

Chapter 6: Wala' of Leadership

It means the right of social and political leadership. Indeed a society must have a leader. The person qualified to take charge of the social affairs of the Muslims and to control their destinies is called Waly-ul Amr al-Muslimin (Administrator of the affairs of the Muslims). During his lifetime Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, held this position which was granted to him by Allah. Following his death, it was attained by the Ahl al-Bayt. There exists undeniable evidence to prove this fact. Besides the Hadith of Ghadir, several verses of the Holy Qur'an point out this kind of *Wala'*. "

Obey Allah, the Messenger and those of you who are in charge of your affairs".¹ (al-Nisa, 4 59).

"The Prophet has more authority over the believers than that which they have over their selves". (al-Ahzab, 33:6)

There is no dispute about the fact that the Prophet held this position which was a right given to him by Allah and not by the people. Our Sunni brethren also agree with us on this point. The only debatable question is regarding the person, who holds this position after him. To avoid chaos and confusion there must be somebody who may administer the affairs of the Muslims and whom they must obey. Did Islam devise any procedure in this respect? If it has, what is that? Has it allowed the Muslims to choose somebody as a successor to the Prophet or did the Prophet before his demise designate a particular person to succeed him?

In this connection we should see what duties, according to the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet performed with regard to the social affairs of Muslim community.

It is inferred from the Holy Qur'an and the life of the Prophet that he simultaneously held three positions.

Firstly he was the Imam, religious leader and the law-giver. Whatever he said or did was authoritative. The Qur'an says

"If the Messenger orders you to do something, obey it, and if he forbids somethings abstain from it". (al-Hashr, 59:7)

Secondly his decisions with regard to any internal disputes and any lawsuits were binding and valid.

Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

"I swear by your Lord, they will not be true believers until they make you judge of what is in dispute between them and find in themselves no dislike of that which you decide, and submit with full submission". (al-Nisa, 4: 65)

In this sense the use of the word 'Wilayat' is correct, but, in fact, we do not find it being used as a judicial term.

Thirdly he held political and social Wilayat. Besides preaching and explaining the commands of Allah and adjudicating the disputes among the Muslims, he administered their social and political affairs. He was Walyy-u Amr al-Muslimin. The following verses envisage this aspect

"Obey Allah, His Messenger and those of you who are in charge of your affairs". (al-Nisa, 4: 59)

"The Prophet has more authority over the believers than that which they have over their selves". (al-Ahzab, 33: 6)

The Prophet had a fourth position also. We will mention it later.

The Holy Prophet ruled over the people formally and led them politically. He collected taxes from them and administered their financial and economic affairs according to the command of the Holy Qur'an. (Vide al-Tauba 9 103)

This position of the Holy Prophet out of the three preceding positions, constitutes the basis of the question of Caliphate.

It may be mentioned that the word "imam" is also used for the religious leaders and guides from whom the outlines of religion are to be acquired. In this sense the Sunni Muslims apply it to Abu Hanifah, Shafi'i, Malik and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.² It is also often applied to the political and social leaders.

The Holy Prophet has said: "The heart of a Muslim cannot put up with treachery in respect of three things

1. Devotion to the cause of Allah (i.e. whatever one does should be only to seek Divine pleasure).
2. Benevolence for the leaders in the matter of the guidance of the Muslims (i.e. to render them sincere advice, whether they like it or not, and to guide them to the right path as and when there is a danger of their deviating from it).
3. Unwavering support to the community (i.e. to prefer the interests of the society to one's own interests).

Imam Ali in one of his letters recorded in Nahj al-Balaghah says "The betrayal of the community is the worst treachery and the deceiving of the Muslim leaders is the most abominable fraud".

It is evident that deceiving the Imam amounts to deceiving all the Muslims. If a person by deceiving his captain, endangers the ship, he in reality betrays all the passengers aboard it.

It is evident that in the above saying of Imam Ali the word "Imam" has been applied to the social and political leader.

We have read in Islamic history that the Muslims including the Holy Imams often addressed their contemporary Caliphs as Imams. In this connection it may be borne in mind that the Imam in this sense may either be just or unjust. In either case the Muslims have certain duties.

According to a well-known hadith, which is considered to be authentic by both the Shi'ah and the Sunni, the Holy Prophet said: "The best jihad is to say what is true before an unjust Imam". Similarly the Holy Prophet is reported to have said "Three persons cause damage to religion: an unjust Imam, an ignorant pietist and an immoral scholar".

On the top of all these the Qur'an itself mentions the Imams who invite the people to Hell.

"We have made them Imams inviting to Hell". (al-Qasas, 28 41)

Anyhow, there is no doubt that the word "Imam" is applied mostly to the just and virtuous leaders. According to the Shi'ah terminology it is applied exclusively to the twelve infallibles whose names are

- Imam Ali b. Abi Talib—al-Murtaza
- Imam Hasan b. Ali—al-Mujtaba
- Imam Husayn b. Ali—al-Shaheed
- Imam Ali b. Husayn—al-Sajjad
- Imam Muhammad b. Ali—al-Baqir
- Imam Ja'far b. Muhammad—al-Sadiq
- Imam Musa b. Ja'far—al-Kazim
- Imam Ali b. Musa—al-Riza
- Imam Muhammad b. Ali – al-Taqi
- Imam Ali b. Muhammad—al-Naqi

- Imam Hasan b. Ali—al—Askari
- Imam Muhammad b. Hasan—al—Mahdi, (May peace be upon Muhammad and his vicegerents)

1. From the Shi'ah point of view, since the Major Occultation of Mahdi, the Imam of the Age in 329 A.H. no particular person has been appointed to be the head and leader of the Muslim ummah. That is why in the hadiths related to leadership during this period only the general qualities and characteristics required to be possessed by a leader have been mentioned. This shows that it is up to the people themselves to choose a person as their leader, having those qualities and characteristics. The main qualifications of a ruler during Occultation are: (a) Faith in Allah, His revelations and the teachings of His Prophet. The Holy Qur'an says: "Allah will never let the disbelievers triumph over the believers". (al-Nisa, 4 141). (b) Integrity, adherence to the laws of Islam, and earnestness about their enforcement. When Allah told Prophet Ibrahim that he had been appointed the Imam, the latter asked whether anyone of his family would also attain that position. In reply Allah said "My covenant does not include the wrong-doers". (al-Baqarah, 2:124). Prophet Daud was told by Allah "O Daud! We have made you our representative on the earth. Therefore judge rightly between people ". (Sad, 38 26). (c) Adequate knowledge of Islam, appropriate to his prominent position. The Holy Qur'an says: "Is he who guides the people to the truth more worthy to be followed or he who does not guide unless he himself is guided?"(Yunus, 10:35). (d) Enough competence for holding such a position and freedom from every defect not in keeping with Islamic leadership. (e) His standard of living being equal to that of the low-income people . In this connection there is enough material in the sermons of Imam Ali and in the epistles he sent to his officials. In a number of episodes it has been emphasized that an administrative officer should be free from love of money, ignorance, inefficiency, outrage, timid-ness, bribery, and violation of Islamic injunctions and conventions and should not be guilty of shedding blood.

2. The four Imams of the Sunnis are Abu Hanifah No'man bin Thabit who was a slave of Banu Taymullah. He died in 150 A.H. Abu Abdillah Malik bin Anas died in 179 A.H., Abu Abdillah Muhammad bin Idris Shafi'i Muttalibi died in 204 A.H. and Abu Abdillah Ahmad bin Hanbal Zahli Sheybani, died in 241 A.H.

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