

MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God,  
the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

## MESSAGE OF THAQALAYN

A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Studies



**The Ahlul Bayt (A) World Assembly**

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“The *Message of Thaqaalayn* feels responsible to present the teachings of Islam in general and the School of the Ahlul Bayt (AS) in particular with complete honesty and accuracy and at the same time to emphasise the common ground that binds all Muslims together. Strengthening ties of brotherhood amongst all Muslims, whatever school of Islam they may adhere to, and establishing genuine, enduring and intimate friendship between all those who believe in God are two of the main aims and tasks of the *Message of Thaqaalayn* and indeed, any responsible media.”

Editor-in-Chief

## Editorial

Publication of this issue has coincided with the second three months of the Islamic Lunar Calendar i.e. Rabi‘ al-Thāni, Jumādā al-Ūlā and Jumādā al-Ukhrā. In this period, there are important religious occasions. The anniversary of demise of lady Fatimah al-Zahra (A) on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Jumādā al-Ūlā or the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Jumādā al-Ukhrā, her birth anniversary on the 20<sup>th</sup> of Jumādā al-Ukhrā, birth anniversary of Lady Zainab (A) on the 5<sup>th</sup> of Jumādā al-Ūlā and demise anniversary of lady Fatimah Masumah of Qum on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Rabi‘ al-Thāni are amongst great occasions of this period. Therefore, it seems timely to have a brief reflection on the position of women in Islam.

According to Islam, men and women are to be treated as equal individuals. That is not to say that they are the same, but that they should be treated equally and as complete human beings. In order to understand this better, we need to see what the basic elements of humanity are and then see whether men and women share them all or not. Essential elements of humanity are freedom, understanding and responsibility. All these ingredients are fundamental to humanity, as without them men and women cannot achieve their full potential. It seems obvious that both men and women enjoy all these qualities so much so that there is no limit for the exercise of their free will and acquisition of knowledge and movement towards their perfection. This has been Islam’s stance from the very beginning. For instance, during the pre-Islamic era (the Age of Ignorance – *al-Jāhiliyyah*) pagans would bury their daughters alive. The reason for this practice was that the birth of a daughter was considered to be a great shame and disgrace, as daughters did not share the same status as sons. Hence, a daughter was not held in high regard by the father. Islam severely rejected this practice and its underlying ideas.

An important aspect of Islamic view about women is that in several places the Holy Qur'an introduces great women that can and should be adopted as role models, not merely for other women but for the whole of mankind. For example, in the Chapter *Tabrim*, verse 11, we read:

“And He sets for a parable for those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh, when said she: O my Lord! Build me a house in the garden and deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and deliver me from the unjust people.”

In addition, Allah (s.w.t) provides more evidence to show that women can become role models, as demonstrated in verse 12 of the same chapter:

“And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and breathed we into her body of our spirit, and she testified the truth of the words of her Lord, and his scriptures, and she was of the obedient ones.”

Lady Mary (the exalted) is a second example of a role model provided by Allah (s.w.t), not only for women but for all believers. However, there are many other verses that view the believing women with the same reverence. When we study the Qur'an, we notice that lady Mary was able to have conversation with the angles:

When the angels said, ‘O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, distinguished in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near [to God]. (3:45)

When the angels told Lady Mary (A), “O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you, and He has chosen you above the world's women. O Mary, be obedient to your Lord, and prostrate and bow



down with those who bow [in worship]" (3:42 & 43), one is made fully aware of the position she holds and the status she commands, not only among women but in the entire creation. Of course, this illustration of a woman's place in society and in the whole world does not end with Lady Mary (A). It can be understood from the Qur'an that the wife of Prophet Abraham (A) also had conversation with the angels when the angels went to Abraham and his wife and gave them good tidings, informing them that they would be blessed with a son, even though he was aged and his wife was infertile.

Both Sunnai and Shi'a narrators have quoted the Prophet Muhammad (S) as saying: "Truly God gets angry when Fatimah is made angry and God is pleased when Fatimah is pleased." (The late Allamah Amini in the fifth volume of *Al-Ghadir* refers to numerous sources of the hadith in Sunni sources.) In a beautiful hadith, Imam Mahdi (A) is quoted as saying: "there's a good example for me in the daughter of the holy Prophet (S)." (*Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 53, p. 180) This illustrates the fact that women are given a lofty status in Islam, as even the holy twelfth Imam (A) looks at Lady Fatimah (A) as a role model for him.

Interestingly, on visiting the holy city of *Qum* one will be surrounded by many renowned scholars and great personalities and sages, as there are tens of thousands of seminarians who study in this noble city. However, within this city is the shrine of a noble lady that overwhelms and empowers the whole town and its seminaries. It is by the grace of Lady Masumah (A) of Qum and her patronage that even the most grand Jurists have had the privilege to study in this place and receive inspiration. For example, it has been recorded that the late grand Ayatollah Najafi Marashi, for more than sixty years, was always the first person to enter the sacred mausoleum of her holiness Masumah of Qum before dawn. Sometimes he would eagerly wait outside the holy shrine even during the harshest of winters till the gates were opened and he could pay his respects to this great lady. This shows once again the lofty position ascribed to women within Islam and that there is no limit for their perfection and proximity to Allah (s.w.t).

By the Grace of God, we present to our dear readers the new issue of the *Message of Thaqaalayn*. Publication of this issue marks the beginning of the second year of the resumption of the *Message of Thaqaalayn* and the activity of a new team. Alhamdulillah, so far all the issues have been printed and distributed on time. The quality of the papers is maintained. Most of the papers are published for the first time. Previously each issue included six papers. Beginning with this issue we are trying to have seven papers so that the readers can have more material to read until the next issue is published. A new website for the *Message of Thaqaalayn* has been designed and launched ([www.messageofthaqaalayn.com](http://www.messageofthaqaalayn.com)), in which full text of all the papers of the previous four issues are available and the viewer can easily browse them easily by issue, by author and by title. We hope you continue supporting us by praying for our success, introducing the journal to others and encouraging them to read and sending your valuable comments. We welcome your feedback on this journal. If you have any comments or suggestions, please send them to [info@messageofthaqaalayn.com](mailto:info@messageofthaqaalayn.com).

Similar to previous issues, this issue again addresses different aspects of Islamic thought, such as the Doctrines, Spirituality, Qur'anic Studies and History.

The first paper is entitled: "Practical Instructions for Spiritual Journey." Continuing the discussion on spirituality in the last four issues, in this paper Dr. Mohammad Ali Shomali refers to five practical instructions given by Muslim spiritual instructors. These five which are rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah are as follows: not to eat too much, not to speak too much, not to sleep too much, to have some private time for reflection and to remember God as much as possible. These five which are easy to understand and need no special setting or instruments are very productive and if one starts practicing them he/she will soon start feeling a difference. Hujjatu'l-Islam Dr. Shomali is an associate professor and the head of the Dept. of Religions at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum. He is also the Director of the International Institute for Islamic Studies and the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for the International Students at Jami'at al-

Zahra, the Islamic University for Women in Qum. God-willing, this series of papers will continue in the forthcoming issues.

The second paper is entitled: "God in Islamic Traditions: A Glance at *Al-Tawhid* by Shaykh al-Saduq." In this paper Dr Karim Aghili tries to present the image of God according to the Islamic hadiths. All the hadiths in this paper are cited from *Al-Tawhid*, which was compiled by Shaykh al-Saduq in the fourth century. In addition to training great scholars of hadith, Shaykh al-Saduq wrote and compiled about three hundred essays and books, including *Man lā Yabḍuruhu al-Faqih* (For him not in the Presence of a Jurisprudent), which is regarded as one of the four major collections of Shi'a hadiths (*al-kutub al-arbi'ah*). *Al-Tawhid* consists of sixty-six chapters pertaining to divine essence, attributes and acts. This paper has been published first in *God: Existence & Attributes* (London: 2008), edited by M A Shomali and is now reprinted here. In addition to his studies in Iran, Dr Karim Aghili has completed his PhD. on Comparative Philosophy of Education at the University of Sheffield and is currently based in Manchester.

The third paper is entitled: "Moral Characteristics of the Prophets: A Qur'anic Perspective." In this paper Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali and Mrs Mahnaz Heydarpoor have tried to present a comprehensive list of the characteristics of the Prophets who are mentioned in the Qur'an. The idea is to show which human characteristics are praised by God and to illustrate that moral characteristics seem to occupy a higher position compared to other aspects of one's personality like actions. It is not just enough to control ourselves and try to have good actions and avoid bad actions; we need to go further and try to achieve good qualities of the soul as well as purify of our hearts.

The fourth paper is part two of "Preparing the Shi'a for the Age of Occultation." In this section, Dr Mohammad Reza Jabbari refers to the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam 'Askari (A) and the way they tried to reinforce the network of agents as a key factor in making contact between Imam and the Shi'a whether in presence of Imam (A) or in his absence. The author studies the way the network

developed and its status at the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam ‘Askari (A) and also the age of occultation and its other features and tasks. This paper was originally written in Farsi and published in *Darsnāmeḥ Tarīkh-e ‘Asr-e Gheybat* by Mas‘ud Pur Sayyid Aqā’i, Mohammad Reza Jabbari, Hasan ‘Ashuri and Sayyid Mundhir al-Hakim (Qum: 2008, the International Centre for Islamic Studies, 2nd ed.). This paper has been translated into English for the *Message of Thaqalayn* by Mr Mohammad Reza Farajian from the International Institute for Islamic Studies, Qum. Hujat’l-Islam Dr Mohammad Reza Jabbari is an assistant professor in the Dept. of History at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

The fifth paper is part two of “Imam Ali (A) the Herald of Unity.” In the previous part, Mr Sayyid Kazem Mirjalili studied the significance of unity in Islam and then focused on Imam Ali’s (A) attitude towards unity. Referring to Imam’s words in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, the author argued that after the demise of the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Ali (A) did his best to protect the Islamic community from divisions. Imam Ali’s (A) theoretical view on unity and its fruits was discussed and then the factors which can create unity in Islamic community were mentioned. In the second part, the author studies Imam Ali’s view about disunity and its roots. This paper was originally written in Farsi and translated into English for the *Message of Thaqalayn* by Mrs. Seyyedeh Zahra Mirfendereski. Mr Mirjalili is a lecturer at the University of Yazd.

The sixth paper is entitled, “Status of Women in Islam: A Critical Analysis on a Matter of Equality.” In this paper, Dr Ghulam Hossain Adeel studies one of the important issues in contemporary thought. This paper studies briefly the status of women in Islam and shows that right from the beginning of Islam women have been regarded as complete human beings and their rights have been recognised and indeed urged in the Qur’an and Sunnah. The author tries to offer an analytical study of the issue of equality with particular reference to the rulings pertaining inheritance. Hujjat’l-Islam Ghulam Hossain Adeel has obtained his doctorate from the University of Birmingham and is currently based in Manchester.

The seventh and final paper is first part of “Islam and Nationalism: A Theoretical Point of View.” In this part, Dr Sayyid Ahmad Rahnamaei studies the idea of nationalism and whether it can exist in Islam. The paper starts with the arguments for the universality of the message of Islam and tries to show how Islam views unity of the faithful community as an unavoidable part of its teachings. The paper goes on explaining the concept and history of nationalism. The author argues that although there are positive points in nationalism, the emphasis of its modern proponents on presenting it as a religion in which one’s nation is worshipped instead of God, and people are divided and scattered is not plausible. Islam certainly asks people to be loyal to the nations and states they belong to and do their best for their improvement and prosperity, but at the same time emphasizes on the universality of human nature and calls for the unity of mankind. Hujjatu’l-Islam Dr Rahnamaei is an assistant professor in the Dept. of Education at the Imam Khomeini Education & Research Institute, Qum.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have contributed to this volume and pray for their success. I want to especially thank Mrs. Fatima Khimji of Canada for proofreading all the papers of this publication and making valuable comments. I would also like to thank the Ahlul Bayt (A) World Assembly and the Islamic Centre of England for their support and encouragement. And last, but not the least, I thank God the Almighty for His guidance and favour upon us in the past and present and to help us all achieve a unified worldwide community.

Mohammad Ali Shomali

April 2010



## Practical Instructions for Spiritual Journey

Mohammad Ali Shomali

In the previous part (Vol. 10, No. 4), we have already discussed some general principles, such as observing the shari'ah and taking care of our qualities and characteristics. However there are also certain practices which can strengthen us, increase our will-power and which can make us courageous and determined enough to continue the spiritual journey. These should then keep us on the right track.

There are five instructions given by all Muslim mystics which are indeed rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

### 1. Not to speak unless necessary

We should try not to speak too much. People may think that this is not very important but in fact it is very important indeed. We should try to speak only as much as it is necessary. Unfortunately there are many types of sins that are committed by people which are related to the tongue. Some scholars have counted up to seventy types of such sins. Once a person requested the Prophet Muhammad (S) to give him some advice:

قَالَ لَهُ رَجُلٌ أَوْصِنِي فَقَالَ لَهُ احْفَظْ لِسَانَكَ- ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ يَا رَسُولَ  
اللَّهِ أَوْصِنِي قَالَ احْفَظْ لِسَانَكَ- ثُمَّ قَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَوْصِنِي فَقَالَ  
وَيَحَاكَ- وَ هَلْ يُكَبُّ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَنَآخِرِهِمْ فِي النَّارِ إِلَّا حَصَائِدُ  
السِّنِّتِهِمْ

The Prophet said: "Keep your tongue!" Again the man requested for advice. The Prophet said: "Keep your tongue!" For the third

time the man asked for advice. The Holy Prophet said: “Ah, is there anything other than what people collect with their tongues that causes to collapse on their faces in the fire?”<sup>1</sup>

One reason that speaking can be the cause of so many sins is because we always speak. We continually speak because it is easy for us. We do not need to make any effort; nor do we need any instruments, means, training or money; and for this reason we have less control over what we say. Nowadays, it is even easier to speak to each other, as many alternative methods of communication have become widely available, enabling people in different countries to communicate, and therefore leaving more opportunity for sin.

In early Islam, some people used to put some sand in their mouths in order to make it more difficult to speak. If they had ever thought of something to say, they would have had to first remove the sand. By the time they thought about doing this, they thought about the need for speaking and about what they were going to say, and realised it was better not to speak. This reduced the amount of unnecessary talk. This is not what I advise to do, and I only relay this story to emphasise my point that it is necessary to control what we say.

Even if what we say is not prohibited (*haram*) we should still not say it unless it is necessary. Unnecessary talk is harmful to our spirituality. Our words not only make our minds preoccupied, but also have great impact on our hearts. It is like when someone eats too much of a poisoned food. Not only would he have pain in his stomach because he cannot digest the food properly, but also he would become ill and feel sick. Our hearts become ill from saying things which are unnecessary. From a spiritual point of view, there is no single act or word, except that it either brings light or darkness. Unnecessary talk or speech is harmful and makes our heart dark.<sup>2</sup> We should take this very seriously as it is of utmost importance. If we can say something in five sentences rather than ten, then we should do this. If we were about to say something and then we realise that it is not necessary to say it, then it is better not to speak.



People may say that they have to sit with their parents, family or friends and that they must be sociable. In these circumstances we should of course say something but we must watch carefully what we do say and speak for the sake of God. We can say to God that we are speaking in order to make our family or friends happy. 'To bring joy to the heart of a believer' is an act of worship. However, there is a huge difference between someone who says something to make others happy and a person who makes a mockery of others or who just wants to amuse himself or show off by saying too much.

So, we should watch our words carefully. There is a very interesting hadith from the Holy Prophet which indicates that he told a group of his companions:

لولا تكثير في كلامكم و تمرير في قلوبكم لرايتم ما ارى و  
لسمعتم ما اسمع

'If it were not because of speaking too much and because of those bad thoughts which come to your heart, you would have been able to see what I see and hear what I hear.'<sup>3</sup>

This shows that, either we speak too much or we think about things which are not useful and therefore we cannot make any progress. It can be both easy and difficult not to speak. It can be easy because there is nothing to learn, there is nothing we have to buy and no special place is needed in order to implement this advice. We are not required to do any thing. We are just told not to speak too much. So it seems that it is not difficult. But if we try, we will find that it is indeed very difficult. Sometimes we may feel as if we are going to explode because we want to say something very much. But if we practice, it becomes easier.

According to some hadiths, silence is a very good form of worship. For example, Imam Ali (AS) is quoted as saying:

أَفْضَلُ الْعِبَادَةِ الصَّبْرُ وَالصَّمْتُ وَانْتِظَارُ الْفَرَجِ

Patience, silence and awaiting *faraj* (delivery; relief) are best types of worship.<sup>4</sup>

لا عباده كالصمت

There is no worship like silence.<sup>5</sup>

الصمت روضه الفكر

Silence is the garden for contemplation.<sup>6</sup>

This is because when one is silent their mind starts to enjoy the beauty of the spiritual world. But if one speaks, their mind becomes busy with the physical world.

## 2. Not to eat more than necessary

In the same way as keeping silent, eating small portions affects the spirit in a powerful way, as it allows the spirit to grow. On the other hand, when we eat too much, even if our food is halal, it makes us busy and our spirit lazy. We will not be able to remain alert. In other words what we eat is food for our body, but fasting is food for our soul. However there is a dilemma here because we need to feed both our body and our soul as they both need food and we must give each of them its due right. What should we do? We should eat only as much as is needed for our health and in this way we can make sure that we have done justice to both our body and soul. Eating too much harms both our body and spirit. Fasting is very important and useful if we can do it, but even if we do not fast we can achieve a great deal by simply reducing the amount of food we eat. One practical way of implementing this is shown to us by Allamah Tabataba'i. Sometimes we get busy when we eat and then we forget how much we have eaten. The late Allamah was determined to put in his plate at the beginning of each meal exactly what he had wanted to eat, and then not touch anything else.

There are many hadiths on the merits of fasting or eating little. For example, in his well-known advice to ‘al-Unwān al-Basri, Imam Sadiq (AS) said:

أَمَّا اللّوَاتِي فِي الرِّيَاضَةِ فَيَاكَ أَنْ تَأْكُلَ مَا لَا تَشْتَهِيهِ فَإِنَّهُ يُورِثُ  
الْحَمَاقَةَ وَ النَّبْهَةَ وَ لَا تَأْكُلْ إِلَّا عِنْدَ الْجُوعِ وَ إِذَا أَكَلْتَ فَكُنْ حَلَالًا وَ  
سَمِّ اللَّهَ وَ اذْكُرْ حَدِيثَ الرَّسُولِ ص مَا مَلَأَ أَدَمِيَّ وَ عَاءَ شَرًّا مِنْ  
بَطْنِهِ فَإِنْ كَانَ وَ لَا بُدَّ فَتَلْتُ لِطَعَامِهِ وَ تَلْتُ لِشَرَابِهِ وَ تَلْتُ لِنَفْسِهِ

As for the three pieces of advice on self-discipline: firstly do not eat that which you have no appetite for, for this brings about idiocy and stupidity. Secondly do not eat unless you are hungry. And thirdly when you do eat, eat only that which is lawful (*halāl*) and begin in the Name of Allah, and remember the tradition of the Prophet (S): “Man has never filled any vessel worse than his own stomach”. So if you must fill, then allow one third of it for food, another third for drink, and keep the last third for air.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. Not to sleep too much

This is especially important so that we do not waste our time and lose the golden opportunity of performing night prayers. Excessive comfort of the body is poisonous for the spirit. We need just the right amount of food and rest in order to have a healthy body because our body must be healthy to serve us.<sup>8</sup> But more than is necessary will be harmful for both our body and our spirit. God has created our body in such a way that when we look after our body we also end up looking after our spirit. We do not need to damage our body to become a pious person. If we eat too much we damage both our body and our spirit. If we sleep too much, do not take exercise and follow an inactive life-style, we will damage our body and our spirit. So it is very important not to sleep too much. In the Glorious Qur’an, God praises believers by saying:

Indeed the Godwary will be amid gardens and springs, receiving what their Lord has given them, for they had been virtuous aforetime. They used to sleep a little during the night, and at dawn they would plead for forgiveness, and there was a share in their wealth for the beggar and the deprived. (51:15-19)

There are some people who do not sleep very much but the problem is that they do not know when it is the correct time to sleep. So they sleep at the time of the day which is best for worship and they are awake during the time which is least beneficial. For example, sometimes we sleep very late, after midnight, around 2 or 3am and then at the best time of the day for worship and contemplation we are un-conscious. The part of the day which is most important is the time before dawn and after dawn till sun rises. Whoever has achieved something, it is because they have appreciated this time. Allamah Tabataba'i says that in the early days of his arrival in Najaf, his teacher, the late Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Qādi said to him: "If you want the *dunya* (this world), do *tabajjud* (night prayer); if you want the *akbira* (the hereafter), again do *tabajjud*".

#### 4. To have private time to contemplate

We need some time to be alone, either during the day or more probably at night. It is good to promise ourselves that for at least ten or fifteen minutes each day we will just sit alone, for example on our prayer mat or in the garden, and think. This is enough to begin with. In time you will appreciate these private moments, such that you will wish your whole day to be spent in this way. This will lead to your life becoming stable, as investing this time creates a private space in your heart. In this way you can be active in society, and at the same time have an inner-peace and clear vision of your actions, as if you were alone. This can happen if you spend some time physically alone. When you gain control over the soul, you can be socialising, working, etc., and still maintain control over your actions, and have remembrance of Allah (s.w.t).

But what should we think about during this private time?

We should think about divine attributes and actions. We should think about the things that we have done, about the things that we were supposed to do but did not and about the condition of our soul. We should decide if we are making any progress or not. If we have done something right then we should thank God for that. If we have done something wrong then we should try to remedy it. If we are not strong enough then we should fix some penalty on ourselves.

Sometimes people ask what they should do when they know that something is wrong and do not want to do it but they do it again and again anyway. For example, some people say that they do not have control over their anger and ask what they should do about this. They say that they are angry due to a psychological problem which they can do nothing about and that is out of their control. However, we should understand that God has given self-control to all of us, but the problem is that we ourselves may not exercise this power. There is an interesting story about this.

Once there was a person who had been newly employed in an office. On his first day at the office he told his new colleagues that he wanted to explain something to them straightaway so that in the future they would not feel upset or offended. He told them that unfortunately he was an angry person and that when he became angry he might shout at them, insult them or say something bad to them but that they should not feel upset or angry about it. One person who was listening to this was very clever. He thanked the new employee for saying this and told him that it was good that he had mentioned it. He said that now the new employee had been honest with them, he too would be honest with him. He said that he was also an angry person and that if anyone said something bad to him he had the habit of throwing whatever was within reach at the face of that person and so he was glad that the new employee had mentioned this. After this the new employee never became angry, he was always careful and watched what he said. This shows we can have self-control if we really try.

Sometimes we are very angry and aggressive at home but at work we are very calm. Even if people say bad things to us, we keep our anger inside. So it is possible for us to have self-control but in reality we choose not to. What should we do about this?

One thing that we can do is to fix a penalty for ourselves. For example, we can decide that if we become angry then we will do something that is difficult for us. And we must keep this promise that we have made to ourselves. We could promise that if we become angry and say something wrong to our spouse, our children or our parents, then we will donate a certain amount of money to charity, or fast the next day or walk ten kilometres. It should be something difficult. We will then see that we gain strength because our soul makes some kind of calculation that although it enjoys being angry and aggressive, it will also lose out due to the penalty that is imposed afterwards. So our soul will behave itself. This is called. "*musharitah*". *Musharitah* means to put some kind of condition on ourselves and to fix a penalty for breaking it. On the other hand, we can reward ourselves if we do something good. For example, if we like sweets very much then we can tell ourselves that we will not eat sweets unless we get up for our night prayers. If we get up, then we can have sweets. Then we will find that our soul will help us in getting up for our prayers because it wants sweets. So this is a technique that can help us to strengthen our determination.

The only time that we can think about and plan these kinds of things is when we have some private time alone. If we are always busy we cannot think about such things. But if we spend fifteen or twenty minutes alone with ourselves then we can achieve all these things. It is hard to know why people are afraid of being alone. We can often notice this. We love ourselves so much but the most painful thing for us is to be left to ourselves. If we are put in a room and locked in for 24 hours to be alone with ourselves, even if we are told that we will have food and all other necessities but just that we will be all alone, we will ask why we are being confined, imprisoned and tortured. But what is wrong with this? We have not been shut in with a wild animal or a criminal. We have only been asked to be alone with ourselves. Why do we not want to be alone with

ourselves? There must be some unhealthy issue behind this. Imam Ali b. Husayn al-Sajjad says:

لَوْ مَاتَ مَنْ بَيْنَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ - لَمَا اسْتَوْحَشْتُ بَعْدَ أَنْ  
يَكُونَ الْقُرْآنُ مَعِي.

If all the people of the east and west die and I am left alone with the Qur'an I will not feel lonely.<sup>9</sup>

But most people are so afraid of being alone that they constantly make themselves busy. And if no one else is around, they will switch on the television or mp3 player or radio to make some noise so that they feel that they are not alone. But this is very bad. Sometimes we must try to be alone, have some privacy, have some rest and relaxation and think about the things that are very important.

### 5. Constant remembrance of God.

Forgetting God is the source for all spiritual problems and naturally remembrance of God is the cure. In the Du'a of Kumayl, we read:

My Lord! I seek approximation to You with Your remembrance...

O the One whose Name is medicine and whose remembrance is cure.

Thus, remembrance of God brings tranquillity and light into the heart:

Those who believe and whose hearts find tranquillity by the remembrance of God; now surely by God's remembrance hearts find tranquillity. (13:28)

Imam Ali (AS) says:

Certainly God, the Glorified, has made His remembrance the luminosity and shine of the hearts.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, it becomes clear why so much emphasis has been put on the remembrance of God. The Qur'an says:

Remember your Lord much and glorify Him in the evening and the morning. (3:41)

And remember the name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with exclusive devotion. (73:8)

And remember your Lord within your heart beseechingly and reverentially, without being loud, morning and evening, and do not be among the heedless. (7:205)

In Islam, everything has a limit even fasting and hajj. The only exception is the remembrance of God which is always and under all circumstances good and needed.<sup>11</sup> Ahmad b. Fahd Hilli narrates from the Holy Prophet (S), that he said:

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّ خَيْرَ أَعْمَالِكُمْ وَ أَرْكَأَهَا وَ أَرْفَعَهَا فِي دَرَجَاتِكُمْ وَ خَيْرَ مَا طَلَعَتْ عَلَيْهِ الشَّمْسُ ذِكْرُ اللَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ فَإِنَّهُ أَخْبَرَ عَنْ نَفْسِهِ فَقَالَ أَنَا جَلِيسٌ مَنْ ذَكَرَنِي وَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَهِ فَأَذْكُرُونِي أَدْكُرْكُمْ بِنِعْمَتِي وَ أَذْكُرُونِي بِالطَّاعَةِ وَ الْعِبَادَةِ أَدْكُرْكُمْ بِالنِّعَمِ وَ الْإِحْسَانِ وَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَ الرِّضْوَانِ

Be informed that the best of your acts near Allah (s.w.t), and the purest and highest of them in degree, and the best thing upon which the sun has shone is the remembrance of Allah Almighty. Verily he has informed you saying: "I am the companion of him who remembers Me."<sup>12</sup>



Constant remembrance of Allah (s.w.t) is both difficult and not difficult to do. It is not difficult because it does not cost us anything, we do not need to pay for it or go to a special place or do any physical exercise. So it should be very easy, as are all the other practices mentioned above, none of which costs us anything and so they are very cost effective methods when we consider the results which they can produce. However, it is also very difficult to do because our soul always tries to indulge itself, to do what it wants and does not want to be disciplined. But if we discipline our soul then things become easy.

Remembrance of God is healing. The Names of God are medicine and if we take this medicine in order to remember God then we will be healed, but if we constantly repeat invocations like '*Allahu Akbar*' again and again but do not remember God then we are just keeping our mouths busy with repetitions and this is not proper remembrance of God. However if we use the Names of God to remember Him then this is the healing. It is very easy to do this. For example, we can be driving or walking or doing whatever we have to do and still be remembering God. The Qur'an speaks of the people who do not forget God even when they are involved in business and commerce. They always remember God. We may be cooking or washing, teaching or studying, but at the same time we must remember God. So we need to remember God and these invocations are means to help us to keep our concentration. All the different dhikrs (like *Allahu Akbar*, *Alhamdulillah* and *Subhanallah*) are medicines but we must take these medicines correctly by remembering God, by trying to get close to that Attribute of God which we are mentioning and then we will feel that we are closer to God.

So this is the way in which we should remember God and if we taste the sweetness and beauty of true remembrance of God then we will never be pleased with anything else. We need to rid ourselves of all the bad things inside us and then we will start to really enjoy remembrance of God.

If we spend some private time alone then we can start to learn how to remember God during that private time and then expand this to the rest of our lives. In the beginning we may only remember God when we are on our prayer mat. But gradually we can try to remember God throughout the day. And then remembrance of God becomes constant.

### **A practical suggestion to incorporate these attitudes into your life**

As we saw above, there are five important things that we need to observe: not to speak too much, not to eat too much, not to sleep too much, to have private time for contemplation (not to mix with people too much or keep ourselves too busy) and to remember Allah (s.w.t) constantly. These are five very easy things to do which do not cost anything. They are five powerful vitamins for our spiritual health and growth. If one maintains them for several weeks he will certainly start feeling the difference and will see the results.

One practical step is to keep a notebook and set out some objectives for yourself each day. Give a mark to yourself for each category. Whenever needed also make some comments. Then on a regular basis review your comments and evaluate your progress. Do this every day and compare your actions with the objectives. If all the actions are good, thank Allah (s.w.t) and continue. If some areas are bad, try and improve. For the first few weeks, do not take any chances by delaying this process for any reason. Complete the chart in all circumstances. This brings discipline into to your life. If you feel as though you are achieving, you will feel more determined. If you feel there are areas in which you cannot improve, even though you try to, fix a penalty for yourself. For example, if I notice that last week I kept getting angry, I should find an action which I find difficult to do, such as housework; then set myself the penalty: for example I might say “if I get angry again, I will do all the housework for 2 days”. By the time I have undertaken the penalty a few times, I will learn to think before I get angry, and stop myself. In the same way, to give an incentive for good actions, you can set yourself a

reward. In this way you can increase your determination. Allah's (s.w.t) help will always be there for those who strive in Him:

As for those who strive in Us, We shall surely  
guide them in Our ways, and God is indeed with  
the virtuous. (29:69)

It is also very helpful to have close friends who have the same inclinations, with whom you can discuss your progress and problems. In this way, you can also advise each other. The Qur'an says:

Most surely man is in loss. Except those who  
believe and do good, and enjoin on each other  
truth, and enjoin on each other patience. (103: 2-  
3)

## Summary

In this article, we have reviewed the various practical ways in which we can perform self-building. By speaking little, eating little, sleeping little, keeping private time, and remembering Allah (s.w.t), we can really begin to achieve closeness to Allah (s.w.t) through purification of the soul. The techniques discussed above are neither strenuous nor costly; rather, they require patience and determination. We pray that Allah (s.w.t) grants this to us so that we may gain the true reward: proximity to Him (s.w.t). May God help us all!

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<sup>1</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 74, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Some people may wonder why they do not feel darkness of the heart when they speak too much or even when they speak sinfully like backbiting (*ghaybah*). The answer is that sensibility of people is very different. There is a story in *Mathnawi* by Rumi that illustrates this fact. Rumi says that there was a person who brought a horse to a perfume market. The horse made the market dirty. This made the perfume-sellers very upset, as previously the market had beautiful aromas filling every corner. They wanted to get the market cleaned, but no one could tolerate going near the bad smells. They decided to hire someone who was accustomed to

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these bad smells so they found a young man whose job was to clean and wash horses. They brought him to the market, but as soon as the perfume fragrances reached the man, he fainted as he could not tolerate the scents. This is because his tolerance for scents had been transformed. In the same way, there are people who are used to dirt: physical or spiritual. Not only are they used to dirt, they are allergic to purity. So if we do not feel that something is bad, or we do not feel that our heart has been darkened, it is not because good things have no effect; rather, it is because our hearts have become desensitised. This is similar to a person who has a cold, and cannot taste food properly. Furthermore, sometimes very delicious food tastes bitter to him: this is not because the food is bitter; but because he has a distorted sense of taste.

<sup>3</sup> Cited from Sunni sources in *Al-Mizān fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Vol. 5, p. 315.

<sup>4</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 68, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *Ghural al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, Hadith no. 10471.

<sup>6</sup> *Ghural al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim*, Hadith no. 546.

<sup>7</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 1, p. 226.

<sup>8</sup> We can actually transform our eating and resting into acts of worship by making a good intention. For example, I can eat with the intention of becoming strong to serve Allah (s.w.t) and therefore my eating or even preparation of the food becomes an act of worship, for which I will be rewarded.

<sup>9</sup> *Bihar al-Anwar*, Vol. 46, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> *Nahj al-Balaghah*, Sermon 219.

<sup>11</sup> For example, see *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, pp. 498 & 499.

<sup>12</sup> *Uddat al-Da'ī*, p. 238.

## God in Islamic Traditions: A Glance at *Al-Tahwid* by Shaykh al-Saduq

Karim Aghili

After Kulayni, the second greatest Shi'ite scholar of hadith was Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Ali b. Husayn b. Musa b. Babawayh Qummi, commonly known as Shaykh al-Saduq. His exact date of birth is not known, but what we learn from his own book *Ikmāl al-Din* and Shaykh al-Tusi's *al-Ghaybah* and al-Najashi's *al-Fihrist* is that it is likely that he was born during the early years of the *safarah* (deputyship) of the third deputy (*nā'ib*) of the present Imam (*circa* 305/917-18) in the city of Qum.

Besides collecting and editing the books of hadith, al-Saduq trained a large number of pupils, who carried on preserving, collecting and narrating the traditions of the Shi'ite Imams throughout the Islamic world. He occupied a central place in the circle of the Shi'ite scholars and had a large number of followers.

Most of the researchers believe that al-Saduq wrote and compiled about three hundred books. The titles of two hundred and nineteen of these are given in the introduction of *Man la Yahduruhu al-Faqih* (For him not in the Presence of a Jurisprudent), which is the most important of all the extant works of al-Shaykh al-Saduq and one of the most famous and authoritative collections of Shi'ite hadiths. It is regarded as the second most important hadith collection after al-Kulayni's *Al-Kafi fi 'Ilm al-Din* (the Sufficient in the Knowledge of Religion).

What follows is a translation of a number of traditions (hadiths) selected from *Al-Tawhid* (the Unity of God), another very important

work of Shaykh al-Saduq. It is taken from the edition edited by Sayyid Hashim Tehrani.

*Al-Tawhid* contains the most profound and delicate hadiths dealing with the issues pertaining to God, especially to the Unity of God from the perspective of the Shi'ite school of thought. The compiler has commented on some of the hadiths (traditions) contained in the book in the light of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Shi'ite Imams. Some Shi'ite scholars have written commentaries on this book and several of these have also been referred to by the editor in his introduction to the book.

*Al-Tawhid* contains 583 hadiths arranged in 67 chapters. In some manuscripts or editions, there are 66 chapters. This is due to either chapter 43 or chapter 49 being combined with its previous one. Every chapter deals with a specific issue, which is related to Divine Essence, Attributes or Acts.

### **Titles of the Chapters of al-Tawhid**

1. Reward for the for the Monotheists and the Gnostics
2. Divine Unity and Negation of Anthropomorphism
3. The Meanings of the One, Divine Unity and the Monotheist
4. Commentary on "Say: He is Allah, the One. Allah is the All-everlasting. He neither begets nor was He begotten, nor has he any equal" (112).
5. The Meanings of Divine Unity and Justice
6. That He, the Majestic and Exalted, is not corporeal nor does He have a form.
7. That He, the Blessed and Exalted, is a Thing (*shay'*)
8. What has been said on the Vision [of God]

9. Divine Omnipotence
10. Divine Omniscience
11. Divine Essence, Attributes and Actions
12. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "Everything is perishable save His Face." (28: 88)
13. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "O Iblis! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands?" (38:75)
14. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "That day when the catastrophe occurs, and they are summoned to prostrate themselves, and they will not be able [to do it]." (68:42)
15. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth...."(24:35)
16. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "They have forgotten God, so God has forgotten them." (9:67)
17. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "...yet the entire earth will be in His fist on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand." (39:67)
18. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "No Indeed! They will be alienated from their Lord on that day." (83:15)
19. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "... and your Lord and the angels arrive in ranks." (89:22)
20. Commentary on the saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: "Do they await anything but that God [’s command] should come to them in the shades of the clouds, with the angels." (2:210)

21. Commentary on the sayings of God, the Exalted and Majestic: “God shall put them to ridicule” (9:79); “Then they plotted [against Jesus] and God also devised, and God is the Best of devisers” (3:54); “The hypocrites indeed seek to deceive God, but it is He who outwits them” (4:142).
22. The Meaning of the Vicinity of God, the Exalted and Majestic
23. The Meaning of *al-hujzab* [originally, the place where the trousers or kilt is fastened; it is also used in the sense of trousers and kilts themselves].
24. The Meanings of the eye, the ear, and the tongue.
25. The Meaning of the Saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: “The Jews say, ‘God’s hand is tied up.’ Tied be their hands, and cursed be they for what they say! Rather, His hands are wide open.” (5:64)
26. The Meanings of Divine Approval (*ridā*) and Wrath (*sakbat*)
27. The Meaning of the Saying of God, the Exalted and Majestic: “..and breathed into him of My spirit.” (15:29)
28. Negation of Space, Time, Rest, Motion, Descent, Ascent and Change of location of God, the Exalted and Majestic.
29. The Names of God and the Difference between their Meanings and Those of the Creatures
30. The Nature of the Qur’an
31. The Meaning of ‘In the Name of God, All-merciful, Most-merciful’
321. Commentary on the Letters of the Alphabet (*hurūf al-mu’jam*)
33. Commentary on the Letters of Calculation (*hurūf al-jumal*)



34. The Meanings of the Words of the Call to Prayers and the Declaration of Standing for Prayer
35. Commentary on Right Guidance, Error, Success, and Being Forsaken by God
36. Refutation of Dualism and Atheism
37. Refutation of Those “who say, ‘God is the third [person] of a trinity’, while there is no except the One God.” (5:73)
38. Mentioning the Tremendousness of God, the Blessed and Majestic
39. The Gentleness of God, the Blessed and Exalted
40. The minimum necessary amount of the knowledge of Divine Unity
41. Surely He, the Exalted and the Majestic, cannot not be known except through Himself
42. Proof of the Temporality of the World
43. The Tradition of Dhi‘lib
44. The Tradition of al-Sabkhat, the Jew
45. The Meaning of Glory be to God!
46. The Meaning of God is Greater.
47. The Meanings of the First and the Last
48. The Meaning of the Saying of God, “The All-merciful, settled on the Throne.” (20:5)
49. The Meaning of the Saying of God, “and His Throne was [then] upon the water.” (11:7)

50. The Throne and its Qualities
51. The Throne was the fourth thing to be created
52. His seat embraces the heavens and the earth (2:255).
53. God originated creation upon [innate knowledge of] His Oneness
54. Change of Destiny (*badāʾ*)
55. Divine Intention and Will
56. The Ability [of human beings]
57. Putting to the Test and Trial
58. Felicity and Misery
59. Refutation of Compulsion and Complete Freedom
60. Divine Decree (*qadāʾ*) and Measure (*qadar*), Sedition, Provisions, Prices, and the Appointed Times
61. Children and the Justice shown to them by God, the Exalted and Majestic, towards them
62. God, the Exalted, does not deal with His servants except based on that which is in their best interest
63. Command, Prohibition, Promise and Threat
64. Information, Explanation, Proof and Guidance
65. Imam Ridāʾs meeting, peace be upon him, with the people of the different religions and the people of different beliefs, such as Jathiliq (Catholics), Raʾs al-Jālūt (Exilarch, lit. 'Head of the Exile'), the chiefs of the Sabaeans, Chief Hirbud, and what ʿImrān al-Tʾābīʿi said on Divine Unity in the presence of al-Maʾmun

66. Imam Ridā's Meeting, peace be upon him, with Sulayman al-Marwazi, the theologian of Khurasan on Divine Unity in the presence of al-Ma'mun

67. Prohibiting Disputing and Arguing about God, the Exalted and Majestic

### Selection of hadith

The Unity of God is the foundational principle of all the revealed religions. Hence, a follower of the Islamic religion must first accept the testimony of faith: 'There is no god but God'. It is this profession of God's Unity, which is Islam's first pillar and all else depends upon and is derived from it. In what follows, I will refer to three exemplar hadiths on divine attributes, narrated by Shaykh al-Saduq in *Al-Tawhid*. The following hadiths are all from the Chapter on "Divine Unity and Negation of Anthropomorphism".

1. Hadith number 27: Muhammad b. Muhammad b. 'Isam al-Kulayni, may God have mercy upon him, narrated to us from Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulaini that: Muhammad b. 'Ali b. 'Ātikah from al-Hasan b. Naār al-Fihri from 'Amr al-Awzā'i from 'Amr b. Shimr from Jabir b. Yazid al-Ju'fi from Abi Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Baqir from his father from his grandfather, peace be upon them, who said: The commander of the faithful said in a sermon that he delivered seven days after the death of the Prophet, when he had finished collecting the holy Qur'an:

All praise belongs to God, Who made it impossible for imaginations to comprehend His existence, and veiled their intellects from being able to imagine His essence, because it is impossible for His essence to have a like or form. His essence does not vary nor is it divided by numerical division in its [attributes of] perfection.

He is separated from things not in terms of distance, and within them not in terms of mixing, and knows [things] not by instruments [while others] cannot attain

knowledge except through them. There is no other knowledge than His between that which is known by Him and Him [so that He may need it to know things]. If it is said that 'He was', it should be interpreted as the pre-eternity of [His] existence. If 'still' is said of Him, it should be interpreted as the negation of non-existence [of His Essence].

Glory be to Him, and high is He exalted above what those who worship other than Him say and who take a god other than Him.

We praise Him with a praise that He accepted for His servants and with a praise that He made its acceptance obligatory upon them. I profess that there is no god but God, without any associate and profess that Muhammad is His servant and messenger. These two professions of faith elevate words and double [the weight of] deeds. The scale will become light when these two professions of faith are taken away from it, and it will be weighty if they are put in it. The attainment of Paradise, being saved from Hell, and crossing the path successfully are gained through these two professions of faith. You will enter Paradise by the two professions of faith and attain Divine mercy by prayer. Hence, invoke blessings on your Prophet and his Household frequently. "Indeed God and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who have faith! Invoke blessings on him and invoke Peace upon him in a worthy manner." (33:56)

O people, surely there is no honour higher than Islam, no generosity more precious than mindfulness of God, no stronghold more protective than piety, no intercessor more beneficial than repentance, no treasure more beneficial than knowledge; no glory higher than forbearance, no noble descent more lasting than good manners, no fatigue more exhausting than anger, no

beauty better than intelligence, no evil worse than falsehood, no guardian more protective than silence, no dress more beautiful than good health, and no absence closer than death.

O people, whoever walks on the surface of the earth will eventually go beneath it. Day and night make haste to bring to an end the life spans. Every possessor of the breath of life has provisions and every seed has an eater.

You are the food of death. He who realizes the [vicissitudes of] time will not neglect readiness [for the hereafter]. Neither the wealth of the rich nor the poverty of the poor will save them from death. O people, he who fears His Lord will stop his wrongdoing. Whoever is not pious in his speech is more manifest in remoteness [from his Lord]. He who cannot distinguish good from evil is the same as an animal. How scanty are worldly misfortunes compared with the huge neediness of tomorrow. Your enmity is but due to your committing sins and acts of disobedience to God. Rest is very close to fatigue, and misery is very close to change. Any evil that is followed by Paradise is not a true evil, and any welfare that is followed by Hell is not a true welfare. Every comfort other than Paradise is valueless. Every misfortune other than Hell is good health.

2. Hadith number 26: Abu'l-'Abbas Muhammad b. Ibrahim b. Ishaq al-Tāliqāni, may God be pleased with him, narrated to us this hadeeth, saying: "Abu Sa'īd al-Hasan b. Ali al-'Adawi said: "al-Haitham b. Abd al-Allah al-Rummani narrated to us: 'Ali b. Musa al-Riḍā narrated to me, from his father, Musa b. Ja'far from his father, Ja'far b. Muhammad on the authority of his father Muhammad b. 'Ali from his father 'Ali b. al-Husain from his father al-Hasan b. 'Ali, peace be upon them, saying: 'The Commander of

the Faithful (peace be upon him) addressed the people in the mosque at Kufa and said:

All praise belongs to God, who does not exist because of anything and who did not bring that which exists into existence out of anything. He attests to His pre-eternity through the temporality (*hudūth*) of things, to His power through the impotence with which He has branded them, and to His everlastingness through the ‘annihilation (*fanaʿ*)’ which He has forced upon them. No place is empty of Him so that He might be perceived through location, and nothing is like Him so that He might be described by quality, and He is not hidden from anything so that He might be known through comparison.

He is distinct in terms of attributes from all that He has originated, impossible of perception because of the changing essences which He has created, and transcends all changing states because of grandeur and tremendousness. His delimitation is forbidden to penetrating and surpassing sagacity, His description to the piercing depths of thought and His representation to the penetrating and insightful probes.

Because of His tremendousness, places do not encompass Him, because of His majesty measures cannot gauge Him, and because of His grandeur standards cannot judge Him. It is impossible for imaginations to fathom Him, understandings to comprehend Him or minds to imagine Him. High-aspiring powers of reason despair of contriving to comprehend Him, oceans of knowledge run dry without alluding to Him in depth, and the subtleties of disputants fall from loftiness to pettiness in describing His power.

He is One not in terms of number; Everlasting, without duration; Standing, without supports, He is not of a kind that [other] kinds should be on a par with Him, nor an object that objects should be similar to Him, nor like things that attributes should apply to Him. Powers of reason go astray in the waves of the current of perceiving Him, imaginations are bewildered at encompassing the mention of His pre-eternity, understandings are incapable of becoming conscious of the description of His power, and minds are drowned in the depths of the heavens of His kingdom (*malakūt*).

He possesses mastery over [giving] bounties, inaccessible through Grandeur, and Sovereign over all things. Time does not make Him old, nor does description encompass Him. The firmest of obstinacies in the limits of their constancy are humbled before Him, and the most unbreakable of the ropes in the extremity of their towering regions are submitted to Him.

The totality of the different kinds [of creatures] attests to His Lordship, their impotence to His Power, their creation to His eternity, and their extinction to His permanence. So they possess no place of refuge from His grasp of them, no exit from His encompassing them, no way of veiling themselves from His enumeration of them and no way of avoiding His power over them. Sufficient is the perfection of His making them, (creatures) as a sign [of His creation], His compounding of their (natural) constitutions as a proof, the temporal origin of their natures as (a reason for His) eternity, and the creation's laws governing them as a lesson. No limit is attributed to Him, no similitude struck for Him and nothing veiled from Him. Indeed He is far above the striking of similitude and above creaturely attributes.

And I testify that there is no god but He and have faith in His lordship and oppose whoever denies Him; and I testify that Muhammad is His servant and messenger, who resides in the best lodging-place and passed from the noblest of loins and immaculate wombs, extracted in lineage from the noblest of mines and in origin from the most excellent of plantations, and (derived) from the most inaccessible of peaks and the most glorious roots, from the tree from which God fashioned His prophets and chose His trusted ones: [a tree] of excellent wood, harmonious stature, lofty branches, flourishing limbs, ripe fruit, noble interior, and was implanted in generosity and cultivated in a sacred precinct. There it put forth branches and fruit, became strong and unassailable, and then made him (the prophet Muhammad) tall and eminent, until God, the Mighty and Majestic, honoured him with the Faithful Spirit, the Illuminating Light, and the Manifest Book. He subjected to him Buraq and the angels greeted him. By means of him He terrified the devils, overthrew the idols and the gods (who were) worshipped apart from Him. His prophet's way (*sunna*) is integrity, his conduct is justice and his decision is truth. He complied with that which his Lord commanded and proclaimed that with which he was charged with until he made plain his mission through the profession of Unity and made manifest among the creatures that there is no god but God alone and that He has no associate; until His Oneness became pure and His lordship unmixed. God made manifest his argument through the profession of His Unity and He raised his degree with submission. And God, the Mighty and Majestic, chose for His prophet what was with Him of repose, degree and means and God bless him and his pure household.

3. Hadith number 2: Muhammad b. al-Hasan b. Ahmad b. al-Walid, may God be pleased with him, narrated the following to us from Muhammad b. 'Amr al-Katib who narrated from Muhammad b. Abi



Ziyad al-Qulzumi from Muhammad b. Abi Ziyad al-Juddi, the leader of the prayer in Jaddah, who said that Muhammad b. Yahya b. 'Umar b. 'Ali b. Abi Talib related to him: 'I heard Aba'l-Hasan b. al-Rida talking in this way about Divine Unity (*tawhid*) in the presence of al-Ma'mun. Ibn Abi Ziyad said: Ibn Abd al-Allah al-'Alawi, their master and the uncle of some of them, also related it to me from al-Qasim b. Ayyub al-'Alawi: When al-Ma'mun desired to appoint al-Rida [as his successor] he gathered together Banu Hashim and said to them, "Surely, I wish to appoint al-Ridā in this affair after me."

'Banu Hashim envied al-Ridā and said, "You [wish to] appoint an ignorant man who does not possess the insight to direct the caliphate? Send for him. He will come to us and you will see how his ignorance proves to be against him." So he sent for him and he came. Banu Hashim said to him, "O Abu'l-Hasan! Ascend the pulpit and raise for us a banner by which we may worship God. So he ascended the pulpit and sat for a long time, his head bowed in silence. Then he trembled a great trembling and stood up straight, praised and lauded God, and asked His blessing for His prophet and his household. Then he said:

The first act of worship of God is knowledge of Him, the root of knowledge of Him is to profess His Unity, and the correct way to profess the Unity of God is to negate attributes from Him. For the powers of reason testify that every attribute and everything having an attribute is created. Everything that has an attribute testifies that it has a Creator, which is neither an attribute nor possesses an attribute. Every attribute and everything that has an attribute testifies to a connection between the attribute and that the thing to which it is attributed. Connection testifies to temporal origination, and temporal origination testifies that it does not accept pre-eternity, which refutes temporality.

So it is not God whose Essence is known through comparison. It is not His Unity that is professed by

someone who attempts to fathom Him. It is not His reality that is attained by someone who strikes a similitude for Him. It is not He who is confirmed by him who professes an end for Him. It is not He to whom someone who points to Him turns to. It is not He who is meant by him who compares Him [to something]. It is not to Him that he who divides Him into parts humbles himself. And it is not He who is desired by him who conceives of Him in his imagination.

Everything that can be known in itself is created. All that stands apart from Him is an effect. God is inferred from what He fashions, the knowledge of Him is made firm by the powers of reason, and the argument for Him is established by original human nature. God's creating of the creatures is a veil between Him and them. His separation from them is that He is disengaged from their localization. That He is their origin is proof for them that He has no origin, for whatever has an origin cannot originate others. That He has created them possessing the means needed for accomplishing things is proof that He has no means, for means are witness to the poverty of those who use them.

So His names are an expression, His acts are [a means of] making [Him] understood, and His Essence is Reality, His innermost centre separates Him from creation, and His otherness limits what is other than Him. Therefore, he who asks for Him to be described is ignorant of God! Transgressing against Him is he who seeks to encompass Him! He who imagines to have fathomed Him is mistaken!

Whoever says 'how?' has compared Him [to something]. Whoever says 'why?' has professed for Him a cause. Whoever says 'when?' has determined Him in time. Whoever says 'in what?' has enclosed Him.

Whoever says 'to what?' has professed for Him a limit. Whoever says 'until what?' has given Him an end. Whoever gives Him an end has associated an end with Him. 'Whosoever associates an end with Him has divided Him. Whoever divides Him has described Him. Whoever describes Him has deviated from the straight path concerning Him.

God does not change with the changes undergone by creation, just as He does not become limited by delimiting that which is limited. He is One, not according to the explanation offered by number; Outward, not according to the explanation of being immediate (to the senses); Manifest, not through the appearance of a vision [of Him]; Inward, not through separation; Apart, not through distance; Near, not through approach; Subtle, not through corporealization; Existent, not after non-existence; Active, not through coercion; Determining, not through the activity of thought; Directing not through movement; Desiring, not through resolution; Willing, not through directing attention; Grasping not through touch; Hearing, not through means; and Seeing, not through organs.

Times do not accompany Him, places do not enclose Him, slumber does not seize Him, attributes do not delimit Him, and instruments are of no use to Him. His being precedes time, His existence non-existence and His beginninglessness beginning.

By His giving sense to the sense organs it is known that He has no sense organs. By His giving substance to substances it is known that He has no substance. By His creating opposition among things it is known that He has no opposite. By His causing affiliation among affairs it is known that He has no affiliate. He opposed darkness to light, obscurity to clarity, moisture to solidity, and heat to cold. He joins together those things

that are hostile to one another and separates those that are near. They prove their Separator by their separation and their Joiner by their junction, that is [the meaning of] His words - He is the Mighty and Majestic – “And We created pairs of all things so that you [people] might take note.” (51:49).

So through them He separated ‘before’ and ‘after’ so that it might be known that He has no before and after. They testify with their temperaments that He who gave them temperaments has no temperament. They prove through their disparity that He who made them disparate has no disparity. They announce, through their being time-bound that He who subjected them to time is not subject to it Himself.

He veiled some of them from others so that it might be known that there is no veil between Him and them other than them. His is the meaning of lordship when there was nothing over whom He was Lord, the reality of godhood when there was nothing for whom He was God, the meaning of Creator when there was nothing created and Knower when there was nothing knowable, the meaning and the import of hearing when there was nothing audible. It is not because He created that He deserves the meaning (of the term) Creator and not because He brought the creatures into being that the meaning of nothing is derived.

How [should it not be so]? For *mudh* (ever since) does not conceal Him, *qad* (already) does not bring Him near, *la‘alla* (perhaps) does not veil Him, *matā* (when?) does not limit Him in time, *hin* (at the time of) does not contain Him, and *ma‘a* (with) does not bring Him into association.

Instruments (*adawāt*) limit only themselves and means (*ālah*) allude only unto their own like. Their activities are

found only in things. *Mudh* withholds things from being eternal, *qad* shields them from without beginning, and *law lā* (if only) wards off perfection. Things become separate and prove (the existence of) their Separator. They become distinguished and prove their Distinguisher. Through them their Maker manifests Himself to the powers of reason. Through (these powers) He becomes veiled to sight, to them imaginations appeal for a decision, in them is substantiated (only) other than Him, from them is suspended the proof and through them He makes known to them the acknowledgement.

Confirmation of God is made firm by the powers of reason and faith in Him. Perfection is reached through acknowledgment. There is no religiosity except after knowledge, no knowledge except through sincerity and no sincerity along with comparison. There is no negation of comparison if there is affirmation of attributes.

So nothing in creation is found in its Creator. All that is possible in it is impossible in its Maker. Movement and rest do not affect Him. How should that which He effects [in others] have effect upon Him, or 'that which He has originated recur for Him? Then His Essence would be disparate, His innermost centre divided, His significance prevented from eternity. How would the Creator have a meaning different from the created?

If something from behind limited Him, then something in front would limit Him. If perfection were seeking Him, imperfection would be upon Him. How should that which is impossible of temporality be worthy of pre-eternity? How should that which is not impossible of being produced produce things? Then there would have arisen in Him a sign of createdness and He would become a proof after having been the proven.

There is no argument in absurd opinions, no answer when it [absurdity] is asked about, no glorification of Him in its meaning. There is no harm in distinguishing Him from creation unless it is that the Eternal is impossible of [accepting] duality, nor does the Pre-eternal have a beginning.

There is no god but God, the All-high, the Tremendous. They have told lies who ascribe equals to God! They have gone into extreme error and incurred a manifest loss. And God bless Muhammad and his household, the pure.

## Moral Characteristics of the Prophets: A Qur'anic Perspective

Mahnaz Heydarpoor & Mohammad Ali Shomali

There are a number of ways to understand the best qualities of human beings in Islam. One way is to study how God has described the Prophets in the Qur'an, since they are the people who are chosen by God as His messengers and are the best ones to be chosen by human beings as their guide and role models. For this purpose, this paper tries to present a Qur'anic account of the characteristics of each of the Prophets mentioned in the Qur'an. This paper also shows that moral characteristics occupy a central, if not, the central, position in God's praise of their qualities and this illustrates the significance of morality in Islam.

### Characteristics of Prophet Muhammad

#### *1. Submissive to God*

So if they argue with you, **say, 'I have submitted my will to God, and [so has] he who follow me.'** And say to those who were given the Book and the uninstructed ones, 'Do you submit?' If they submit, they will certainly be guided, but if they turn away, then your duty is only to communicate; and God sees best the servants. **(3:20)**

He has no partner, and this [creed] I have been commanded [to follow],and **I am the first of those who submit [to God].**' (6:163)

## *2. Gentle to the people*

**It is by God's mercy that you are gentle to them; and had you been harsh and hardhearted, surely they would have scattered from around you.** So excuse them, and plead for forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in God. Indeed God loves those who trust in Him. (3:159)

## *3. Deep concern for the people*

There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves. **Grievous to him is your distress; he has deep concern for you,** and is most kind and merciful to the faithful. (9:128)

## *4. Most kind and merciful to the faithful*

There has certainly come to you an apostle from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your distress; he has deep concern for you, and is **most kind and merciful to the faithful.** (9:128)

## *5. Who has faith in God and His words*

Say, 'O mankind! I am the Apostle of God to you all, [of Him] to whom belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no god except Him. He gives life and brings death.' So have faith in God and His Apostle, the uninstructed prophet **who has faith in God and His words,** and follow him so that you may be guided. (7:158)



See also 10:104 and 39:14.

### **6. *God-fearing***

When Our manifest signs are recited to them, those who do not expect to encounter Us say, 'Bring a Qur'an other than this, or alter it.' Say, 'I may not alter it of my own accord. I follow only what is revealed to me. **Indeed should I disobey my Lord, I fear the punishment of a tremendous day. (10:15)**

Say, '**Indeed, should I disobey my Lord, I fear the punishment of a tremendous day.**' (39:13)

### **7. *Pure in his worship***

Say, 'O people! if you are in doubt about my religion, then [know that] I do not worship those whom you worship besides God. **Rather I worship only God, who causes you to die**, and I have been commanded to be among the faithful, (10:104)

Say, '**[Only] God do I worship**, putting my exclusive faith in Him. (39:14)

### **8. *His heart is strengthened by God***

Whatever We relate to you of the accounts of the apostles are those by which **We strengthen your heart**, and there has come to you in this [surah] the truth and an advice and admonition for the faithful. (11:120)

The faithless say, 'Why has not the Qur'an been sent down to him all at once?' **So it is, that We may strengthen your heart with it**, and We

have recited it [to you] in a measured tone.  
(25:32)

### ***9. He puts his trust in God***

Thus have We sent you to a nation before which many nations have passed away, that you may recite to them what We have revealed to you. Yet they defy the All-beneficent. Say, 'He is my Lord; there is no god except Him; **in Him I have put my trust**, and to Him will be my return.' (13:30)

Whatever thing you may differ about, its judgment is with God. That is God, my Lord. **In Him I have put my trust**, and to Him I turn penitently. (42:10)

### ***10. Mercy to all the inhabitants of the world:***

We did not send you but as **a mercy to all the nations**. (21:107)

### ***11. Trustworthy:***

[saying,] 'Give over the servants of God to me; **indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you**. (44:18)

### ***12. Hard against the faithless***

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are **hard against the faithless** and merciful amongst themselves. You see them bowing and prostrating [in worship], seeking God's grace and [His] pleasure. Their mark is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration. Such is their description in the Torah and their description in the Evangel. Like a tillage that sends out its shoots and builds them up, and

they grow stout and settle on their stalks, impressing the sowers, so that He may enrage the faithless by them. God has promised those of them who have faith and do righteous deeds forgiveness and a great reward. (48:29)

### *13. Devotion to God*

Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and those who are with him are hard against the faithless and merciful amongst themselves. **You see them bowing and prostrating [in worship], seeking God's grace and [His] pleasure. Their mark is [visible] on their faces, from the effect of prostration...**(48:29)

**Indeed your Lord knows that you stand vigil nearly two thirds of the night —or [at times] a half or a third of it— along with a group of those who are with you...** (73:20)

### *14. Great character*

Nun. By the Pen and what they write: you are not, by your Lord's blessing, crazy, and yours indeed will be an everlasting reward, and **indeed you possess a great character.** You will see and they will see, which one of you is crazy. Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are guided. (68:1-4)

### *15. Good example*

**In the Apostle of God there is certainly for you a good exemplar,** for those who look forward to God and the Last Day, and remember God greatly. (33:21)

## Characteristics of the Prophet Abraham

### 1. *Righteous*

And who will [ever] renounce Abraham's creed except one who fools himself? We certainly chose him in the [present] world, and **in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous.** (2:130)

We gave him good in this world, and **in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous.** (16:122)

And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and We ordained among his descendants prophethood and the Book, and We gave him his reward in the world, and **in the Hereafter he will indeed be among the Righteous.** (29:27)

### 2. *Submissive to God:*

When his Lord said to him, 'Submit,' he said, 'I **submit to the Lord of all the worlds.**' (2:131)

See also 3:67 and 37:103.

### 3. *Upright (hanif)*

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. Rather **he was a hanif**, a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists. (3:67)

Say, 'God has spoken the truth; so follow the creed of Abraham, **a hanif**, and he was not one of the polytheists. (3:95)

And who has a better religion than him who submits his will to God, being virtuous, and follows the creed of Abraham, **a hanif**? And God took Abraham for a dedicated friend. (4:125)

Indeed I have turned my face toward Him who originated the heavens and the earth, as **a hanif**, and I am not one of the polytheists.’ (6:79)

Say, ‘Indeed my Lord has guided me to a straight path, the upright religion, the creed of Abraham, **a hanif**, and he was not one of the polytheists.’ (6:161)

Indeed Abraham was a nation obedient to God, **a hanif**, and he was not one of the polytheists. (16:120)

Then We revealed to you [saying], ‘Follow the creed of Abraham, **a hanif**, and he was not one of the polytheists.’ (16:123)

#### **4. Benefactor (*muhsin*)**

And We gave him Isaac and Jacob and guided each of them. And Noah We had guided before, and from his offspring, David and Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron —**thus do We reward the benefactor**— (6:84)

You have indeed fulfilled the vision! **Surely thus do we reward the benefactor.** (37:105)

**Thus do We reward the benefactor.** (37:110)

### 5. *Tender-hearted (awwah)*

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfill a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. **Indeed Abraham was most tender-hearted and forbearing. (9:114)**

Abraham was indeed forbearing, **most tender-hearted**, [and] penitent. **(11:75)**

### 6. *Forbearing (halim)*

Abraham's pleading forgiveness for his father was only to fulfill a promise he had made him. So when it became manifest to him that he was an enemy of God, he repudiated him. **Indeed Abraham was most tender-hearted and forbearing. (9:114)**

Abraham was indeed **forbearing**, most tender-hearted, [and] penitent. **(11:75)**

### 7. *Penitent*

Abraham was indeed forbearing, most tender-hearted, [and] **penitent. (11:75)**

...Our Lord! In You do we put our trust, and **to You do we turn penitently**, and toward You is the destination. **(60:4)**

### 8. *Obedient*

Indeed Abraham was a nation (or leader or model) **obedient** to God, a hanif, and he was not one of the polytheists. **(16:120)**

**9. Grateful**

Grateful [as he was] for His blessings, He chose him and guided him to a straight path. (16:121)

**10. Most truthful**

And mention in the Book Abraham. **Indeed he was a most truthful one**, a prophet. (19:41)

**11. Meets his Lord with pure heart**

when he came to his Lord with a pure heart, (37:84)

**12. Faithful**

**He is indeed one of Our faithful servants.** (37:111)

**13. Puts his trust in God**

...Our Lord! **In You do we put our trust**, and to You do we turn penitently, and toward You is the destination. (60:4)

**14. Good example in his and his followers' treatment of idol worshippers**

**There is certainly a good exemplar for you in Abraham and those who were with him**, when they said to their own people, 'Indeed we repudiate you and whatever you worship besides God. We disavow you, and between you and us there has appeared enmity and hate for ever, unless you come to have faith in God alone,' except for Abraham's saying to his father, 'I will

surely plead forgiveness for you, though I cannot avail you anything against God'... **(60:4)**

**There is certainly a good exemplar for you in them** —for those who look forward to God and the Last Day— and anyone who refuses to comply [should know that] indeed God is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable. **(60:6)**

### Characteristics of the Prophet Jesus

#### 1. *Righteous*

He will speak to people in the cradle and in adulthood, **and will be one of the righteous.** **(3:46)**

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Ilyas, —**each of them among the righteous**— **(6:85)**

#### 2. *Held in honour in the world and the Hereafter*

When the angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, **held in honour in the world and the Hereafter**, and one of those brought near [to God]. **(3:45)**

#### 3. *Taught the Book and wisdom by God*

**And He will teach him the Book and wisdom**, the Torah and the Evangel, **(3:48)**

When God will say, O Jesus son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so you would speak to the people in the cradle and in adulthood, and **when I taught you the Book and wisdom**, the Torah and the



Evangel, and when you would create from clay the form of a bird, with My leave, and you would breathe into it and it would become a bird, with My leave; and you would heal the blind and the leper, with My leave, and you would raise the dead, with My leave; and when I held off [the evil of] the Children of Israel from you when you brought them manifest proofs, whereat the faithless among them said, 'This is nothing but plain magic.' (5:110)

#### 4. *Near to God*

When the angels said, 'O Mary, God gives you the good news of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, held in honour in the world and the Hereafter, **and one of those brought near [to God].** (3:45)

When God said, 'O Jesus, I shall take you[r soul], and **I shall raise you up toward Myself**, and I shall clear you of [the calumnies of] the faithless, and I shall set those who follow you above the faithless until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me will be your return, whereat I will judge between you concerning that about which you used to differ. (3:55)

#### 5. *Pure*

He said, 'I am only a messenger of your Lord that **I may give you a pure son.**' (19:19)

#### 6. *Kind and considerate*

**and to be good to my mother, and He has not made me self-willed and wretched.** (19:32)

## Characteristics of the Prophet Moses

### 1. *Penitent*

When Moses arrived at Our tryst and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'My Lord, show [Yourself] to me, that I may look at You!' He said, 'You shall not see Me. But look at the mountain: if it abides in its place, then you will see Me.' So when his Lord disclosed Himself to the mountain, He leveled it, and Moses fell down swooning. And when he recovered, he said, 'Immaculate are You! **I turn to You in penitence**, and I am the first of the faithful.' (7:143)

### 2. *Faithful*

... And when he recovered, he said, 'Immaculate are You! I turn to You in penitence, and **I am the first of the faithful.**' (7:143)

**They are indeed among Our faithful servants.**  
(37:122)

### 3. *Purified*

And mention in the Book Moses. **Indeed he was purified [by God]**, and an apostle and a prophet. (19:51)

### 4. *Given wisdom (and judgement)*

So I fled from you, as I was afraid of you. **Then my Lord gave me wisdom (judgment)** and made me one of the apostles. (26:21)

5. *Benefactor (muhsin)*

Thus indeed do We reward the benefactor.  
(37:121)

6. *Noble*

Certainly We tried the people of Pharaoh before them, **when a noble apostle came to them,**  
(44:17)

7. *Trustworthy*

[saying,] 'Give over the servants of God to me;  
**indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you.**  
(44:18)

### Characteristics of the Prophet Joseph

1. *Most truthful*

'Joseph,' [he said], '**O truthful one,** give us your opinion concerning seven fat cows who are eaten by seven lean ones, and seven green ears and [seven] others dry, that I may return to the people so that they may know [the truth of the matter].'  
(12:46)

2. *Trustworthy*

The king said, 'Bring him to me, I will make him my favourite.' Then, when he had spoken with him, he said, 'Indeed today [onwards] you are honoured and **trustworthy** with us.' (12:54)

### 3. *Good keeper*

He said, 'Put me in charge of the country's granaries. **I am indeed a good keeper** [and] well-informed.' (12:55)

### 4. *Benefactor (muhsin)*

That is how We established Joseph in the land that he may settle in it wherever he wished. We confer Our mercy on whomever We wish, and **We do not waste the reward of the benefactor.** (12:56)

## Characteristic of the Prophet Jones

### *He was of those who glorify God*

And had he not been **one of those who glorify God,** (37:143)

## Characteristics of the Prophet Lot

### 1. *Trustworthy*

**Indeed I am a trusted apostle** [sent] to you. (26:162)

### 2. *Given wisdom (and judgement)*

**We gave wisdom (judgement)** and knowledge to Lot, and We delivered him from the town which used to commit vicious acts. Indeed they were an evil and profligate lot. (21:74)

### 3. *Given knowledge*

**We gave wisdom (judgement) and knowledge to Lot ...** (21:74)

#### *4. Righteous*

God draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. **They were under two of our righteous servants**, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against God, and it was said [to them], ‘Enter the Fire, along with the incomers.’ (66:10)

#### **Characteristic of the Prophet Saleh**

##### *Trustworthy*

**Indeed I am a trusted** apostle [sent] to you. (26:143)

#### **Characteristics of the Prophet David**

##### *1. Given wisdom and kingdom*

Thus they routed them with God’s will, and David killed Goliath, and **God gave him the kingdom and wisdom**, and taught him whatever He liked. Were it not for God’s repelling the people by means of one another, the earth would surely have been corrupted; but God is gracious to the world’s creatures. (2:251)

**We made his kingdom firm and gave him wisdom and conclusive speech (or sound judgement).** (38:20)

##### *2. Given knowledge*

... and taught him whatever He liked. ... (2:251)

### *3. Strong*

Be patient over what they say, and remember Our servant, **David, [the man] of strength**. Indeed he was a penitent [soul]. (38:17)

### *4. Penitent*

Be patient over what they say, and remember Our servant, David, [the man] of strength. **Indeed he was a penitent [soul]**. (38:17)

## Characteristics of the Prophet Aaron

### *1. Benefactor (muhsin)*

Thus indeed do We reward the benefactor. (37:121)

### *2. Faithful*

They are indeed among Our faithful servants. (37:122)

## Characteristics of the Prophet Noah

### *1. He puts his trust in God*

Relate to them the account of Noah when he said to his people, ‘O my people! If my stay [among you] be hard on you and [also] my reminding you of God’s signs, **[for my part] I have put my trust in God**. So conspire together, along with your partners, leaving nothing vague in your plan, then carry it out against me without giving me any respite. (10:71)

## 2. *Grateful*

descendants of those whom We carried [in the ark] with Noah. **Indeed he was a grateful servant.** (17:3)

## 3. *Trustworthy*

**Indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you.** (26:107)

## 4. *Benefactor (muhsin)*

**Thus indeed do We reward the benefactor.** (37:80)

## 5. *Faithful*

**He is indeed one of Our faithful servants.** (37:81)

## 6. *Righteous*

God draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. **They were under two of our righteous servants**, yet they betrayed them. So they did not avail them in any way against God, and it was said [to them], 'Enter the Fire, along with the incomers.' (66:10)

## Characteristics of the Prophet Solomon

### 1. *Given judgement and knowledge*

**We gave its understanding to Solomon, and to each We gave judgement and knowledge.** And We disposed the mountains and the birds to glorify [Him] with David, and We have been the doer [of such things]. (21:79)

## 2. *Given knowledge*

**Certainly We gave David and Solomon knowledge**, and they said, ‘All praise belongs to God, who granted us an advantage over many of His faithful servants.’ (27:15)

## 3. *Penitent*

And to David We gave Solomon —what an excellent servant! **Indeed he was a penitent [soul].** (38:30)

## Characteristics of the Prophet John (Yahya)

### 1. *Eminent*

Then the angels called out to him, as he stood praying in the sanctuary: ‘God gives you the good news of John, as a confirmer of a Word of God, **eminent** and chaste, a prophet, among the righteous.’ (3:39)

### 2. *Chaste*

...‘God gives you the good news of John, as a confirmer of a Word of God, **eminent** and **chaste**, a prophet, among the righteous.’ (3:39)

### 3. *Righteous*

... ‘God gives you the good news of John, as a confirmer of a Word of God, eminent and chaste, a prophet, among **the righteous.**’ (3:39)

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Ilyas, — **each of them among the righteous—** (6:85)



#### 4. *Compassionate*

and a **compassion** and purity from Us. He was pious, (19:13)

and **good to his parents**, and **was not self-willed** or disobedient. (19:14)

#### 5. *Purity*

and a compassion and **purity from Us**. He was pious, (19:13)

#### 6. *Pious*

and a compassion and purity from Us. He was pious, (19:13)

and good to his parents, and **was not self-willed** or **disobedient**. (19:14)

### Characteristic of the Prophet Elias

#### 1. *Righteous*

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Elias, —**each of them among the righteous**— (6:85)

### Characteristics of the Prophet Hud

#### 1. *Puts his trust in God*

**Indeed I have put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord.** There is no living being but He holds it by its forelock. Indeed my Lord is on a straight path. (11:56)

## 2. *Trustworthy*

**Indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you.  
(26:125)**

### Characteristics of the Prophet Shu‘ayb

#### 1. *He puts his trust in God*

He said, ‘O my people! Have you considered, should I stand on a manifest proof from my Lord, who has provided me a good provision from Himself? I do not wish to oppose you by what I forbid you. I only desire to put things in order, as far as I can, and my success lies only with God: **in Him I have put my trust**, and to Him I turn penitently. (11:88)

#### 2. *Penitent*

... and my success lies only with God: **in Him I have put my trust**, and **to Him I turn penitently**. (11:88)

#### 3. *Trustworthy*

**Indeed I am a trusted apostle [sent] to you.  
(26:178)**

**Note:** In the verse 11:87, those who had not believed in the Prophet Shu‘ayb’s mission, characterised him with forbearance and right-mindedness:

They said, ‘O Shu‘ayb, does your worship require that we abandon what our fathers have been worshiping, or that we should not do with our means whatever we wish? **You are indeed [a] gentle and sensible [person].’ (11:87)**

There are two views among the exegetes of the Qur'an in this regard. Some believe that they were not serious in this and were instead ridiculing him. Others believe that they had admitted that he possessed these two qualities and were asking him that why a person like him with such characteristics must ask them not to worship what their fathers used to worship.

### Characteristics of the Prophet Jacob

#### 1. *Puts his trust in God*

And he said, 'My sons, do not enter by one gate, but enter by separate gates, though I cannot avail you anything against God. Sovereignty belongs only to God. **In Him I have put my trust; and in Him let all the trusting put their trust.'** (12:67)

#### 2. *Righteous*

And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, **and each of them We made righteous.** (21:72)

### Characteristics of the Prophet Ismail

#### 1. *Submissive to God*

So **when they had both submitted [to God's will]**, and he had laid him down on his forehead, (37:103)

#### 2. *Knowledgeable*

They said, 'Do not be afraid. Indeed we give you **the good news of a knowledgeable son.'** (15:53)

Then he felt a fear of them. They said, 'Do not be afraid!' and they gave him **the good news of a knowledgeable son. (51:28)**

### *3. Truthful in his promise*

And mention in the Book Ishmael. **Indeed he was true to his promise**, and an apostle and a prophet. (19:54)

### *4. Pleasing to his Lord*

He used to bid his family to [maintain] the prayer and to [pay] the zakat, and **was pleasing to his Lord. (19:55)**

### *5. Patient*

And Ishmael, Idris, and Dhul-Kifl —**each of them was among the patient. (21:85)**

When he was old enough to assist in his endeavour, he said, 'My son! I see in a dream that I am sacrificing you. See what you think.' He said, 'Father! Do whatever you have been commanded. **If God wishes, you will find me to be patient.'** (37:102)

So We gave him **the good news of a forbearing son. (37:101)**

## Characteristics of the Prophet Isaac

### *1. Righteous*

And We gave him Isaac, and Jacob as well for a grandson, **and each of them We made righteous. (21:72)**

And We gave him the good news of [the birth of] Isaac, a prophet, one of the righteous. **(37:112)**

## Characteristics of the Prophet Zechariah

### *1. Righteous*

and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Elias, —**each of them among the righteous**— **(6:85)**

### *2. Humble before God*

So We answered his prayer, and gave him John, and remedied his wife[’s infertility] for him. Indeed they were ever quick in [performing] good works, and they would supplicate Us with eagerness and awe and **were humble before Us.** **(21:90)**

### *3. Quick in performing good works*

So We answered his prayer, and gave him John, and remedied his wife[’s infertility] for him. **Indeed they were ever quick in [performing] good works,** and they would supplicate Us with eagerness and awe and were humble before Us. **(21:90)**



## Preparing the Shi'a for the Age of Occultation

### Part II

Mohammad Reza Jabbari

In the previous part, when we reached the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam 'Askari (A), we said that in this period additional measures were adopted and the preparation for entering the Shi'ite for the age of occultation was culminated. Imam Hādi (A) and Imam 'Askari's (A) first action was the same as the Prophet's (S) and other Imams' in informing and prophesying about [Imam] Mahdi (A) and the facts about his occultation, reappearance and whatever Shi'a needed to know about this issue. Their second action which was carried out by both Imams (A), sometimes wittingly and sometimes compulsorily, was to reduce direct and oral contact with Shi'a so that they become used to having no contact with Imam. Their third important action in making preparations for occultation was to reinforce the network of agents as a key factor in making contact between Imam and the Shi'a whether in presence of Imam (A) or in his absence. In the previous part, we discussed the first two actions. With respect to reinforcing the network of agents, reinforce the network of agents. In this part, we will try to study the way the network developed and its status at the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam 'Askari (A) and also the age of occultation and its other features and tasks.

**A) The lexical and idiomatic definitions of the word "Wikālah" and brief introduction of "Wikālah" network**

The word “Wikālah” [in Arabic] means to authorise someone to do a task on someone’s behalf especially when someone is unable to do it by himself. And therefore, a “Wakil” [in Arabic, the subjective noun] is one who is entrusted with a task:

Wakil” is a sagacious one, whom is entrusted with a task, the guardian (patron), agent, second (in command).<sup>1</sup>

In jurisprudential references, “Wikālah” is defined as:

‘Wikālah’ is that another is chosen as agent in decision and approval of a task or to be the second in rank having the right to interfere in what is concerning him.

‘Wikālah’ is delegation and from the viewpoint of Islamic law, it is a particular type of agency.

‘Wikālah’ is to take one as delegate to do a task while he is alive, or it is to give another the right to direct something out of a person’s activities at the same time with his own right to do so.<sup>2</sup>

By paying attention to the lexical and idiomatic definitions of the word “Wikālah”, it can be understood that there is “a weakness in fulfilling the task directly” hidden in the lexical origin of this word, which means that the client appoints the agent when he himself is unable to perform a task directly because of certain causes, circumstances and exigencies. Therefore, if Shi‘ite Imams (A) took an action in appointing agents, it was because they were not able to make contact with Shi‘a in distant locations of Islamic world directly and in normal ways.

Studies show that “organization or network of agents” are terms which are associated with the age of Imams’ (A) presence and the age of minor occultation. The reason for labelling that community



as “organization or network of agents” is the existence of an interiorized integrity and orderly form in it.

The formation of this community dates back to the age of Imam Sādiq (A). In that age, Imam (A) sent some agents and representatives to near and far Shi‘ite towns to make contact between Imam (A) and the Shi‘a and also to fulfill their other duties. This community retained more integrity and developed at the time of Imam Kāzīm (A) and became more organized and undertook a broader level of activities in late age of Imam Riḍā (A) and later during the age of Imam Jawād (A). The situation continued during the ages of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam ‘Askari (A) until we see an increase in activities of this network because it was the only way of communication between Imams (A) and the Shi‘a in this age. In this way, “the network of agents” began its activities in this course of development and continued to work until the end of the age of minor occultation. Imams’ (A) agents were this network’s members who had to have certain qualities to hold this position. They were entrusted with certain tasks when they held the position of being Imam’s (A) agents; but then some of them went astray and some who were not agents made false claims of agency in a way that the Imams (A) had to stand against them. To gain a general knowledge about this network, it is necessary to discuss each one of the issues mentioned independently. The following topics are related to this matter.

### **B) The causes that led to the formation of “the network of agents” and continuation of its activities until the end of the age of occultation**

One of the key points in this issue is to determine why Imams (A) founded the network and continued its activities and also to find out about the causes that made Imams (A) care about this community and its members and endeavour seriously to keep and promote it. These causes and circumstances can be listed as below.

**B.1. The necessity of connection between leadership and the followers:** It seems that one of the primary causes in developing this network was the necessity of maintaining a connection between the infallible Imams (A) and their Shi'a. In every religious, political and social system, the connection between leadership and the members of the system is vital. Therefore, there must be some persons appointed by the Shi'ite Imams (A) as their agents to play the role of making contact between the Shi'a and the Imams (A). This matter becomes clearer when we consider the vast size of Islamic world at that time and the spread of the Shi'a in many places in Iraq, Hijāz, Iran, Yemen, Egypt and Morocco. As a result, it was natural that not all Shi'a could travel to visit Imams (A) and, therefore, it was necessary to send some trusted people as the Imams' (A) representatives and to be the link between the leader and his followers.

**B.2. Restrictive atmosphere of Abbasids' time and the necessity of protecting Shi'a and the religion by Imam (A):** Although, existence of a restrictive atmosphere cannot be considered as the major cause of establishment of the network of agents but for sure, the existence of such an atmosphere can cause acceleration of that network's activities and also its progress and development. Therefore, we see the peak of this network's activities at the age of Imam Kāzīm (A) and Imam Hādi (A).

**B.3. Preparation of the Shi'a for the Age of Occultation:** Undoubtedly, one reasons for establishing the organization was to prepare Shi'a to accept the new situation at the age of occultation, the age during which Shi'a could not make any contacts with their leader and Imam (A) except through his agents and representatives. It was according to this fact that, as Shi'a approached the age of occultation, their way of making contact with Imam (A) became more limited while the network of agents became stronger in a way that at the age of Imam Hādi (A) and Imam 'Askari (A), most Shi'a' affairs concerning the two Imams (A) were conducted through correspondence, representatives and agents. Therefore, it can be concluded that at least during the age of these two Imams (A),

reinforcing the network of agents was a strategic plan for preparing the Shi'a for entering to the age of occultation.

#### **B.4. Resolving doubts of some Shi'a at the age of occultation:**

When we reach the age of minor occultation, the necessity of such network becomes more obvious, since the only way for Shi'a to make contact with Imam (A) was through representatives and agents. In this age, special and general representatives and deputies of Imam (A) were the only authorities for Shi'a in political, intellectual, social, economic and religious difficult situations. They were also appropriate authorities for Shi'a at the ages of some of the Imams (A) such as Imam Kāẓim (A) and the two Imams: Imam Hādi (A) and Imam 'Askari (A).

#### **C) Time and place of the activities of “the network of agents”**

According to references, the age of Imam Sādiq (A) should be considered as the exact time for beginning of the activities of “the network of agents.” This network, although having many ups and downs, progressively continued its activities and did not stop working at any stage during the time of the succeeding Imams (A). One of the most critical and decisive periods of this network's activities occurred during the age of minor occultation, because with the absence of the infallible Imam (A), his representatives and deputies were the only references and refuge for Shi'a.

The network's activities lasted until year 329 A.H. when the fourth and the last deputy of Imam Mahdi (A) passed away. In that year, as the major occultation began, the contact with Imam (A) through special deputies broke off and the activity of the network of agents stopped, for the network consisted of persons who were chosen directly by Imam (A) himself as deputies, but when the major occultation began, fully qualified jurists took on the deputies' duties and no one was specifically appointed as Imam's deputy. Therefore, although in a general sense, jurists took on deputyship of Imam (A) at the age of major occultation, but they were not considered to be part of the network of agents. Then chronologically, the period of that network's activities can be considered from the age of Imam

Sādiq (A) until the end of the age of minor occultation (i.e. 329 A.H).

With respect to the location scope of the network, it should be noted that since Shi'a at that time were scattered across the Islamic world, the network was extended to all Shi'a centres and areas. According to historical sources, the list of regions include: Hijāz (Medina),<sup>3</sup> Iraq (Kufah<sup>4</sup>, Baghdad<sup>5</sup>, Samarra, Wāsīt<sup>6</sup>), Iran (Khurāsān, the large<sup>7</sup>, Qum<sup>8</sup>, Rey<sup>9</sup>, Qazvin<sup>10</sup>, Hamedān<sup>11</sup>, Azerbāyējān<sup>12</sup>, Qarmisin<sup>13</sup>, Ahwāz<sup>14</sup>, Sistān and Bust<sup>15</sup>) and Egypt.<sup>16</sup>

### **D) Duties of “the network of agents”**

Examining historical sources illustrates the fact that “the network of agents” had different duties and functions as follows:

#### **1. Collecting religious taxes**

Since establishment of this network, agents began to collect religious taxes and hand them over to the Imams or spend them locally according to the instructions of the Imams. For example, Mu'allā b. Khunays is mentioned as the financial agent of Imam Sādiq (A) in Medina. His activity in collecting religious taxes from Shi'a made Abbasids worry, so they martyred him. Mansūr who was the Abbasids' caliph accused him of collecting money for assisting the uprising of Muhammad b. 'Abdullah – Nafs Zakiyyah (the Pure Soul).<sup>17</sup>

Due to expansion of the network of agents and their activities and also growing Shi'ite-resident areas at the age of Imam Kāzīm (A), the sum of financial taxes which agents received were much more than those of the time of Imam Sādiq (A). This increase of property in the hands of some of agents tempted some of them to betray Imam's (A) path after his martyrdom. They tried to keep the properties under their control by announcing endowment [of the property] or claiming to be the promised Mahdi (A) or denying Imam Riḡā's (A) imamate.<sup>18</sup> At the other times, religious taxes were

taken and handed over to the Imams in an orderly manner because the network by that time had become more organized.

These financial payments were collected in forms of zakat, khums and endowments.<sup>19</sup>

It seemed that at the age of Imam ‘Askari (A), some Shi‘a were a little indolent to pay Khums. During the age of minor occultation, we see some increase in the payment of khums and other taxes by Shi‘a. The agents were also more determined to collect the khums or other taxes. Some of the reasons for this are understandable from the following passage in the *Wasā’il al-Shi‘ah*:

This strictness in paying khums was because of some agents, to whom paying taxes was necessary; also there were people in need, among whom, there were some descendants of the Prophet (S).<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes agents used to collect religious taxes at the age of occultation in special ways that would establish perfect trust in the side of the tax-payers. For example, an agent of Imam described the exact amount and other details of the money to Muhammad b. Ibrāhim b. Mahziyār before taking the money from him. Similar stories are reported about Ahmad b. Muhammad Dinwari<sup>21</sup> and Husayn b. Rūh Noubakhti.<sup>22</sup>

During a certain period of the age of occultation, receiving taxes was performed without giving or taking receipt which seems that it had been because of the restrictive atmosphere of Abbasids’ period.<sup>23</sup>

Properties sent to Imams (A) would be spent for different purposes including:

- Helping descendants of the Prophet (S) and Bani Hāshim;
- Spending on common interests of the Shi‘a community;

- Resolving financial disputes among the Shi‘a;
- Helping the people in need.

## 2. Managing endowments

Endowed lands and estates were located in different places. For example, Hasan b. Muhammad Saydalāni was the agent who managed endowments in Wāsīt.<sup>24</sup> Some of the agents, such as Ahmad b. Ishāq Qummi in Qom, were designated for the same affairs.<sup>25</sup>

## 3. Guiding Shi‘a and debating with oppositions

One of the network’s tasks was to guide Shi‘a about their duties and true principles of religion. There is no doubt that the one who is introduced to residents of a city or region as the acting and chief agent of an infallible Imam (A) is the most informed and knowledgeable one in that area. People used to ask them about their religious enquiries. An example is that after Imam Riḳā’s (A) martyrdom, some people were puzzled about the imamate of Imam Jawad (A) since he was very young. To solve the problem about 80 persons of Twelvers’ leaders (among whom were ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Hajjāj - the chief agent of Iraq - and many other agents) gathered in Baghdad to discuss this issue and clarify it for the public.

At the age of minor occultation, when Shi‘a faced challenges of having no access to the infallible Imam (A) obviously there was a greater risk that some people may get confused or puzzled. Therefore, it was the network headed by the deputy of Imam (A) which was the refuge and authority for the people who were in need of guidance. For example, after the first deputy of Imam Mahdi (A) passed away, when people were in doubt about the next deputy, it was Abu Ja‘far ‘Amri, the second deputy, who took over the responsibility of guiding Shi‘a and eliminating their confusion. The

story about Abu al-‘Abbās Ahmad Dinwari Sarrāj proves the claim above.<sup>26</sup>

There is plenty of evidence indicating that Imams (A) would refer Shi‘a to agents for knowing the truth at the time of inaccessibility to Imams (A). One of the best examples is a case when Imam Hādī (A) asked Ahmad b. Ishāq Qumi to go to ‘Uthmān b. Sa‘id when Imam (A) [himself] was out of reach.<sup>27</sup>

In religious issues, especially during the age of occultation, Imam’s (A) deputies were the authority to ascertain whether a belief was true or false. For instance, when Shi‘a asked ‘Amri, the deputy of Imam Mahdi (A), about Mufawwiḍah [those who believed in delegation of divine power to Imams (A)] and their beliefs, he rejected their viewpoints in considering people and their sustenance depending on Imams (A), and he indicated that the sustenance depended only on the Sacred Supreme Being of Allah.<sup>28</sup> By adopting that position, the official standing of Imams’ (A) deputies in that issue which was the same as that of the Household’s followers and Shi‘ite community was proved.

In the same way, when one of the Shi‘a asked Husayn b. Rūh Nawbakhti about the cause of the domination of Imam Husayn’s enemies; he gave a convincing and definite answer to it in a way that the narrator of the story stated that: “I doubted if he gave the answers by himself, but I did not say a single word. [At this time, ] he turned to me and said that he had heard all these from its original source (Imam Mahdi (A))”.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, discussion and debate with those who had other ideas were not exclusive to the time of occultation. For example, ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Hajjāj, who was the chief agent of Imam Sādiq (A) and the three Imams (A) after him, was once ordered by Imam Sādiq (A) to have a discussion with the people of Medina. It is quoted that Imam (A) told him: “O’ ‘Abd al-Rahmān! Talk with people of Medina, for I like to see someone like you among Shi‘a”.<sup>30</sup>

Sometimes, Imams' (A) agents would get help from reliable Shi'ite narrators of hadiths to resolve doubts. For instance, Husayn b. Rūh Nawbakhti sent a book, whose credibility was in doubt, to narrators of hadiths in Qum so that they could investigate the contents and inform him about anything that was in contradiction with their own knowledge of the narrations. Finally, guiding Shi'a towards the truth by agents was not only about opinions and beliefs but sometimes it would include personal matters too.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4. Political role of the network of agents**

Although the network was established mainly to collect religious taxes, its political role cannot be neglected. Even regardless of all political activities, the issue of collecting properties from around neighbouring areas for Shi'ite Imams (A) itself was considered as a political movement in the eyes of Abbasid rulers.<sup>32</sup> Mansūr accused Imam Sādiq (A) of collecting money to help the oppositions of Abbasid government and Hārūn made the same accusation about Imam Kāẓim (A). Mutawakkil Abbāsi had the same kind of sensitivity about Imam Hādi (A). When he found out about Imam's agents' activities, he sought to destroy the network and arrest its members. He even arrested some of Imam's (A) companions and martyred or tortured them.<sup>33</sup>

The Abbasid government's attempt to identify the members of the network of agents during the age of occultation is another proof for the network's political role.<sup>34</sup>

#### **5. Communicational role of the network of agents**

When discussing the causes of establishing the network of agents, it should be mentioned that one of the most leading causes was the communicational role of the network of agents. It is obvious that those Shi'a who lived in far places and could not find the chance to see their Imam (A) even once, would refer to agents, who made contact with Imam (A), in different cities in order to meet their religious, financial and other needs. Delivery of religious taxes,



answering people's questions about religion and beliefs, presenting letters and messages to Imam (A) and also taking oral and written messages and responses from Imam (A) to Shi'a were agents' other actions that they would perform as the liaison between the Imam (A) and the Shi'a. It is clear that if the network of agents was not established among people, those affairs would not have any responses and Shi'a would become confused.

One of the most important duties of the agents in periods near the age of minor occultation and during it, was "delivery of *Tawqī's*". Idiomatically, "Tawqī" [in Arabic] means the short words which authorities would write at the bottom or sides of books to answer a question, resolve a problem or explain a certain idea or opinion. Although, Imam's (A) short words were often the answers to questions [of people], there were times when Imam (A) himself would issue and send out a 'Tawqī' even if no one had submitted a question or problem, like the one Imam Mahdi (A) sent out to express sympathy about his first deputy (after he passed away) or another time announcing the end of deputyship of the fourth deputy.

Normally, Tawqī's would be released in about two or three days after a question was addressed, but sometimes the answer was ready even in a shorter time. Tawqī's contained issues such as answers to questions of religious laws, different orders to the agents, receipt of the religious taxes, announcements of appointing an agent, warning about a political danger threatening the network of agents and suggesting solution, issuing denunciation, deposing and dismissing treacherous, corrupted or false agents, describing some of the agents' personalities and clearing them of accusation and settling arguments, and removing doubts and misgivings.<sup>35</sup>

## 6. Helping the oppressed and needy Shi'a

For instance, 'Ali b. Yaqtin, Imam Kāzīm's (A) agent, was one of those who entered Abbasid government to remove oppression from Shi'a and he was successful. When Imam (A) expressed his disapproval of 'Ali b. Yaqtin's cooperation with Abbasid's

oppressive government (even though at that low level) unless he uses this as an opportunity to help the oppressed, Imam (A) told him:

Surly, Allah appoints a minister from His friends beside every illegitimate ruler, in order to remove [the problem] from His friends by that appointed one and O' 'Ali! You are one of those appointed ones.<sup>36</sup>

In a similar manner, sometimes some of the agents were ordered to deliver help [in form of money] from Imams (A) to needy Shi'a, like Muhammad b. 'Isā b. 'Ubayd b. Yaḡtin Asadi who was ordered to go for hajj on behalf of Imam Riḡā (A) and deliver financial aid to the poor in Medina and Imam Riḡā's (A) households.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes, Imams' (A) agents were ordered to resolve arguments between some Shi'a; where if necessary, they would spend money to do so. For example, Mufaḡḡal b. 'Umar Ju'fi, Imam Sādiq's (A) agent and trustee, was ordered to pay 400 Dirhams, on behalf of Imam (A), to Abu Hanifah Sā'iḡ al-Hājj and his son-in-law who had argument over inheritance. That shows how Imams (A) were determined to preserve unity of Shi'a.<sup>38</sup>

## **E) Features of “the network of agents”**

### **1. Characteristics of members of “the network of agents”**

- a) Reliability;<sup>39</sup>
- b) Being confidential and stealthy;<sup>40</sup>
- c) Cleverness;
- d) Being organized;
- e) Piety & trustworthiness;

- f) Being detached from materialistic things;
- g) Having none of the attributes of deceit, selfishness, envy, fame-seeking, treachery, exaggeration, ignorance, bigotry and tendency towards the wrong and oppression;
- h) Being respectful to the Holy Prophet's (S) household;
- i) Having knowledge about God, tradition and Imams' (A) rights;
- j) Competency in accomplishing extraordinary tasks at the time of emergencies about Imams' (A) affairs like the four deputies.

## **2. Other characteristics of “the network of agents”**

In addition to the previously mentioned features of this network's characteristics, there are some others as the following:

### **I Leadership**

[At every age] a leader who was the Infallible Imam (A) would carefully supervise agents' activities; he (A) would also handle several affairs such as appointing local agents, supervising their functionality, introducing local agents to Shi'a, making their virtues and personalities known to others, dismissing corrupted and treacherous agents and replacing them with new agents, explaining movements of false agency and how to treat them, guiding agents in their duties and the way they had to deal with the Abbasid government, financially supporting agents and also dismissing accusations from them.

### **II Head or chief agents**

In the network of agents, different regions had special partitioning and eventually for every vast area, a chief agent was appointed whose duty was to supervise dispatched agents' works in their

appointed areas, while local agents were also supposed to refer to the chief agents. Reported by Dr. Jāsim Husayn, based on historical evidences agents divided Shi'a regionally into four groups: first region including Baghdad, Madā'in, Sawād and Kufah. Second region included Basra and Ahwaz. Third region included Qum and Hamadan and finally, the fourth region included Hijaz, Yemen and Egypt. Each region was assigned to an independent agent under whose supervision, local representatives were appointed.<sup>41</sup>

### **III Resident and roaming agents**

Although most agents sent to regions were residents of those regions, based on historical evidence, some agents undertook the task of observing different regions in order to supervise resident agents' works and also played the role of the medium between Imam (A) and other [resident] agents. Moreover, they would submit religious taxes and properties which people brought to them, to Imam (A).

### **IV The factor of hiding and concealment**

One of the most essential features of the network of agents was the factor of secrecy due to dangers arising from the Abbasid government. Considering close and constant monitoring of Imams (A) and their Shi'a activities exercised by Abbasid rulers, it seemed necessary for agents' activities to be done in complete hiding. And that guaranteed the security of the network of agents during its working life; and except for few cases, the network itself and its members were secured from the danger of disclosure and collapse. And in certain cases whereby the danger of disclosure existed, the insight and awareness of the leadership of the network and also its members' devotion caused the core of the network's existence to be secure and the danger was limited to some members and not the core of the network. For instance, even after being threatened by Dāwūd b. 'Alī to death if he does not reveal the names of Imam's (A) [close] Shi'a, Mu'ala b. Khunays, Imam Sādiq's (A) agent,

answered: "Do you threaten me to death?! I swear by God that even if they were under my feet, I would not disclose them [to you]".<sup>42</sup>

During the age of minor occultation when 'Ubaydullah b. Sulaymān, the Abbasid minister, was informed about agents' secret activities, he consulted with the Caliph and decided to identify the agents; therefore, he sent some people pretending to be some Shi'a who wanted to pay their religious taxes to whom he thought they would be the agents, but all of a sudden act, a Tawqi' was issued by Imam (A) forbidding all the agents from taking any payment from anyone. Muhammad b. Ahmad was among those agents to whom a government spy went to pay religious taxes and in response, he answered that: "You have come to wrong person. This is none of my business". This continued to be the case till the danger was completely over.<sup>43</sup>

#### **V) Necessary means of communication**

Necessary means of communication were among other features of the network. Means such as letters and release of Tawqi's, Hajj, roaming agents, direct contact with Imam (A), etc. were used to pass the messages between the Imams (A) and the Shi'a.

#### **F) Introducing some of most eminent agents of Imams (A)**

Investigating primary references of biographies of the narrators of hadiths, collections of hadiths and historical references, one would find numerous names of Imams' (A) agents who were the members of the network of agents discussed previously. Although one cannot claim that the names of all Imams' (A) agents are recorded, but in an almost extensive search of these references, we found numerous names of them which assisted so much in knowing this network and its features. Thorough investigation of these agents' personalities and biographies is far beyond capacity of this paper; therefore, we end this paper by mentioning some prominent names among them and introduce necessary references for further study in the endnote:

1. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. al-Hajjāj
2. Muhammad b. Sanān
3. Mu‘ala b. Khunays
4. Nasr b. Qābūs Lakhmi
5. Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Amr Ju‘fi
6. ‘Ali b. Yaḡtin
7. ‘Abdullah b. Jundab
8. Ibrāhim b. Salām Neyshābūri
9. ‘Ali b. Abi Hamzah
10. Safwān b. Yahyā
11. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz b. al-Muhtadā
12. ‘Ali b. Mahzyār Ahwāzi
13. Zakaryā b. Ādam Qummi
14. Ibrāhim b. Muhammad Hamidāni
15. Ayyūb b. Nuh b. Darrāj
16. ‘Ali b. Ja‘far Hāmāni
17. ‘Ali b. al-Husayn b. ‘Abdurabbih
18. Ibrāhim b. Mahzyār
19. Ibrāhim b. ‘Abduh al-Nishābūri.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakarīyā, *Mu‘jam Maqā’is al-Luḡbah*, vol. 6, p. 136; *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf*, p. 1053; *Loḡhat Nāmeḡ Debkhodā*, vol. 14, p. 20542.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakarīyā, *Mu‘jam Maqā’is al-Luḡbah*, vol. 6, p. 136; *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf*, p. 1053; *Loḡhat Nāmeḡ Debkhodā*, vol. 14, p. 20542.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sheikh Ḥūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 102; ‘Allāmeḡ Māmaḡānī, *Tanqīḡ al-Maḡāl*, vol. 3, no. 12451; Sheikh Ṭūsī, *Al-Rijāl*, p. 324; *Biḡar al-Anmār*, vol. 47, p. 342, trans.

by Yūnus b. Ya‘qūb and Mufaḍal b. ‘Umar Ja‘farī; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 511, no. 988, trans. by Abu ‘Alī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ḥamad Marvzī Maḥmūdī.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Tārikh Syāsī Ghaybat Imām Dawāzḍahum (A)*, p. 78. 134; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 493, no. 946; *Rijāl Najāshī*, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 134. Also, it can be understood from Imam’s (A) letter addressing the resident agents of the above regions that he appointed ‘Alī b. Rāshid as the successor instead of ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn and he (A) ordered them to go to ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn. Imam (A) took this action in following Mutawakkil ‘Abbāsī’s action in arresting Shī‘ites. About this, refer to: *Tārikh Syāsī Ghaybat Imām Dawāzḍahum (A)*, p. 136; moreover, the meaning of the [Arabic] expression “Qurā Sawād” here is surrounding regions. It should be noted that they were called towns since they were fertile regions where farming was common and the land there seemed dark [like cities].

<sup>6</sup> *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘mah*, p. 504, no. 35; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 336.

<sup>7</sup> *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 2, no. 6470, trans. by Faḍl b. Sanān; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 580, no. 1089. [where] in a letter to ‘Abdullah b. Ḥamduwayh, Imam (A) stated: “So I appointed Ibrāhīm b. ‘Abduh for you to defend the regions and your region’s residents. You are charged with obligatory fees set for him, and I [also] appointed him my trusty friend and my trustee there.” Also [refer to] *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 542, no. 1027 trans. by Ayūb b. al-Nāb. He was disregarded by Faḍl b. Shādhān - one of Nishābūr’s noble men - because of his tendency toward extremism, then Imam (A) resolved the matter for him through a decree to Faḍl b. Shādhān. Cf. *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 10843, trans. by Muhammad b. Shādhān b. Na‘īm b. Shādhānī; Ibid. vol. 2, no. 2820, trans. by ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 339; *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘mah*, p. 509; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 533, no. 1017; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 341. He was living at the time of Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ, the third deputy of Imam Maḥdī (A.J) and went to him.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 483, no. 910; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 2, p. 251; *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 10304; Mīrzā Ḥusayn Nūrī, *Mustadrak al-Wasā’il*, vol. 1, p. 374; Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Ardībīlī, *Jamī’ al-Ruwāt*, vol. 1, p. 41; *Aḡyan al-Shi‘ah*, vol. 2, p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Sheykh Ṭūsī stated about Rey in his book, *Al-Ghaybah*, that: “And at the time of honourable deputies, there were some trustees who carried decrees [from Imam (A)] before the originally appointed ones, among whom were Abu al-Ḥusayn, Muḥammad b. Ja‘far al-Asadī”. Also, according to Sheykh Ṭūsī’s reports, a person called Ṣāliḥ b. Abī Ṣāliḥ, year 290 A.H, was ordered to collect religious taxes from people and deliver to Abu al-Ḥusayn in Rey. Cf. Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 257; *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 2, p. 92; *Jamī’ al-Ruwāt*, vol. 2, p. 83; *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘mah*, p. 509, no. 38, p. 522.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ḍiyāfah al-Akḡawān*, p. 66.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 611, no. 1136; *Rijāl Najjāshī*, p. 242; *Tanqīḡ al-Maqāl*, vol. 2, no. 9607; *Ibid.* vol. 1, no. 2752; *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, p. 483, no. 2; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 297; *Ibid.* vol. 97, p. 45.

<sup>12</sup> *Wasā'il al-Shr'ah*, vol. 20, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 300; *Al-Masālik wal Mamālik*, p. 41, 198.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Tanqīḡ al-Maqāl*, vol. 2, no. 6792; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 549, no. 1038, 1039, 1040; *Rijāl Najjāshī*, p. 177; *Wasā'il al-Shr'ah*, vol. 12, p. 342; Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 211.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Tārīkh Syāsī Ghaybat Imām Dawāzḡdabum (A)*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p. 71; Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 43; *Manāqīb*, vol. 4, p. 432; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 5, p. 285.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Tanqīḡ al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 11994.

<sup>18</sup> Those who were the leaders of Waqīfite school, were denounced and rejected by Imām Riḡā (A) and also rejected from the Shī'ite community of that time. From among them are 'Alī b. Ḥamzah Baṡā'inī, Ḥayyān Sarrāj and 'Uthmān b. 'Īsā Rawāsī; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 493, no. 946; Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mudarrisī Ṭabāṡabā'ī, *Maktab Dar Farāyand-e Takāmol*, p. 19; *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 434, no. 819.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Wasā'il al-Shr'ah*, vol. 6, no. 378.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 171; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 303 (Story concerning Muḡammad b. Ibrāḡīm b. Mahzīyār Ahwāzī).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 195.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 225.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, p. 504, no. 35; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 336.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Rijāl Najjāshī*, p. 66; *Tanqīḡ al-Maqāl*, vol. 1, p. 50; *Jami' al-Ruwāt*, vol. 1, p. 41.

<sup>26</sup> As a people's trustee, he took some properties [as endowments] of people of Dīnwar to Baghdad, and so did Aḡmad b. al-Ḥasan al-Māwarā'ī (as the deputy in Qarmīsīn) while on the way, they faced false claims of some rivals of the second deputy (Abu Ja'far 'Amrī). He [Abu al-'Abbās Aḡmad Dīnwarī Sarrāj] found the false rivals incapable of proving their claims while Abu Ja'far 'Amrī provided necessary proofs and gave a description of the properties, discovered the truth



and went toward his own town. You may see the full account of this story in: *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 300.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Āyatullah al-‘Uzmā Khuṭī, *Mu‘jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 11, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 178; *Maktab Dar Farāyand-e Takāmol*, p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘mah*, p. 507, no. 37.

<sup>30</sup> *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 422, no. 830.

<sup>31</sup> In a case, when one doubted the relation of his son with him; he sent someone to Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ in order to clarify the matter to him. Husayn b. Rūḥ sent the messenger to Abū ‘Abdullah Bazūfarī and he said: “That is his son, and has been produced at some certain time and name him Muḥammad. (Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 185).

<sup>32</sup> That would become confirmed better if we pay attention to the way Manṣūr accused Imam Ṣādiq (A) when Imam (A) sent Mu‘alla b. Khunays, his agent, to collect money from Shī‘ites, for the movement of ‘Abdullah, Nafs Zakīyyah [the Pure Soul]. That led to an accusation for which Manṣūr called Imam (A) to Baghdad. Similar accusation was made about Imam Kāzīm (A) by Hārūn. (*Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, No. 11993.)

<sup>33</sup> Mutawakkil ‘Abbāsī sued Ayyūb b. Nūḥ who was Imam Hādī’s (A) agent in Kufah because of such sensitivity he had about Imam Hādī’s (A) agents. (*Tārīkh Syāsī Ghaybat Imām Dawāzdahum (A)*, p. 81) He also put ‘Alī b. Ja‘far Hāmānī in jail and decided to kill him. When ‘Ubaydullah b. Yaḥya b. Khāqān, his minister, wanted to mediate in the matter, Mutawakkil ‘Abbāsī told him: “Do not bother yourself to mediate in the matter for him or alike him for his uncle told me that he is an extremist Shī‘ite and also ‘Alī b. Muḥammad’s (A) agent. (*Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 607, no. 1129, 1130; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 50, p. 183) Mutawakkil martyred Abu ‘Alī b. Rāshid who was the chief agent of Baghdad, Madā‘in and Qurā Sawād. Mutawakkil also killed some others such as ‘Īsā b. Ja‘far by striking them with a spear. He lashed B. Band 300 times and then threw him into Dījlāh [Tigris River]. (*Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 603, no. 1122)

<sup>34</sup> ‘Abd b. Sulaymān, Abbasid minister, sent some people as spies pretending to pay religious taxes to different agents about whom he was suspicious in order to find out if they were really agents; but becoming informed by Imam (A), none of the agents accepted any money until the danger was completely passed. (*Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 310.)

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Tārīkh al-Ghaybat al-Ṣughrā*, p. 472; *Maktab Dar Farāyand-e Takāmol*, p. 131; *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni‘mah*, p. 483, no. 4; *Tanqīḥ al-Maqāl*, vol. 2, no. 10222; *Rijāl Kashshī*, no. 1005; *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 82, p. 50; Sheykh Ṭūsī, *Al-Ghaybah*, p. 185.

<sup>36</sup> *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 433, no. 817.

<sup>37</sup> *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 11211.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 12084;

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Maktab Dar Farāyand-e Takāmol*, p. 22; *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 4, p. 74; *Wasā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 20, p. 114 also vol. 18, p. 100; *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 281; vol. 1, no. 200; vol. 2, no. 106.

<sup>40</sup> It is for this reason that Imam Ṣādiq (A) criticized about Mu'allā b. Khanīs's deed in revealing some of Imams' (A) secrets that lead to his death when Imam (A) stated: "May God forgive Mu'allā! I predicted that, for he revealed our secret and ... whoever reveals our secret before one, who is not authorized; he will be killed by weapon or rope." (*Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 75, p. 85); *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah*, p. 501, no. 28.

<sup>41</sup> An example of replacing local agents is appointing Abu 'Alī b. Rāshid by Imam Hādī (A) replacing 'Alī b. Ḥusayn b. 'Abd Rabeḥ. (Cf. *Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 513, no. 991.) With respect to supervising agents' functionality, see the story of Imam Ṣādiq's (A) treating one of the treacherous agents (*Wasā'il al-Shi'ah*, vol. 13, p. 291); With respect to introducing agents to Shī'ites, see the story of introducing 'Uthmān b. Sa'eed 'Amrī to some Shī'ites of Yemen by Imam 'Askarī (A) (*Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 5, p. 345); About dismissing treacherous agents, see the story of denunciation and dismissal of Fāris b. Ḥātām Qazwīnī by Imam Hādī (A) (*Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 552, no. 1003-1011); About explaining movements of false agents, see Imam Hādī's (A) letter to one of Shī'ites and his expression of disapproval of Muḥammad b. Nuṣayr Numayrī and Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Bābā'i Qummī (*Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 520, no. 999); About assigning tasks, see Imam 'Askarī's (A) letter regarding appointing Ibrāhīm b. 'Abduḥ and assigning his tasks (*Rijāl Kashshī*, p. 509, 982).

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Tanqīh al-Maqāl*, vol. 3, no. 11994; *Mu'jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, vol. 18, p. 2374; *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 47, p. 81, 342.

<sup>43</sup> *Biḥār al-Anwār*, vol. 51, p. 310, no. 30.

<sup>44</sup> To find more evidences concerning agency of mentioned names, the reader can refer to original biographies of the narrators of ḥadīths and also Sheykh Ṭūsī's *Al-Ghaybab* and Sheykh Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah* and B. Shahr Aṣhūb's *Manāqib Al-e Abi Ṭalīb*.

## Imam Ali (A) the Herald of Unity

### Part II

Sayyid Kazem Mirjalili

In the previous part, we discussed Imam Ali's (A) view about the significance of "unity" in continuing the mission of the holy Prophet (S). We saw that criticizing disunited nations, Imam Ali (A) mentions that division leads to destruction of dignity and honour while unity leads to the descent of divine blessings. Referring to Imam's words in *Nahj al-Balāghah*, we argued that he (A) has been the greatest herald of unity of Islamic community and he (A) constantly made efforts to achieve and preserve it. We studied Imam Ali's (A) theoretical view on unity and its fruits and then we referred to the factors which create unity in Islamic community. In this part, we will study disunity and its roots to see how it can be avoided.

#### Imam Ali (A)'s theoretical position on division and its roots

The following describes the reasons for division and its roots.

##### 1. Disbelief and deviation from truth

Imam Ali (A) believed that one of the causes of ideological disputes is "disbelief" and not being steadfast in the belief. Regarding this issue, Imam (A) wrote to Mu'āwīyah that:

Now then, certainly, we and you were on amiable terms as you say but difference arose between us

and you the other day, when we accepted belief (*imān*) and you rejected it. Today the position is that we are steadfast (in the belief) but you are creating mischief.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Worldliness

“*Dunyā*” (world) in Islamic sciences and in the statements of religious leaders is sometimes praised and sometimes criticized. The praised world is a place for living in which mankind could make use of its blessings to achieve happiness in the hereafter. From this point of view, the world is a holy place for prophets’ missions, angels’ functions, servants’ worship and the blessings bestowed by Allah (s.w.t), while the reproached world is the one which itself and its manifestations such as wealth, power, family and comfort are the ultimate goals for those who live in it and they do anything and commit any crime to achieve them. Imam Ali (A) described the world as follows:

This world is a place for which destruction is ordained and for its inhabitants departure from here is destined. It is sweet and green. It hastens towards its seeker and attaches to the heart of the viewer. So depart from here with the best of provision available to you and do not ask herein more than what is enough and do not demand from it more than subsistence.<sup>2</sup>

He (A) pointed out the features of the world and warned people against being attached to it:

I warn you of the world, for it is the abode of the unsteady. It is not a house for foraging. It has decorated itself with deception and deceives with its decoration. It is a house which is low before Allah. So He has mixed its lawful with its unlawful, its good with its evil, its life with its death, and its sweetness with its bitterness. Allah has not kept it

clear for His lovers, nor has He been niggardly with it towards His foes. Its good is sparing. Its evil is ready at hand. Its collection would dwindle away. Its authority would be snatched away. Its habitation would face desolation. What is the good in a house which falls down like fallen construction or in an age which expires as the provision exhausts, or in time which passes like walking? Include whatever Allah has made obligatory on you in your demands.<sup>3</sup>

It is recorded in history that the holy Prophet (S) passed away in early morning on Monday, but the issue of Caliphate caused some people to pay no attention about the holy Prophet's (S) burial and instead they engaged in choosing the Caliph in Saqifah of bani Sa'idah and it was only after the Caliph was chosen that they thought of the holy Prophet's (S) burial.<sup>4</sup> According to some historians, the body of the holy Prophet (S) remained unburied for three days.<sup>5</sup> However, it is evident that at least from Monday morning until Tuesday night his holy body remained unburied.<sup>6</sup>

This was the first cause of dispute among Muslims which arose after the holy Prophet's (S) death and the following conflicts among Muslims have had their roots in this matter and also the enemies of Islam have taken advantage of the dispute and have attempted to add fuel to the fire; as Abū Sufyān, the sworn enemy of Islam, knew the matter of Caliphate as a great sedition and said: "I see a storm which nothing but blood can make it calm." He wanted to engage in a civil war with Imam Ali (A) but Imam (A) was aware of his evil intention and kept him away from himself. Ṭabari writes:

Imam Ali (A) blamed him and stated: 'Your intention is nothing but exciting sedition. You have been the enemy of Islam for a long time. I do not need your advice and your troops and pedestrians.'<sup>7</sup>

As a peacemaker, Imam Ali (A) had to keep silent to preserve unity, although the endurance of silence was as hard as having pricks in the eye and a piece of bone in the throat and drinking bitter poison.

Worldliness and considering this world as the goal is one of the main causes of division and disunity and the Islamic community should avoid it.

### **3. Lawbreaking**

Another cause of division and disunity which results from attachment to the world is oppression and lawbreaking of the ruler or the ruled. For, if the ruled do not fulfil the rights of the just ruler and do not obey him or the ruler turns away from justice and abuses his power and oppresses the ruled, then the unity will be destroyed and disputes and conflicts will replace it. Regarding this issue, Imam Ali (A) has stated:

If the ruled fulfil the rights of the ruler and the ruler fulfils their rights, then right attains the position of honour among them, the ways of religion become established, signs of justice become fixed and the Sunnah gains currency. In this way times will improve, the continuance of government will be expected, and the aims of the enemies will be frustrated. But if the ruled gain sway over the ruler, or the ruler oppresses the ruled, then differences crop up in every word, signs of oppression appear, mischief enters religion and the ways of the Sunnah are forsaken.<sup>8</sup>

### **4. Ruling based on arrogance**

One of the divisive factors is ruling based on the culture of arrogance. The nation who accepts the rule of arrogance or surrenders to it loses its national and religious identity and that is when it will become like the arrogant and obtains animal characteristics and habits and then vices and corruptions spread in the society.

Imam Ali (A) introduced this factor which creates disunity and described such a society as follows:

The people of this time would be wolves, its rulers beasts, the middleclass gluttons and the poor (almost) dead. Truth would decrease, falsehood would overflow, affection would be claimed with tongues but people would be quarrelsome at heart.<sup>9</sup>

To stay away from the domination of arrogance, Imam (A) admonished Muslims from feeling proud of their vanity and boasting over ignorance and stated:

(You should fear) Allah! Allah! in feeling proud of your vanity and boasting over ignorance, because this is the root of enmity and the design of Satan.<sup>10</sup>

## **5. Disputes and spitefulness**

A human being is a social creature and needs others' assistance and services, and naturally wherever the interests of people depend on each other, everyone may seek more benefits for himself and conflicts arise, and the only solution for these disputes is establishing national and universal laws and applying them. However, those who have not practiced religious and moral virtues harbour a grudge against others whenever they do not meet their wishes, receive more benefits or see others superior to themselves. Imam Ali (A) introduced spitefulness as a cause of division and considered it as a sign of impure nature and bad conscience:

You are brethren in the religion of Allah. Impure natures and bad conscience have separated you. Consequently you do not bear burdens of each other nor advise each other, nor spend on each other, nor love each other.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

All cultures and nations have been constantly trying to create unity to enjoy its benefits and the establishment of unity in some periods has provided them with benefits. In Islam and Islamic nations, because of having many things in common, such as believing in one God, the prophethood of the holy Prophet (S) and the Qur'an, unity can be created easily, even though Muslims live in different geographical regions. The origin of the unity among Islamic community is the religion of Islam which has been propagated by all the prophets (A) throughout the history and its comprehensive version has been delivered by the Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad (S). The practical conduct and speech of Imam Ali (A) can be used as a role model for conduct which can create the real unity among Muslims and quench the thirst of human beings for justice.

Imam Ali (A) is one of the distinguished characters and leaders of Islamic world who has left great legacy in both practical management and leadership of Islamic society and theoretical explanation of theological and moral issues related to unity. When we study the works and the life of Imam Ali (A), we learn that he (A) considered unity as the gift of the holy Prophet's (S) mission which put all enmities aside and caused the divine blessings to embrace mankind. From Imam Ali's (A) point of view, the factors which can create unity among the Islamic community are preserving good traditions, satisfying reasonable demands of people and making appropriate use of people's emotions. These factors have healed divisions among Muslims in many critical conditions. Imam Ali (A) views rejection of faith, worldliness, lawbreaking, being under the rule of the arrogant and disputes and enmity as factors which can create disunity and Muslims must avoid them.



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<sup>1</sup> *Nahj al-Balāḡbah*, Letter no. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 45.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 113.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sirat al-Nabawīyah*, vol. 4, p. 314; Ibn Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh*, vol. 2, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Umam wa al-Muluk*, vol. 3, p. 211.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 2, p. 273; ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh ibn Khaldūn*, translated by ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Āyatī, Tehran, Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1996, 2nd Ed., vol. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Muhammad b. Jarīr Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk*, vol. 3, p. 209.

<sup>8</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon no. 216.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 192.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Sermon no. 113.



**Status of Women in Islam:  
A Critical Analysis on a Matter of Equality**

**Ghulam Hossein Adeel**

**Introduction**

The status of women in Islam is one of the crucial topics and dominant themes in the modern era, which theologians have been studying. Islam regards men and women as being of the same essence created from a single soul. A woman has a completely independent personality in Islam. In this paper, I will provide an overview of the status of women in Islam in general and then I will focus on the issue of equality. One important part of the discussion will be devoted to clarify the conceptual context and the relevant terminology of the subject of inheritance and to explain certain rulings of inheritance in Islamic law that may seem at first glance to be in conflict with the idea of equality.

**Status of Woman in Islam**

In the Islamic perspective, a woman has an honoured position. She has special respect, love, affection and gentle feeling along with her legal and civil rights.

Is she not the compassionate mother?

Is she not the beloved wife?

Is she not the affectionate daughter?

Actually Islam expresses the best explanation for a woman's true image in the following verses from the Qur'an:

We have enjoined man to be kind to his parents. His mother has carried him in travail, and bore him in travail, and his gestation and weaning take thirty months. When he comes of age and reaches forty years, he says, 'My Lord! Inspire me to give thanks for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds which may please You, and invest my descendants with righteousness. Indeed I have turned to you in penitence, and I am one of the muslims.' (46:15)

Your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone except Him, and [He has enjoined] kindness to parents. Should they reach old age at your side — one of them or both— do not say to them, 'Fie!' And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words. Lower the wing of humility to them, out of mercy, and say, 'My Lord! Have mercy on them, just as they reared me when I was [a] small [child]!' (17:23 & 24)

Do not covet the advantage which God has given some of you over others. To men belongs a share of what they have earned, and to women a share of what they have earned. And ask God for His grace. (4:32)

Similar to the Qur'an, the Prophetic hadiths also emphasize the honour and respect of women within such a frame of love, endearment and affection. This is especially true when the hadiths teach about the mother, the wife and the daughter. For example, the Prophet said:

Observe your duty to God in respect to the women, and recommend them to be well treated.<sup>1</sup>

He also said:

I do not think that a man gets better in faith without loving women better.<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet had a daughter whom he loved very deeply and tenderly. He used to say: "Fatimah is a part of me; whoever wrongs her wrongs me and who pleases her pleases me."<sup>3</sup> He visited her frequently; and on his return from any journey he called on her first before going to his own home. Whenever she approached, his eyes glowed with joy. He would take her in his arm, kiss her warmly and offer her his own seat. Indeed this kind, tender pattern is an ideal model for mankind.

A man came to the Prophet and asked him, "O messenger of God! Whom should I be more dutiful to?" The Prophet replied: "To your mother." He asked, then to whom. Then he replied: "To your mother." The man again asked, then to whom. Then the Prophet replied: "To your father."<sup>4</sup>

## Equality

Islam considers both men and women equally human and grants them equal human rights. Though their tasks and functions may sometimes differ, they both have opportunities for achieving perfection and closeness to God. The following verses from the Qur'an and sayings of the Prophet support this argument. For example, God says:

O mankind! Indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you nations and tribes that you may identify with one another. Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you. Indeed God is All-knowing, All-aware. (49:13)

O mankind! Be wary of your Lord who created you from a single soul, and created its mate from it, and,

from the two of them, scattered numerous men and women... (4:1)

Also Prophet Muhammad (S) said:

All people are equal, as the teeth of a comb. There is no claim of merit of an Arab and non-Arab, or a white over a black person, or a male over a female. Only Allah-fearing people merit a preference with God.<sup>5</sup>

The most important sources in Islamic thought i.e the Qur'an and Sunnah both confer the great message of universal equality among all mankind. The above texts are just a few examples and there are many more available. Apart from this, there are hundreds of verses which take the form of address: "O mankind, or "O believer" which refer to both men and women. Both have similar duties to perform; for instance prayer, rituals, fasting, to command to good and to prohibit from evil. Moral virtues such as tolerance, truthfulness, honesty are required from both. According to Islam, personal superiority is only based on piety.

Islam's regard for women is not simply giving her a chance to survive. Muslims, men and women, are told to seek knowledge and education wherever they find it and to use this knowledge to help fellow human beings. This is a duty about which they will be questioned on Judgement Day. History tells us about the immense contribution of Muslim women to the community. One lady i.e. the Lady Khadijah, daughter of Khuwaylid, and one young boy were the first to believe in Islam. Lady Khadijah was a great supporter of Islam and the Prophet.

### **An analysis of equality**

There are four logical characteristics of equality, which are crucial in Qur'anic perspective:

1. Equality in religious matters;



2. Equality in ethical obligations and rewards;
3. Equality in education;
4. Equality in legal rights.

### ***I. Equality in religious matters***

The Qur'an commands equality for men and women regarding religious obligations and rewards. We read:

Indeed the muslim (or submissive) men and the muslim (or submissive) women, the faithful men and the faithful women, the obedient men and the obedient women, the truthful men and the truthful women, the patient men and the patient women, the humble men and the humble women, the charitable men and the charitable women, the men who fast and the women who fast, the men who guard their private parts and the women who guard, the men who remember God greatly and the women who remember [God greatly]—God holds in store for them forgiveness and a great reward. (33:35)

### ***II. Equality in ethical obligations and rewards***

Secondly, the Qur'an reveals to mankind the desired equality of the two sexes by establishing the same ethical obligations and rewards for women and men:

And whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, should he or she be faithful —such shall enter paradise and they will not be wronged [so much as] the speck on a date-stone. (4:124)

Whoever acts righteously, [whether] male or female, should he be faithful, —We shall revive him with a

good life and pay them their reward by the best of what they used to do. (16:97)

If God had not deemed the two sexes of equal status and value, such explicit statements of their equality in ethical obligations and rewards would not have been made in the Qur'an.

### **III. Equality in education**

Although the more specific commands for the equal rights of women and men to pursue education can be found in the hadith literature, the Qur'an does at least imply the pursuit of knowledge by all Muslims regardless of their sex. For example, it repeatedly commands all readers to read, to recite, to think, to contemplate, and as well as to learn from the signs (*ayāt*) of God in nature. In fact, the very first revelation to Prophet Muhammad (S) was concerned with the message of knowledge.

In the Qur'anic perspective there can never be a restriction of this knowledge to one sex. It is the duty of every Muslim man and every Muslim woman to pursue knowledge throughout life, even if it should lead the seeker to "China," we are told. The Prophet even commanded that the slave girls be educated, and he asked Shifa' bint 'Abdillah to educate his own wife - Hafsa bint 'Umar.

Audiences of both men and women attended lectures of the Prophet; and by the time of the Prophet's death, there were many women scholars.<sup>6</sup>

### **IV. Equality in legal rights**

A fourth evidence in the Qur'an for the equality of men and women is its specification of legal rights which are guaranteed for every individual from cradle to grave. The Qur'an proclaims the right of both women and men in enjoying full legal rights. She may buy, sell, earn a living and manage her own money and property. In Islam the woman has a legally independent personality and her obligations are independent from those of her father, husband or brother. Thus,

the woman in Islam enjoys all rights and is treated equal to man in this respect.

In addition to these rights, the Qur'an grants the woman a share in the inheritance of the family (4:7-11) and warns against depriving her of that inheritance (4:19), specifies that the dowry (*mahr*) of her marriage should belong to her alone and never be taken by her husband (2:229; 4:19-21 & 25) unless presented by the woman herself as a free gift (4:44).

As with any privilege, these rights of women carry corresponding responsibilities. If she commits a civil offence, the Qur'an tells us, a woman's penalty is no less or no more than that of a man in a similar case (e.g. 24:2). If she is wronged or harmed, she is entitled to compensation just like a man.

It is clear that the Qur'an not only recommends, but is also insistent upon, the equality of women and men as an essential characteristic in the Qur'anic perspective.

### ***A critical analysis of equality***

There are some discussions about a woman's equality in her inheritance, education and social rights. As we have already discussed, the religion of Islam has clearly required that equality has to be exercised regardless of the physical gender. However, there may be a difference between the theory of Islam and the practice of Muslims. In order to understand what Islam has established for woman, there is no need to look at wrong customs that may exist in some Muslim societies.

Objectively, religion means humanity, not cruelty or brutality. However, some cultures may have just a mask of Islam but in reality there are some local cultural problems behind the mask. For example, one writer says:

Men's energies should be expended in worship,  
religious activities and in the search of knowledge.

This is to be attained by making women devote themselves to serving their men in the home, preparing food and drink, washing, cleaning and caring for the children and elderly.<sup>7</sup>

However, the above ideas are not related to genuine Islamic perspectives as demonstrated in the Qur'an and Hadith. This writer has just reverted back to pre Islamic culture. Based upon the above texts from the Qur'an and Sunnah, these ideas are not plausible. If we were to ask the writer, "where are these characteristics in the Qur'an and Hadiths?" we will be assured of a silence that would speak volumes.

According to Islamic point of view, a woman has no obligation to prepare food and drink, wash and clean for her husband or his family. Of course, husbands and wives who form a family, should share and care to maintain family life with mutual understanding.

In the case of inheritance, the question of equality is fully applicable. In principle, both man and woman are equally entitled to inherit the property of the deceased relation but the portions they get may vary. In some instances man receives two shares whereas woman gets only one. This is no sign of giving preference or supremacy to man over woman. The reasons why a man gets more in these particular instances may be classified as follows:

First, a man is solely responsible for the complete maintenance of his wife, his family and any other needy relations. It is his duty by Law to assume all financial responsibilities and maintain his dependants adequately. It is also his duty to contribute financially to all good causes in his society. All financial burdens are borne by him alone.

In contrast, a woman has no financial responsibilities whatsoever except very little of her personal expenses, e.g. the high luxurious things that she likes to have. She is financially secure and provided for. If she is a wife, her husband is the provider; if she is a mother, it is the son; if she is a daughter, it is the father; if she is a sister; it is

the brother, and so on. If she has no relations on whom she can depend, then there is no question of inheritance because there is nothing to inherit and there is no one to bequeath anything to her. Even if she has no one to look after she will not be left to starve; maintenance of such a woman is the responsibility of the society as a whole and the state. She must be given aid or a job to earn her living, and whatever money she makes will be hers. So, in the hardest situation a woman's financial responsibility is limited, while a man's financial responsibility is unlimited.

Secondly, she is not actually deprived of anything that she has worked for. The property inherited is not the result of her earning or her endeavours. It is something coming from an external source, something additional or extra. It is something that neither man nor woman has struggled for. It is a sort of aid, and any aid has to be distributed according to the urgent needs and responsibilities especially when the Law regulates the distribution.

### **Equalities or similarities**

This argument is based on the ground that human dignity being common to man and woman, they both must enjoy the same rights. In this connection, the point worth considering is whether on the basis of human dignity they both should have equal rights without any discrimination, or they both should have the same rights irrespective of their different roles in life. No doubt, human dignity being common to them, they both should have equal rights. But what about the similarity of their rights?

If we think deeply and consider very carefully, the first question, which comes to mind, is whether equality of rights really means their similarity also. In fact, they are two different concepts. Equality means a condition of being equal in degree and value, whereas similarity means uniformity. It is possible that a father may distribute his wealth among his three children equally, but not uniformly. Suppose his wealth consists of several items such as a commercial store, some agricultural land and some property, which has been leased out. Taking into consideration their respective tastes

and aptitudes, he gives the store to one, the agricultural land to another and the leased property to the third. He takes care that what he gives to each of them should be of fair value and at the same time should suit their aptitude. Thus he distributes his wealth equally, but not uniformly.

Quantity is different from quality, and equality is different from uniformity.

Islam does not believe in uniformity between man and woman. But at the same time it does not give preferential treatment to men, in the matter of rights. It has observed the principle of equality between man and woman, but it is opposed to the uniformity of their rights.

No doubt, Islam has not in all cases accorded similar rights to man and woman. But it has not also prescribed similar duties and similar punishments for the two sexes. However, the total value of the rights accorded to women is not less than that of the rights accorded to men. We propose to prove this point.

Here the question arises as to “What is the reason behind certain cases of dissimilar rights? Would it not have been better, had their rights been similar, as well as equal?” There are two points and two reasons that their rights are not similar to each other’s.

First: The Islamic view of the position of woman from the angle of her nature.

Second: The effect of the physical disparity between man and woman.

One may argue that physical disparity as a reason to make them dissimilar in the matter of rights does not seem plausible, because physical disparity has no concern with the matter of rights. From the Islamic point of view they are both human beings and, as such, enjoy equal rights. The point which is worth considering is that man

and woman are dissimilar in many respects. Their very nature does not want them to be similar.

This position demands that they should not be similar in respect to many rights, obligations, duties and retributions. For instance an attempt is being made at present to make their rights and obligations uniform, but how can we ignore their natural and innate differences.

Throughout history and all over the world there are clear examples of injustice to woman. We must say that it is essential that the position of woman should be reviewed, and the abundant rights, which Islam has granted her, should be understood and implemented. Rights throughout history which have been denied to her should be restored to her. What we claim is that non-similarity of rights between man and woman, within such limits as are required by the disparity between their natures, is more in keeping with justice. It meets the requirement of natural rights better, ensures domestic happiness better and pushes society forward on the path of progress better.

According to the Islamic perspective, it is proven that equity demands that in each case the law should have a particular form. That very form will be the legal form irrespective of any other argument to the contrary, for according to the basic teachings of Islam the law must, in no case, infringe natural justice and basic rights. The Muslim scholars, by expounding the principle of equity, laid the foundation of the philosophy of rights, though due to some unhappy historical events they could not continue the good work started by them. In this regard, Ayatollah Mutahhari says:

It was the Muslims who, for the first time, paid attention to the question of human rights and the principle of equity, and set them forth as original and self-existing principles unaffected by any contractual law. The Muslims were the pioneers in the field of the inherent natural rights. But it was so destined that they could not continue their work and

ultimately, after eight centuries, it was further developed by European intellectuals and philosophers, who appropriated the credit for it. The Europeans brought social, political and economic philosophies into existence, and acquainted the individuals, societies and nations with the value of life and human rights.<sup>8</sup>

Also, apart from historical reasons, there was a psychological and regional reason which prevented the Muslims in Eastern countries from pursuing the question of inherent rights. In reality they did not pay attention to rights in general, and in particular, to the inherent rights.

The East is enamoured of morals and the West of rights. It is one of the differences between the spirit of the East and the spirit of the West. The man of the East is more sentimental and believes that he should be forgiving, chivalrous and philanthropic. But the man of the West thinks that as a human being he should know and defend his rights and must not allow others to violate them.

Humanity needs morals as well as rights. Neither of them, on its own, can be the criterion of high human qualities.

Islam has had, and still has, the significant distinction of simultaneously paying attention to both morals and rights. In Islam sincerity, forgiveness and virtue are sacred moral qualities. At the same time consciousness of one's rights and the preparedness to defend them, are also equally sacred and human.

Nevertheless, the Eastern spirit has been dominant with the Muslims, and consequently, though in the beginning both morals and rights engaged their attention, gradually the field of their activity became confined to morals.



## Conclusion

Islam attaches great importance to equality, liberty and human dignity and respects human rights. Every human being is a member of the same family. The rights and responsibilities of a woman are equal to those of a man but they are not necessarily identical with them. Equality and similarity are two quite different things. This difference is understandable because man and woman are not identical but they are created equals. With this distinction in mind, there is no problem. It is almost impossible to find even two identical men or women.

- Islam recognises a woman as a full and equal partner of a man in the procreation of humankind. He is the father; she is the mother, and both are essential for life. Her role is no less vital than his.
- She is equal to man in bearing personal and common responsibilities and in receiving rewards for her deeds. She is acknowledged as an independent personality, in possession of human qualities and worthy of spiritual aspirations.
- She is equal to man in the pursuit of education and knowledge. When Islam enjoins the seeking of knowledge upon Muslims, it makes no distinction between man and woman.
- Islam grants a woman equal rights to sign contracts, and to earn and possess independently. Her life, her property, her honour are as sacred as those of man. If she commits any offence, her penalty is no less or more than of man in a similar case. If she is wronged or harmed, she gets due compensation equal to what a man in her position would get (the Qur'an 2:178; 4:45, 92 & 93).
- Apart from recognition of woman as an independent human being acknowledged as equally essential for the survival of humanity, Islam has given her a share of inheritance.

- Woman enjoys certain privileges of which man is deprived. She is exempt from some religious duties i.e. prayers and fasting, in her regular periods and at times of confinement. She is exempt from all financial liabilities. As a mother, she enjoys more recognition and higher honour in the sight of God (31:14-15; 46:15). The Prophet acknowledged this honour when he declared that Paradise is under the feet of the mother. She is entitled to three-fourths of the son's love and kindness with one-fourth left for his father. As a wife she is entitled to demand of her prospective husband a suitable dowry that will be her own. She is entitled to complete provision and total maintenance by the husband. She does not have to work or share with her husband the family expenses. She is free to retain, after marriage, whatever she possessed before it, and the husband has no right whatsoever to any of her belongings. As a daughter or sister, she is entitled to security and provision by the father and brother respectively. That is her privilege. If she wishes to work or be self-supporting and participate in handling the family responsibilities, she is quite free to do so, provided her integrity and honour are safeguarded.

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Harrani, *Tubaf al-Uqul 'an Aali al-Rasul*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Al- Kulayni, *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p.159.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, vol. 1, p.644. This hadith can be found in many others sources.

<sup>4</sup> Al- Kulayni, *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p.159. Ibn Majah, *Sunan*, vol. 11, p.1207.

<sup>5</sup> Ahmad b. Hanbal, *Al-Musnad*, vol. 6, p. 411.

<sup>6</sup> Lois Lamya' al-F'aruqi, "Women in Qur'anic Society" in *Al- Tawbid*, vol. 1. This article can also be found in the book: *Status of Women in Islam*, (1984: Sepehr), Ch. 3, p. 51.

<sup>7</sup> Nawal Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Love and Sex in the Life of the Arab*, Ch. 16, p. 144.

<sup>8</sup> Murtaḡa, Mutahhari, *Woman and Her Rights*, Chapter: "Woman in the Qur'an," (Qum: Ansarian Publications).

**Islam and Nationalism:  
A Theoretical Point of View  
Part I**

**Sayyid Ahmad Rahnamaei**

**Introduction**

Since the very beginning of its revelation to the world, Islam as the last divine law (*Shari'ah*) and as the global religion of nations has expressed its universal message through the *Qur'an* and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (S). The expression of its universal message continued with the sayings of the Imams after the Prophets. All Muslims have been encouraged towards a feeling of brotherly unity from the earliest days of Islam. All the faithful, as it is stated in the *Qur'an*, are brothers.<sup>1</sup> The *Qur'an* as the common sacred Book and the language of this Book, which is the language of all prayers and all theological and legal instruction, have "established a medium of communication" among Muslim nations.<sup>2</sup>

According to the *Qur'an*, Allah is the source of governing authority. He sent Prophet Muhammad as the final (and as the seal) of the prophets "who was to repair and reconstruct the world into a monistic order."<sup>3</sup> Embodied in the term Islam, the Prophet's teachings "were to constitute the final and definitive religion to all people."<sup>4</sup> The term Islam, meaning 'surrender' or 'submission' to Allah, "reflects the nature of the relation between Allah as governor and His people, the believers, as governed."<sup>5</sup> This concept forms part of the Islamic state.<sup>6</sup>

Nothing from within the religion causes Islam to restrict itself to one nationality rather than another. According to Islam, all races and nations are equal. The term *millah* (which is usually interpreted to refer to religious nationhood) appears in the holy book of Islam seventeen times, where it literally means religion or path. Though the *Qur'an* was revealed in Arabic and the Prophet was of an Arab origin, and though Islam emerged in Arabia, this never meant that Islam or its Qur'anic and prophetic messages were destined for the Arab only. Rather they are explicitly declared to belong to humankind, to all people, in short to all who adhere to Islam as their religion, whichever nationality they belong to.

There are many Qur'anic verses that start with the formula “*Yā ayyuha al-nās*” (O, you people!), hence they are addressed to all people. The best example is the Qur'anic passage that is concerned with the original unity of man's creation, indicating that human beings are basically all descended from the same male and female. In the Qur'an there are words such as:

O you mankind! surely We created you of a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other; surely the most honourable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful (of his duty); verily Allah is Knowing, Aware. (49:13)

The Qur'an was revealed to function as a Divine message to all the worlds: “Verily, this is not but a message to all the worlds.”<sup>7</sup>

Also, the Prophet was sent to be God's representative to all humankind (*kāffah lin-nās*). The *Qur'an* states: “We have not sent you but as a universal Messenger to humankind, giving them glad tidings and warning them ...” (34:28) Similarly, “Say, ‘O human beings! I am sent unto you all, as the apostle of Allah.’” (7:158) He was also commissioned to be a mercy for all nations and creatures: “We sent you not, but as a mercy for all creatures.”(21:107)

Thus, Islam and its Prophet are considered to be the message and the messenger respectively, to all people in general. According to

some interpretations, true Islam teaches people to disregard what separates them and become one again. It tells those who have faith in God to strive and search for the same reality, disregarding the divisions of race, religion, or caste.<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Fundamental Elements of Nationalism***

In order to understand the basic principles of nationalism, I must first consider its history from various perspectives. In his preface to his work *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, Hans Kohn states:

Nationalism has been one of the determining forces in modern history. It originated in eighteenth-century Western Europe; during the nineteenth century it spread all over Europe; in the twentieth century it has become a world-wide movement ....<sup>9</sup>

... it was not until the end of eighteenth century that nationalism in the modern sense of the word became a generally recognized sentiment increasingly moulding all public and private life.<sup>10</sup>

Soekarno, the nationalist leader of Indonesia during the 1950s and 60s, writes in one of his works:

In 1882 Ernest Renan<sup>11</sup> expressed his views on the concept of the nation. A nation, he said, has a soul, an intellectual foundation, which consists of two things: first of all, a people must have shared a common history; secondly, a people must possess the will and desire to live as one. Neither race, language, religion, common needs nor state boundaries make a nation.<sup>12</sup>

Soekarno quoting Otto Bauer,<sup>13</sup> states that “A nation is a unity of attitudes which derives from a unity of historical experience.” Nationalism, from his point of view, “is the conviction, the

consciousness of a people that they are united in one group, one nation.”<sup>14</sup> In general, nationalism, as Soekarno explains,

by its very nature excludes all parties who do not share the ‘desire to live as one’; ... nationalism actually belittles all groups which do not feel that they are ‘one group, one nation’ with the people; ... Nationalism in principle rejects all attitudes which do not stem from a ‘unity of historical experience.’<sup>15</sup>

In discussing the roots of nationalism, Hans Kohn remarks that

Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state. A deep attachment to one’s native soil, to local traditions and to established territorial authority has existed in varying strength throughout history.<sup>16</sup>

The well-known American nationalist theoretician, Carlton Hayes, trying not to moor the word “nation” to any exact dictionary definition,<sup>17</sup> states that “In simplest terms, nationalism may be defined as fusion of patriotism with a consciousness of nationality.”<sup>18</sup> To understand the matter properly, some explanation of the term nationality is required. The word nationality, to Hayes, “derives from the Latin *Natio*, implying a common racial descent, but few, if any, modern nationalities consist of a distinctive ‘race’ in the biological sense.”<sup>19</sup> He also states: “Every nationality of which I have knowledge has been, or is, biologically and racially, a melting pot.”<sup>20</sup> From Hayes’ point of view, traditions and language should be counted as the two bases of nationality. A nationality does not receive its impression, its character, its individuality, just from physical geography or biological race. In addition to these factors, cultural and historical forces in general and language in particular play a serious role in the formation of a nationality.<sup>21</sup>

Even if one alleges that factors such as race, language, homeland, etc. do not form the underlying principles of a nationality and

nationalism, nationalist movements nevertheless always have these motives and tendencies at heart. In other words, there is always a subliminal inclination towards such factors among nationalists. Therefore, one cannot ignore the importance of these tendencies in promoting and maintaining a nationalist movement.

### ***Islam and the Traits of Nationalism***

Ever since nationalism came into existence, it has always featured certain basic characteristics. In many ways these have proven to be inimical towards religious beliefs. The following are just some instances of this tradition as it has affected Islam.

I- Nationalism is a secular ideology according to which religion and state, politics and faith should be separated from one another. One of the mottos most often expressed by Egyptian nationalists was: "The religion belongs to Allah, but the country belongs to all."<sup>22</sup> What this statement intended to say was that religion is a personal issue which falls outside the framework of public life. Religious thought should not interfere with social-political decision-making, for it is the nation and not religion that deserves the loyalty of a society. Nationalism rejects religion's claim to be regarded as the fundamental element of unity. Accordingly, religion after all undermines national unity and causes religious minorities to live separate from each other. Nationalism teaches us that the only instrument of unity is human being's tendency towards geographical, racial and linguistic identification. For these reasons, nationalism encourages secularism and consequently, religion and everything else that is perceived as threat to national unity must be sacrificed for its sake.<sup>23</sup>

This attitude persists in spite of the fact that Islam was revealed to the Prophet to unify the World-wide Community and to regulate all dimensions of human life. It was the practice and *sunnah* of the Prophet to welcome every single individual no matter which nationality he belonged to. Among the Prophet's companions were Salman the Persian, Bilal the Abyssinian and Suhayb of Rum, all of whom helped the Prophet in administering the Islamic state.<sup>24</sup> It is

related that one of the Prophet's Arab companions named Qays once referred to these three as foreigners. When the Prophet heard this, he became angry and said, "Both your father and your religion are the same, and the Arabism by which you are taking pride was never attributed to your original parents ...."<sup>25</sup>

In the *Qur'an* those verses that highlight the identity of the Muslim Community (*Ummah*) never disregard the necessary role that religion played within every day life. The concept of the *ummah* as a religio-political community connotes the presence of religion in all personal, social, earthly and heavenly aspects of life. The first leader of the *ummah* was the Prophet himself, then his successors who ruled as Caliphs according to Sunni tradition or as Imams according to that of the Shi'i tradition. Twelver Shi'i tradition also holds that during the occultation of the Imam, the Muslim Community is entrusted to the "Guardianship [the Authority] of the Jurist" (*Wilāyat al-Faqih*), a system according to which a religious scholar (*faqih*) who possesses all or most of the requirements necessary to guide the community is entrusted with the leadership of the Muslim *ummah*.<sup>26</sup>

The leadership of Imam Khomeini during the first decade after the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran (1978-1989) is perhaps the best example of the *Wilāyat al-Faqih* system. Today one of the most important articles in the Iranian Constitution is that which sets forth the principles underlying this office.<sup>27</sup> The Late Imam Khomeini declared in one of his speeches that "If a *faqih* acts dictatorially on just one occasion, he loses his guardianship mandate." According to his view, if a *faqih* were to take a wrong step, or commit a minor sin, his guardianship would have to be revoked.<sup>28</sup> As Hamid Dabashi elaborates,

Khomeini never appears explicitly in his speeches and correspondences to claim any power or demand any obedience for his person. Even in *Velayat-Faqih* (the Authority of the Jurist) he argues theoretically for the authority of the Jurist without ever explicitly,



or even implicitly, indicating that he personally ought to occupy that position....<sup>29</sup>

The unity of religion and politics is regarded as one of the central elements of an Islamic government. Sayyid Hasan Mudarris (d.1938/39), a distinguished clergyman who represented the people in the Iranian parliament and finally was poisoned and martyred by King Reza Pahlavi, declared that “The foundation of our politics is our religion,”<sup>30</sup> and also professed that “Our religion is the same as our politics and our politics is the same as our religion.”<sup>31</sup> Later on the same doctrine was espoused by Imam Khomeini. The Imam, opposing those who separate Islam from government and politics, remarks in his *Final Discourse* that:

... they need only be reminded that the Holy Qur’an and the traditions of the Messenger of God (S) have more edicts in relation to government and state craft than in any other areas. More importantly, many of the apparently devotional precepts in Islam are truly politico-devotional precepts, the overlooking of which has been responsible for the present afflictions of the Muslim world.<sup>32</sup>

He states furthermore that “The Prophet of Islam (S) instituted a government like other governments of the world except that his was one for the purpose of promoting social justice ....”<sup>33</sup>

**II-** Traditionally, nationality and the attachment to a homeland are the most authoritative criteria in assessing the virtue of a nation. To affirm this virtue, a nation should maintain a link with its history and culture.<sup>34</sup> A good example was Iran during the time of the Pahlavi dynasty. There were many attempts made by the nationalists to persuade Iranians to relate to the early monarchy, concentrating on Cyrus and Darius the great kings of ancient Iran. One of the manifestations of this effort was the substitution of the Islamic calendar with that of the Iranian monarchical calendar in 1976. Hamid Dabashi states:

As yet another measure of his attempts to shift the cultural basis of his legitimacy from Islamic to Iranian symbolics, the monarch decided to alter this arrangement. He wished for the Iranian calendar, the one particularly dear to the nationalists, to begin not with the migration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina, but, instead, to commence with the presumed date of the coronation of Cyrus the Great, the assumed royal progenitor with the man identified. ...<sup>35</sup>

Dabashi goes on to say that Ayatullah Khomeini then in Najaf, accusing such attempts and the ideas behind them, regarded them as “the clear indications of the anti-Islamic designs of the regime and forbade Iranians from using the new calendar.”<sup>36</sup>

In Egypt, Taha Husayn and Lutfi Sayyid were among those who suggested reviving the national heritage of ancient Egypt, and of awakening in the people a sense of their Pharaonic history.<sup>37</sup>

However, Muslims are supposed to follow the example of their Prophet and the teachings of the *Qur'an*, and to take pride in them as the means of achieving unity and saving humankind. In his *Final Discourse*, Imam Khomeini states:

We take pride and our noble and thoroughly committed nation is proud in being the followers of a school of thought which intend to dig out the Qur'anic truths - which commit themselves thoroughly to the unity of Muslims and even humanity- from the graveyards and utilize it as the greatest prescription for the disentanglement of man from all shackles on limbs and on his mind and souls which are leading him towards destruction, slavery and servitude to the oppressors.<sup>38</sup>

In Imam Khomeini's opinion, nationalism is one of the causes of the disasters and miseries faced by Muslims today. He writes in fact

that those who try to revive nationalism are struggling against Islam.<sup>39</sup> One of his statements in this regard is as follows: “Nationalism is planned by plotters to create discord among Muslims and it is being propagandized by agents of colonialization.”<sup>40</sup> Imam Khomeini also states:

The plan of the great powers and their affiliates in the Muslim countries is to separate and divide the various strata of Muslims, whom God has declared brothers, under the guise of Kurd, Arab, Turk, Fars, etc. nations and even make them regard themselves as enemies of one another. This is against the path of Islam and the Qur’an.<sup>41</sup>

He furthermore remarks that: “Those who, in the name of nationalism, factionalism, etc., create schism and disunity among Muslims, are armies of Devil, opponents of the holy Qur’an and helping agents of the superpowers.”<sup>42</sup> Imam Khomeini clearly identified nationalism with reactionary forces and with colonial powers who encouraged nationalistic feelings among Muslims in order to foster disunity.<sup>43</sup>

**III-** National prejudice (*‘aşabiyyah*) in any of its forms, whether it be tribalism, racism, nationalism, or other manifestations such as bias against other nations and favouritism towards ones own, selfishness, fanaticism, vanity, exaggerating of national excellencies and finally feelings of being superior to others<sup>44</sup> are the touchstones of nationalism. Ibn Khaldun remarks that “‘aşabiyyah is one of the fundamental elements of nationalism.”<sup>45</sup> According to Islamic teachings, prejudice is strongly condemned. The Prophet said: “Whosoever possesses in his heart ‘aşabiyyah ... even to the extent of a mustard seed, God will raise him on the Day of resurrection with the (pagan) Beduins of the *jābiliyyah* (the pre-Islamic era).”<sup>46</sup> According to one definition,

... ‘asabiyyah is an inner psychic quality which is manifested in patronizing and defending one’s kindred and those with whom one has some kind of

affinity or relation, whether it be religious creed or ideology, or whether it be soil or home. The affinity may also be similarity of profession or the relationship of teacher and pupil, or something else.<sup>47</sup>

‘Aṣabiyyah may therefore be seen as a moral wickedness and a hateful characteristic generating moral and behavioural vices. Those who ascribe to this quality often claim that it “take[s] the form of defence of truth or religion, but in reality it is not aimed to defend a just and truthful cause but for extending one’s own influence or that of one’s co-religionists and allies.”<sup>48</sup> When someone because of his selfish and tribal impulses defends the vices of his kinsmen or group, his attitude is an evident example of ‘aṣabiyyah. In the words of Imam Khomeini:

He is a corrupt member of society, who corrupts it by confusing vice with virtue, and stands with the Beduins of the *jābilīyyah*, who were a group of nomadic Arabs who inhabited the desert before the advent of Islam, in an era of prevalence of darkness and ignorance.<sup>49</sup>

And Iqbal Lahuri says “Nationalism is another face of barbarism.”<sup>50</sup>

Prior to the spread of Islam, the Arabs were a tribal society. They had a strong sense of ‘aṣabiyyah towards their own groups. Islam challenged this prejudicial spirit and declared that the division of human beings into different tribes and races had only been willed by Allah in order to allow people to recognize one another more readily, not to give a sense of superiority to one tribe or nation over another. This is because in the sight of Allah, it is an individual’s virtue and piety that functions as the key element of his superiority.<sup>51</sup> According to a *hadith* the Prophet said: “O you mankind! All of you are from Adam and Adam was created from earth (clay). There is no superiority of Arab over non-Arab except through the virtue of piety (God fearing).”<sup>52</sup> It is also related that on the occasion of the battle of *Uhud*, a young Persian Muslim soldier,

while attacking an infidel enemy, proudly said: “Here is my sword, and I am a Persian.” The Prophet felt that such words would motivate nationalistic sentiments among the Muslims; thus he warned the man right away to take pride in his religion instead of his nationality.<sup>53</sup> The Prophet, once addressing the Quraysh, said: “O People of Quraysh! Verily one’s honour and pride should be due to one’s Islam ... (neither to his/her blood nor to his/her race).” He insisted that Arabism was not a matter of narcissism; it was merely a language (like other languages) spoken by Arabs. In the Prophet’s eyes, it was only by means of faith and good behaviour only that a man could achieve a higher position.<sup>54</sup>

These points demonstrate that nationalism is not concerned just with people’s emotional feelings; it is an ideology as well. Islam never recommends such feelings and ideology to Muslims, though it does not oppose the positive feelings of nationalism that causes good results.

### **Positive aspects of nationalism**

The positive aspects of nationalism may be summarized as follows:

- a)** It can lead to better integration among the members of a single nation.
- b)** People of the same nationality may have a better understanding of one another and consequently better relations between themselves.
- c)** When expressed in a positive way, nationalist sentiments can encourage the people of a nation to love their homeland and to serve each other and their country in ways that are noble.<sup>55</sup>

In these senses is nationalism in harmony with religion and intellect? Islam, in differentiating between the positive and negative products of nationalism, naturally favours the former, and thus encourages people to respect the virtue of their homeland (*watan*) and love it and their countrymen as well. It also recognizes greater

rights for neighbours, relatives and members of the same family. The negative results of nationalism are the result of separatist feelings which encourage people of different backgrounds to be hostile to one another and to deny rights to their fellow human beings.<sup>56</sup>

### ***Nationalism as the Religion of Modern History***

In the eyes of many, nationalism is equivalent to a religion, with those who preach nationalist ideals acting as its prophets. Kohn remarks:

The age of nationalism saw for the first time the peoples, aroused to national consciousness, as the decisive actors of history. They found their spokesmen in national prophets who became the voice and the conscience of their people, interpreting its history or mission and shaping its character and personality ...<sup>57</sup>

Kohn goes on to say that this national prophet “expressed the genius of his people or at least an important and representative aspect of it.”<sup>58</sup> According to him, the “free interplay of individual forces” and the citizen’s “complete union with his nation” are respectively the two most distinctive manifestations of nineteenth century nationalism: the former representative of the English-speaking peoples, and the latter the force behind the French Revolution.<sup>59</sup>

The nineteenth century Russian nationalist Dostoevsky, while accusing Western nationalism and liberalism of being morally dangerous because they “set the individual free from his dependence upon God and the moral order and led to doubt and to immorality,”<sup>60</sup> regarded “religion as the true life-force.” All evil, according to him are rooted in the lack of religion.<sup>61</sup> However, like his fellow nationalists in the West, he spoke of Russian nationalism as the religion and thus “was a prophet not of a universal God but

of the Russian God in whom he saw ‘the way, and the truth, and the life’: no man and no people could come to salvation but by Him.”<sup>62</sup>

Kohn, paraphrasing Dostoevsky’s message, states:

Each nation creates its God, Dostoevsky tells us, and yet one nation claims universality for its God, not for the universal God of Christianity, but for the tribe and its own creation. The exclusive fanaticism of a racial God is proclaimed here, as in most primitive antiquity, without any trace of the ethical sublimation into the God of universal justice demanded by the Hebrew prophets.<sup>63</sup>

Of those nationalist theoreticians who regard nationalism as a form of religion, Hayes offers the most moderate and practical arguments in favour of belief. He remarks that since the very dawn of life, human beings have lived with a tendency towards what he called a “religious sense.” This is a spiritual state which is reflected in human beings’ life by their “faith in some god, some mysterious and controlling power outside” themselves.<sup>64</sup> This religious sense has survived throughout the history of humankind as a natural and normal sense.<sup>65</sup> Elaborating on this, Hayes goes into some detail in asserting the application of the religious sense to nationalism. He maintains that in modern Europe and the contemporary world “under the impact of science, technology, and secular education”, and, “with the advent and spread of the Industrial Revolution,” large numbers of people have tasted a kind of unnatural “religious void.” But, this void, according to Hayes, is regarded “as urge arises to fill the void with some new faith.” This phenomenon may be observed in the rise of various movements such as scientism, humanitarianism, positivism, emotional nationalism, etc.<sup>66</sup>

In his *A History of Nationalism in the East*, Kohn states:

From the eighteenth century onwards nationalism supplanted religion as the governing principle in Europe. ... Everywhere the language of religion was

replaced by the vernacular<sup>67</sup>, which was moulded and stimulated in its development almost everywhere by the translation of the Holy Scriptures into the national language. ... Religion ceased to be the unquestioned basis and source of public law; its place was taken by national sovereignty.<sup>68</sup>

In analyzing the progress of nationalism in the East, Kohn states that it is comparable to that which religion had achieved in the past. He believes that all the systems in the East that had survived for centuries “were violently shaken by the penetration of the national idea from Europe” and consequently nationalism took religion’s place “as the principle governing all social and intellectual life.”<sup>69</sup> Kohn’s remarks indicate how nationalism, from its early development, was similar to religion to the extent that it was able to take the place of the latter and function as a kind of modern religion by itself.

Again, according to the views of some Muslim thinkers, nationalism in one sense can be simply seen as equivalent to nationality-worship (in Persian, *milliyyat-parasti*).<sup>70</sup> Sometimes it is believed that nationalism is similar to religion (*shibb-i din*) in having its own god, prophet, constitution and laws.<sup>71</sup> It seems obvious that nationalism in this sense represents a new religion. It is also considered as a great obstacle to Muslim unification.<sup>72</sup> These are some of the elements that may be found within nationalism and in the writings and views of the above-mentioned nationalist thinkers.

Nationalism in this sense can never be reconciled to Islam, for they are both essentially and effectively different. Based on the monotheistic teachings of Islam, God’s prophets were sent in order to, among other tasks, call humankind to acknowledge the Oneness of God, to bring human beings’ life into order and safeguard the rights of the people –regardless of their nationality- “to keep a balance between their rights and their duties” and then to establish social justice.<sup>73</sup>



Comparing the effects of nationalism and the teachings of Islam, one can see how far the movement of nationalism is from Islamic thought. The Muslim thinker and poet Iqbal, a man fully aware of the consequences of modern nationalism, says:

In our modern age, we have nothing to do with idols such as Hubal, al-Lāt, and al-‘Uzzā, the gods of the age of pre-Islamic ignorance. However, it is a modern idol and idol-worship known as nationalism that is the most dangerous goddess of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They (colonial powers) intend to destroy the religion of the Prophet. Be aware! O brothers and sisters of Islam, there is no border to limit us except Islam. Our hearts are not restricted by territorial borders. We are from Islam and live in the country of Islam.<sup>74</sup>

Another famous Muslim scholar, Mutahhari goes even further, saying that nationalist thought and pride have no role to play in the sciences, philosophy or divine religion. No scientific doctrine, nor a philosophical theory or religious truth ever belonged to a specific nation or a specific nationalism. Indeed, the scholars and thinkers responsible for discovering scientific, philosophical or religious fact or truths, belong to humankind in general. Science, philosophy and heavenly religion reside in no particular nation; rather, they are universal and belong to humanity. The same can be said of the theoreticians of science, religion and philosophy. The entire world is their homeland and the people of all nations are their countrymen.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it is humanity that would take pride in them and their invaluable theories. Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, etc. were born and educated in ancient Greece, but their schools of thought were welcomed by Muslim thinkers many centuries later. Jesus was born in the Middle East, but nowadays it is the West which is considered to be the headquarters of Christianity. Makkah was the cradle of the Prophet Muhammad and the birthplace of Islam, but it was Madinah that welcomed Islam first. And today the Muslim world is not restricted to only the Arabic-speaking countries; rather, it has expanded to many areas of the world.<sup>76</sup>

### *An Overview of Contemporary Muslim History*

Pan-Arabism, Pan-Iranism and Pan-Turanism, three of the different tendencies or ideologies among Muslim societies, came into being as a result of secularist activities at the beginning of the twentieth century and during the inter-war period (1914-1945).<sup>77</sup> However, my present discussion will not focus on the problems of particular Muslim nations or Arab, Turkish or Persian nationalism. My major concern here is the theoretical stance of Islam on the subject of nationalism. In some ways, it is almost confusing to speak of Islam and nationalism by referring to specific examples. P. J. Vatikiotis in his chapter on Islam and Nationalism, faces this problem in dealing with individual nationalist ideologies.<sup>78</sup> The work conducted by Vatikiotis is to a large extent a study of a specific Muslim nation and its nationalism rather than of Islam and nationalism, for the terms Arab, Persian, Turk, etc., are not equivalent to Islam.

At any rate, Syria was the country in which Arab nationalism, (*al-qanmiyyah al-ʿArabiyyah*) had its origin.<sup>79</sup> However, according to M. J. Steiner, “Syria was not the first Arab land to open her gates to modern nationalist; Egypt did so several decades earlier. But Syria was the first Arab speaking country to ride towards nationalism on the vehicle of cultural awakening.”<sup>80</sup> It was before World War I that Arab nationalism emerged, and it was in the period after World War II that it spread through the Arab world. Sharabi has stated:

The most sophisticated articulation of the doctrine of Arab nationalism is probably that given by the Socialist Arab Baʿth party. But Arab nationalism does not constitute a single political creed ... Under the leadership of Gamal ʿAbdul-Nasser, a mass nationalist movement emerged which attracted the allegiance of Arabs from Morocco to Iraq.<sup>81</sup>

*ʿUrubah* (Arabism) may be defined as taking pride in being the inheritor of the Arab as well as Muslim culture heritage.<sup>82</sup> Syria at that time was considered to be a cosmopolitan country of many races, nationalities and religions. Therefore, it is rather surprising to find it stated by Sharabi that Syria “was destined to become the

cradle of Arab nationalism.” There existed around twenty religious sects in that relatively small area each with its own voice. From within such an area “the cultural renaissance of the Arabs in modern times” emerged.<sup>83</sup>

As a result of this movement, however, the religious outlook was replaced by a secular doctrine whose power had been derived from both the cultural and political aspirations of the peoples who were fighting for their independence. This wave of secularism derived from the West, was to a large extent more successful in Turkey than in the Arab lands “where Islam still retains some power as a cultural and even political factor.” In the case of the latter, “the bonds of religion had to be removed slowly and gradually.”<sup>84</sup>

The Pan-Islamic movement of the end of the nineteenth century on the other hand, represented “an impulse to resist and repulse the attacks of the European powers.” It was obviously intended to unite all Muslims “in a common defensive struggle against European attacks.”<sup>85</sup> ‘Divide and rule’ had been the policy of the colonial powers up to that time.

Since the rise of nationalist movements within their societies, Muslims have been constantly encouraged to think about and to take pride in their nationality. In some instances, and mostly in Western societies nationalism is considered to be a key factor in a nation’s success and independence. In Europe the expansion of the movement was natural since there was no energetic and effective school of religious thought encouraging people of the same religion and different nations to come together and form a single community. In Muslim world, however, Islam itself is considered to be the guarantor of liberty, and is regarded as the basic element of Muslim independence and freedom. Algeria, Indonesia, Pakistan, and more recently Islamic Republic of Iran are examples of this trend.<sup>86</sup>

In the nineteenth century the Muslim world was stirred by the teachings of two insightful figures, Sayyid Jamāl al-Din (1838-1896/97) and Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849-1905), the “two

champions of the Pan-Islamic movement.” These two Muslim thinkers, and particularly Sayyid Jamāl al-Din were among the first figures who “inspired feelings of resistance to the danger of Western imperialism in the hearts of the Muslim peoples” and forced them to think of an Islamic front against imperialism.<sup>87</sup> Sayyid himself used to hide his own nationality for he preferred not to be known as an individual belonging to a specific nation so that the Western colonialists might motivate others against him.<sup>88</sup> He stated that there is no nationality for Muslims except Islam.<sup>89</sup>

Sayyid was chief among individuals who “were the first to seize upon the Pan-Islamic idea, and became its propagandists.”<sup>90</sup> Familiar with the ancient civilization and power of the East, he “yearned to rouse it from a state of complete decadence. He recognized all the menace of existing conditions and the need of a solid alliance against Christian Europe.”<sup>91</sup> Sayyid Jamāl al-Din “conceived the idea of Pan-Islam”, in 1882 while in Constantinople, where he made a “deep impression upon” Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II. The Turkish Sultan developed and supported the idea of Pan-Islam “as a deliberate policy and attempt to restore to the office of Caliph its ancient significance as the chief and protector of all Muhammedans.”<sup>92</sup> The Sultan sent delegates to the Muslim world “to rally all believers behind their caliph.” Consequently, even among the orthodox Arabs, Shi‘ites, and Sunnites, the Pan-Islamic idea received an encouraging response, although theoretically they could not recognize Abdul-Hamid as caliph,<sup>93</sup> probably because they realized that the *Qur’an* did not predict the office of Caliph. Instead they believed that such an office “sprang from military and political needs.”<sup>94</sup> During the revival of Pan-Islamism, the office of caliphate, after having long been void of all significance, “rose again to importance, especially through Abdul-Hamid who endeavoured to restore the authority of the Caliph.”<sup>95</sup>

It was in the late nineteenth century that both Sayyid Jamāl al-Din and Sultan Abdul-Hamid upheld the call for Muslim unity and for a single Islamic government ruling the entire Muslim world. They tried to gather all Muslims under the umbrella of the Ottoman Empire in the hope of defending Islam against Western imperialism

and its dream of conquering the Middle East.<sup>96</sup> However, as Kohn elaborates:

In spite of a consciousness of Islamic affinity, politically nationalism was the stronger force. Attempts to revive the Caliphate (which Mustafa Kemal abolished in Turkey in 1924) as a pan-Islamic movement ... failed.<sup>97</sup>

At the very outset of the movement of Pan-Islam, the Western colonial powers, mainly France and England, realized the danger of this newborn doctrine. They tried as a result to defeat this movement before it grew and acquired strength. They began to explore every means of destroying Muslim unity. One of the most effective methods utilized in this regard was to encourage nationalist feelings among Arabs and Turks in order to create barriers between the various peoples of the Muslim world. This strategy was aimed in particular at the Ottoman Empire. Thus, it was no accident that the first nationalist aspirations arose in the dependencies of the latter.<sup>98</sup> Three motivations have been recognized as lying behind this policy. First, the British colonial office actually perceived a threat in the wave of Islamic unity and so tried to discourage its emergence. Secondly, the creation of a Jewish state was in the planning stages. Thirdly, the presence of Russia in the Muslim world was endangering the political aims of the office. Steiner remarks:

To the policy makers of the British Colonial Office, Pan-Arabia is occasionally an expression of what is known as 'benevolent imperialism,' and sometimes - oddly enough- a bugbear aimed at intimating the Jewish National Home in Palestine.<sup>99</sup>

He continues that it was the intention of the British "to build up Pan-Arabia as a bulwark against Russian penetration into the Arab World."<sup>100</sup> Since Pan-Arabism lacked the necessary elements required to unify the Arabs of different areas, it did not go beyond the status of a myth in the Arab history. "The three prerequisites of

any political movement are: ideology, organization, and leadership. In Pan-Arabism all three are lacking.”<sup>101</sup>

Alongside the Pan-Arabism movement, two other movements were being formed in other parts of Muslim world. The role of German Orientalists in planting the idea of Pan-Turanism in the minds of the Turks is discussed by Steiner as well. Again, it was done to inspire “the Pan-Turan leaders of Turkey to side with Germany against Russia and Great Britain.”<sup>102</sup>

It is asserted that three Jewish from Europe motivated the thought of Turk Nationalism. This is confirmed by the famous Orientalist Bernard Lewis in his *Islam in History*. According to him, Arthur Lumley David (1832-1811) was the first one who encouraged the feeling of nationalism among the Turks. He was a British Jewish who departed to Turkey and distributed a book known as *Preliminary Discourses* trying to confirm the excellence and superiority of Turk race to Arab and other nations.<sup>103</sup>

At that time, Iran was not governed by the Ottoman Empire; therefore, the movement of pan-Iranism has its own story. In fact, the pan-Iranism movement, propagated as it was by Western-leaning free-thinkers, was not as advanced as the nationalist movements in other Muslim areas. This was because the British Colonial Office now realized that the wave of Muslim unity influenced Iranians less than Turks and Arabs, due to Iran’s independence from the Ottoman Empire. The colonial powers were not very concerned that Iran might become a part of a united Islamic world. They therefore concentrated on introducing Western institutions into Iran without feeling obliged to strengthen the nationalist sentiment for Pan-Iranism. It was for this reason that the nationalist movement of Pan-Iranism was weaker than Pan-Turanism or Pan-Arabism in other parts of the world of Islam.<sup>104</sup> Here again, and in Pan-Turanism as well the above-mentioned three prerequisites were lacking.

In any case, the establishment of nationalist movements in Muslim world was not the result of a real consciousness or awareness

among Muslims. Rather it was the fruit of Western colonialism. Kohn claims that the rise of nationalism in countries outside Western Europe during this period was influenced by the West. “Yet this very dependence on the West hurt the pride of the native educated class, as soon as it began to develop its own nationalism  
...<sup>105</sup>

To be continued.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Qur'an*, 49: 10.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Kohn, *A History of Nationalism in the East*, English translation by Margaret M. Green, (London: 1929), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, (U.S.A.: William Byrd Press, 1955), p.8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

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- <sup>7</sup> This passage occurs four times in the *Qur'an*: 12: 104; 38: 87; 68: 52; 81: 27.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. M.R. Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, *Islam and World Peace: Explanations of a Sufi*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: 1987), pp. 37 & 98.
- <sup>9</sup> Hans Kohn, *Nationalism; Its Meaning and History*, (New York: 1965), p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- <sup>11</sup> Ernest Renan (1823-1892) the celebrated French historian and philosopher.
- <sup>12</sup> Soekarno, *Nationalism Islam and Marxism*, Translated by Karel H. Warouw and Peter D. Weldon, 2nd edition, (New York: 1984), p. 38.
- <sup>13</sup> Otto Bauer (1881-1938) was a leading theoretician of the Austrian Social Democratic Party, whose book, *Die Nationalitätenfrage und die österreichische Sozialdemokratie* (The Nationalities Question and Austrian Social Democracy), first published in 1906. He was very influential in the European socialist movement of the time. (*Ibid.*, p. 39)
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> Kohn, *Nationalism*, p. 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Carlton J. H. Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion*, (New York: 1960), p. vii.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- <sup>22</sup> ‘Ali Muhammad Naqawi, *Al-Islam wal-Qawmiyya*, (Tehran: Munazzamah al-I‘lām al-Islami, 1984), p. 54.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 101-102.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.
- <sup>26</sup> See: Muntaziri, Husayn ‘Ali, *Dirasat fi Wilayat al-Faqih*, (Beirut: 1988), v.1, pp. 525-492. As an English reference, see: Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent; the Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (New York; London: New York University Press, 1993), pp. 424-425 & 491-493.
- <sup>27</sup> Cf. *Pity Aphorisms*, Selected from Imam Komeini’s words, (Tehran: 1994), p. 102.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

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- <sup>29</sup> Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 419.
- <sup>30</sup> A. Khaji Nuri, *Bazjigaran-i 'Asr-i Tala'i: Sayyid Hasan Mudarris*, (Tehran: 1980), p. 49.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>32</sup> Imam Khomeini, *Imam's Final Discourse*, (Tehran: Ministry of Guidance and Islamic Culture, 1989), p. 20.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- <sup>34</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 55.
- <sup>35</sup> Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, p. 472.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 56.
- <sup>38</sup> Imam, *Imam's Final Discourse*, p. 8.
- <sup>39</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 5.
- <sup>40</sup> *Pity Aphorisms*, p. 109.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> Amir Kabir Publication, *Dar Justujuy-i Rab-i Imam az Kalam-i Imam; Milli Garayi*, Ayatollah Khomeini's sayings, (Tehran: 1982), no. 11, pp. 9, 27, 29 & 57.
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. Mutaharri, *Khadamat-i Mutaqabil-i Islam va Iran*, (Tehran: 1981), p. 44.
- <sup>45</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 55.
- <sup>46</sup> Imam Khomeini Ruhullah, *Forty Hadith*, translated into English by M. Qara'i, (Tehran: 1989), part one, p. 137.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.
- <sup>48</sup> Imam Khomeini, *Forty Hadith*, p. 138.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, p. 38.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55, citing Ibn Hisham, *Sirat al-Nabi*, v. 2, p. 412.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

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- <sup>55</sup>Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, p. 44.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>57</sup> Hans Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples; Studies in Nineteenth Century Nationalism*, (New York: 1946), p. 2.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup> Kohn, *Nationalism*, p. 23.
- <sup>60</sup> Kohn, *Prophets and Peoples*, p. 145.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- <sup>64</sup> Hayes, *Nationalism*, p. 11.
- <sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
- <sup>67</sup> “The **vernacular** of a country or region is the language that is most widely spoken there.” Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary, 1994.
- <sup>68</sup> Kohn, *A History of Nationalism*, p. 8.
- <sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
- <sup>70</sup> Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, p. 34, also see: Abaas Arianpoor Kashani, *English-Persian Dictionary*, (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publication, 1963), v. 3, p. 3347.
- <sup>71</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 50.
- <sup>72</sup> Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, p. 34.
- <sup>73</sup> M. H. Tabataba’i, *al-Mizān; An Exegesis of the Quran*, English, translation by Rezvi, (Tehran: 1982), v. 3, p. 179.
- <sup>74</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 7.
- <sup>75</sup> Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, p. 38.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.
- <sup>77</sup> P. J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and State*, (London, New York, Sydney: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 13.
- <sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-83.
- <sup>79</sup> Hisham B. Sharabi, *Nationalism and Revolution in the Arab World*, (Toronto, New York, London: 1966), p., 96.

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- <sup>80</sup> M. J. Steiner, *Inside Pan-Arabia*, (Chicago: 1947), p. 79.
- <sup>81</sup> Hisham B. Sharabi, *Nationalism*, p. 96.
- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>83</sup> Steiner, *Inside Pan-Arabia*, p. 79.
- <sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>85</sup> Kohn, *A History of Nationalism*, p. 38.
- <sup>86</sup> Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, pp. 34-35.
- <sup>87</sup> Soekarno, *Nationalism*, pp. 44-45.
- <sup>88</sup> Mutaharri, *Khadamat*, p. 36.
- <sup>89</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 7.
- <sup>90</sup> Kohn, *A History of Nationalism*, p. 38.
- <sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40.
- <sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- <sup>93</sup> Steiner, *Inside Pan-Arabia*, pp. 42-44.
- <sup>94</sup> Kohn, *A History of Nationalism*, p. 42.
- <sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>96</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 31.
- <sup>97</sup> Kohn, *Nationalism*, p. 83.
- <sup>98</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>99</sup> Steiner, *Inside pan-Arabia*, p. 197.
- <sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* p. 198.
- <sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>103</sup> Naqawi, *al-Islam*, p. 37, citing Bernard Lewis, *Islam in History*, (London: 1973), p. 132.
- <sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>105</sup> Kohn, *Nationalism*, p. 30.