

Imamatus versus Prophethood Part 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Shi'a believe that the rank of Imamatus (the position of a divinely-appointed leader) is higher than that of prophethood and messengership.

Note that here we are comparing the rank of positions and not the rank of persons. As such, two divinely appointed Imams which both have the highest possible position from Allah, may have different ranks. For instance, out of the twelve Imams of Ahlul-Bayt, Imam 'Ali (as) is the most virtuous. Also Prophet Muhammad (S) is more virtuous than Imam 'Ali (as) though they were both appointed by Allah as leaders.

In other words, Prophet Muhammad (S) has the highest rank among mankind, and is the most virtuous creature of God and the most honored before Allah. The above belief does not undermine his position since Prophet Muhammad was an Imam during his time as well!

However, comparing the "duty" of prophet and Imam is like comparing apples and oranges or is like comparing the duty of a physician and an engineer. Imamatus and prophethood are totally different functions though they may gather in one person such as Prophet Muhammad or Prophet Abraham, peace be upon them.

Evidence From Qur'an

People who are familiar with Qur'an to some extent, know that this belief is not a weird-thing. In fact, Qur'an testifies that the position of Imamatus is higher than the position of prophethood and messengership. Allah, to whom belong Might and Majesty, said:

"And when Abraham was tested by his Lord with certain commands and he fulfilled them. Then He said: Lo! I appoint you an Imam for mankind."(Qur'an 2: 124).

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ

As we can see, Prophet Abraham was further tested by Allah during his prophethood, and when he successfully passed the tests (which were the test on his life, leaving his wife, sacrificing his son), he was granted the position of Imamat. This shows position of Imamat is higher in degree than prophethood which has been given to him later after acquiring more qualifications. Degrees are always granted in ascending order. We have not seen any person who got his Ph.D. degree first, and then gets his highschool diploma. At least in the administration of God there is no such mess!

The first degree of Abraham, may the blessing of Allah be upon him, was becoming a servant of Allah ('Abd), then he became Prophet (Nabi), then he became Messenger (Rasul), then he became a Confident (Khalil), and then he finally became Imam.

By the way,, the above verse of Qur'an (2: 124) proves that Allah assigns Imam, and the designation of Imam is not the business of people.

Below is the Sunni commentary of Yusuf 'Ali on the above verse (2: 124):

Kalimat, literally "words", here used in the mystic sense of God's Will or Decree or Purpose. This verse may be taken to be the sum the verses following. In everything Abraham fulfilled God's wish: he purified God's house; he built the sacred refuge of the Kaba; he submitted his will to God's (referring to sacrifice of his son)

He was promised the leadership of the world; he pleaded for his progeny, and his prayer was granted, with the limitation that if his progeny was false to God, God's promise did not reach the people who proved themselves false.

As we see, Qur'an clearly justifies the Shi'ite point of view in this matter. But again, since Prophet Abraham, Prophet Muhammad, and few others were also Imams, such belief (i.e., Imamat higher than prophethood) does not undermine their position.

Imam means a person who is appointed by God as a leader and as a guide (see Qur'an 21:73 and 32:24) to whom obedience is due, and whom people should follow. Messengers are Warners and Imams are Guides (13:7). Imams are the Stars of Guidance (6:97).

Muhammad (S) was a Prophet, a Messenger, and an Imam. By His death the door of prophethood and messengership was closed for ever. But the door of Imamat (leadership) remained open because he had successors (Caliphs; deputies).

Successor means a person who succeeds the position of the previous one. It is the obvious that

successors of Prophet Muhammad did not share anything about his position of prophethood and messengership. What remained for them was Imam (leadership).

And the number of these Imams are twelve as the Prophet himself testified. Also note that Qur'an clearly says that Imam and Caliph is assigned by God and this designation has nothing to do with people. For more evidence in the assignment of Imam by Allah, see the following verses of Qur'an: 38:20 (about David), 2:124 (about Abraham), 2:30 (about Adam), and 7:142, 20:29-36, 25:35 (about Aaron).

A Wahhabi contributor implied that the Shi'a are non-Muslims because they believe the above thing (Imamat higher than Messengership) while he did not present any single evidence from Qur'an and authentic Hadith against it. But I have presented a proof from Qur'an, and as such, better better be their own judge as to whether you are a Muslims or not.

As for Angels, Muslims agree that the level of the prophets are higher than that of angels. Qur'an states that all angels prostrated Adam. This is enough to prove that the rank of the prophets is higher than that of angels. And based on the previous conclusion that the position of Imam is higher than that of prophethood, the position of Imam will be higher than the rank of angels as well.

Evidence From Sunni Collections Of Traditions

The Shi'a further believe that the twelve Imams of the House of Prophet Muhammad have the rank higher than that of ALL the messengers (be Imam or not) except Prophet Muhammad (S). In other words, the Status of the successors of the Seal of the Prophets is higher than that of the successors of all the previous prophets. (Note that the successors of the previous Prophets were themselves prophets). Need Sunni reference? Here are some:

- Imam 'Ali (as) having the highest virtues of the early great Messengers:

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "He who wants to see Noah (as) in his determination, Adam (as) in his knowledge, Abraham (as) in his clemency, Moses (as) in his intelligence and Jesus (as) in his religious devotion should look at 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as)."

Sunni references:

- Sahih al-Bayhaqi
- Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, as quoted in
- Sharh Ibn Abi al-Hadid, v2, p449
- Tafsir al-Kabir, by Fakhruddin al-Razi, under the commentary of the Verse of Impreciation (Mubilah), v2 p288. He wrote this tradition has been accepted as all genuine.
- Ibn Batah has recorded it as a tradition related by Ibn Abbas as is stated in the book "Fat'h al-Mulk al-'Ali bi Sihah Hadith-e-Bab-e- Madinat al-Ilm", p34, by Ahmed Ibn Muhammad Ibn Siddiq al-Hasani al-

Maghribi.

- Among those who have admitted that Imam 'Ali (as) is the store house of the secrets of all the Prophets is the Chief of Gnostics, Muhi al- Din al-Arabi, from whom al-Arif al-Sha'arni has copied it in his al- Yuwaqit wa al-Jawahir (p172, topic 32).

- The Light (Noor) of the Prophet (S) and 'Ali (as) preceded the creation of Adam (as):

Salman al-Farsi (ra) narrated that:

I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) saying: "I myself, and 'Ali were one light in the hands of Allah fourteen thousand years (14,000) before He created Adam (as). When Allah created Adam (as) He divided that light into two parts, one part is me and one part 'Ali."

Sunni References:

- Mizan Al-Ei'tidal, by al-Dhahabi, v1, p235
- Fada'il al-Sahaba, by Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v2, p663, Tradition #1130
- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by al-Muhib al-Tabari, v2, p164, v3, p154
- History of Ibn Asakir Remark: "hand of Allah" means His power. The phrase "within the hands of Allah" means in His presence, domain, realm, kingdom.

This clearly shows that the rank of Prophet Muhammad (S) and Imam 'Ali (as) are better than any human being ever created by Allah.

- No one crosses the Path except by a passport from 'Ali (as):

Anas Ibn Malik narrated:

"When Abu Bakr neared death,..., Abu Bakr said that he heard the Messenger of Allah (S) saying: That there is an obstacle on the Path which no one crosses unless with a passport (permission) from 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as). And I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) saying: "I am the seal of the prophets and you, 'Ali, the seal of the Awliyaa."

Sunni references:

- Tarikh, by al-Khateeb al-Baghdadi, v10, p356
- al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar, Ch. 9, subheading 2, p195

Imam 'Ali (as) narrated:

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: When Allah gathers the first-ones and the last-ones on the Day of Judgment, and the Path has been erected on the bridge of Hell, no one can cross it unless he had along proof of allegiance (Wilaya) to 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib."

Sunni reference: al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibuddin al-Tabari, v2, p172

- 'Ali (as) is the divider of People to Paradise and Hell:

"The prophet (S) said to 'Ali (as): You are the divider of Paradise and Hell on the Day of Judgment, you say to Hell: This one for me and that one for you."

Sunni reference: al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar, Ch. 9, subheading 2, p195

"'Ali (as) said: I am the allotter/divider of Hell."

Sunni references:

- Kanzul Ummal, by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, v6, p402

- Radd al-Shams, by Shathan Al-Fudhaily

"The Messenger of Allah (S) has said: 'Ali is the divider of Hell."

Sunni reference: Kunooz Al-Haqa'iq, by Abdul Raouf al-Manawi, p92

And here is a poem from al-Shafi'i (one of the four Sunni Imams):

"'Ali will judge mankind and allot them either paradise or hell. He was the leader of men and Jinns, the true Testator of the Holy Prophet. If the followers of 'Ali are 'Rafidhi' verily I am one of that sect. 'Ali at the time of breaking of the symbols in the Ka'ba put his feet on that shoulder where God had put his hand on the 'Night of Mi'raj' and verily 'Ali was that into whose eyes shone the light of God."

Do I need to comment?! Now look at what your master Umar said on the virtue of Imam 'Ali (as):

Umar Ibn al-Khattab said: "If all the seven planets, and the all the seven heavens are put in one scale of balance and the faith of 'Ali in the other, 'Ali's pan will turn the scales."

Sunni References:

- al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, by Muhibbuddin al-Tabari

- Izalat al-Khifa Maqsad

- 'Ali (as) the best of people after Prophet Muhammad (S):

"...Jabir said: The messenger of Allah (S) said: 'Ali is the best of humanity (after me), so whoever has doubt is a Kafir."

Sunni references:

- Kinooz Al-Haqa'iq, by Abdul Raouf al-Manawi, p92

- Tarikh, by al-Khateeb al-Baghdadi, v7, p421

Here is another one:

...Zar quoting Abdullah, quoting 'Ali (as), that the Prophet (S) said: "Whoever does not say that 'Ali is the best in my people, is a Kafir."

Sunni references:

- Tarikh, by al-Khateeb al-Baghdadi, v3, p19
- Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v9, p419

also Barida narrated:

The messenger of Allah (S) said to Fatimah (sa) that: "I gave you in marriage to the best in my Ummah, the most knowledgeable in them, the best in patience in them, and the first Muslim among them."

Sunni reference: Kanz al-Ummal, by al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, v6, p398

Now, let us now look at a future episode on the appearance of Imam Mahdi (as) (the last Imam of the House of the Prophet(S)). Sunnis have narrated in their authentic books that when Imam Mahdi (as) comes, Prophet Jesus (as) will descend and will pray behind him. This clearly shows that the rank of Imam Mahdi (as) is higher than that of Prophet Jesus who was one of the five greatest messengers of Allah. It is narrated in Sahih

Muslim that:

Jabir Ibn Abdillah al-Ansari (ra) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah saying: "A group of my Ummah will fight for the truth until near the day of judgment when Jesus, the son of Marry, will descend, and the leader of them will ask him to lead the prayer, but Jesus declines, saying: "No, Verily, among you Allah has made leaders for others and He has bestowed his bounty upon them."

Sunni reference:

- Sahih Muslim, Arabic, part 2, p193
- Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v3, pp 45,384
- Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, p251
- Nuzool Isa Ibn Maryam Akhir al-Zaman, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p57
- Musnad, by Abu Ya'ala which provides another version of the tradition with more clear words on the authority of Jabir that the Messenger of

Allah said: "A group among my Ummah will continue to fight for the truth until Jesus, the son of Marry, will descend, and the Imam of them will ask him to lead the prayer, but Jesus replies: "You have more right to it and verily Allah has honored some of you over others in this Ummah."

Ibn Abu Shaybah, another Sunni traditionist, and the mentor of al-Bukhari and Muslim, has reported several traditions about Imam al-Mahdi (as). He has also reported that the Imam of the Muslims who will lead Prophet Jesus in prayer is Imam al-Mahdi himself.

Jalaluddin al-Suyuti mentioned that: "I have heard some of the deniers of (truth) deny what has been conveyed about Jesus that when he descends will pray the Fajr prayer behind al-Mahdi. They say, Jesus has higher status than to pray behind a non-Prophet.

This is a bizarre opinion since the issue of prayer of Jesus behind al-Mahdi has been proven strongly via numerous authentic traditions from the Messenger of Allah, who is the most truthful." And then al-Suyuti goes on narrating some of the traditions in this regard. (See Nuzool Isa Ibn Maryam Akhir al-Zaman, by Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, p56).

Also al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani mentioned that:

"The Mahdi is of this Ummah, and that Jesus (S) will come down and pray behind him."

Sunni reference: Fat'h al-Bari, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v5, p362

This is also mentioned by another scholar, Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, who wrote:

"The Ahlul-Bayt are like the stars through whom we are guided in the right direction, and if the stars are taken away (or hidden) we would come face to face with the signs of the Almighty as promised (i.e., the Day of Resurrection). This will happen when the Mahdi will come, as mentioned in the traditions, and the Prophet Jesus will say his prayers behind him, the Dajjal will be slain, and then the signs of the Almighty will appear one after another."

Sunni reference: Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah, by Ibn Hajar al-Haythami, Ch 11, p91

All these clearly show that the rank of Imam Mahdi (as) is higher than that of Prophet Jesus (as) who was one of the five greatest messengers of Allah.

Are The Imams Inspired

There is no doubt that when the verse:

***"Today I have perfected your religion and completed my bounty upon you, and I was satisfied that Islam be your religion."*(Qur'an 5:3)**

the religion completed. Allah revealed Qur'an as well as the Shari'ah (Divine law) ONLY to the Prophet (S), and non of such things was revealed to Imam 'Ali (as). If Imam 'Ali was inspired (Ilham) it had nothing to do with religious commandments; it was rather about what happened and what will happen.

There are many methods that Allah may inform His servants of something. One way is revelation (Wahy). The other way is inspiration (Ilham). By inspiration, Allah induces the knowledge into the heart of His servant.

This is unanimously held by the all the Islamic Schools.

But do you really think revelation (Wahy) is only for the prophets and the messengers? If yes, then you have contradicted Qur'an, for Qur'an confirms that Allah sent revelation (Wahy) to the mother of Moses. The mother of Moses was neither a prophet nor a messenger. Agreed? Allah revealed to her to leave her son in the river so that Pharaoh's soldier could take it to the Palace:

And We revealed to the mother of Moses: Suckle (thy child) but when thou hast fears about him cast him into the river but fear not nor grieve: for We shall restore him to thee and We shall make him one of Our apostles. (Qur'an 28:7)

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ أُمِّ مُوسَىٰ

...

Notice that Qur'an straightforwardly uses the word Wahy (revelation). Here, Yusuf 'Ali has translated the word Wahy into inspiration. But Qur'an uses Wahy (revelation), and not Ihlam (inspiration). Wahy and Ihlam are two different things.

However one thing which is clear is that the revelations to those who were neither prophet nor messenger, did not have anything to do with Shari'ah (divine law). It did NOT have anything to do with religious practices etc.

Rather, It was an order to what way to choose at the time of confusion and/or informing what has happened or what will happen.

So we can conclude that even revelation has different types. Only the revelation to Prophets and messengers is related to Shari'ah (divine law) and new religious practices, while others do not receive this type of revelation.

Remark: Qur'an also uses the word Wahy for non-human beings, but I am not concerned about that. I was focusing on different types of Wahy for human being only.

About our Imams: There are twelve Imams (Guides) after Prophet Muhammad (S). Prophet mentioned that the number of his successors are twelve, and al-Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Ahmad, ... recorded that.

The first of them, Imam 'Ali, got his knowledge of religion and the Divine Laws from Prophet Muhammad directly. Later Imams got it from the preceding Imams. There was NO revelation of Divine Law

(concerning oneself or people) after Prophet Muhammad (S). Allah may inform something to his appointed Imam, but the information is not any how related to Divine Law since the religion is complete. The information is only related to what happened and what will happen.

Do Imams Meet Angels

Also, according to Qur'an, talking to angels is NOT exclusive to prophets and messengers. Allah mentioned in Qur'an that Mary (the mother of Jesus) talked to angels, and angels talked to him. Look at Qur'an, to see the conversation of Mary and the angels:

"Behold! the angels said "O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus the son of Mary held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah. (Qur'an 3:45)"

There is a whole conversation between Mary and the angel. See a couple of verses before and after the above verse. Mary (as) was neither a prophet nor a messenger, yet she talked to angels. However the communication of Mary with angels had nothing to do with Shari'ah (Divine Law). It did not have anything to do with religious practices. Rather it was a news to what is about to happen, and instructions of what to do.

In this connection, also see verses 11:69–73 where angels talked to the wife of Abraham and gave her the glad tidings that she is pregnant of prophet Isaac (as).

Even Sunnis claim that Imran Ibn al-Husayn al-Khuzai (d. 52/672) who was one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (S), was visited by angels, greeted by angels, shook hands with angels and saw them, only being left by them for a short period after which the angels returned to him till the end of his life.

Sunni references:

- (1) Sahih Muslim, V4, pp 47–48
- (2) Also commentaries of Sahih Muslim by al-Nabawi, V8, P206, and by al-Abi and al-Sanusi, V3, P361.
- (3) Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, V4, PP 427–428
- (4) Sunan Darimi, V2, P305
- (5) al-Mustadrak, by al-Hakim, V3, P472
- (6) Tabaqat, by Ib Sa'd, V7, part 1, P6
- (7) al-Isti'ab, by Ibn Abd al-Barr, V3, P1208
- (8) Usdul Ghabah, by Ibn Athir, V4, P138
- (9) Jami'ul Usul, by Ibn Athir, V7, P551
- (10) al-Isabah, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, V3, PP 26–27

(11) Tahdhib al-Tahdhib, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, V8, P126

(12) Fathul al-Bari, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, V12, P261

(13) Sharh al-Mawahib, by al-Qastalani, V7, P133

There is no shadow of doubt that Imam 'Ali (as) was "Muhaddath" which means "a person who has been spoken to". Not only him, but also, all the twelve Imams as well as Lady Fatimah (sa) were Muhaddath/Muhaddathah.

Based on the authentic Sunni traditions, it is narrated by Abu Huraira and Aisha that:

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 4.675 (Arabic-English Version)

Narrated Abu Huraira:

The Prophet said, "Amongst the people preceding you there used to be 'Muhaddathun' (i.e. persons who can guess things that come true later on, like those persons have been inspired by a divine power), and if there are any such persons amongst my followers, it is ..."

Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith: 5.38 (Arabic-English Version)

Narrated Abu Huraira:

Allah's Apostle said, "Among the nations before you there used to be people who were inspired (though they were not prophets). And if there is any of such a persons amongst my followers, it is ."

Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet said, "Among the nation of Bani Israel who lived before you, there were men who used to be inspired with guidance though they were not prophets, and if there is any of such persons amongst my followers, it is ..."

Also:

The Messenger of Allah (S) said: "Verily among the nations before your time there have been Muhaddathoon (those who have been spoken to), and if there is one among my people it is ..." Also the Messenger of Allah said: "Verily among the Children of Israel before your time there have been men who have been spoken to (rijalun yukallamoon) who were NOT prophets and if there is one among my people it is ..."

Sunni reference:

- Sahih al-Bukhari, Arabic version, v4, p211, v5, p15, and also its commentaries:
- Fat'h al-Bari, by Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, v7, p324, v8, pp 49-51
- Umdatul Qari, by al-Ayni, v16, pp 55, 198-199
- Irshad al-Sari, by Qastalani, v6, p103
- Sahih Muslim, Arabic version, part 7, p115, and its commentaries:

- Sharh Nawawi (sahih Muslim), part 15, p166
- Sharh al-Abi, part 6, pp 203-205
- Sahih al-Tirmidhi, v5, p622, and its commentaries:
- Aridah al-Ahwadhi, by Ibn al-Arabi, v13, pp 149-150
- Tuhfah al-Ahwadhi, by al-Mubarak Furi, v10, pp 182-183
- Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, v6, p55

Note: I have deleted the name of the companion of the Prophet mentioned in the above traditions since his being Muhaddath is not confirmed by the Shi'a. Concerning the opinion of the Shi'a see al-Ghadir, by al-Amini, v5, pp 42-54, v8, pp 90-91.

It is mentioned in the above Sunni commentaries that the meaning of Muhaddath here is a person who is divinely inspired, who meets the angels and is spoken to by them, and who is informed of the news of Ghayb (not to be confused with the knowledge of Ghayb which belongs to Allah only) which is the information about the present time and the future, and that the companions who are mentioned in those traditions had these attributes!!!

The conclusion is that the existence of Muhaddathoon (those who are spoken to) is a matter attested by all Muslims and that it is not something contrary to the fundamentals of Islam. The above Sunni documents also give evidence to the fact that Muhaddathoon are not prophets and they did not bring Shari'ah (divine law) from Allah to people.

Here are the definitions of messenger, prophet, and Imam:

1. A Prophet (Nabi) is a person to whom the Divine Law (Shari'ah) descends; this divine law may be concerned with beliefs ('aqa'id) or with practical activities (Ibadat, like prayer). This Divine Law either deals with the Nabi's own life or with that of his community; or both.

This is the fundamental definition of prophethood, though the prophet may also be informed of other things. The descent of the Divine Law (Shari'ah) may be direct, or through an intermediary like an angel.

2. A Human Messenger/Apostle (Rasool) is a Prophet who receives a Divine Law that concerns himself AND people other than himself.

3. Imam means a person who is appointed by God as a leader and as a guide (see Qur'an 21:73 and 32:24) to whom obedience is due, and whom people should follow. Messengers are Warners and Imams are Guides (13:7). Imams are the Stars of Guidance (6:97).

It is also interesting to remark about the time when the verse of the completeness of religion was revealed. It should be quite surprising that many Sunni scholars of Tafsir have confirmed that the verse:

***"Today I have completed your religion and my bounty upon you, and I was satisfied that Islam be your religion."*(Qur'an 5:3)**

Was revealed in Ghadir Khum when the Messenger of Allah declared his successor. Some of Sunni references which mentioned the revelation of the above verse of Qur'an in Ghadir Khum after the speech of the Prophet:

- (1) al-Durr al-Manthur, by al-Hafiz Jalaluddin al-Suyuti, v3, p19
- (2) Tarikh, by Khatib al-Baghdadi, v8, pp 290,596 from Abu Hurayra
- (3) Manaqaib, by Ibn Maghazali, p19
- (4) History of Damascus, Ibn Asakir, v2, p75
- (5) al-Itqan, by al-Suyuti, v1, p13
- (6) Manaqib, by Khawarazmi al-Hanfi, p80
- (7) al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah, by Ibn Kathir, v3, p213
- (8) Yanabi' al-Mawaddah, by al-Qudoozi al-Hanafi, p115
- (9) Nuzul al-Qur'an, by al-Hafiz Abu Nu'aym narrated on the authority Abu Sa'id Khudri.

... and more.

The above verse clearly indicates that Islam without announcing the leadership of Imam 'Ali was not complete, and perfection of religion was due to announcement of the Prophet's immediate successor.

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