is added. I am saying that I seek closeness to you by having your wilayah, by disassociating myself from your enemies, and also by having the wilayah of your friends—muwalati waliyukum. Moreover, this wali is not the Imam because the Imam is already addressed through the [previous] phrase of bi muwalatikum.

So whoever wants to get close to the Ahl al-Bayt and whoever wants to get close to the Prophet (S) and to Lady Fatimah (‘a), it is not just a matter of visiting their shrines, reciting their ziyarat, and doing something for them; on the contrary, you must show this [desire] by showing how much you love their followers. If you love a father or mother you must love their children; you must respect their children. I cannot, for example, beat someone’s child and then claim that I love them. How can you love someone and beat his child, or ignore his child?

In another place within Ziyarat ‘Ashura’ we say:

فَاسْئَلُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي أَكْرَمَنِي بِمَعْرِفَتِكُمْ وَ مَعْرِفَةِ أَوْلِيَائِكُمْ وَرَزَقَنِي الْبَرَاءَةَ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ أَنْ يَجْعَلَ لِي مَعَكُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ الْآخِرَةِ

So I ask Allah—the One Who has honoured me through knowing you and knowing your awliya’ and Who has provided me with [the gift] of disassociation from your enemies—to place me with you in this world and in the hereafter...

“Knowing your awliya’”—if I have time I will talk about this concept of wali. This wali is not just a friend; the wali is not just a lover; this wali is the one who is in the same camp as you just as the ‘aduww is in the opposite camp.

In the above phrase, there are four requests that are made. Before I mention those four, we have to remember that whenever you ask Allah (swt) for something, and then you mention one of his blessings at the beginning or one of his qualities at the end, there must be a relation. If I say “O Allah, Who is Merciful,” and then ask something [from Him], there must be a relation between what I ask and the Mercy of Allah. I cannot ask, “O Allah, Who is Merciful, please kill so and so.” This does not make sense. Or for example, “Oh Allah, Who is razzaq (the Sustainer), please destroy so and so.” There is no relation [between the two].

In this phrase, before the request we make, we are describing Allah as such:

الَّذِي أَكْرَمَنِي بِمَعْرِفَتِكُمْ وَ مَعْرِفَةِ أَوْلِيَائِكُمْ وَرَزَقَنِي الْبِرَاءَةَ مِنْ أَعْدَائِكُمْ

... the One Who has honoured me through knowing you and knowing your awliya' and Who has provided me with [the gift] of disassociation from your enemies ...

So you realize that this is the key for what you are going to ask since it comes just before your request. So what do we ask? First:

أَنْ يَجْعَلَني مَعَكُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَ الْآخِرَةِ

... to place me with you in this world and in the hereafter...

I want to be with you in the dunya (this world) and in the hereafter. What does it mean to be with them in the dunya and the hereafter? Does it mean to physically be with them in the dunya? If that is the case, then people of our age are deprived of this tawfiq (or opportunity) and this privilege of being with them physically. But I think even in the time of the Ahl al-Bayt it was not necessary for every Shia to go and live in Madinah so as to be with Imam as-Sadiq ('a) or to go and live in Kufa so as to be with Imam 'Ali ('a). To 'be with you' is different from physical union. To 'be with you' means "to be in your camp." It means to be known as someone who is your follower and who is working for your cause.

And I also want to be with you [O Imam] in the akhirah. We have many ahadith (traditions) which are very beautiful, which say that on the Day of Judgment, when Allah (swt) calls every nation to come, wait, and stand in queue behind their leader, then insha-Allah you the Shia—the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt—will come and be with us [i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt] and we will be taken together to heaven. For example, Imam as-Sadiq ('a), in a hadith which is mentioned by Allamah Tabataba'i in al-Mizan, commenting on the verse:

.... يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ

The day We shall summon every group of people with their imam... (17:71)

narrates the following (which is also mentioned in Tafsir-e Namuneh and in many other places):

أَلَا تَحْمَدُونَ اللَّهَ إِذَا كَانَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَدَعَا كُلَّ قَوْمٍ إِلَىٰ مَنْ يُتَوَلَّوْنَهُ وَ دَعَانَا إِلَىٰ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ص وَ فَرَعْتُمْ إِلَيْنَا فَإِلَىٰ أَيْنَ تَرَوْنَ نَذْهَبُ بِكُمْ إِلَىٰ الْجَنَّةِ وَ رَبُّ الْكَعْبَةِ قَالَهَا ثَلَاثًا

Do you not praise Allah that when the Day of Resurrection comes Allah will call every group towards those who have their wilayah. And He will call us towards the Messenger of Allah (S). Then you will seek

asylum with us. Then where do you think we will take you? Towards heaven and the Lord of the Ka'bah.

The Imam repeated this three times. Insha–Allah if you manage [to be with them then you will be taken to heaven], but this is the challenge. It is not a matter of claiming something; rather if you manage to be with them in that particular moment then you will be taken to heaven. In another hadith, Imam as–Sadiq (‘a) said:

إذا كان يوم القيامة قال الله: أليس عدل من ربكم أن تولّوا كلّ قوم من تولّوا؟ قالوا: بلى، قال: فيقول تميّزوا
فيتميزون

When the Day of Resurrection comes, Allah will say: ‘Does not Allah’s justice necessitate that every group be with those they have followed?’ They will say: ‘Yes.’ They will be told: ‘Distinguish yourselves!’ So they will distinguish themselves.

So on the Day of Judgement, Allah (swt) tells the people: tamayyazu—“distinguish yourselves.” In a school, for example, before the kids go to the classrooms, they are playing all over the yard. But then the head–teacher or the principal says, “everyone stand in queue!” So the first year–, second year–, third year–students all stand in queue, and one by one they go to their classrooms.

On the Day of Judgment, it is not a matter of age, classrooms, ethnicity, etc. People will automatically be distinguished based on their faith, their practices, and their qualities. There is no need for anyone to come and say, “this person must go to this group and that person must go to another group.” Allah says tamayyazu. He just says to stand in your own place, your due place—fa yatamayyazun (“they will distinguish themselves”). And we have lots of ahadith about this.

So to ‘be with them’ in the dunya—to be in their camp in this dunya—and to ‘be with them’ in the akhirah is what we always have to ask from Allah (swt). But what is the key? It is ma’rifatakum (knowledge of them). We must, first of all, know the Ahl al–Bayt. It is impossible to live like the Ahl al–Bayt and be resurrected in their group without knowing them properly. And to know the Ahl al–Bayt is not just their historical, biographical information.

Many of us know the Ahl al–Bayt as people who lived in history and have nothing to do with our lives. Even Imam az–Zaman—most of us have knowledge of him as a historical matter. Many of the things that we know about Imam az–Zaman were known to the people who lived one thousand years ago. Today, we still benefit from the books written about Imam az–Zaman by Shaykh Saduq or Shaykh Tusi.

But is this really the meaning of knowing the Imam of our age? Or [is it more likely that] when I say I must know the Imam of my age, it means that I must know my Imam, I must know my age, and I must know what my Imam is trying to achieve in this age? Is this the meaning of “Imam az–Zaman” (the Imam of the Age)? What is the main concern of my Imam az–Zaman at this particular time? What are the concerns of my Imam az–Zaman in this community, in this city, and in this school?

I must have enough of an understanding of my Imam's wills that I can work for him. It is not enough that I just read a book that was written a thousand years ago—that is part of it, no one can deny that. But you must know enough about Imam az-Zaman and you must think enough about Imam az-Zaman so as to understand what you are supposed to do in this particular age and in this particular setting for the Imam.

This, of course, is something for which we need the guidance of the 'ulama' (scholars), for which we need the guidance of the maraji' (religious authorities), for which we need the guidance of the wali-ye faqih (i.e., the Supreme Leader). It is not something where every person says, "Yes! I had a dream that Imam az-Zaman wants this," or as we say in the English context, "I had a call from God."

This is not working. Everything must be rational—everything must have a clear methodology. In the end, there is no doubt that whoever is trying to be with the Ahl al-Bayt in the akhirah must, from now, start working for the Ahl al-Bayt.

In Du'a Nudbah, we find that it has different stages: first we start with a deep theological discussion about the way Allah (swt) has sent prophets on their missions; then we focus on the mission of Prophet Muhammad; then we move to the Ahl al-Bayt and what the people did with the Ahl al-Bayt; finally, we reach the point where we are ready to address Imam az-Zaman ('atfs). Even in that very emotional and personal part where we talk to Imam az-Zaman, we still find the social and collective nature of wilayah. We say:

هَلْ مِنْ مُعِينٍ فَأُطِيلَ مَعَهُ الْعَوِيلَ وَالْبُكَاءَ

Is there any aid (or helper) with whom I can prolong my weeping and crying?

If you want to cry, why do you need a helper? Many of us think that crying is something personal. Of course, it has to be somehow personal. But here, even for crying, they [i.e., the Ahl al-Bayt] ask you to search for the other people who are willing to cry with you—so that you can prolong your crying.

This is very important: fa utila ma'ahu al-'awila wa al-buka' ("so that I can prolong my weeping and crying with him"). If I cry alone, I will cry for maybe five minutes. If you cry alone, you [too] will cry for five minutes. But if we cry together, how much do we cry? Five plus five? No. I will cry longer and you will cry longer, so it will be ten plus ten. This is the blessing of working together: fa utila ma'ahu al-'awila wa al-buka'. It is not just that I will cry with someone else; otherwise, the du'a would have read, Hal min mu'inin fa abki ma'ahu ("Is there any helper so that I can cry with him?"). But it is not abki ma'ahu; it is uTila ma'ahu al-'awila wa al-buka'. I would be able to prolong my crying.

هَلْ مِنْ جَزُوعٍ فَأُسَاعِدَ جَزَعَهُ إِذَا خَلَا

Is there anyone worried (for you and who is lamenting) so that I may assist him in his worries when he is

alone?

Idha khala—i.e., when he is in his private place and time. This shows that we must be so close to one other that we do not just meet in mosques or public spaces. The Shias must be so close to the point of idha khala—when they are alone and when there is no one else, it should not stop you to be with your brother or sister in faith.

What is interesting is that in the first sentence we say, hal min mu'inin ("Is there any helper?"), but in the second sentence we say, hal min jazu'in fa usa'ida jaza'ahu ("Is there anyone worried so that I may assist him in his worries"). In this case, you offer help. In the first case you sought help, whereas in the second, you offer help.

Hence, help must be mutual. In a hadith it is recorded that someone said to Imam al-Baqir ('a), "you have lots of supporters" [referring to the Shias] to which the Imam replied, "Do every one of you place your hand in the pocket of his brother and take from it to the extent that you require?" [i.e., such should be the qualities of a supporter of the Imam].

Unfortunately, when we talk to most people about wilayah or quote the above hadith for example, the people sadly say, "where are the people that I can put my hand in their pockets?" This is automatically what people say. They look for someone whose pockets they can put their hands in [but are not ready to give to others].

But this is not wilayah. Wilayah is that you are ready to open your own pocket and your own account for other mu'minin. When we say to the 'ulama' please work together, they say: "okay, come and help me", instead of saying, "okay what can I do for you?" Of course, we have to be thankful because there are others who actually say, "I don't want to see you; please don't interfere." But if they are very good, they say, "okay, come and help me."

Interestingly, this du'a tells us that the offer to help must be greater than the request for help. Why? Because the first time, it says, hal min mu'inin ("Is there any helper?"); the second time, it says, hal min jazu'in fa usa'ida jaza'ahu ("Is there anyone worried that I may assist him in his worries"); then in the third instance, it says:

هَلْ قَذِيَتْ عَيْنٌ فَسَاعَدَتْهَا عَيْنِي عَلَى الْقَذَى

Is there any eye which has been pricked with a thorn (from intense weeping) that my thorn-pricked eye can assist his?

So, twice you offer help and only once do you ask for help. In a community which is based on wilayah and which is based on the love of the Ahl al-Bayt, everyone is ready to work for the good of others and they are reluctant to ask others for help. This is a healthy community.

A healthy community is a community in which everyone is ready to obey and offer help, but they try not to be a burden on the society. What is our society like? Is our society like this? Or is it that everyone wants to be, as much as they can, takers and not givers.

Du'a 'Ahd, the du'a which Imam as-Sadiq ('a) taught the Shias, is particularly important for our time I believe—the time of ghaybah (occultation)—and in particular, during a time when the Shia community is distributed worldwide. In such a du'a, when we want to send our salutations to Imam Mahdi ('atfs), what do we say? What are we supposed to say?

Should I say, “O Allah, please send my salutations to the Imam” or “O Allah, please send my salutations, on behalf of myself, my parents, my children, and my family” or “O Allah, please send salutations to Imam Mahdi on my behalf, on behalf of my family, parents, cousins and uncles and finally, on behalf of the mu'minin (believers)”?

No. Imam as-Sadiq says, first you must think about the community:

اللَّهُمَّ بَلِّغْ مَوْلَانَا الْإِمَامَ الْهَادِيَ الْمَهْدِيَّ الْقَائِمَ بِأَمْرِكَ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَى آبَائِهِ الطَّاهِرِينَ عَنْ جَمِيعِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ فِي مَشَارِقِ الْأَرْضِ وَمَغَارِبِهَا سَهْلِهَا وَجَبَلِهَا وَبَرِّهَا وَبَحْرِهَا وَعَنِّي وَالِدَيَّ

O Allah send (blessings to) our master—the leader, the guide, the guided, the one who will rise with Your command, blessings of Allah be on him and his pure forefathers, from all the believing men and believing women in the east's of the earth and it's west's, in its plains and its mountains, its lands and its seas, from me and my parents...

First of all on behalf of every mu'min man or woman fi mashariq al-arĀihi wa magharibiha (“in the east's and the west's”). It is not only the mu'minin who live in my city; it is not only the mu'minin who live in my country or my continent—it is those who are in the East and the West. How many people lived in the time of Imam as-Sadiq in the East who were Shias?

How many people lived in the time of Imam as-Sadiq in the known West of that time who were Shia? This is why I said that the Imam is speaking to us for we live in a time in which the community is distributed and spread out worldwide—fi mashariq al-arĀihi wa magharibiha. This, by itself, was enough to include every person.

However, the Imam says, sahliha wa jabaliha, barriha wa bahriha (“in its plains and its mountains, its lands and its seas”). So even if there are a few Shias living, for example, on an island, you have to remember them [and send blessings on their behalf].

If there are some people travelling on a boat or in a plane, you have to remember them before you remember yourself. Interestingly, you must start your day with this remembrance. You start your day with the remembrance of the Imam and the remembrance of all the people who love the Imam and who work

for the Imam. And it is only then that you say:

وَعَنِّي وَعَنْ وَالِدَيَّ مِنَ الصَّلَوَاتِ زَنَةَ عَرْشِ اللَّهِ وَمِدَادَ كَلِمَاتِهِ وَمَا أَحْصَاهُ عِلْمُهُ وَأَحَاطَ بِهِ كِتَابُهُ

... from me and my parents—blessings, which are the weight of Allah’s throne, and ink of His words, and whatever His knowledge enumerates, and His book encompasses.

There are many other things that one can mention. I think I should stop here and make just one or two points clear. I believe the message is clear enough and we do not need further evidence. Nevertheless, there is a great amount of evidence for this idea, beginning with the Salah: for instance, why do we say iyaka na’budu (“it is only You that we worship”) instead of iyyaka a’budu (“it is only You that I worship”)?

Why do we not say ihdi Sirat al-mustaqim (“Guide me on the straight path”)? And why do we end with al-salamu ‘alayna (“peace be on us”) as opposed to al-salamu alayya (“peace be on me”)? What about the hajj? What about many other [communal] types of worship in Islam? I think it is quite clear and obvious: it is a message which was presented to us in the clearest manner, but unfortunately, we were not able to get this message. And even if we have understood it, we have not been able to implement it.

One important question should be addressed: is this understanding of wilayah against Islamic unity? When we talk so much about remembering the Shias, loving the Shias, working for the betterment of the Shia community, does it mean that it is against the Sunnis?

No. In fact, that is a wrong conclusion. I believe unity is something which exists at different levels and stages. If you want to have a unified community in one city, in which for example, there are a few thousand mu’minin, how can you create a community which is very close, very intimate, and very friendly?

Do you need to tell people, not to be close to their parents, their cousins, and their uncles so that they [i.e., the mu’minin of the city] can all be together? No. Indeed, if you want to have unity in the city, you must start with having unity within families, followed by unity within extended families, and then in the streets of the city, and then in the whole city. And if we establish this in every city, then we will be in a position to have unity in the whole country, and if we have unity in the whole country, then we can have unity in the whole continent.

The unity of the faithful is like this. You are in Qom, coming from different backgrounds. We have brothers from Pakistan, from India, from the UK, from the US, from Canada, and from other countries. You must be united, no doubt, but is it at the cost of your own smaller communities? Should Pakistanis, Indians, Americans, and Canadians not meet and have any close relations within their own respective communities so that the whole community [of mu’minin] can be united? Or is it more likely that unity must start from these nuclei and these smaller points of meeting?

I believe the best chance that we can ever have for Islamic unity is if the Shias are united themselves around wise leadership and not around those who are confused and want to make us fight against our brothers, just like we have their counterparts in the other party who want to turn Sunnis against the Shia brothers.

We do not like such people. If we are united in the way that the Ahl al-Bayt have taught us then we would be in a better position to be united with the rest of the Muslim community. And if all the Muslims are united, would it be against the Christians or Jews? Or [rather] would it be serving and helping to create a unity of all believers? At present, some people work for unity while others work for disunity.

Some people try to bring people together while others try to divide and cause fitnah. This is not working and people are becoming confused. They wonder who is speaking for the Shias. Is it these people who are doing all this la'n (cursing) and these types of sins, or the people who are like Imam Khumayni, the Supreme Leader, and the other great 'ulama' throughout the history of the Shias who have always called for unity.

Since we are not united ourselves, people are confused: Who is a real Shia? Who is really expressing the Shia voice? So this unity and this wilayah is not against anyone—it is for the betterment of all mankind. This is a very important concept.

Sometimes people think that people are either with us or against us—that they are either a wali or an 'aduww—but this is not what we understand from our ahadith. We have many ahadith, for example, in the case of Imam 'Ali that people are divided into three categories, not two: those who followed him, those who opposed him, and those who are in neither of the above groups.

For example, we have in a hadith that the Imam is like a gate, and there are people who entered through this gate, people who exited from it, and finally, people who didn't have any experience with it—i.e., they did not have any relation with this gate. When the Prophet on the Day of Ghadir said allahumma wali man walahu wa 'adi man 'adahu ("O Allah, befriend the one who befriends him [i.e., Imam 'Ali] and show enmity to the one who shows enmity to him"); he did not say, for example, allahumma ahibba man ahabbahu wa abghia man la yuhibbuhu ("O Allah, love the one who loves him and hate the one who does not love him")—he did not say this.

He said that those who have his wilayah, who are with him, and who support him, You be supportive of them. Those who start hostility and enmity and war, You be against them. Then there are people who are in between the two. They do not necessarily follow the Imam nor are they necessarily at war with him. As for most of the Muslim community we have today, it is not that they are enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt. Perhaps, we do not have that many enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt today, but there are some extremists and radical people.

Nevertheless, it is not that we have this idea that either people are with us or they are our enemies. No. So, our own camp comprises of people who have this understanding: First of all, they are the people

who believe in the Ahl al-Bayt. Yet, in our camp it is possible for there to be people who work for the Ahl al-Bayt without knowing the Ahl al-Bayt. This is also something very important. You may have a non-Shia who works for the Ahl al-Bayt better than many Shias. Indeed, you have some Shias that work against the Ahl al-Bayt.

You may even have non-Muslims who are working for Imam Mahdi—for the cause of Imam Mahdi, for justice, for many things—and they may not even know who Imam Mahdi is. So it is not that whoever is not a Shia is not in our camp. This camp has a hierarchy—there are different levels of closeness to the Ahl al-Bayt. Moreover, the opposite camp is not composed of everyone who is not in the first camp.

The opposite camp comprises people who have deliberately decided to oppose the causes of the Ahl al-Bayt. In between the two, there are many people who are misguided and they wonder what to do. And it is our responsibility to open up our camp and to let these people come into our camp, or at least prevent them from going into the other camp. Unfortunately, sometimes we are so exclusive that we turn the people easily against us. This is not acceptable.

So we do not necessarily have this concept that people should either be in our camp or be our enemy. There are three possibilities and I think most of the people are not our enemies—I do not have this pessimism. I believe that the majority of the people of the world are not against us; it is just our failure to present our ideas and to convince them that what we have is for all mankind.

I think in particular, in the case of Imam Mahdi, we must do the same thing: we must not present Imam Mahdi as a saviour for the Shias. Imam Mahdi is not a saviour for [just] the Shias. Imam Mahdi is a saviour for all mankind in whose time maybe the Shias suffer.

You know, if you want to have a peaceful life, according to the hadith, maybe the time of ghaybah is a much better period. In the time of Imam Mahdi, however, you must be ready to work hard; it is not that the Imam will come and we will go on holiday. Imam will come as a saviour for mankind. This is very important. And as we have in Du'a Nudbah again:

مَتَى تَرَانَا وَتَرَكَ وَقَدْ ... نَحْفُ بِكَ وَأَنْتَ تَوْمُ الْمَلَأَ

When shall you see us and we see you ... and we are around you, and you are leading the masses of people?

We say, “we are around you to support you and to be your shelter, but you are leading mankind.” So the Imam is not the leader and saviour of only the Shias. The Imam is the saviour of mankind. This is the type of understanding of Imam az-Zaman that we have to try to present and it is very important.

The other thing, which is my second and final point, is that Imam Khumayni (r)—may Allah (swt) send His Mercy to Imam Khumayni and all the great ‘ulama’ who have passed away and make them happy

and content at this moment—first started by educating, training, and purifying himself, and then training a group of devotees of students.

He then initiated the Revolution and the Islamic Republic was established. We are [currently] trying to have an Islamic government. It is not the case that what we have today is complete and perfect; rather we are in the process [of getting there], but we think that al-hamdu lillah over the years we are getting closer insha-Allah.

The point, though, is that you do not necessarily need to have this [Islamic government] in every place. It is not the case that in every place if you want to follow Imam Khumayni you must first have a revolution and then establish an Islamic government, etc. Some people are confused regarding this—not so many among the Shias but there are a few among the non-Shia Muslims. They say, ‘we want to establish khilafah.’ Where?

In a country in which two percent are Muslims they want to establish khilafah. This does not make sense! If we want to follow Imam Khumayni, it is not necessary that we call for a revolution and for establishing a new regime in every country. What is important is to establish this concept of wilayah. And this is something not restricted by any boundaries nor is it against any law or political establishment.

Moreover, it is much more influential than having a system or government which is just political, and lacking this spiritual aspect of wilayah. In Iran al-hamdu lillah, we have an Islamic government and Republic under the leadership of the great leader. We have lots of ‘ulama’, lots of mujtahidin (jurists), and lots of good people.

Yet we still have not been able to achieve this aspect of spiritual wilayah. So we need to work hard. But in other places you do not need to go all the way through [by establishing an Islamic republic] and then come to this [spiritual wilayah]. You can start with it. I think every person—every one of us—is responsible for starting this type of implementation of wilayah: to know all the people who are within the same camp; to know about their concerns, their talents, and their abilities; to have concern for them; and to always think about what we can do for the community.

If we start with this, then we will be in a better position insha-Allah to prepare for the advent of Imam Mahdi (‘atfs). I thank you very much for your attention and I pray that Allah (swt) insha-Allah gives you all a great reward for respecting such a great man as Imam Khumayni. You spent your time and energy for organizing this forum and for attending it. May Allah and may the Lady Fatima, mother of Imam Khumayni, reward you all for this great service insha-Allah.

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