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Lesson 26: Amir al-Muminin Ali , the Chosen Successor of the Prophet

The Successor to the Prophet (S)

The Twelve-Imam Shi'ites believe that after the Prophet of Allah, the leadership of the world of Islam fell to Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali (a.s.), and then to his eleven pure descendants.¹

This idea, this belief, is as clear as the rays of the morning sun, and those who are unprejudiced and impartial will have no cause for doubt in it.

Jabir ibn 'Abdillah, one of the special companions of the Prophet (S) said: 'The day the ayah concerning obedience to Allah, the Prophet and those vested with authority was revealed² I asked the Prophet: We know Allah and the Prophet, but who is the third?'

He said: They are the Imams, my successors, the first of whom is Ali ibn Abi Talib, then, in order, Hasan, Husayn, Ali ibn Husayn, Muhammad ibn 'Ali, who was called Baqir in the Torah, and whom you, Jabir, will meet and to whom you will convey my salami then, after him, Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq, Musa ibn Ja'far, 'Ali ibn Musa, Muhammad ibn Ali, 'Ali ibn Muhammad, Hasan ibn 'Ali, and in the end the son of Hasan ibn 'Ali will come, whose name will be the same as mine (Muhammad Abul-Qasim).³"

The First Leader

No society, at any time or place, can stand free and liberated without a leader. This is always true. Inspired by this reality, we can proceed to say that anyone who is the ruler over a society, if he is dedicated to its strength and happiness, must necessarily strive to protect it and must, to the extent of his power, ability, knowledge and foresight, take into consideration the present, future and even the distant future of that society, and plan and programme so that the destiny of that society may become near to the realm of ideal contentment.

It is because of this necessity that rulers, even during short journeys, appoint a deputy. This is remarked in every case of leadership.

A head of a family, a headmaster, a foreman in a factory, all put a deputy in their place for the absence of a few hours, and they give instructions on the orders of the one they replace in their absence. This matter is so obvious that it needs no proof.

The Devoted and Prudent Prophet (S)

The great Prophet, who was the leader of world Islamic society, observed this very principle. Wherever the light of Islam shone for the first time, however much or little it shone, he always appointed a worthy administrator for that place to look after its affairs.

For armies which he sent off on jihad he appointed a specific commander of the troops, and he sometimes appointed several persons as assistant leaders to the commander, so that if one was killed, the army would not be without a commander.

Thus we know of persons whom the Prophet appointed as his deputies and representatives whenever he travelled from Medina so that Medina should not be without a leader in his absence

The Shi'ites ask how, with this evidence, it is consistent with the wisdom of the Prophet (S) that he should die without appointing a successor. Which of the following possibilities accords with reason:

- Was Islamic society, after the death of the Prophet (S) not in need of a leader again?
- Or did the Prophet (S) attach no importance to the community of Muslims after he had gone?
- Or were concern and prudence something he could do nothing about?
- Or did he not know who was the most worthy successor?

Which of these possibilities accords with reason?

With his all-embracing love, and the signs of leadership and determining of duties which he gave to the Muslims in all the ups and downs of their lives, how could the Prophet of Islam (S) not give an order on this great matter?

In the light of these realities, the followers the Imams proceeded to investigate the first and original texts and documents of Islam, and in this investigation they came across an enormous quantity of sources, which their Islamic wisdom and consciences judged to be the most important, and they arrived at this result: that there are dear, sufficient, exact orders from the Prophet (S) about the detailing of a successor: the ayah of wildcat, the hadith of Ghadir, the hadith of Safinah, the hadith of Thaqalayn, and many more, all of which are tested, explained and examined with great details in these great books.

From all these we shall select the hadith of Ghadir and we shall seek to judge its value in an unprejudiced manner.

The Historical Hadith of Ghadir

In the tenth year of the hijrah, the Prophet (S) set out for Mecca to perform the rites of Hajj. This Hajj was undertaken in the last years of the dear Prophet's life and for this reason history has given it the name of the "Farewell Hajj" (hijjah al-wida').

Those who accompanied the Prophet, who were pressing forward in their stirrups with eagerness to follow him, to see and learn the true Hajj, numbered about 120,000. Some groups also became attached to him in the town of Meccah.

Then, when resuming to Medina after completing the Hajj, on the 18th day of Dhul-hijjah, at Ghadir Khumm, this ayah was:

"O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord; for if thou dost not, thou wilt not have delivered His Message. Allah will protect thee from men." (5: 67)

Thus a great message reached the Prophet from Allah. The edges of the caravan were slowly rolling along.

"Allah has given a command...Let everyone await the command..."

Thereupon, the Prophet (S) gave the order that everyone should stop moving and come to a halt; and they did. Many travellers stood there on the order of the Prophet of Allah (a.s.) to hear the news. About the desert we have been told, 'Ghadir Khumm is a plain without water, parched'. It is midday and the heat of the sun was scorching. What is the news for which the Prophet is keeping the people standing in such a place, at such a time?

Now the sound of adhan is heard. The Prophet performs the prayer with the people, and then camel saddle-packs are built up to form a raised platform. The Prophet stands on the top of them. People catch their breath, and are as quiet as the sands of the desert. They are waiting for the news.

The Prophet starts. His speech, like the spray of drops that shower from a waterfall, is cool and soothing; it calms the heat, and the people quench their thirst under the sun by listening with their souls. After praising Allah, the Prophet continues: "I and you, we have shouldered every responsibility. Don't you agree?"

"We are witnesses that you have delivered the message to us, that you made every effort in this direction. May Allah give you the best reward!"

"Do you witness to the Unity of Allah, and to the prophethood of his slave, Muhammad. And to heaven

and hell, death and the resurrection, and life after death?” “We do witness to these.”

“May Allah be our witness!” And then he continued, saying to the people: “A people; I and you, we shall see one another beside Kawthar. Be careful after me how you deal with two precious jewels.” “O Prophet, what are these two?”

“The Book of Allah, and my descendants. Allah told me that these two are not be separated from one another till they reach me beside Kawthar. Do not go ahead of them, for you will be ruined. Do not fall behind them, for you will also be ruined.”

Then he raised the hand of 'Ali, Amir al-Mu'minin (as.), so that everyone could see him and know him. Then, in the same position, he read the divine farman of succession.

“O people. Who is more deserving among the believers to have wilayat and guardianship over them?”

“Allah and the Prophet know best.”

“Allah gave me wilayat and I am more worthy than the believers and the followers themselves. Therefore to whosoever I am his (mawla) master and guardian, 'Ali is his guardian and master.⁴ O Allah, be the friend of his friends, and the enemy of his enemies. Help anyone who helps him, and punish anyone who rebels against him.

“Now everyone who is present must tell those who are absent.”

The people had not dispersed when the following ayah was revealed:

“Today I have perfected your religion for you, and I have completed my blessing upon you, and I have approved Islam for your religion.” (5: 3)

Then the Prophet cried out: “Allahu Akbar! The religion of Allah has been perfected, and He is pleased with my prophethood and the Imamate of 'Ali after me.”

After this ceremony, people felicitated Amir al-Mu'minin. Among the foremost of the companions who felicitated him were Abu Bakr and 'Umar who said: “How good for you, O 'Ali, to have become the master of me and every believing man and woman.”

The Chain of Narration of the Hadith of Ghadir

From the point of view of its chain of narration, this hadith is so strong that it is probably unique.

One hundred and ten of the companions of the Prophet (S) who were present at Ghadir have narrated it from the Prophet (S) without any intermediary, and also eighty-four of the followers, those who knew the companions.

Aware and unprejudiced scholars, be they historians or commentators or whatever, from the Sunni school have mentioned the matter of Ghadir with much documentation in their books. The names of three hundred and fifty such scholars are mentioned in the book 'al-Ghadir'⁵.

Many of the great Islamic scholars have independently written books on this subject, and twenty-six such writers have been recorded in 'al-Ghadir', together with the particulars of each of their books.

Dictionary compilers have related the story of Ghadir under the entry of 'Ghadir' or Mawla '(master).

So there is not the smallest doubt, not the least shadow, over the chain of narration of the hadith of Ghadir. Unless for that handful of people who can stand in the light of the sun and feel its warmth on their skin but then say that there is no light or warmth

A Short Investigation into the Meaning of the Hadith of Ghadir

The hadith of Ghadir with the signs contained within it and without it, is so striking that everybody must in all fairness notice, and then become certain, that Amir al-Mu'minin, 'Ali (a.s.), became the first successor to the Prophet (S).

Now let us proceed to an elucidation and an unlocking of some of these signs and testimonies.

1. The word 'mawla' which we come across in this hadith, is one of the clearest words which can be used in this area.

Mawla, in this hadith, means someone who has the stations of wilayat and Imamate, and can give his opinion and command on it what he wants has priority over all other wants. For this reason, before he said: "He whose master (mawla) I am", he said "O People, who among the believers is more deserting?"

The meaning of the priority of the Prophet (S) is that his wish comes before the wish of the people, and that whatever he says or does in an authority for the people. People follow him, and in fact he has wilayat and guardianship over them. Now, we can see that just as in the first sentence the priority and wilayat of the Prophet (S) is mentioned, so in the following sentence, his priority and wilayat must be spoken of with the same meaning, so that there can be some connection in meaning between the two sentences.

Therefore the correct and complete meaning, which we get from these few sentences, is as the Prophet (S) said: "Am I, compared with you, not more deserting?" "Yes, you!" Everyone replied.

"So, this being deserving, this priority and wilayat which I have as regards you, 'Ali also has, and after me, he will be the Mawla of all Muslims and my successor."

Thus, in this hadith, there is no question of any other meaning for 'mawla' apart from priority, wilayat and Imamate and any other meaning in its place is entirely irrelevant. We should also note that the Prophet

of Islam kept people standing in this great heat. This historical fact makes it clear that the matter has a special importance; for, if not, no reasonable man would suppose that the Prophet would detain people under such conditions when his purpose was only to remind people of a trivial matter, for example, that 'Ali was his friend.

2. A second proof is that after this the Prophet said: “O Allah, help those who help 'Ali, and keep far from Thy Mercy those who refuse help to 'Ali.”

The Prophet (S) knew that after him Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.) would take official command of power and the army, and people would have to help him so that Islam would take root. For Islamic government needs just and obeyed commanders, and it is necessary that all people obey the Prophet's successor. Therefore he prayed for Hazrat 'Ali's helpers and cursed his opponents so that in this way too the people would understand that to oppose Hazrat 'Ali would bring about the anger of Allah and the curses of the Prophet.

3. In the beginning of his speech, the Prophet said: “Do you witness to the Unity of Allah and the prophethood of his slave, Muhammad?”

“We do,” they replied.

“Who is your wali and Mawla To whoever I am his Mawla 'Ali will also be his Mawla

It is clear that the meaning of the wilayat of Hazrat Ali after the witnessing of the Unity of Allah and the prophethood and wilayat of the Prophet, is the Imamate, because, with any other meaning, the connection between the sentences would be broken, and we know that the Prophet (a.s.) was one of the most eloquent and accurate of speakers.

4. After the meeting were over, the people congratulated Amir al-Mu'minin. It is obvious that this felicitation was because they had accepted the truth 'Ali being appointed that day to a high station by Allah and the Prophet. If there had been another reason, felicitation would have had no place.

5. “O Messenger, deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord; for if thou dost not, thou wilt not have delivered his Message. Allah will protect thee from men.” (5: 67)

According to scholars of the Sunni school, this ayah was revealed on the day of Ghadir about the matter of the succession of Hazrat 'Ali – may Allah bless him. As a sample, let us see what the great Sunni commentator and historian, Hafiz Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir at-Tabari has to say:

“...After this ayah, which was revealed at Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet said: 'Jibra'il has brought a command from Allah that we should halt in this place, and to announce to all, black or white, that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, my brother, my executor (wasi), is my successor and the Imam after me.”

6. The splendid, magnificent poems and odes which the poets and writers of the times from those days

up to now have composed on the subject of Ghadir and the succession of Amir alMutminin, Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), are, apart from their literary importance, a strong proof in the matter of our discussion, for they have all acknowledged and commented upon the speech of Ghadir Khumm in connection with wilayat and the Imamate.

The poems and the names of the poets have all been recorded, and those who are acquainted with Arabic literature can consult the book of al-Ghadir mentioned previously.

In this great book, the poems and many of the names of the poets who composed poems about Ghadir Khumm from the first century AH through the subsequent centuries have been mentioned in order and analysed.

7. Our great Prophet (S) and Imams (a.s.) have ordered that the 18th day of Dhu'l-hidjah be kept as a true Muslim 'id, so that the event of Ghadir might be remembered every year and not fall into oblivion.

Thus Abu Rayhan al-Biruni, the famous fifth-century (A.H.) Iranian scholar, in his book – The Chronology of Ancient Nations, and also Ibn Talhah ash-Shafi'ism his book, Matalib as-Su'ul, name the day of Ghadir as one of the 'ids of Islam.

Abu Mansur ath-Tha'alabi, the famous writer and scholar, also wrote in his book Thimar al-Qulub that the event of Ghadir is one of the greatest nights in Islam.

8. Objections. Whenever Amir al-Mutminin, Hazrat 'Ali (a.s.), and the other Imams reasoned about the hadith of Ghadir with objectors and in front of opposers, no-one raised any objection about its significance or about its connection with the Imamate and the succession of Amir al-Mutminin who was not reduced to silence.

One day in Kufah, Amir al-Mu'minin gave a speech during which he said: "Anyone who was present at Ghadir, and heard with his own ear the Prophet appoint me as his successor, stand up. Only those who heard the Prophet with their own ear, not those who heard from others who were there."

A number of people rose up. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, the Imam of the Hanbali sect, says that there were thirty people who stood up that day, and testified to having heard the hadith of Ghadir.

It should be remembered that this event took place twenty years after Ghadir; that some of the companions of the Prophet (S) were not present on that day in Kufah, or had died since, and that some also, for various motives, did not testify.

The leader of the free, Hazrat Imam Husayn (a.s.), also asked during a speech he gave to the Islamic community in Mecca, among seven hundred of the pious companions and followers of the Prophet (S)

"Do you know that the Prophet appointed 'Ali to the Khilafate and the Imamate at Ghadir, and ordered those present to tell those who were absent."

“May Allah be witness that it was so.”

We shall end this lesson with a foreword which Shaykh Muhammad Dahduh, the Sunni Imam and the spiritual leader of the town of Aleppo, wrote for the book al-Ghadir. We have abbreviated it.

“The book al-Ghadir confirms the facts, and equally refutes the superstitions. It expounds some things, which we were ignorant of, and cancels out sayings which we have kept in our hearts for centuries.

“Indeed, past events had been related in a way which made us say: ‘We do not know where these come from, and we do not want to think about their secrets’, whereas we should have learnt from these events, and we should have conducted research into historical problems on a higher level.

“As we have seen, before the book al-Ghadir the general knowledge of the Sunnis about the historical reality of Ghadir was only slight, but now and after this, as the parts of al-Ghadir are published, they will, on the contrary, see a boiling sea overflowing with impressive arguments, clear proofs and brilliant knowledge. What I see in al-Ghadir says with one voice: ‘The radiance of the moon cannot be concealed.’”

Questions

1. What is the Shia Muslim belief about the successor of the Holy Prophet?
2. Where, why, and by whom Imam Ali was declared the successor of the Holy Prophet?
3. What kind of book Al-Ghadir and what does it prove and how?
4. What did Jabir ask Prophet about IV: 59?
5. What Jabir mean by whom is the third and was the adversary from the prophet?
6. What must the leader of society do?
7. Who do most of the people of reason do in the time of their absence?
8. What would the Prophet do about the people of a new Muslim committee?
9. How would the Holy Prophet organize the army of Muslim defences?
10. What would the Holy Prophet do before going on a journey?
11. What do Shia Muslims believe about the Holy Prophet’s deputies and what questions do they ask?
12. What have the followers of the Imam found in their investigation?
13. When, where, and why did the Hadith of Ghadir come into the public?

14. What does verse 65 ch. 5 say?
15. What did the Holy Prophet do when verse 65 ch. 5 was revealed to him?
16. How was the weather when the Prophet called everyone to listen to his declaration?
17. Where is Ghadir Khumm and what kind of place is it?
18. What were questions asked by the people to the Prophet?
19. What did Prophet say he would leave behind among the people?
20. Whose hands did the Prophet raise?
21. What did the Holy Prophet say about wilayat?
22. What does verse 3 chp. 5 say?
23. Who was congratulated by the crowd after the ceremony?
24. How many people have reported the Hadith of Ghadir?
25. How is the condition of the Hadith of Ghadir in terms of authority?
26. How would you prove that the Hadith of Ghadir is authentic?
27. What is the meaning of the word mawla?
28. What is the authority of the Holy Prophet over the people?
29. What kind of authority according to Hadith Imam Ali has over the people?
30. What is the second proof in support of the authority of Imam Ali?
31. What are the contents of the third proof?
32. What kind of authority does the third proof establish in favour of Imam Ali?
33. What are the contents of the fourth proof?
34. How is verse 67 ch. 5 related to 4?
35. About who and what according to Sunni Muslim scholars have this verse revealed?
36. What are the contents of the sixth proof?
37. What are the contents of the seventh proof?

38. What are the contents of proof eight?

39. What has Shaikh Muhammad Dahduh said about the book Al-Ghadir?

1. "Al-Ghadir" and 'Allamah al-Amini. The encyclopaedic work 'al-Chadir the great enterprise of the late mujahid 'Allamah Sheikh 'Abdul-Husayn al-Amini – may the mercy of Allah rest with him – is written around the hadith of al-Ghadir. This great book, which is the achievement of a lifetime of pure seeking by this scholar, is in many volumes and is in the Arabic language. Till now, 11 volumes have been published.

The exposition of the book was put together in a strong and easy style, and its contents are so well reasoned that according to the acknowledgement of the leaders and scholars of the Sunni school, the question of the legitimacy of the Shi'ites has been revived. It has transformed the attitude of the Sunnis towards the Shi'ites and has rendered a great service to these two groups. May the author's name be always well known. Much use has been made of this great book during the writing of the present lesson.

2. See IV; 59.

3. Safi, Muntakhab al-Athar, p. 101. The writer quotes so similar hadith from Sunni and Shia sources.

4. According to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, the Imam of Hanbalites, the Prophet (S) repeated this sentence four times.

5. see footnote above about the Al-Ghadir encyclopedia.

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