

Imamah, Imamate

Now I want to explain our stand about the 'Fourth Root of Religion' that is "Imamate." Imamate means 'Leadership.' Here it means "Succession to the Prophet."

We believe that it is necessary for a Prophet to be infallible and sinless, so it is necessary for his successors to be infallible and sinless. The same reason and proofs that are put forward for infallibility of prophets can be put for infallibility of his successors. Otherwise, nobody will believe that the interpretations of the Book of Allah and the directions about religion which come from Imam, are true interpretations and right directions. Here it should be made clear that an Imam is not entitled to change the commands of Qur'an or concepts of religion. Imam is the defender of Faith. His work is to preserve it, not to change it. Islam and Qur'an as brought by Muhammad (S), are the last Divine Religion and last Divine Book.

Nothing is to be added to it, nothing is to be taken away from it, nothing is to be amended in it. And it is the duty of Imam to see that the commands of Qur'an are respected and the path opened by the Prophet is followed.

I was telling you that an Imam, like Prophet, should be infallible. But nobody can know anything about another person. A man may have an excellent character, but nobody can be sure that he cannot commit any mistake at any time. Only the Creator of the man knows whether a man is infallible. And as we receive message of Allah through the Prophet, it is with the words of the Prophet that we can know the real nature of a man. According to the Qur'an and accepted traditions of the Prophet, there were three men, after the Prophet who were sinless. First of them was 'Ali, who was declared by the Prophet as his successor in Khumm.

Other two were Hasan and Husayn, sons of 'Ali and Fatimah and grandsons of the Holy Prophet. There is an ayah (verse) in Qur'an that says:

. . . Verily, Allah intends but to keep off from you (every kind of) uncleanness, O People of the House! and purify you a thorough purification " (33:33)

Both the Sunnis and the Shi'ahs agree that `Ali, his wife Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn are definitely included in the title "People of the House (of the Prophet)." The Sunnis, however, add the names of the wives of the Prophet in it, but the Shi'ahs do not agree with it. Anyhow, according to Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and the commentaries of Qur'an it is clear that `Ali and his two sons were infallible and sinless.

The verse of "Purity": When I said, "Shi'ahs do not include anyone else in the verse of Qur'an," I made an under-statement. In fact, many Sunni Scholars also have said the same thing. They also do not include anyone else. I would like to quote Mawlana Wahid al-Zaman, the famous Sunni Scholar, whose translation and commentary of Qur'an as well as his book Anwar al-lughah (being the dictionary of Qur'an and Traditions) are among the recognized reference books.

He writes in his commentary of Qur'an about this ayah "Some 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, (i.e. himself), says that correct (sahih) and well-connected up to Prophet (Marfu) traditions support the same view, because when the Prophet himself has declared that my family members are these only, 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. It appears that this verse has been placed between the verses connected with the wives of the Prophet. Perhaps the companions (who compiled the Qur'an) did so according to their own `ijtihad' (independent judgment)."¹

Again he says in his dictionary of Qur'an and Traditions²: "The correct view is that in this ayah of `Purity' only these five persons are included (i.e. The Prophet, `Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn), though in the usage of Arabs, the word Ahlu'l-Bayt' is used for wives also. Some people prove by this ayah that these five persons were sinless and masum (infallible). But, if not `ma'sum' then, of course, they were `mahfuz' (Protected from committing any sin or error) surely."

I have quoted two references (though I do not agree fully with him in some of his assertions) just to show that not only the `Ithna `Asharis but the learned men of Sunnis also confirm that, according to the rules of Arabic Grammer and according to the correct unbroken traditions of the Prophet only `Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn are included in it, besides the Prophet himself. Also it is clear that our claim that these persons were sinless, is shared by the Sunnis scholars also. It is apparent that the least they can say is that they were not infallible (theoratically) but were protected from sins and errors (practically).

But infallibility is not enough. According to our belief, as the Prophets were chosen by Allah to carry on His mission, so their successors also should be appointed by Allah.

It may be mentioned here that there are some more conditions for Imamah, but I have mentioned here two of them only i.e. Infallibility and appointment by Allah through the Prophet, because these two conditions are the most important of all.

Now I think I should throw some light on the question of our Imams' appointment by Allah. As I have mentioned earlier Prophet made a promise to `Ali (which was in fact a command of Allah) in the early days of Islam that he would be his successor, and that promise was fulfilled in Khumm when the Prophet declared that all the believers were to accept `Ali as their Master just as they accepted the Prophet as their Master. `Ali was the man who was chosen by the Prophet to sleep in his bed and offer himself for sacrifice when the Prophet left Mecca.

He was entrusted to return the articles of the Meccans that were deposited with Muhammad (S). `Ali was the man whom the Prophet declared twice as his brother in this world and the life hereafter. It was `Ali, his wife and his children who were selected by the Prophet to represent Islam against the tribe of Najran. It was about `Ali that the Prophet said: "I am the city of knowledge and `Ali is its gate." It was the famous saying of the Prophet that: "Ali is from me and I am from `Ali." It was to `Ali that the Prophet said: "Thou hast the same position with me as Aaron had with Moses."

Thus it is clear that so far as `Ali is concerned the question of infallibility and appointment from Allah are settled once and forever. Even the Sunnis do not challenge the authenticity of these traditions and events, although they might differ in interpretations.

After the death of the Prophet the Muslims split in two groups; Sunnis and Shi`ahs. The Shi`ahs, as mentioned above believe that `Ali was the first Imam appointed by Allah, declared by the Prophet. The Sunnis believe that Abu Bakr, a father-in-law of the Prophet, was his first successor. They call them "Caliphs." Abu Bakr was elected by some people at the time when most of the Muslims were attending the funeral of the Prophet. But there was the ancient tribal custom of Arabs that when a man was accepted as Chief even by some of the members of the tribe, others accepted him as such without grumbling. When it was known that Abu Bakr had been elected as Caliph, the majority of the Muslims followed him, according to the old rule.

The second Caliph, `Umar ibn al-Khattab was not elected but nominated by the first Caliph. `Umar, at the time of his death appointed a committee of six persons and said that they should select one amongst themselves, and, the third Caliph, Uthman, thus came to power. Their sixth Caliph, Mu'awiyah, came to power by military strength. So the Sunnis following these precedents, believe that a Caliph can be regarded as a legal successor of the Prophet if he is either elected or nominated, or selected by a committee or if he gains power by military strength.

But we, the Shi`ahs, do not think that these are the right methods to determine the succession of Prophet. We say that these methods may be useful to settle the claims for a King's throne, but not correct for setting a man on the Prophet's pulpit. According to our belief, only Allah, who appointed the Prophet, has the right to appoint his successors.

There are many traditions of the Prophet in which he has proclaimed the number and even the names of his successors whom we call `Imams.' There are the accepted traditions of the Prophet that `Imams after

me will be twelve.' Isma'ilis, and perhaps Zaydis, do not believe in it; but the Ithna `Asharis, get support in their belief from the Sunnis, who have these traditions in their books of traditions called 'Sihah.' They also record the tradition that: "The day of Judgment will not come unless these Twelve Imams come in this world."

Also there is a tradition recorded in Sunni books (e.g. Kifayat al-athar and Rawdat alahbab of al-Muhaddith Jamal ad-Din) which gives, the names of these Twelve Imams as foretold by the Holy Prophet. It is narrated by Jabir ibn Abdallah al-Ansari, companion of the Holy Prophet; and is as follows: When the ayah of the Qur'an was revealed.

". . . Obey Allah and obey the Messenger (of Allah) and those invested with authority among you. . ." (Qur'an, 4:59).

Jabir asked the Holy Prophet: "O Messenger of Allah! We know Allah and His Prophet; but who are those persons invested with authority whose obedience has been joined by Allah with that of yourself?" The Prophet said: "They are my Caliphs and the Imams of the Muslims after me. First of them is `Ali, then Hasan, then Husayn, then `Ali son of Husayn, then Muhammad son of `Ali (who has been mentioned as Baqir in Torah).

O Jabir, you will surely meet him; when you see him, convey my salaam (greetings) to him. He will be succeeded by his son Ja'far as-Sadiq (the Truthful), then Musa son of Ja'far, then `Ali son of Musa, then Muhammad son of `Ali, then `Ali son of Muhammad, then Hasan son of `Ali. Then his son whose name and patronymic (kunya) will be the same as mine. (He will be) `Hujjat Allah' (i.e. the Proof of Allah) on the earth and `Baqiyat Allah' (the one spared by Allah to maintain the cause of faith) among His servants. Mohammad ibn al-Hasan ibn `Ali.

He it is on whose hand Allah will open (conquer) the world east and west; he it is who will remain hidden from his followers and friends so long that the belief in his Imamate will remain only in those hearts which have been tested by Allah for the Faith." Jabir said: "I asked him, `O Messenger of Allah! Will his followers benefit from him during his Seclusion?"

The Holy Prophet said: "Yes! By Him Who sent me with Prophethood! They will be guided by his Light and benefit by his wilayah (Love: Obedience) during his seclusion just as people benefit from the sun even when it is hidden in the cloud. O Jabir! This is from the hidden secrets of Allah and the treasured knowledge of Allah. So keep it secret except from its people (who deserve to know)."

The Ithna `Asharis believe in those Twelve Imams, and hence, the title "Ithna `ashariyyah" which means `Belonging to Twelve.'

Some people ask: Why this particular number `twelve'? But anyhow any number may be objected to. Can anybody explain why Jesus Christ selected twelve Apostles from among his disciples? Why was this number so important that when Judas betrayed Jesus and Jesus went to heaven, the remaining

Apostles wanted to make up their number?

And most important of all, why that twelfth Apostle was not elected by the majority of the Christians or by the Apostles themselves? Why his appointment was left in the hands of Allah and the Holy Ghost? All of this shows that representatives of Allah were never elected by the people, they were selected by Allah Himself. If any religious leader is elected by people; then he will work 'for people' and not for Allah.

These Twelve Imams are not creation of our fancy. The Bible says that God had promised Abraham:

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply, him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation" (Genesis, 17:20).

These Twelve Imams are the promised Princes who are respected and loved even by those who do not accept them as their Imams. Our twelfth Imam was born in 256 (Hijrah). His life was in great danger. So he made such arrangements that only selected persons were allowed to meet him. He also appointed four representatives, one after another, to act on his behalf. The last of them was 'Ali In Muhammad Simmari. When he was on his deathbed, he received a letter from Imam, saying, *inter alia*:

"O 'Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari! . . . You are to die within six days from now: therefore, wind up your affairs and do not make any will nominating anybody to take your place after you, because now the Total Seclusion has begun and I will not re-appear until Allah (May His Name be glorified) allows; and it will be only after a long period when the hearts will become hard and the earth will become full of tyranny."

He died, as foretold, on the sixth day, and the Imam is now secluded from all. For the religious guidance, during this period, the Imam has made the following arrangement:

"In the events which happen (to you) refer to the narrators of our traditions; because they are my proof (authority) upon you, and I am the Proof (authority) of Allah.

Also, our eleventh Imam had given the following command:

"And whoever among the religious scholars (jurists) saves his Self (from sins), protects his religion, opposes his desire, obeys the command of his Master (i.e. Allah) then the masses should follow him (do his taqlid)."

According to that command, we follow in religious matters the greatest 'Alim of the time, keeping in view the other qualities also and we call them 'Mujtahids.' At present our greatest Mujtahid is in Iraq; his name is al-Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim al-Tabataba'i.³

He lives in Najaf where 'Ali, our first Imam, is buried. Najaf is the greatest centre of our religious learning. It is a living institution where the finest deliberations of highest quality on religious matters are carried on day in and day out. Those of us who desire to obtain the highest knowledge of religious laws, go there.

The teachings system, according to my information, is unique in the world. There a subject is taken, the teacher is on the pulpit, the students are sitting on the floor, the teacher explains the sentences of Qur'an pertaining to that particular subject, in the light of commentaries and language; then the traditions of the Prophet and Imams are explained in the same way; then the rulings of past scholars are put before the audience and then all the issues concerned are analysed and explained by the teacher. No".

The students explain why they agree or disagree with the teacher on the particular issue. The arguments are, sometimes, prolonged for days and even weeks. At last, the issues are settled by the teacher in the light of Qur'an and Traditions. Now they are ready to take up another subject. That institution is called 'ijtihad' which literally means 'striving';¹ and here it means 'striving to reach to the correct ruling in religious jurisprudence, according to the Qur'an and traditions of the Holy Prophet and Imams.'²

Financial strength or political power is not the basis of religious authority. How many Prophets of the Old Testament had had political power? How many Apostles of the New Testament had financial stability? The foundation rock of the Christ's Church, Peter Simon, was an ordinary fisherman. Therefore, I think that you will agree with me that religious leadership is not derived from wealth or political power.

In short, according to our thinking, an Imam is appointed by Allah, and it is because of that appointment that he gets the right to govern the Muslim ummah. But that governance is not the basis of his Imamate. Our Sunni brethren, on the other hand, treat that governance as the basic factor and accordingly the right of religious leadership is derived from the political power.

1. Tafsir al-Wahidi, on the margin of the translation of Qur'an, by the same author, printed at Gelani Press, Lahore, par.22, p.549, Foot-note No.7

2. Anwar al-lughah, par-22, p. 51

3. He expired in June, 1970. Now al-Sayyid al-Sistani of Najaf, is the greatest living Mujtahid. (Note of the Author) That is the opinion of the author [DILP]