

Boundless Peace and Friendship in the Qur'an

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ABSTRACT: One of the most significant current discussions about Islam is that of peace. What does the Qur'an say about peace and war, and how did the Prophet Muhammad (s) deal with those who did not accept Islam as a way of life? This paper examines the solutions the Qur'an provides to prevent bloodshed and its emphasis on peace towards humankind. According to its teachings, preventing factors that lead to violence such as disputation, unjustified killing, and holding feelings of vengeance are some actions and feelings people are to refrain from. Allah has set worldly punishments as retaliation for those who unjustly kill or injure others. Moreover, the Qur'an sets principles of settling peace, while the Prophet (s) was an exemplar of those standards in assuming the role of the peacemaker with polytheists and atheists, as well as with the People of the Book. Islam highly regards those with a peaceful attitude provided that those who trample on the rights of others are to be firmly resisted in this world, and will face judgment for that act in the afterlife.

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Introduction

According to the Glorious Qur'an, an important characteristic of the Prophet Mohammad (s) is that he was sent as "a mercy to the people of the world". (21:107) Part of this mercy is exhibited in inviting people to peace and friendship. During the establishment of the Islamic government in Medina, the Prophet's first missions were to establish peace, friendship, and brotherhood as commanded in the Qur'an. For many years, the Prophet (s) was asked by God not to use any militant exercise including defensive war as a resort in his encounter with the enemies of Islam. The efforts were made to treat the enemies, including the polytheists and atheists, with as much mercy as possible. The People of the Book were dealt with in the same manner. In what follows, we will study two points. The first regards the solutions Islam provides to prevent bloodshed and conflict; the second is how to treat polytheists, atheists, and the People of the Book with a peaceful attitude with the exception that all oppressors must be firmly resisted.

I. Preventive factors that lead to war and bloodshed

Preventing serious conflict is essential in establishing peace and harmony. That is, preventing war is more important than putting war to an end. The holy Qur'an affirms this matter and offers solutions to avert war. Below we point to some of them:

Prohibiting Disputation

Disputing and illogical argumentation is one factor that brings about war and quarrelling. Disputing is understood as speaking while stubbornly persisting in opinions that are not accepted by the other party. Islam recommends arguing based on reason. This type of argument is called "*al-burhān*" and Allah (swt) asks those who do not rationally accept Islam to "Present your reason," a verse repeated four times in the Qur'an (2:111; 21:24; 27:64; 28:75). In this verse, Islam does not support the imposing belief

without reason; its aim is to allow for a respectful intellectual discussion. If the unbelievers find their own reasons insufficient and realize Islam's plausibility, they will accept this religion.

Another verse that reads "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256) is also a witness to the fact that the principles of religion must not be reluctantly accepted: it must be based on reason. Ibn Mas'ud and Ibn Zayd, two of the Prophet's disciples, misinterpreted this verse when they mentioned it to have been abrogated by the verse of *sayf* (sword) because Islam does not resort to force in accepting its principles, nor does it confirm its claim via war. On the contrary, it intends to present its reasons and distinguish truth from falsehood based on reasoning, as the next verse says, "The right direction is henceforth distinct from the false one." This indicates that at the beginning, there was no reluctance; accepting Islam must be based on rationale, and if a Muslim acknowledges Islam without certainty his acceptance of Islam will not mean anything. The opinion of all Shi'ite jurists is that following (*taqlid*) is not permitted in the principles of religion. And it means that believing in Allah, His Prophet (s), and other articles of faith must not be reluctantly accepted. Thus, the verse "There is no compulsion in religion" has not been abrogated and if Islam's plausibility is not confirmed, we must not force one to accept it as those who accept the truth when it is presented because Allah created mankind with the ability to distinguish right from wrong. We conclude from the above that the Qur'an invites mankind to rationally think and converse while prohibiting disputation and obstinacy as that which brings about war and bloodshed.

Islam and the Qur'an have tried to prevent war and quarrelling via prohibiting disputation. Reflecting on the verses such as 2:134 and 139, and 11:121 and 122, one may come to the conclusion that when discussing an issue, disagreements do not produce good results; both parties should stop arguing and leave it to God.

Profanity even as retaliation has been prohibited; the believers are

asked to avoid it. The Qur'an says:

Do not abuse those whom they invoke besides God, lest they should abuse God out of hostility, without any knowledge. That is how to every people We have made their conduct seem decorous. Then their return will be to their Lord and He will inform them concerning what they used to do. (6:108)

Therefore, the first factor which has an important role in preventing quarrelling and war is to avoid disputation and illogical argumentation. People are expected to leave the matter to God. The Qur'an also assures humankind that every nation is responsible for its own deeds:

That was a nation that has passed: for it there will be what it has earned, and for you there will be what you have earned, and you will not be questioned about what they used to do. (2:134)

Any nation or man by any religion will be punished as a result of his own bad deeds and the false religion of a nation will not result in the punishment of other nations. In this way, Islam prevents void disputing. Due to its importance, this idea is repeated in the same chapter:

That was a nation that has passed: for it there will be what it has earned, and for you there will be what you have earned, and you will not be questioned about what they used to do. (2:141)

In chapters/verses 43:83 and 70:82, God asks the Prophet (s) to "let them gossip and play until they encounter their day which they are promised." Thus, the Prophet (s) is asked to leave those who are not ready to engage in a rational discussion until the Day of Judgment in which their destiny will become clear.

Prohibition of unjustified killing and its divine punishment

In the Qur'an, one of the most terrible heavenly punishment is for those who unjustly kill another person:

That is why We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a soul, without [its being guilty of] manslaughter or corruption on the earth, is as though he had killed all mankind, and whoever saves a life is as though he had saved all mankind. Our apostles certainly brought them manifest signs, yet even after that many of them commit excesses on the earth. (5:32)

In this verse, killing one person is likened to killing mankind from Adam's creation to the end of the world. There are several traditions that explain this verse:

If one person kills another unjustly, he will be judged equal to a killer of mankind and if he repeats this crime, his punishment will be more severe.

Fear of divine punishment is an internal sanction and factor that helps prevent bloodshed. The internal preventing factors are more important than the external ones, because there is no way to escape from them. So in addition to considering the external preventing factors, Islam tries to strengthen the internal factors in order to prevent many crimes. Islam not only sets a heavenly punishment for murderers but it also forbids any kind of oppression and injustice, even minor crimes, and settles heavenly punishment for it to prevent oppressors.

Shi'ite jurists unanimously agree that one of the conditions for attaining Imamate is that the Imam must not have committed any oppression or injustice in his lifetime. Before his demise, Imam

Sajjad (a) embraced his son Imam Baqir (a) and told him what he himself was told by his father Imam Husayn (a): “O my son, avoid oppressing anyone who does not have any supporter but Allah.”¹ Allah has prevented quarrelling, war, and bloodshed by prohibiting oppression and injustice and setting divine punishment for murdering believers. Islamic law not only prohibits oppressing Muslims; rather, the same applies with regards to oppressing Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Persecuting them under an Islamic government is forbidden and results in punishment. The Prophet (s) said: “Anyone who troubles the People of the Book who live under the security contract, it is as if he has troubled me.” In this manner, by forbidding oppression and distressing others, and considering the heavenly punishment for the oppressor, even to non-Muslims, Islam provides the ground for peace and friendship for humankind.

Setting worldly punishment

Allah has prescribed retaliation as a worldly punishment for those who unjustly kill or injure others: “There is life for you in (the law of) retaliation.” (2:179) Retaliation is necessary, since it contributes to the continuity of human life and helps to avoid chaos. Islam has set worldly punishments not only for those who unjustly kill Muslims but for those who kill the infidels who do not fight against the Islamic government as well. All Muslim jurists unanimously agree that if a Muslim unjustifiably kills a non-Muslim, he must be punished. If the murderer, after being punished, kills another member of the People of the Book, he will be killed in retaliation. According to jurists, if a Shi‘ite Muslim kills another Muslim, he will be retaliated, regardless of the murderer’s nationality or the victim. Thus, Islam has prevented bloodshed and quarrelling by considering retaliation for unjust murder.

¹ *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, p. 331.

Controlling feelings of vengeance

Before the advent of Islam, Arab tribes held the vengeful practice of killing not only the murderer, but also the members of his tribe. Throughout history, many great wars took place between the tribes as a result of one or a few murders. The Qur'an's dictum "...but let him not commit excess in slaying. Lo! He will be helped" (17:33) is ordered to prevent hostility and warfare. Allah sentences the murderer and advises the victim's relatives not to feel compelled to take revenge by killing the murderer's relatives or other members of his tribe, city, or country. This in turn prevents great wars that result in the killing of many innocent people. Moreover, Islam has defined the way in which to punish the murderer and prohibit him from horrible killings to control the revengeful feeling of the killed person's family. It has explained that guardians of the murdered are not permitted to act as they wish. Imam Ali (a) stated in his will to his sons Imam Hasan and Imam Hussein (a) that should he die by Ibn Muljim's stroke, he should retaliate by only one stroke of the sword. The Imam also reminded his sons of the Prophet's statement to "abstain from mutilating the dead body, even the body of a wild dog."¹ Here, Islam tries to remove hardheartedness by controlling vengeful feelings and disallowing anyone to commit crimes against the murderer.

II. Boundless peace and harmony

Islam emerged in a society which suffered from racism and discrimination. They believed in superiority of the Arab race and took pride in their tribe and language. Islam nullified this attitude by regarding superiority only in piety:

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

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 401, p. 104.

the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most Godwary among you. Indeed God is all-knowing, all-aware. (49:13).

One of the Prophet's great teachings was that differences in race and ethnicity were merely a reason for recognizing and acknowledging each other. If mankind were similar in appearance, recognition would be difficult; thus, these differences do not indicate any superiority or inferiority. Islam invites all to be brothers and sisters to one another and eliminate feelings of superiority. Moreover, Allah invites His Prophet to show humility to the believers: "Lower thy wing (in tenderness) for the believers" (15:88) and "lower thy wing (in kindness) unto those believers who follow thee." (26:215) "Lowering the wings" is an allusion of the utmost humility that one can show to another person. Allah advises man to display humility to his parents (17:24) and to the believers. Allah also asks Muslims to be affectionate to other Muslims despite any differences that may exist between them. The Qur'an names Muslims of any race and tribe "brothers" of one another: "The believers are naught else than brothers" (49:10) and because of it, they must set the brotherhood relation with each other. The Prophet in his first undertaking in Medina established the brotherhood relation between Muslims who harbored hostility among each other. Islam removed this hostility:

Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided. And remember Allah's blessing upon you when you were enemies, then He brought your hearts together, so you became brothers with His blessing. And you were on the brink of a pit of Fire, whereat He saved you from it. Thus does Allah clarify His signs for you so that you may be guided. (3:103)

Deeds such as slandering and backbiting, which provide the ground for quarrelling and disputing, have also been prohibited

and their punishment is known to be much more severe than those which are personal. Similarly, deeds such as establishing friendly relations and peace are rewarded much more than those good deeds which merely affects the agent himself. In his will, Imam Ali (a) indicates the value of peaceful relations by quoted the Prophet (s) who said, "Settling peace and friendship is better than one year of praying and fasting."

The principle of settling peace and friendship among people

Explaining the mission of the Prophet (s), the Qur'an says: "We did not send you but as a mercy to all the nations." (21:107) This verse shows that Islam itself is based on mercy and kindness and indirectly asks Muslims to treat mankind with mercy and peace. The Qur'an also says:

And when we made a covenant with the children of Israel: you shall not serve any but Allah and (you shall do) good to (your) parents, and to the near of kin and to the orphans and the needy, and you shall speak to men good words and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate. Then you turned back except a few of you and (now too) you turn aside. (2:83)

In this verse, God instructs people to treat one another with respect and kindness. Practicing good conduct is not exclusive to using good words with one another; it must be observed in all aspects of one's life:

Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed Allah loves the just. (60:8)

Elsewhere, the Qur'an praises "those who restrain their anger and pardon men" (3:134). It means that virtuous people, both Muslims

and non-Muslims forgive mankind, pardon their mistakes, and do not compensate evil with evil. Considering the previous verse, God has ordered the Prophet of Islam (s) and the people who invite others to Islam to treat their enemies peacefully, confront them with patience and forbearance, and to forgive their ill-treatment. This friendly and honourable behaviour may transform the enemy to become an intimate friend. Prophet Muhammad said, "Behave well with those who mistreat you." Thus, it becomes clear that in Islam having peaceful behaviour is a general principle, although in some cases, such as when there is a case where a systematic violation of one's rights is carried out, an exception may be made to it.

The Prophet's peaceful conduct with polytheists and atheists

In spite of the pressures the Prophet faced during his residing in Mecca and before immigrating to Medina which lasted 13 years, he had been ordered to be patient with the polytheists despite their hostility and prohibited retaliating the militant enemies. This was ordered until the verse "Sanction is given unto those who fight because they have been wronged; and Allah is indeed able to give them victory." (22:39) was revealed in Medina. Based on the commentaries of the Qur'an and hadiths, this verse was the first to be revealed in Medina. Thus, the Prophet and his disciples were permitted to fight with the polytheists in order to protect themselves against the oppressors and their hostility.

Many events during the Prophet's time indicate that he made extreme efforts not to shed blood. For example, when the polytheists broke the Hudaibiyyah Peace treaty, the Prophet honourably refrained from bloodshed though he had an army of 1000 equipped soldiers; instead, he took advantage of intermediating with his uncle Abbas. This was an effort to capture Mecca in peace. By reflecting on the Prophet's behaviour toward the Qurayshi polytheists, especially their chiefs, we can understand the real meaning of verse 107 in chapter 21, which states, "We did not send you but as a mercy to all nations."

The Prophet's kindness is also depicted in his treatment towards the polytheist leaders who committed heinous crimes. When Abu Sufyan, the chief of the polytheists, converted to Islam, the Prophet introduced his home as a peaceful place when he stated, "Anyone who takes refuge in Abu Sufyan's home or who closes the door of his home or takes refuge in Masjid-al-Harām will be safe."

Another example is the Prophet's behaviour toward Safwān ibn Umayyah, a famous criminal whose name was listed among the ten persons whom the Prophet (s) described as those who had to be punished because of their numerous crimes. The Prophet (s) forgave Safwān through Umayyah ibn Wahhāb, one of the Prophet's disciples and invited him to Islam. In response, Safwān asked the Prophet (s) to give him two months to consider this offer, upon which the Prophet (s) gave four months. The Prophet's behaviour shows that he (s) never intended to impose his beliefs: conversion to Islam must be based on insight and awareness. Instead of confiscating his properties or taking part of it for free, when the Muslims were in need, the Prophet (s) asked Safwān to give 70 armours as a guaranteed loan.

In another instance, when the Muslim army was entering Mecca, Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah was carrying the flag. As he was passing by Abu Sufyan, he cried, "Abu Sufyan, today is the day of fight and bloodshed. Today, God makes the Quraysh despised and humble." When the Prophet (s) heard these words he stated, "No, today is the day of mercy and kindness. Today is the day in which God will endear the Quraysh." According to Ibn Hishām and Vāqidi, after the above-mentioned conversation, the Prophet removed Sa'd ibn 'Ubādah of the flagman position and gave it to Imam Ali (a). After capturing Mecca, despite Quraysh's hostility, the Prophet (s) stated, "Proceed. All of you are free." Addressing the Prophet (s), God says in the Qur'an:

Thus it is due to mercy from God that you deal
with them gently, and had you been hard-hearted,

they would certainly have dispersed from around you. (3:159)

In the year nine A.H., verse 5 in chapter 9 was revealed and until that time permission was not given to attack the idolaters despite all their mischief. Until that time war had not been legislated. This means that the polytheists had the opportunity of more than 20 years to study Islam and put forth any objections or refute its claims. They did not do so and instead continued to trouble the believers and prevent God's message from reaching His people; finally, God revealed the above verse. Nonetheless, immediately afterwards God says:

And if one of the idolaters seek protection from you, grant him protection till he hears the word of Allah, then make him attain his place of safety; this is because they are a people who do not know. (9:6)

This verse modifies verse 5 and indicates that if one of the polytheists takes refuge from you and is not informed about Islam and asks for an opportunity to research Islam's truth, even during war, you must accept his request. Of course, this verse uses the phrase "hearing the word of Allah," but exegetes take it to mean to study Islam in general. The one who wants to know more should be given a chance to return home or to a safe place. Thus, the initial war is not against those who have not been informed about Islam; it is carried out against oppressors who reject Islam due to their interests and may even resort to fighting against them. The permission must also come from God.

Defensive nature of the initial war

Defensive aspects of the initial war will become clear after surveying the following verses. The first and foremost ones to be fiercely resisted against are the war makers and those who follow them, as stated in verses 12, 13, and 36 of chapter 9:

But if they break their pledges after their having made a treaty and revile your religion, then fight the leaders of unfaith - indeed they have no [commitment to] pledges - maybe they will relinquish.

Will you not make war on a people who broke their pledges and resolved to expel the Apostle, and opened [hostilities] against you initially? Do you fear them? But Allah is worthier of being feared by you, should you be faithful.

...Fight all the polytheists, just as they fight you all.

These verses include the recurring command of war to be used only as a defensive strategy knowing too well that the opposite sides are war seekers who plan and/or commit atrocious acts towards humanity. The order to initiate war was never put into action: Allah's purpose was to threaten the polytheists and intimidate the proud monarchists. Narrated by historians, after the revelation of the above verses, the polytheists converted to Islam in groups after realizing its truth; the prophet (s) was not required to execute this verse. Therefore, the war in Islam is "defensive war" in principle, and God prescribes it only when necessary.

Peace and friendship with the People of the Book

Muslims are encouraged to strengthen their relationship with the People of the Book, namely, the Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians, though some of them may have on occasions attempted to question Muslims' faith or make them turn away from it. God urges Muslims to treat them with mercy and kindness and to strive to seek companionship:

And argue not with the people of the scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better. (29:47)

If a conversation leads to an argument, Muslims must observe respecting the other side by gently arguing their points, while avoid insulting and inappropriate talk. There were cases in which the Prophet (s) was compelled to fight some of the People of the Book. For example, after some Jews in Medina acted against the peace treaty between themselves and the Prophet (s) in an attempt to overthrow Islam, the following verse was revealed:

Fight those who do not believe in Allah, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allah and his messenger have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, out of those who have been given the book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection. (9:29)

This verse was revealed in the year nine A.H. after the three Jewish tribes of Medina, namely Banu Qaynuqā', Banu Nadhir, and Banu Qurayzah, concluded a peace treaty with the Prophet (s) and all three broke it. They were therefore to be punished for their deeds. Thus, in the above verse, God orders Muslims to fight with the People of the Book if they reject the laws of the Islamic government, such as paying tax (instead of zakat and in return to services they receive from the government) and avoiding hostility against Muslims. The meaning of the phrase "They are in a state of subjection" which some of the clear-sighted exegetes have mentioned in their commentary, is that they must accept these laws, in addition to observing the state's laws. It does not mean Muslims have been permitted to insult them when they take tax from them.

According to the Prophet's peace contract with the Najrān Christians in the tenth year of Hijrah, we can understand that the People of the Book (including Christians and Jews) who lived in an Islamic country accepted to pay tax and in return, the Islamic ruler was responsible for their security. Though the great Prophet of Islam had complete authority and was therefore able to

encounter them in any manner, he yearned for harmony and endorsed the peace contract.

The holy Qur'an declares that the general principle for treating unbelievers who have not fought with Muslims as follows:

Allah does not forbid you in regard to those who did not make war against you on account of religion and did not expel you from your homes, that you deal with them with kindness and justice. Indeed Allah loves the just. (60:8)

Based on this holy verse as a general principle that Muslims must treat all people who do not intend to kill Muslims, occupy their land, and/or drive them out of their homes, with kindness and justice.

Conclusion

Islam invites all mankind towards peace, regardless of one's nationality or religion, and recommends them to base their dealings on peace and good conduct. Of course, there may be narrowly defined exceptions, but the general principle is that Muslims must be companionable towards themselves or others and must live in peace with one another. Tribal, racial, or language differences must not cause the self-glorification that result in humiliating others. Muslims must also gently and kindly interact with non-Muslims. This general principle is not to be mistaken for contradicting the notion of fighting to resist the oppressors and defending one's rights. Islam invites all people to peace and friendship and invites other religions to converse in such a spirit. This general principle does not contradict resisting against the oppressors and defending one's rights.

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Understanding God's Mercy

Part III

Mohammad Ali Shomali¹

ABSTRACT: Part II of this series offered a description of the implications of Allah's attributes, such as *al-Rahmān* and *al-Rahim*, as well as His coexisting attributes of mercy and power with a connection to Allah's objective in His creation. In this part, attributes such as His generosity, forgiveness, and kindness are described with further descriptions of His mercy connected to His knowledge and richness. Divine mercy is All-embracing as Allah has made mercy incumbent upon Himself; this mercy cannot be prevented by any source and can save people from divine punishment. Allah greatly emphasizes on His mercy for no other reason than to qualify ourselves to receive more of it and eventually become His vicegerents.

Introduction

In part II of this series, we saw that among divine qualities and attributes revealed in the Qur'an, His mercy is by far the most

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frequently mentioned and the most emphasised one. We have already studied those which are derived from the root *rahmah*, such as al-Rahmān, al-Rahim, Arham al-Rāhimin, Khayr al-Rāhimin, Dhu al-Rahmah, and Dhu Rahmat-in Wāsi‘ah. Allah’s characteristics of being Noble, Bountiful, All-affectionate, All-forgiving, the Possessor of all majesty, and others are offered in this part. Moreover, descriptions of His mercy as linked to his knowledge and richness has also been described. Keeping in mind the abovementioned attributes, Allah instructs people to be merciful with one another.

Additional qualities of Allah’s mercy

al-Wadūd

One of the names of Allah in the Qur’an is Wadūd. It comes from the root *wudd* which means affection; thus, Wadūd means all-Affectionate. This is mentioned twice in the Qur’an in 85:14: “And He is the All-forgiving, All-affectionate” and 11:90: “Plead with your Lord for forgiveness, then turn to Him penitently; My Lord is indeed All-merciful, All-affectionate.”

al-Akram

The other name is al-Akram. This is mentioned in the Qur’an once: “Read and your Lord is the Most Generous.” (96:3) This is one of the very verses that were revealed at the beginning of Islam.

Khayr-un Thawāb-an

This means that Allah is the best in rewarding. So if you work for Him, He will be the best person to reward you. This is used once in the Qur’an in the verse 18:44: “There, all guardianship belongs to Allah, the Real. He is best in rewarding, and the best giver of success.”

Ghaffār

This means that Allah is All-forgiving. This has been used for Allah five times in the Qur'an, such as in 71:10: "...Plead to your Lord for forgiveness. Indeed He is All-forgiving."

Ahl al-Maghfirah

This means that Allah is someone whose nature is forgiving to those who are worthy to forgive. This is mentioned once in the Qur'an in chapter 74, verse 56: "And they will not remember unless Allah wishes. He is worthy of [your] being wary [of Him] and He is Worthy to forgive."

Wāsi'al-Maghfirah

This means that Allah is expansive in His forgiveness. Nothing remains outside the boundaries of His forgiveness. Everything can be forgiven if a person sincerely asks for forgiveness. This has been mentioned once in the Qur'an in 53:32: "Those who avoid major sins and indecencies, excepting [minor and occasional] lapses. Indeed your Lord is expansive in [His] forgiveness."

Khayr al-Ghāfirīn

He is the best of those who forgive. This is mentioned once in the Qur'an in 7:155.

Karīm

He is generous or noble. This has been mentioned twice in the Qur'an in relation to Allah: once as a quality of Allah Himself in 82:6 and another as a quality of divine Throne in 23:116, where it can be translated as 'the Noble'.

Ghāfir al-Dhanb

He is the Forgiver of sins. This has been used once in the Qur'an for Allah in 40:3.

Qābil al-Tawb

He is the Acceptor of repentance. This has been used once in the Qur'an for Allah in 40:3.

Dhi al-Tawl

He is Bountiful. This has been used once in the Qur'an for Allah in 40:3.

Dhu al-Jalāl wa al-Ikrām

He is the Possessor of majesty and generosity (or nobleness). This is mentioned twice in the Qur'an, once for Allah Himself and on another occasion for His face (*wajh*). About Allah Himself the Qur'an says, "Blessed is the name of your Lord, Possessor of majesty and generosity" (55:78). Here a combination of two qualities is mentioned: generosity and majesty. The former is related to Allah's mercy and the latter is related to His greatness.

Tawwāb

This refers to the one who often returns to Allah. When used for human beings it means those who often return to Allah to repent, but when used for Allah it means that He often returns to His servants. He first prepares them for repentance, and then accepts it if they do so. This is mentioned for Allah 11 times in the Qur'an, one of which states, "... He returned toward them so that they might repent. Indeed Allah is Oft-returning, All-merciful." (9:118)

Dhu al-Fadl al-'Azīm

Allah is the Possessor of great grace. This is mentioned in the Qur'an thirteen times. In one of these verses, Allah says:

O you who have faith! If you are wary of Allah, He shall appoint a criterion for you (to judge between right and wrong), and absolve you of your misdeeds, and forgive you, for Allah is the Possessor of great grace. (8:29)

Ra'ūf

Allah is Most kind. This is mentioned for Allah ten times in the Qur'an. For example, Allah says:

It is He who sends down manifest signs to His servant that He may bring you out of darkness into light, and indeed Allah is Most kind and Most merciful to you. (57:9)

Ghafūr

Allah is Oft-forgiving. This is mentioned 91 times in the Qur'an. For example, the Qur'an says:

When those who have faith in Our signs come to you, say, 'Peace to you! Your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself; whoever of you commits an evil [deed] out of ignorance and then repents after that and reforms, then He is indeed Oft-forgiving, Most merciful.' (6:54)

Dhū Maghfirah

Allah is the possessor of forgiveness. This is mentioned twice in the Qur'an in 13:6 and 41:43.

Halīm

Allah is the All-forgiving who forgives the wrong-doers' actions. This is mentioned eleven times in the Qur'an one of which states:

The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth [too], and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification. Indeed He is All-forgiving, Oft-forgiving. (17:44)

Wahhāb

Allah is the All-munificent, the One Who bestows many blessings. This is mentioned as a quality of Allah three times in the Qur'an. In one verse, Allah says, "[They say,] 'Our Lord! Do not make our hearts swerve after You have guided us, and bestow Your mercy on us. Indeed You are the All-munificent.'" (3:8)

'Afuww

Allah is All-excusing, All-pardoning. This is mentioned five times as a quality of Allah. In one of these verse, Allah says, "Whether you disclose a good [deed that you do] or hide it, or excuse an evil [deed], Allah is indeed All-excusing, All-powerful." (4:149)

There are several other qualities that relate to Allah's mercy such as *Mujīb* (Responsive - 11:61), *Hamīd* (All-praiseworthy - 17 times, such as in 35:15), *Khayr* (Better - 3 times, such as 20:73), *Barr* (All-benign - 52:28), *Salam* (Peace - 59:23), *Quddūs* (All-

holy - 59:23;62:1), *Khayr al-wāriṭhīn* (Best of inheritors - 21:89) and *Khayr-un 'uqbā* (Best giver of success - 18:44).¹

Allah treats us with mercy and expects us to treat each other similarly

One can suggest that Allah has tried various ways to reassure us about His mercy. As He has mentioned His mercy numerous times, we are to be completely assured about it.

Allah's emphasis on His mercy is also asking us to be merciful with each other. In fact, Allah is telling us that as your Lord I am showing abundant mercy without being in debt or needing anyone; you should also be merciful, especially because you are in need of each other and have rights upon one another. Allah does not need any of us and He is still merciful. Our dependency on one another gives us more reason to be merciful to each other. If it were supposed to have one person who could say, "I do not and will not need anyone and therefore I do not need to bother what is happening to you" that would be Allah. He is the only one who can say, "I do not have any need and still I am the Most merciful." So what stops us needy people from being merciful? Later, we will reflect on verses 12 and 54 in chapter 6 where Allah says that He has made it compulsory on Himself to be merciful.

Allah's mercy cannot be blocked

If Allah wants to give His mercy to someone, no one can stop Him. If everyone gathered to do so, it cannot happen. He is the one with the power to ensure that His mercy reaches you. One is mistaken to worry about Allah as one who wants to give mercy but is unable to do so.

¹ For more information about this category and other categories of divine qualities, please refer to "Image of Allah in the Qur'an" in *Islamic Reference Series, vol. 1, Allah: Existence and Attributes*, edited by M. A. Shomali.

Allah's mercy saves you from punishment

One of the teachings of the Qur'an is that it is through His mercy that one can be saved from punishment in this world or the hereafter as depicted in the story of Prophet Noah, when his son refused to board his ship:

He said, 'I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the flood.' He said, 'There is none today who can protect from Allah's edict, except someone upon whom He has mercy.' Then the waves came between them, and he was among those who were drowned. (11:43)

Prophet Noah's son, instead of boarding the ship, took refuge with a mountain and expected to be saved from the flood. Prophet Noah warned his son that none is able to protect him from Allah's punishment, i.e. being drowned, and that only those who receive His mercy are saved. For those who are saved, it is only because of Allah's mercy and if people do not make themselves available to His mercy they will not be saved. Allah is offering His mercy by asking us to board His ship of mercy. People should expect His protection although the son of Noah refused.

Another verse in the same chapter is about the Prophet Salih. When his people did not believe in him and slaughtered his camel Allah (swt) decided to punish them. However, the faithful were saved because of His mercy:

So when Our edict came, We delivered Salih and the faithful who were with him by a mercy from Us, and from the [punishment and] disgrace of that day. Your Lord is indeed the All-strong, the All-mighty. (11:66)

Because of mercy from Him, Allah saved them. Thus, Salih and the believers were not saved except by His mercy. This is another function of the mercy of Allah.

Further descriptions of Allah's mercy

Merciful and Rich

In part II, we saw that Allah is both merciful and powerful.¹ Allah is not like those who when weak they are kind and when strong they are not. Allah describes Himself as rich, absolutely free of any need; with these characteristics, He is still merciful:

Your Lord is the rich dispenser of mercy. If He wishes, He will take you away, and make whomever He wishes succeed you, just as He produced you from the descendants of another people. (6:133)

Our lord is all-sufficient and merciful; He is needless though He is still merciful. His mercy is not because weakness or His expectation of lending Him a helping hand in the future. He was not needy in the past to feel sympathetic towards us. Moreover, He is not like those who have mercy only when they are weak and for example, have no position, and forget you once they become rich.

Merciful and Knowledgeable

According to the Qur'an, Allah has both mercy and knowledge. Sometimes people are very kind to us because they do not know who we are, our wrong actions, the negative things we have said about them, or the lowly qualities you have. Had they known our true colours, they would have withdrawn their love and mercy from us. 'Abd al-'Azim Hasani reports that Imam Jawad (a) narrated through his fathers the following hadith from Imam Ali (a):

لو تكاشفتكم ما تدافنتم

¹ Shomali, M.A., "Understanding God's Mercy" in *The Message of Thaqaalayn*, Vol. 12, no. 1, Issue 45.

If you knew all the secrets about each other you would not have [even] buried each other.¹

Out of His mercy, Allah has covered our defects us so much so that people do not know about the immoral qualities we have and the wrong actions we committed. Of course, the friends of Allah (swt) are exceptions, since they are much better than what people imagine; otherwise, most people have many problems upon which only Allah knows and still, Allah is merciful with them. People do not know and may or may not be merciful. Allah knows and He is certainly merciful.

There is a very beautiful verse about the prayer of the angels that confirms this characteristic of divine mercy. At the beginning of the creation of man, the angels were puzzled when Allah said He is going to appoint a vicegerent on the earth. They did not object. They simply questioned Allah to understand:

When your Lord said to the angels, ‘Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth,’ they said, ‘Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?’ He said, ‘Indeed I know what you do not know.’ (2:30)

They said, are you going to appoint someone who is going to shed blood and do mischief? Of course, they did not refer to Prophet Adam as the one who would ‘shed blood and do mischief.’ That mischief was going to happen and continue in the progeny of Adam; they knew that some of his descendants would shed blood and do mischief, beginning with one of the sons of Adam. Finally, the angels were convinced that although there is such a problem, human beings *do* have some virtues, above all

¹ *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 74, p. 385.

the capacity for knowledge that makes them worthy of being appointed as a vicegerent of Allah.

What would be your reaction if you were an angel? If angels were not pure, they would harbour feelings of hatred and hostility towards human beings because they would have thought of human beings as their rivals. They would have thought that they were too close to Allah, considering their constant worship and glorification of Him. Though this human being is now appointed as Allah's vicegerent on the earth, the angels did not develop any hatred. Indeed, what they do, as mentioned in the following verses and elsewhere is in addition to glorifying and praising Allah (or more precisely, as a part of their glorification of Allah, because *tasbih* includes everything that angels and the inhabitants of heaven perform), they ask forgiveness for human beings. These constant prayers for us truly portray the beauty of their altruism. There is no sense of rivalry, hatred, or hostility. Regarding the prayer of the angels who carry the divine throne, the Qur'an says:

Those who bear the throne, and those around it, celebrate the praise of their Lord and have faith in Him, and they plead for forgiveness for the faithful: 'Our Lord! You comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge. So forgive those who repent and follow Your way and save them from the punishment of hell. Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them, along with whoever is righteous among their forebears, their spouses, and their descendants'. (40:7-9)

Therefore, believers have numerous angels who pray to Allah to forgive them. More importantly, because of their purity, their prayers are not rejected. Indeed, it is due to His mercy that Allah has created such benevolent angels and has taught them to ask forgiveness for us. So is it possible that Allah will not listen to

them? Will He disappoint them? Certainly not. If we are true believers and sincerely return to Him and repent, He will not let them or us down.

Moreover, the angels in the above verses emphasize on two things: the All-embracing mercy and All-embracing knowledge of Allah.

Divine mercy is All-embracing

The angels' affirmation of Allah's mercy as all-embracing is seen in, other verses. For example, the Qur'an tells us about the prayer of Moses and Allah's answer:

...You are our master, so forgive us and have mercy on us, for You are the best of those who forgive. And appoint goodness for us in this world and the Hereafter, for indeed we have come back to You.' Said He, 'I visit My punishment on whomever I wish, but My mercy embraces all things...' (7:156 - 157)

"Whomever I wish" refers to those who have been insistently performing immoral actions that have left no room for forgiveness. Of course, this applies only to a specific type of people, but when it comes to Allah's mercy it "embraces all things." So to warn corrupt people, Allah speaks of punishment, while at the same time He reassures us of His all-embracing mercy. There is a story, perhaps fictional, about a spiritual wayfarer who had a conversation with Allah. Teasing him, Allah told him, "Shall I inform people about your true character so that no one would respect you?" He replied, "Shall I inform people about Your true character so that no one fears You and Your warnings and therefore would not obey You?" This inspirational story shows that if most people truly comprehended the immense mercy of Allah, there is a worry that they may, instead of appreciating His mercy, take advantage and become lazy and

careless with respect to their duties. This is why Imam Ali (a) says:

الْفَقِيْهَ كُلِّ الْفَقِيْهَ مَنْ لَمْ يَقْنَطِ النَّاسَ مِنْ رَحْمَةِ اللهِ وَلَمْ يُوَيِّسْهُمْ
مِنْ رُوحِ اللهِ وَ لَمْ يُؤْمِنْهُمْ مِنْ مَكْرِ اللهِ

He is the wisest and the most knowing man who advises people not to lose hope and faith in the mercy of Allah and not to be too sure and overconfident of immunity from His wrath and punishment. (*Nahj al-Balāghah*, Wise sayings 90)

A proper scholar of Islam is he who does not give too much hope to the people to the point where they end up feeling safe from the punishment of Allah, and does not frighten them so much that they lose hope. You have to strike a balance. One should be balanced in this world, though in the hereafter, the idea of people taking advantage of the mercy of Allah and carelessly performing corrupt actions does not exist. There, all the realities will become clear and you will see the mercy of Allah with all the expansion that it has. The only people who are deprived from Allah's overwhelming mercy are those who chose not to benefit from His mercy, just as the son of Noah (a) who refused his father's invitation to board the ship and be saved by Allah's mercy. Stressing on Allah's all-embracing mercy, the Qur'an says:

But if they deny you, say, 'Your Lord is dispenser of an all-embracing mercy, but His punishment will not be averted from the guilty lot.' (6:147)

If you were to send the most pious and honest person to deliver your message to a people who are deeply indebted to you, and instead of getting appreciation he is rejected and accused of being a liar, what would your response be? You may get angry and use harsh words or boycott them. However, the same does not refer to Allah, tells His Messenger that if the people deny you and accuse

you of lying, tell them that your Lord has an encompassing mercy, for Allah wants them to return to Him. In other words, Allah is implying that though you have said this to my Prophet, there is still a chance for you to return, and He is eager to embrace you with His mercy.

Allah has made mercy incumbent upon Himself

Another aspect of Allah's mercy stressed on in the Qur'an is that Allah has made it necessary and obligatory for Himself to show mercy. The Qur'an says:

Say, 'To whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth? Say, 'To Allah. He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself. He will surely gather you on the Day of Resurrection, in which there is no doubt. Those who have ruined their souls will not have faith.' (6:12)

When those who have faith in Our signs come to you, say, 'Peace to you! Your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself: whoever of you commits an evil [deed] out of ignorance and then repents after that and reforms, then He is indeed All-forgiving, All-merciful.' (6:54)

Ka-ta-ba 'alā comes from the root '*kitābah*' which means 'to write' and *ka-ta-ba 'alā nafsih* means 'He has made it necessary and incumbent upon Himself.' This is similar to the verse, "O those who believe! Fasting has been made incumbent on you (*kutiba 'alaykum*)."

In chapter 6, verse 12, Allah tells the Prophet (s) to ask the people about the one to whom all that is in the skies and the earth belong. Then Allah asks him to give them this answer: "To Allah. He has made mercy incumbent upon Himself." People should not have to worry as this world belongs to none but Allah. If this world had belonged to the people, we would have countless

difficulties and problems; thankfully, this world belongs to Him, with Whom we are absolutely and unquestionably comfortable and relaxed.

Then Allah says that out of His mercy, He will resurrect us and bring us together to give us eternal life. He will not let us perish by death. He will bring us back to give us more mercy. Of course, we should try to have good actions in our record of deeds in order to qualify ourselves to enter heaven and receive even more mercy. According to the Qur'an, there are people who have ruined their souls, or more precisely, 'lost themselves.' 'To lose one's self' is a very beautiful expression mentioned several times in the Qur'an. These are the only people who do not and will not believe because they have chosen to be far from Allah and His mercy. This is their self-created problem. If I am a kind and generous person, in the freezing winter I will provide shelter, turn the heater on, make hot soup, and prepare a warm bed for you. Instead, you choose not to use my shelter. Allah sends 120,000 people to invite you, but you choose not to come. You say "I am fine outside". What would happen to you? and who should be blamed? If you want to deprive yourself from the mercy of Allah, why blame Him (swt)?

Thus Allah says that He has made it compulsory upon Himself to be merciful. It is only because of His mercy that He has stressed so much on His mercifulness in order to qualify ourselves to receive more and more of it; otherwise, He does not need us. Even if every person deviates, nothing is going to happen to Him. But He is so merciful that He says I have made it compulsory for myself to be merciful. It is due to His endless mercy that He treats us like this because when you are free from need, there is usually a tendency to ignore others. Take, for instance, the way we treat ants. We feel we do not need them. Even a kind person would not know what to do with them (unless, of course, they are being researched for scientific purposes). Whether there are hundreds or thousands of them you would not take notice or care about them because you do not need them. If you are not merciful

you may even kill them. How many of us are concerned about the ants that crawl about in our homes? Maybe they have difficulties or a shortage of food. We still do not bother to care. But Allah, despite the fact He does not need us and that the distance between Him and us is considerably more than between us and ants, He still has unlimited devotion for us.

In chapter 6, verse 54, Allah says to His prophet, “When the people who have faith come to you, say *salām* (peace) to them.” It means that the Prophet should be the first to say *salām*, and indeed no one could ever precede the Prophet in doing so. On one occasion, a man wanted to precede the prophet in saying ‘salam’; so he went hid himself in a corner behind a wall and then jumped out to say *salām* to the Prophet. However, when the Prophet (s) approached him he was shocked and could not speak. When the Prophet (s) initiated his *salām*, the man was relaxed. The Prophet was so kind and humble that he always liked to be the first to say *salām*.

In addition to asking His Messenger to say *salām* to the believers, Allah Himself will offer *salām* to the believers in heaven. The Qur’an says, “‘Peace!’ A word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful” (36:58).

In any case, Allah says when believers come to you, say *salām* to them (which may mean ‘send My *salām* to them’) and give them this message that “your Lord has made mercy incumbent upon Himself.” Why? Because “He is indeed All-forgiving, All-merciful.” Allah tells us that if any one of you has done something bad out of ignorance due to the pressures of the desires and temptations but regrets afterwards and becomes good, they should know that their Lord is forgiving and merciful. Therefore, no one should think of himself as having done so many corrupt deeds that there is no chance for returning to Allah. By truly being regretful and changing ourselves for the better, Allah will certainly forgive us and has made it compulsory for Himself to do so. The message Allah asks His messenger to deliver to

humankind is to be merciful. With respect to the acceptance of repentance in particular, we find a similar message in the following verse:

[Acceptance of] repentance is incumbent on Allah only for those who commit evil out of ignorance, then repent promptly. It is such whose repentance Allah will accept, and Allah is All-knowing, All-wise. (4:17)

What does it mean to 'repent promptly'? The next verse clarifies this:

But [acceptance of] repentance is not for those who continue committing misdeeds: when death approaches any of them, he says, 'I repent now.' Nor is it for those who die while they are faithless. For such We have prepared a painful punishment. (4:18)

This means that before death approaches, it is still possible to repent; but when someone is in his deathbed, it is too late. The same goes for those who die without faith and want to become faithful after death. Hence, as long as you are living and are active and able to do something good, there is a chance for repentance, and Allah has made it obligatory on Himself to accept it.

Conclusion

Bearing in mind the many attributes of Allah's mercy in the Qur'an, Allah assures people of its reality with the expectation that we as human beings treat one another in the same way. Allah's mercy cannot be averted once He chooses to offer it and we are to believe it is none other but His mercy that will save us from divine punishment. His mercy and power coincide; He possesses absolute authority and offers His kindness, as opposed to those who are kind when weak yet inconsiderate when in

control. His mercy also overlaps with His knowledge, as He truly knows His servants, their good and bad deeds, and still continues to generously offer His forgiveness and compassion; whereas people tend to withdraw mercy had they been aware of each other's flaws. Moreover, He created selfless angels who constantly pray for us. Had we known of Allah's all-embracing mercy, we would run the risk of being negligent with regards to our duties, which is why it is important for us to simultaneously be aware of His punishment. Taking everything into account, people should not think of themselves as having committed too many wrong deeds to be immune from His vast forgiveness. One is to be truly regretful while changing for the better, and this will bring about salvation, as Allah has made mercy incumbent upon Himself. One is to strike the balance between hope and fear.

In part IV, we will study the arrangement Allah has made out of His mercy so that we can have a comfortable life on this planet. Many things are to be available to us so that we can survive and enjoy our life. Then we will study the divine plan for our guidance which is based on His mercy.

Lady Mary as a Role Model in the Qur'an and Bible

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Translated by Fatima Sultan

ABSTRACT: Qur'anic descriptions of the prophets and other prominent female personalities reveal the importance of using them as an exemplar in our daily lives. This makes certain that we are given the guidelines as to how to attain proximity to God. Lady Mariam is the most distinguished female mentioned by name in the holy Qur'an, so much so that an entire chapter is named after her. Her titles of being the Masteress of women of her era as well as her qualities of chastity, virtue, and purity qualify her for being the mother of a prophet as well as a model for both men and women to follow. This article studies the portrayal of role models in the Qur'an, several aspects of Lady Mary's upbringing, and Lady Mariam's features as seen in the Qur'an and the Bible.

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Introduction

The Qur'an is a book for self-building. To reach its objective which is the flourishing of individuals, examples have been provided. Introducing these role models and examples helps in demonstrating the fact that it is quite possible to face all challenges and still become pious. An outstanding feature of the Qur'an is that Allah has introduced His prophets as role models in order to complete the guidance for mankind and leave no doubt about the possibility of reaching nearness to Him and attaining salvation.¹ Not only does Allah talk about how the Prophets eat, drink, and walk in the streets and bazaars, but He also discusses matters that show their pinnacle point in humanistic essence, their proximity to Allah, and their desire to reach the divine status. For example, referring to Joseph, the Qur'an says, "He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants" (12:24). In this study, Lady Mary is illustrated as an example and role model. Qualities that have made her a role model, effective factors in her upbringing, and her distinguished characteristics for which she was been chosen by Allah have been examined.

Prophets of Allah: Role Models for Mankind

Several verses in the Qur'an portray the Prophets as role models. The Prophets and holy Imams have been introduced as complete and realistic role models since their lives are completely set out on the just path and because they are infallible and free of error and mistake. In the chapter *The Confederates*, with reference to the Prophet Muhammad (s), we read: "In the Apostle of God there is certainly for you a good exemplar... (33:21)"

The idea of the Prophet being an example for humankind can be understood from the male pronoun 'you' which include all

¹ Kashaniha, 1382, p. 119.

human beings including both men and women. The Qur'an also refers to Prophet Muhammad as "a mercy to all nations" (21:107) and as "a bearer of good news and warner to all mankind" (34:28).

Prophet Abraham is also introduced as a role model in the Holy Qur'an: "There was a good lesson in the life of Abraham and those around him, for you" (60:4). In this verse, following Abraham and his companions has been recommended to 'you' i.e. all people; the plural male pronoun (*lakum*) addresses both men and women.

One important point regarding this verse is the adjective 'good' (*hasanah*) which has been used for the word 'exemplar' (*uswah*). This adjective has been used in both verses that refer to Prophet Muhammad (s) and Abraham as role models. Why has the word 'good' been used? The reason is that being a follower can be a good deed and beneficial at times, but it can also be disadvantageous. Since using the divine prophets and those chosen by them as a template is approved, the term 'good' has been used to reinforce this point. Modeling after other individuals, even people who are pious, is not always beneficial because the likelihood that they may make mistakes or fall into negligence remains.

Pursuing a role model is one of mankind's needs, where in the course of struggling towards perfection and attaining progress in an innate spiritual (*fitri*) way, it has been placed in the nature of humans. 'Replication' is another term that is used as a synonym of role modeling. Allah the Exalted, in the Holy Qur'an, has answered to this psychological need of humanity and has introduced role models.

A question arises here regarding the difference between being a role model and exemplar and being an example. Are these two the same? Concerning Abraham (a) and Prophet Muhammad (s)

God says they are good role models or exemplars, but pertaining to the wife of Pharaoh or Lady Mary, God says:

Allah draws an[other] example for those who have faith: the wife of Pharaoh, when she said, 'My Lord! Build me a home near You in paradise and deliver me from Pharaoh and his conduct and deliver me from the wrongdoing lot.

And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb, so We breathed into it of Our spirit. She confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books and she was one of the obedient.
(66: 11 & 12)

Explaining profound gnostic ideas by using parables has been common in Holy Scriptures. For example, the Qur'an refers to the biblical description of those who were with the Prophet Muhammad (s) in the form of parables (48:29). In the Bible, there is a whole book called, *The Parables*. The Qur'an's use of examples has been extensive: "We have certainly interspersed for the people this Qur'ān with every [kind of] parable" (17:89).

The advantage of using examples and parables is that it breaks down hefty and contemplative gnostic knowledge and brings it to the level that the general public can better understand and comprehend it.¹ Bringing examples has been compared to a string where it makes a link from the highest level of gnostic knowledge to the general public's level of understanding, where in the form of a parable they have the ability to comprehend intellectual and rational information and understand what is being compared and evaluated to the best of their ability:

...We draw such parables for mankind, so that they may reflect (59:21)

¹ Jawadi Amuli, 1381, volume 2, p. 326.

And We draw these parables for mankind; but no one grasps them except those who have knowledge (29:43)

Allah draws an[other] example for those who have faith... (66:11)

In the following verse, Allah introduces Lady Mary as another example: “and Mary, daughter of Imran” who was chaste,¹ God breathed into her of His spirit,² confirmed the words of her Lord and His Books,³ and was one of the obedient.⁴

Thus, we may answer to the question concerning the difference between introducing a person as a good role model and bringing someone forth as an example is that the latter can be restricted to some aspects of that person’s character. For instance, the Pharaoh’s wife is an example for the faithful because she had strong faith in God and knew what to ask from Him and how to ask for it. She wanted to be near God which was more important for her than being in heaven and this is why she first said “*indaka*” (near You) and then she said “*bayt-an fi’l-Jannah* (a home in Paradise).” So she could be taken as a role model in these qualities and actions, but not necessarily in her entire conduct. But concerning the Prophet Muhammad (s), it is important to know that he is a role model and should be followed in all his qualities and actions. Lady Mary is introduced as an example for the faithful in such a high qualities and actions like chastity, purity, obedience, and truthfulness; confirming the words of her Lord and His Books, she can certainly be taken as a good role model for most, if not all, in every step taken in the spiritual journey towards God.

¹ أَحْصَنَتْ

² فَفَخَّنَا فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِنَا

³ وَصَدَّقَتْ بِكَلِمَاتِ رَبِّهَا وَكُنْتِ

⁴ مِنَ الْقَائِمِينَ

Lady Mary in the Gospel

In the Gospel of Matthew, Lady Mary is said to be engaged to Joseph even though Christians do not consider Jesus to be his son, but rather the son of God:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise:
When as his mother Mary was espoused to
Joseph, before they came together, she was found
with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her
husband, being a just *man* and not willing to
make her a public example, was minded to put
her away privately. But while he thought on these
things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared
unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of
David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife:
for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy
Ghost... [Matthew 1:18-25]

In the Gospel of Luke two characteristics of the Virgin Mary are mentioned - 'being holy' and 'being favoured':

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you and you are amongst the Holy women."

... But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God... [Luke 1:26-30]

In the Gospel of John, Lady Mary is referred to as an aid and assistant to Jesus in the miracle of changing water to wine:

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water;" so they filled them to the brim... This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee... [John 2:1-11]

In general, the Gospel refers to two of Lady Mary's traits. One quality is that God blessed Mary very much and second is that she was a source of blessing for people. Of course, the Bible does not give a detailed account of Lady Mary's life or specific characteristics. Altogether Lady Mary's name has been mentioned nineteen times in the Gospel and thirty-four times in the Qur'an. A relatively lengthy chapter in the Qur'an has been named after her and a venerated position has been set for her.

Lady Mary's Status in Islam

According to numerous Islamic narrations, Lady Mary is one of the four chosen women, namely Asiyah, Mary, Khadijah and Fatimah, the daughter of Prophet Muhammad. In the book *Conquests of Mecca*, after Muhyiddin Arabi describes how masculinity and femininity are relinquishing aspects and not the truth of humanity, he quotes a narration from the Holy Prophet where he says, "The same way the Holy Prophet gave testimony regarding the perfection of men, he gave testimony about the perfection of women and he referred to Mary and Asiyah as the most perfect women" as seen in the following hadith:

كَمَلْ مِنْ الرِّجَالِ كَثِيرُونَ وَ كَمَلَتْ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ مَرْيَمُ بِنْتُ
عِمْرَانَ وَ أَسِيَةَ امْرَأَةِ فِرْعَوْنَ

Many men have achieved perfection and among women, Mary daughter of ‘Imrān and Asiyah wife of Pharoah.¹

Lady Mary in the Qur’an

Anne Mary Schimmel writes: “Lady Mary has the most honorific status; she is the only woman who has been mentioned by name in the Qur’an and has been glorified and acknowledged as the virgin mother of Prophet Jesus.”² According to the Qur’an, Lady Mary was given the ability to speak with the Archangel Gabriel and conversae with other angels. Her other qualities are as follows:

1. *Masteress of the women of her age:*

وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ
وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ

And when the angels said: ‘O Mary, Allah has chosen you and purified you and He has chosen you above the women of the worlds.’ (3:42)

2. *Chastity:* Mary is chaste and virtuous. She has been referred to as a person who Allah blew into her from His own spirit:

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا فَنَفَخْنَا فِيهِ مِنْ
رُوحِنَا

¹ Ibn Arabi, [Impatient], volume 3.

² Schimmel, 1376, p. 449.

And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb, so We breathed into it of Our spirit... (66:12)

Elsewhere the Qur'an says:

قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ...

She [Mary] said, 'My Lord, how shall I have a child seeing that no human has ever touched me?' (3:47)

قَالَتْ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا

She [Mary] said, 'How shall I have a child seeing that no human being has ever touched me, nor have I been unchaste?' (19:20)

3. *Chosen by God:*

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ
وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ

And when the angels said, 'O Mary, Allah has chosen you and purified you and He has chosen you above the world's women. (3:42)

4. *A sign of God:*

وَجَعَلْنَاهَا وَابْنَهَا آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ

... and We made her and her son a sign for all the nations. (21:91)

In this verse, Mary and her son, Jesus, have been introduced as a single sign, with emphasis on Lady Mary. By mentioning her name and showing Prophet Jesus' kinship with her, the greatness of her personality is further conveyed. The absence of the plural

form of ‘sign’ is probably because Mary and Jesus were very close to each other. If there were a substantial difference between them, they would have been mentioned in the plural format i.e. signs for all the nations, like day and night which are considered as two signs: “We made the night and the day two signs” (17:12). This verse has been revealed in the plural form so that the significant and basic difference between night and day can be completely clear.

5. *Most truthful*: Lady Mary was *siddiqah*, that is, one of the most truthful people (5:75). The most truthful, the witnesses, the righteous, and the prophets are those upon whom God has sent His blessings: “Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle —they are with those whom Allah has blessed, including the prophets and the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous and excellent companions are they!” (4:69). Every Muslim in his ritual prayer asks God to let him join them: “Guide us on the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed.”

6. *Devotee*: Lady Mary has been described in the Qur’an as one of the devotees or obedient (*qānitīn*) servants of God.¹

7. *Lady Mary - a Prophetess*: Based on several verses of the Qur’an, it has been suggested that Lady Mary was a prophetess.² Can a woman bear the responsibility of a social position as big as delivering a message? What have the previous Revealed Books said about this matter and what are some Islamic proofs and sources? Because this topic is quite dated in our current society, it has not been considerably discussed. The Old Testament and New Testament identify women who have had the specifications of “prophethood.”³ *Deborah*, wife of *Lappidoth*, *Huldah* spouse

¹ Qānit has also been defined as preacher (*dā’ī*). See Majlesi, 1403, p. 207. Therefore, Lady Mary was one of those who preached people towards God. See Fahim Kermani, 1374, pp. 42 & 43.

² Fahim Kermani, 1374, p. 27.

³ *Ibid.* p. 15.

of *Shallum*, the four daughters of *Philip*¹ and *Hannah*² have been referred to as prophetesses.

Distinguishing between prophetic (*anbiyā'i*) revelation and legislative (*tashri'i*) revelation, Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli argues for the possibility of women receiving the former. In *Women in the Mirror of Glory and Beauty*, he states that the Prophetic revelation implies that an individual becomes aware of what is happening in the world and what is to come of it. He knows about his future and is aware of the people's future. This type of prophethood is a prerequisite for legislative prophethood and not the same.³ Ayatollah Mutahhari offers an explanation of the Qur'anic perspective of Lady Mary:

Her state reached the point where she used to worship at the altar and the angels would speak to her and converse with her in dialogue. Provisions were provided for her from the unseen. Her actions had reached an extremely high rank from a spiritual perspective that the prophet of her time was astonished by her. She was far ahead of Zecharias, who would always find himself bewildered and amazed when confronted with her.⁴

Mary: A Spiritual Role Model

In the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, Prophet Abraham, the wife of Pharaoh, and Lady Mary have become role models because of their specific characteristics. Allah introduced the Virgin Mary, with her specific traits, as an exemplar and exalted

¹ Gospel, Chapter 21, Verse 7-10.

² Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2, verse 36.

³ Jawadi Amuli, 1371, p. 143-144.

⁴ Motahhari, 1378, p. 119.

role model for believers including both men and women. One of her traits is her chastity. As mentioned before, this virtue has been mentioned by Lady Mary herself:

...وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا

...no human being has ever touched me, nor have I been unchaste? (19:20)

In the chapter, *The Forbidding*, God the Exalted emphasizes this matter:

وَمَرْيَمَ ابْنَتَ عِمْرَانَ الَّتِي أَحْصَنَتْ فَرْجَهَا...

And Mary, daughter of Imran, who guarded the chastity of her womb. (66:12)

Truthfulness of Lady Mary is the other quality mentioned in the Qur'an:

مَا الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ
وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ...

The Messiah, son of Mary, is but an apostle. Certainly [other] apostles have passed before him and his mother was a truthful one. (5:75)

Other traits include Mary as a 'worshipper' (*'ābidah*) because she spent most of her time in the temple worshipping God, and obedient (*qānit*).¹ Moreover, Mary has also been of 'those who bow [in worship]' (*rāki'in*) and of those who pray:

يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

¹ القانتين

‘O Mary, be obedient to your Lord and prostrate
and bow down with those who bow [in worship].’
(3:43)

A combination of these traits qualifies Lady Mary to be chosen by Allah, as seen in the term ‘chosen’ (*istafāk*). The same idea is mentioned in the Bible:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you and you are amongst the Holy women.”

... But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God... [Luke 1:26-30]

Mary’s Upbringing according to the Qur’an and the Bible

An individual’s nurture and upbringing is based on two conditions: genetic and acquired. Scholars and scientists differ as to whether inheritance or environment is more effective. Some believe that inherited factors are more important than environmental factors, such as August Kent and Herbert Spencer. On the hand, there are people who believe that environmental factors are more important, such as Stewart Mill and John Locke who believe that many of the intellectual and behavioral characteristics develop and flourish in the environment. The reality is that both groups have actually taken the path of two

extremes. Living beings are influenced by both environment and inheritance.¹

There are five general factors that bear on one's upbringing: 1) the instructor, 2) the individual, 3) environment, 4) inheritance and 5) the spiritual and supernatural causes. For Lady Mary, the instructor was Prophet Zechariah (a) who was given this task by Allah (swt).

The second factor is Lady Mary herself who was a worshipper, always prostrating, bowing, and supplicating. Every opportunity she found at the temple was spent in self-building and acts of worship. She was virtuous, chaste, and far from Satan as Lady Mary's mother had asked for when she prayed to God:

And when she bore her, she said, 'My Lord, I have borne a female [child]' —and God knew better what she had borne — 'and the male is not like the female. I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Your care against [the evil of] the outcast Satan.' (3:36)

The third factor is the environment. Lady Mary was definitely influenced by a healthy environment. She grew up in the temple, a place where people would come to pray to God.

The fourth factor is inheritance and genetics. As stated in the Qur'an, Lady Mary was from the family of 'Imran and in His book, Allah has 'chosen' the *Family of 'Imran* where He says:

Indeed Allah chose Adam and Noah and the progeny of Abraham and the progeny of 'Imran above all the nations. (3:33)

¹ Hojjati, 1370, p. 124.

Because 'Imran is of the Family of Abraham, Allah the Exalted could have simply used *Family of Abraham* and not have mentioned *Family of Imran* in the verse. However, due to the virtue of that family (which were no more than three individuals: the mother of Mary, Lady Mary herself, and Jesus), Allah the Exalted separately spoke of the *Family of Imran* and included them amongst the chosen and dignified. For this reason, in terms of inheritance and genetics, the originality of Mary's lineage and her purity is approved by the Qur'an.

The fifth factor is the spiritual and supernatural causes. With regards to Mary's nobility and spiritual virtues, it is enough to say that in her perfection she rose above the Prophet of her time (Zechariah). This was to the point that every time Zechariah visited her in the Temple, he would see heavenly provisions at Lady Mary's disposal.

Thus, this good upbringing and proper and complete growth was gathered in Lady Mary and one can say her being chosen was both genetic and acquired. In the Gospel she is only known to be an ordinary person who so happened to be chosen for the birth of Jesus Christ.

According to Islamic narrations, Mary the daughter of 'Imran was of the lineage of *Aaron* and *Levi*, but according to Christian narrations she was not of the lineage of *Levi*; rather, her ancestry reached King David. Her mother's name was '*Hannah*' or '*Hana*' whose sister was *Elizabeth*, the wife of Prophet *Zecharias*. According to the Qur'an, 'Imran's wife had made vow to dedicate her child to serving at the Temple. Even though 'Imran's child was a female, they allowed her to worship at the Temple. Hannah named her child *Mary*, meaning 'the worshipper,' and her uncle *Zechariah* was to convince the priests to allow Mary to live in Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

According to biblical sources, Mary was an ordinary girl who would go to *Heichal* (a place of worship) in Jerusalem only on

Jewish holidays. In the Gospel there is no sign of Mary being 'chosen' and 'distinguished' until the point in time where God spoke to her. According to Christian belief, the basis for why Mary was chosen as the one to give birth to Jesus Christ was simply a decision made by God based on His wisdom.

According to the Qur'an (3:44), the temple priests and the Israelite scholars had a dispute over who should be given Mary's guardianship and custody. They made a draw by throwing their pens into the water. All of the pens sunk into water and only Zechariah's pen stayed afloat. Thus, Zechariah obtained the custody of Mary and built her a room atop the temple; every few days, using a ladder, he would go up to her room and would take essentials for her. Zechariah would also witness her nobility when he visited her:

...Whenever Zechariah visited her in the sanctuary, he would find provisions with her. He said, 'O Mary, from where does this come for you?' She said, 'It comes from Allah. Allah provides whomever He wishes without any reckoning. (3:37)

Of course when exploring the great status of Mary, we must not forget her mother's important role. Even though the growth and nurturing of Mary were in the hands of Zechariah, this was still at the final stages of her rearing. Mary's mother had the worthiness to give birth to a mother of a prophet and she had great insight which made her decide to send her daughter to the temple. The most important point regarding Mary's mother is how God accepted her daughter in the best possible way:

Thereupon her Lord accepted her with a gracious acceptance, and made her grow up in a worthy fashion, and He charged Zechariah with her care... (3:37)

Allah (swt) gave this lady many gifts and blessings and she was capable of safeguarding them. Allah (swt) chooses people for His missions like being role models for people based on His wisdom: “Allah knows best where to place His apostleship” (6:124). And Mary was an example of this. We can say that even though Mary was chosen based on her family background, her formation in the womb of her mother and her superb upbringing by her mother, she continued to improve under the guardianship of Zechariah in her nurture and growth. Of course, as mentioned before, her true guardian was Allah.

Mary’s extraordinary acts

The virtue and greatness of Mary is made clear in the Qur’an. However, throughout time, Qur’anic commentators have had two opinions. Some Mu‘tazilites like Zamakhshari in his *Al-Kashshāf* have suggested that Lady Mary on her own was not able to witness and speak with angels. It was a miracle of Zechariah and Jesus and a sign of their greatness that she could have such experiences. They have suggested that all extraordinary things that happened to Mary were either of Zecharias’ miracles or of the early miracles of Jesus. This is called *irhāṣ* (auspice). It is similar to the series of extraordinary events that will take place before the Day of Judgment (referred to as Signs of the Hour). Before the appointment or birth of a prophet, a series of extraordinary events usually take place.

Conversely, people like Qurtabi, a famous Sunni exegete, believe Mary to be a prophet. Their reason behind this belief is because angels would often appear to her and make her aware of Divine Revelations. Through those revelations they would announce her purity and excellence and give her the glad tiding of becoming a mother to a prophet. Since Mary would receive revelations from the angels and could speak to them and the angels approached and spoke to her, she must be a prophet.

Shi'a scholars are of the belief that the status and greatness of Lady Mary has to do with herself and not just because of Zechariah or Jesus. Those extraordinary acts were not miracles of Zechariah or Jesus. They argue for both positions from the Qur'an's exoteric meaning. According to the Qur'anic passages, all the virtues and extraordinary acts of Mary belonged to herself. The angels spoke to her and appeared to her. The Qur'an states:

And he appeared to her as a well-proportioned human. She said, 'I seek the protection of the All-beneficent from you, should you be Godwary!' (19:17 & 18)

At the same time, Shi'a scholars normally hold that Mary was not a messenger and had not received the legislative revelation. It should be noted that Qurtabi's idea that Lady Mary was a prophetess may be accepted, but if he meant that she was a messenger, this is incorrect as described earlier.

The reason for differences of opinion between the Qur'an and the Gospels

As mentioned, in regards to Lady Mary and Jesus and many other issues, there are differences between the Qur'an and the Gospels. The Qur'an itself states this notion:

Indeed this Qur'an recounts to the Children of Israel most of what they differ about. (27:76)

After relating the story of Mary and the miracle of Jesus, the Qur'an states the following in another section:

That is Jesus, son of Mary, a Word of the Real concerning whom they are in doubt. (19:34)

According to Professor Michelle Dosch, professor of History of Religions, in the various Gospels, on one account Lady Mary's name appears five times; and on another, nineteen times. Also, as

mentioned earlier, Mary was portrayed only as an ordinary and average girl who so happened to be the mother of a prophet. In the Gospel, both her early childhood and final stage of her life are unknown. However, in the Holy Qur'an not only is a chapter (*Mary*) named after her, but her name has also been mentioned thirty-four times with great titles attributed to her.

Conclusion

In order to provide a role model, the Holy Qur'an has used various individuals so that people can use these good exemplars as templates for themselves. Amongst them is Lady Mary, a reliable example for both women and men. Lady Mary qualifies for an exceptional ideal because of her fine ancestry and her proper upbringing in a healthy environment. Having teachers such as her mother and Zechariah, and considering her abilities and her status before God as one who was deserving of the heavenly provisions sent for her, led to her to become a fine role model.

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Imamate and Wilayah¹

Part I

Mohammad Ali Shomali²

ABSTRACT: Imamah, the concept of the universal administrator of the Islamic Nation, is one of the five principles of Shi'i Islam. Although nearly all Muslim theologians agree on the necessity of Imamah, there are different views with respect to its significance, the leader's role and the characteristics that qualify him to be one. As Prophet Muhammad's functions were to teach Islam, judge and rule, the Shi'a hold that a successor to him must also continue his functions with the exception that the Imams did not receive revelation and therefore they taught the same message which was revealed to the Prophet and they gained their religious knowledge through the Prophet. An Imam must have comprehensive knowledge, piety and leadership. On the other hand, Sunnis believe that political leadership suffices as a distinguishing quality of a leader. In this article, the importance of Imamah in Shi'i Islam will be discussed. In doing so, narrations of the Prophet regarding the necessity of simultaneously holding on to the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt will be presented using both Sunni and Shi'a sources.

¹ This paper is based on the first three lectures of a series of 17 lectures delivered by Dr Mohammad Ali Shomali in summer 2004 in Qum.

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Nearly all Muslims, both Sunni and Shi'a, believe in Imamate, although there are some exceptions, such as the Khawārij. However, Sunnis and Shi'as differ on this subject in three ways: 1) the significance and extent of Imamate, 2) the role of the Imam, and 3) the way the Imam is selected. In principle, nearly all Muslims believe in Imamate and various versions of the same narration (hadith) by Prophet Muhammad (s) indicate so:

Whoever dies while he does not know the Imam of his age, he dies a death of the Age of Ignorance.¹

A person who does not know the Imam of his age is likened to a person who died before Islam, or more specifically, the Age of Ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*). It is noteworthy to mention that Islam does not call it 'the Age of Disbelief (*Kufr*).' It is 'the Age of Ignorance' because at that time people had not acted and believed rationally. If they had chosen disbelief rationally, that is, if, at least, they had bothered to study and inquire about the truth and then finally for some reason they had found disbelief to be more reasonable or had not been able to find the truth in faith this would not have been criticized that much. But their disbelief was groundless. In any case, the saying "Whoever dies while he does not know the imam of his age" indicates the necessity of an Imam and the responsibility Muslims carry to identify, know, and believe in him. If not, he is categorized with those who died before Islam. Both Sunnis and Shi'a narrate another version of the same hadith:

Whoever dies without an Imam, he is like someone who died in the Age of Ignorance.¹

¹ 'Allamah Majlisi in *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, p. 368 recognizes this hadith as *mutawātir* for both Sunni and Shi'a. This means that this hadith has been so frequently mentioned in every generation of the narrators of hadith that leaves no chance for anyone to question its authenticity.

So instead of “without knowing his Imam,” used in the previous version, this hadith uses “without an Imam,” though both hold the same meaning. Because in every age there is an Imam and it is the people’s responsibility to identify and know him. So in reality there is no generation without an Imam. Therefore, “without an Imam” means “without knowing the Imam.” Another version available in Sunni sources indicates the same:

Whoever dies while he has not paid allegiance to the Imam of the age is like someone who died in the Age of Ignorance.

Thus, *having* an Imam or even *knowing* an Imam is not enough; one must also pay allegiance to and follow him. Imamate is like the spirit of Islam and someone whose faith lacks this spirit is likened to a person who lived and died in the pre-Islamic era.

The Importance of Imamate

Knowing the Imam of your age is a dynamic and an ongoing process. You can believe in God and the Prophet and this can be kept for generations without any change, but in the case of Imamate, every generation must discover the Imam of his own age and what he actually wants from him in that particular age. There were people who believed in Imam Ali (a) but had difficulties during the time of Imam Hasan (a) and did not follow him. It was not enough to believe in Imam Ali (a) unless they died during his

¹ For example, see *Al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 372, where Imam Baqir (a) is quoted as saying:

عَنْ فَضَيْلِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ أَبَا جَعْفَرٍ ع يَقُولُ مَنْ مَاتَ وَ لَيْسَ لَهُ إِمَامٌ فَمِيتُهُ
مِيتَةُ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ وَ مَنْ مَاتَ وَ هُوَ عَارِفٌ لِإِمَامِهِ لَمْ يَضُرَّهُ تَقَدُّمُ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ أَوْ تَأَخُّرُ وَ
مَنْ مَاتَ وَ هُوَ عَارِفٌ لِإِمَامِهِ كَانَ كَمَنْ هُوَ مَعَ الْقَائِمِ فِي فَسْطَاطِهِ.

Elsewhere (*ibid.* p. 376) he quotes the Prophet’s from Imam Sadiq (a):

ابْتَدَأْنَا أَبُو عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع يَوْمًا وَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص مَنْ مَاتَ وَ لَيْسَ عَلَيْهِ إِمَامٌ
فَمِيتُهُ مِيتَةُ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ فَقُلْتُ قَالَ ذَلِكَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص فَقَالَ إِي وَ اللَّهُ قَدْ قَالَ قُلْتُ فُكُلُ
مَنْ مَاتَ وَ لَيْسَ لَهُ إِمَامٌ فَمِيتُهُ مِيتَةُ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ قَالَ نَعَمْ.

time. But when Allah gave them a chance to live after Imam Ali (a), their responsibility was to find out the Imam of their own age and then follow him. There were some Shi'a who believed in Imam Ali (a), Imam Hasan (a), Imam Husayn (a) and Imam Sajjad (a), but they failed to believe in Imam Baqir (a). Some believed in all six Imams, but not in the seventh, Imam Musa al-Kazim (a). There were even Wāqifids who believed in the 7th Imam but not the 8th. So every person, in addition to all other beliefs, and in addition to the truth laid down by the Prophet, must find the Imam of his own age. In this regards the example of a believers is like a compass that shows all the time the direction or the qiblah. The pointer must be able to adjust itself at any time and not get stuck with one condition or location. A true Shi'a is the one that is directed towards the Imam of his age no matter which time period or geographical place he lives in.

The Shi'a attach more significance to Imamate than their fellow Muslims to the extent that they have taken it as one of the five principles of their faith, along with unity of God, divine justice, Prophethood, and resurrection. These five have been historically chosen by Shi'a scholars, as five principles that can identify their faith. The reason for this choice is that there have been controversies among Muslim theologians on issues such as faith (*imān*), free-will and predestination, successorship to the Prophet and Imamate. This gave each denomination the task of finding and defining their identity. Each school of Islam tried to find some important elements in their understanding of Islam; whoever believes in them can be considered as a full believer in their school of thought. Shi'a scholars assert that whoever believes in the abovementioned five principles is considered a Shi'a and that someone who merely believes just in some of these five principles is not a true Shi'a.

Similar to the Shi'ites, the Mu'tazilites too adhere to five principles as mentioned in their famous book *al-Uṣūl al Khamsah* by Qādi 'Abd al-Jabbār. Their principles consisted of unity of God, divine

justice, promise and threat,¹ enjoining good and forbidding evil² and a status between two statuses.³ In any case, in order to be considered a Mu'tazilite, one must believe in these five principles.

Literal and Technical Meaning of Imamate

Literal meaning: Imam means 'leader' in a broad sense; a leader may be governor of a state or the head of a mosque or leader of a community. In this sense, even a bad leader like Pharaoh or Yazid is also called 'Imam.' For example, the Qur'an says, "We made them imams, guiding by Our command, and We revealed to them the performance of good deeds, the maintenance of prayers, and the giving of zakat, and they used to worship Us" (21:73). This is a case where good leadership takes place; they guide others religiously by Allah's command. On the other hand, the Qur'an describes those who invite others towards hell: "We made them leaders who invite to the Fire, and on the Day of Resurrection they will not receive any help" (28:41).

At any rate, whether an imam is a good or corrupt person, an imam is nonetheless an important person; everyone on the Day of Judgment will be resurrected with and identified by the name of his or her imam (instead of calling us by our individual names)

¹ The principle of promise and threat indicates that Allah (swt) keeps His promises of rewarding good people and punishing criminals.

² Re 'enjoining good and forbidding evil', they had the idea that there are stages: first, you should like good and dislike evil in your heart; second, you must tell the wrongdoer to discontinue sinning and perform his duties; third, if it does not work, steps are to be taken to discontinue the sin (i.e. if your child does not pray, you must take practical measures to make sure he does so). If needed practical measure including usage of force must be taken. To stop a crime or to defend one's honour one may need to get involved in resistance and fight (*jihād*), and be prepared for sacrificing one's life.

³ There has been some controversy among Muslims about those who have committed a great sin. Some consider them as Muslims; others consider them to be disbelievers (*kuffār*). The Mu'tazilites believe they are in between Islam and disbelief.

regardless of his moral standing: “Remember the day that we call every group of people with their Imam” (17:71). Even Pharaoh, as said in the Qur’an, will be the leader of his people on the Day of Judgment, though he will lead them towards hell (11:98). Thus, leadership in this world is reflected in the next world. A good Imam will take his people towards heaven, while a corrupt one will lead them to punishment.

Technical meaning: When we say Imamate is one of our principles of faith – that whoever dies not knowing his imam will die the death of the Age of Ignorance – we do not mean an Imam is merely someone who leads the society regardless of his moral status. Here, we have a technical sense. Before describing the technical meaning of the term *Imam*, it is necessary to present the roles of the Prophet Muhammad (s) in order to have a background for the concept of Imamate.

The functions of the Prophet (s)

1. *A Messenger:* All Muslims agree that one of the Prophet’s tasks was deliverance of the message. He was to deliver the revelation, which was about practical laws, beliefs, and morals. There is no doubt among Muslims that this is the role of the Prophet protected by Allah so that the message can truly and purely reach the people. The content delivered from Allah to the people was without the slightest alteration. He presented the divine message with utmost accuracy and care. He did not and could not add something as small as a letter to the Qur’an. It has to be noted that although all Muslims unanimously agree that he was infallible, i.e. protected from mistakes and sin, there different views with regards to when one can be infallible. The Shi’a believe that all Prophets were infallible before and after their Prophethood. They had comprehensive infallibility (*‘ismah*). On the other hand, some non-Shi’a theologians believe in the Prophet’s infallibility in relation to delivering Allah’s message, but at the same time they believe that the Prophets may have

committed sins and mistakes in their personal life or before they had become Prophets.

2. *A Judge*: According to Islam, a legitimate judge receives his authority from God; otherwise no one can impose his verdicts on people since they are all created by God to be free. No one can impose something on a free person without being given authority by Allah (swt). As free people, I have no authority upon you, or you upon me. But a judge has authority. The source of authority is from Allah. Of course, it is possible that opposing parties may agree on having an arbitration (*qazi takim*). Here the authority of the judge comes from the both parties and he has no authority to settle the issue without them wanting in the first place to do so. For example, after Prophet David fulfilled his responsibilities and passed several trials, Allah told him:

‘O David! Indeed We have made you a vicegerent on the earth. So judge between people with justice, and do not follow desire, or it will lead you astray from the way of God. Indeed those who stray from the way of God —there is a severe punishment for them because of their forgetting the Day of Reckoning.’ (38:26)

In the chapter *al-Nisa* 65, we read: “But no, by your Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission.” Thus, a believer must accept anything the Prophet decrees.

3. *A leader of society, a head of state*: The Prophet ruled the Islamic society. He did not encourage assembling in a mosque for prayers and recitations and let someone like Abu Sufyan rule.¹

¹ Abu Sufyan was the leading man of the Quraysh in Mecca and staunch opponent of Prophet Muhammad (s).

The Prophet exercised political leadership after he arrived in Medina.

Shi'a and Sunni views on the qualifications of an Imam

The three above tasks of the Prophet, in that he acted as 1) a messenger, 2) a judge, and 3) a political leader, should be examined in order to decide who is qualified enough to be his successor. It is important to note that not all Prophets were political leaders. The first task, being a messenger, was shared by all of them. Some held the second and third position as well. This raises the question as to whether or not an Imam should inherit the last Prophet in all three tasks or only in political leadership. Normally Sunni theologians believe that only the third and perhaps the second tasks must be continued after the Prophet by his successors or the caliphs. This justifies the necessity of an Imam. They also hold that it is left to the people to choose who the successor of the Prophet will be. The candidate does not need to be the most knowledgeable person or even very knowledgeable about Islam because he does not have the task of teaching Islam. Neither does he need to be infallible nor the most pious member of the society. According to many of them, even if a prince kills his father and takes over his position he must still be obeyed in the same way that his father used to be obeyed.

The Shi'a believe in the necessity of a political leader after the Prophet as well as its continuance, although this task does not suffice. The Prophet received the full package of Islam. Allah revealed to him all that was necessary, the final message, with no further revelation. But the Prophet could not deliver Islam in its completion with all details to the people in a period of 23 years. Not only the time was not enough, but also the people were not prepared to be given all details. There were many aspects that they could not understand, because they had no clue about them and specific state of affairs did not yet arise at that time to make them even think about them, let alone inquire about them.

Thus, the Prophet taught Imam Ali everything about Islam and then the Imamate was transmitted to his sons Imam Hasan and Imam Husain, and their descendants, until it reached the 12th Imam, Imam Mahdi (aj). This knowledge was not the conceptual or theoretical knowledge a student acquires at school. This was a knowledge given by Allah (swt) with a special provision. The Prophet said, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate. Whoever wants to access this knowledge must enter this city through its gate." Imam Ali said, "The Prophet opened for me a gate of knowledge, from which 1000 further gates were opened and then from each of them another thousand gates were opened for me." This is not quantitative knowledge. It covered everything needed and was given at once. Islam is to be properly taught by an Imam without having to receive any further revelation. Therefore, in addition to acting as a political leader, the Imam must be the most knowledgeable person in the society. This knowledge is given immediately and directly by Allah (swt) through the Prophet without having been schooled. It is knowledge and wisdom that have been placed in the heart and mind of the person.

Political leadership is not the main task. Indeed, most of Imams could not exercise their political leadership as they were imprisoned or under house arrest. Nonetheless, they were still Imams. What makes them an Imam is their duty of flawlessly delivering the true message of the Prophet.

The Prophet's time was an era filled with conflicts, when Muslims bore oppression trying to defend themselves and Islam; the message was not taught in the comfort of an academic institute. Moreover, the people were not prepared enough. Many embraced Islam in the later years of Islam. Few embraced Islam in Mecca and out of those few some migrated to Ethiopia to escape the oppression. The educational level was still low as it was not very long after the Age of Ignorance. Illiteracy was rampant as the literate ranged from a total of ten to twenty people. Events that required an Islamic response did not yet

emerge because normally problems cannot be anticipated and the solutions offered before the problem actually occurs. It was a gradual process in which Muslims faced new challenges and civilizations. When it comes to practical rulings, the Qur'anic message is very general. For example, the Qur'an indicates that prayer is mandatory, but most of the details about prayer are not mentioned in the Qur'an. If practical matters were discussed in the Holy Book, it would be a rather large book, difficult for people to review and reflect on.

Thus, the Prophet delivered the message properly though he did not have the chance to fully deliver its details. So what must be done with respect to new issues that emerge gradually? Sunnis and Shi'as differ with regards to this. Sunnis believe that people must use their own views in the form of juristic preference (*istihsān*), deductive analogy (*qiyās*) and the like. Shi'as believe that such methods are not able to discover the religious rulings and, therefore, are not valid. One has to refer either to the Qur'an and Sunnah or to decisive judgement of reason. Therefore, the Shi'a first tried to preserve the Sunnah of the Prophet (s) by narrating and registering his hadith despite the ban made by the first three Caliphs on narrating and writing down the hadiths which continued up to the reign (99 to 101 A.H) of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, the Umayyad. Secondly, following the instructions given by the Prophet Muhammad (s), they referred to the Imams of his Household for guidance with respect to new or controversial issues. Thus, instead of being in contact with an infallible for a mere 23 years, the Shi'a enjoyed the access to the Infallibles for more than 300 years. When Imam Mahdi (aj) began his major occultation in 329 A.H., a total of 342 years was spent having access to the infallibles. Imams also trained some of their companions to act as jurists who could derive rulings from the principles given by the Prophet (a) and Imams (a). Thus, people were gradually trained to know what to do in the time of major occultation of the 12th Imam.

Having comprehensive knowledge is another aspect of Imamate that is not necessary according to Sunni understanding of Imamate. No one doubts that the first three caliphs were not the most knowledgeable people of their time. For example, ‘Umar ibn Khattāb, the second Caliph, on seventy occasions said: “If Ali were not there, ‘Umar would have been destroyed.”¹ It has also

¹ For a detailed list of Sunni sources, in which this saying is reported, see e.g. Sultan al-Wā‘izin Shirazi, *Peshawar Nights*, “Evidence Regarding Umar's Saying ‘Had Ali Not Been There, Umar Would Have Been Ruined.’” For example, he quotes from the great theologian, Ganji Shafi‘i, in Chapter 57, of his *Kifāyat al-Tālib Fi Manāqib Ali ibn Abi Tālib*, after narrating some authentic hadith, reports from Hudhaifah ibn Yamān that "One day ‘Umar met him and asked him, 'What was your condition when you awoke in the morning?' Hudhaifa said, 'I rose in the morning hating the Truth, liking *fitnah*, bearing witness to the thing unseen; learning by heart the uncreated, reciting salutations without being in the state of ritual purity, and knowing that, what is for me on the earth is not for Allah in the Sky.' ‘Umar was infuriated by these remarks and intended to punish Hudhaifah when Ali came in. He noticed the signs of rage on ‘Umar's face and asked why he was so angry. ‘Umar told him, and Ali said: 'There is nothing serious about this remark: what Hudhaifah said was correct. Truth means death, which he detests; *fitnah* means wealth and children, which he likes; and when he says he bears witness to what he has not seen, this means that he testifies to the oneness of Allah, death, the Day of Judgement, Paradise, Hell, the bridge over it named Sirāt, none of which he has seen. When he says he learns by heart what is uncreated, this refers to the Holy Qur‘an; when he says that he recites salutations without ablution, this refers to reciting salutations on the Prophet of Allah, which is permissible without ablution; when he says he has for himself on earth what is not for Allah in the sky, this refers to his wife, as He has no wife or children.' ‘Umar then said, ' ‘Umar would have been lost had Ali not arrived.'" Ganji Shafi‘i says that ‘Umar's statement is verified according to reports of most of the narrators of hadith. The author of *Manāqib* says that Caliph ‘Umar repeatedly said: "O Abu'l-Hasan! (Ali). I would not be a part of a community without you." He also said: "Women are unable to give birth to a child like Ali."

Muhammad Bin Talhah Shafi‘i in his *Matālibu's-Su‘ul* and Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi Hanafi in *Yanābiu‘ al-Mawaddah*, Chapter 14, narrating from Tirmidhi, record a detailed report from Ibn Abbas at the end of which he says, "The companions of the Prophet used to seek religious judgments from Ali, and they accepted his decisions. Thus, ‘Umar Bin Khattab said on various occasions, 'If it were not for Ali, ‘Umar would have been ruined.'" ...Even Ibn Hajar Makki in Chapter III of *Sawā‘iq Muhriqaah*, reporting from Ibn Sa‘d, quotes ‘Umar as

been reported that when Abu Bakr died, and people cried in his house, 'Umar asked them not to cry. As they continued to do so, 'Umar cautioned them against it, saying, "I will punish you because I have heard the Prophet say that the dead person will be punished on account of those who cry for him or her." 'Aishah, angered at Umar's misquotation, corrected and rephrased the hadith: the Prophet actually said that while the family of a deceased Jew was crying, the dead person was being punished, not *because* they were crying, but because of his own conduct. In reply to Aishah's clarification, 'Umar said, "If the women were not there, I would have been destroyed." Thus, they do not claim that the Caliphs were the most knowledgeable.

According to the Shi'a, delivering the message and having comprehensive knowledge are two traits that are prioritized in Imamate. Political leadership comes after the abovementioned two. Whether the Imam acts as a leader in society or not, he is the Imam. If the Imam is kept in prison all his life, or if he is in occultation, he is still the Imam. And because he is qualified to deliver the true message of Islam, has piety and *wilāyah* (which will be explained later) and it is only after having all of these requirements, that he is qualified to be a political leader. It is not because he is a political leader, he is the Imam; rather, because he is the Imam, he is a political leader. Why is he the Imam? Because he has the greatest knowledge and piety as well as *wilāyah*.

Before devling into the concept of *wilāyah*, we should study the status of the Household of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*) in Islam.¹

saying, "I seek Allah's help in deciding those difficult problems for which Abu-l-Hasan (Ali) is not available."

¹ Apart from a small group called Nawāsib (the plural form of *nāsibi*), all Muslims love the Ahl al-Bayt. However, there are two problems: Non-Shi'a love the Ahl al-Bayt, but they do not necessarily take Islam from them. Secondly, non-Shi'a believe that Ahl al-Bayt includes Imam Ali, Lady Fatimah, Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn, but they extend it to other relatives of the Prophet as well.

For this purpose, we will try first to define who they are and secondly to demonstrate their authority. It should be noted that Ahl al-Bayt are slightly different from the twelve Imams, as it includes Lady Fatima (a), the daughter of the Prophet. Thus, though this discussion is about Imamate, the term Ahl al-Bayt is used because it includes Lady Fatima (a).

The status of Ahl al-Bayt

Who are the Ahl al-Bayt? The Shi'a believe that the "Ahl al-Bayt" refers to the close relatives of the Prophet, namely Lady Fatima, Ali, and their children, Hasan and Husayn. Of course, according to the Qur'an and hadiths, their authority is extended to the succeeding Imams as well. Sunnis generally believe that all Muslim relatives of the Prophet are the Ahl al-Bayt. The children, wives, cousins, uncles, and aunts are included. The only exception they all have to accept is when a relative is a disbeliever (*kāfir*) as some of the Prophet's uncles were so.

There are different arguments for the Shi'a position. Before we refer to those arguments, we should bear in mind that the Shi'a position is the most cautious position and even if someone is in doubt about which position to hold, he can still follow the Shi'a position, because even non-Shi'as accept that Lady Fatima, Imam Ali, Imam Hasan, and Imam Husayn are included. So the burden of argument is on those who extend the scope of Ahl al-Bayt beyond that.

First - a rational argument – is that sometimes we can better understand the subject of a ruling (*hukm*) by looking at the predicate. Studying the predicate clarifies the subject. If the Ahl al-Bayt are those to whom we should appeal next to the Qur'an and if they will never separate from the Qur'an, it is easy to understand that those who fall under the title of Ahl al-Bayt must be special people. They have such a high status that can be found only in a very select group of the relatives of the Prophet (s). Everyone certainly excludes the unbelievers like Abu Lahab.

Then among those who were believers, who were those for whom the greatest knowledge of the Qur'an, perfect purity and immunity from going astray and conflicting the teachings of the Qur'an have been confirmed or even claimed? Is there anyone among the family of the Prophet for whom such a high position of infallibility is claimed other than Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn? Does anyone have any other candidates to put forward? No one can say that there were people other than these four who were infallible and will have always accompanied the Qur'an. Literally the expression of the Ahl al-Bayt may be very broad in its scope, but we are looking for people among the relatives of the Prophet (s) who can satisfy the criteria - that is, constantly accompanying the Qur'an and never act against it. Overall, they must always be a source of guidance for people. Who are they? Sunnis claim that no such person existed; other than the Prophet, they do not believe in anyone who was infallible. Even with respect to the Prophet (s), they generally limit his infallibility to delivering the message and not his personal life.

Second – there are hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad (s) which clarify the meaning of Ahl al-Bayt. In what follows, I will mention some hadiths narrated in major Sunni sources:

(1) Muslim narrates from 'Ayishah, *Umm al-Mu'minin*:

The Prophet went out wearing a black woolen cloak, when Hasan the son of Ali came to him, so the Prophet let Hasan come in with him under the cloak. Then Husayn came and he too entered. Then Fatimah came. She entered as well. Then Ali came. He also went under the cloak, such that the cloak covered the Prophet, Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn. Then the Prophet recited: 'God only desires to keep away impurity from you, O People

of the House! And to purify you a (thorough) purification' (33:33).¹

(2) Muslim also narrates from Sa'd b. Abi Waqqas that he was asked by Mu'awiyah why he refused to verbally abuse Ali. Sa'd replied:

I remember three sayings of the Prophet about Ali which caused me not to say anything bad about him. If I possessed even one of these qualities it would be better for me than red camels.² The first was that when the Prophet wanted to go to the war of Tabuk, he left Ali in Medina. Ali was very sad at not having the good fortune to join the army and fight for the sake of God. He went to the Prophet, saying, 'Do you leave me with children and women?' The Prophet replied, 'Are you not happy to be to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me?' Second I heard from the Prophet on the day of conquest of Khaybar: 'Certainly I will give the flag [of Islam] to a man that loves God and His Messenger and is loved by God and His Messenger.' We hoped to be given the flag, but the Prophet said: 'Call Ali for me!' Ali came while suffering from pain in his eyes. The Prophet gave him the flag and at his hands God granted us victory. Third when the verse of *Mubāhalah* was revealed the Prophet called Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn and said: 'My Lord! These are my household.'³

¹ *Sahih* of Muslim, Vol. 4, p. 1883, No. 2424. (Kitab Fada'il al-Sahabah, Bab Fada'il Ahlul Bayt, Sakhr serial no. 4450)

² Red camels were considered very valuable at the time.

³ *Sahih* of Muslim, Vol. 4, p. 1871, no. 2408. (Kitab Fada'il al-Sahabah, Sakhr serial No. 4420).

(3) Ahmad ibn Hanbal narrates from Anas ibn Malik that when the Verse of Purity (*tathir*) (33:33) was revealed, for six months the Prophet used to call at the house of Ali and Fatimah every morning on his way to the mosque for the Dawn Prayer and say:

Prayer, O People of the House! ‘God only desires to keep away impurity from you, O People of the House! And to purify you a (thorough) purification’ (33:33).¹

Thus, for six months after this verse was revealed, the Prophet applied ‘Ahl al-Bayt’ every day to Imam Ali and Lady Fatimah to establish among Muslims that these are the Ahl al-Bayt. This hadith leaves no space to doubt that at least that these people are the most obvious instances of the Ahl al-Bayt and they must certainly be followed.

(4) Zayd ibn Arqam was one of the companions of the Prophet. Many years after the death of the prophet people referred to him, pleading for narrations. He would reply, ‘I have become very old and have forgotten some of the Prophet’s sayings. So whatever I tell you accept it and whatever I do not tell you do not force me to tell you.’ What he clearly remembered was this:

Once the Prophet stood up to speak to us in a place between Mecca and Medina called Khumm. The Prophet praised Allah and began his sermon: ‘Oh people, know that I am a human being and soon a messenger from Allah (the Angel of Death) will call me and I will answer. Surely I am leaving among you two precious things: the first is the book of God, a guidance and light, so hold on to it. And the second is my household.’ He added three

¹ *Musnad* of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal, Sakhr serial no. 13231. See also *Sunan* of al-Tirmidhi, Sakhr serial no. 3130.

times, 'I ask you to remember Allah regarding the way in which you treat them.'

Then Husayn ibn Subrah said: One of the people who were there asked Zayd, 'Oh Zayd who are the household of the Prophet? Are his wives included?' Zayd replied, 'The wives of the Prophet are his relatives, but his household are those who cannot accept charity, unlike the wives who could accept it.' He was then asked, 'If the wives of the Prophet are not of the Ahl al-Bayt, who are they?' Zaid replied, 'The family of Ali. Aqil, Jafar, and Abbas.' Zayd was not a Shi'a and not a follower of the Ahl al-Bayt, but he knew to this extent that the wives are excluded, though he thought that all cousins of the Prophet are included. It has to be noted that although the cousins of the Prophet (s) are considered as *sayyid* (descendants of Hāshim) and therefore certain rulings apply to them, there are certain rulings that apply only to the children of the Prophet Muhammad (s) through his daughter, Lady Fatimah. Zayd knew that the wives are excluded, but he had this confusion.

In another version of this hadith, Zayd argues for the fact that the wives are not included among the Ahl al-Bayt by saying:

I swear by God, a wife lives with her husband for a period of time and then she may get divorced and return to her own father and family.

In this way, Zayd wanted to suggest that someone's wife is considered as the household of her own parents. They may go back to their home. The household of the Prophet are only those who are from the same root and origin as the Prophet and those who are prohibited to take charity after the Prophet.

There are also traditions about the meaning of *Qurbā* (near ones) which has been mentioned several times in the Qur'an. For example, according to the verse 42:23, the Prophet did not ask any payment in return for his teachings from the people. He only wanted the people to love his Qurbā for their own benefit. So who

are the Qurbā? Zamakhshari, a great Sunni scholar and exegete of the Qur'an, says that when this verse was revealed, the Prophet was asked who was meant by this verse, and to whom all have to be respectful. The Prophet replied: "Ali, Fatimah, and their two sons."¹

The scientific authority of the Ahl al-Bayt? The authority of the Ahl al-Bayt can be studied in two levels. The first regards the *permissibility* of referring to Ahl al-Bayt in order to understand Islam. Are the Ahl al-Bayt a reliable source? In other words, were they sound proofs (*hujjah*) for understanding Islam? The second raises the argument as to whether it is *necessary* to refer to the Ahl al-Bayt.

1) *Permissibility of referring to the Ahl al-Bayt:* According to the Sunni school of thought, all the companions of the Prophet were proofs as they quoted him to have said, "My companions are like stars; whomsoever you follow, you will be guided." Of course, this raises a myriad of questions because it is believed that whoever was a companion of the Prophet must have been deeply knowledgeable and pure-hearted enough to be reliable. Thus, both knowledge and piety must be guaranteed for all companions of the Prophet.

Moreover, Sunni scholars normally define the term *companion* (*sahābi*) quite broadly: a companion is he who met the Prophet at least once while believing in him. In other words, if someone met the Prophet for five minutes or half an hour while having faith in him, he became a companion. Thus, all Muslims who lived in Medina, traveled to Medina, performed the pilgrimage (*hajj*) or met the Prophet by chance were his companions. Furthermore, those hypocrites who lived in Medina and declared their submission to Islam while the Qur'an portrayed the disbelief they harbored in their hearts also fall under the definition of companion. With such a broad definition, how can one believe that whoever met the Prophet

¹ *Al-Kashshaf* by Zamakhshari, Commentary on the verse 42:23, Vol. 4, p. 220.

and declared his submission be a companion? It is necessary to have guidelines that discern true companions from the immoral ones.

According to the Shi‘a scholars, a companion of the Prophet is someone who believed in the Prophet and his message; one who has met him and lived with him for a considerable period of time (not a mere hour or two). *Sahābi* in Arabic refers to a relation that has endured over a reasonably long period of time. First, it is irrational to believe that a strong relationship has occurred between a person and the Prophet within a mere hour. The development of true friendship naturally occurs over a longer period of time. Second, it is not guaranteed that all people who lived with the Prophet and labeled themselves Muslims were truly Muslims who believed in the Prophet, as verified in the Qur’an. Some troubled the Prophet i.e. building a mosque with the purpose of harming Islam (*masjid dirār*) and attempting to assassinate him. It is understandable that there were true companions who fully submitted to Islam and loved the Prophet, but it does not guarantee that whoever lived with the Prophet and declared Islam is a reliable person. It is evident that many conflicts arose amongst the companions after the demise of Prophet. On occasion, the caliphs punished some companions for the good and wrong committed. The companions accused each other and even killed one another. Hence, not all companions were reliable. Nonetheless, since Sunnis believed that all the companions were reliable, sound, and just, they cannot dispute the authority of the Ahl al-Bayt. They must accept both in theory and practice that the Ahl al-Bayt were reliable sources as well. If they dispute their authority in practice, they must at least accept it in theory.

2) *Necessity of referring to the Ahl al-Bayt*: The Ahl al-Bayt cannot be compared with other companions of the Prophet. Imam Ali was not like tens of other companions. It is the duty of every Muslim to refer to the Ahl al-Bayt. It is not merely because these people were close to the Prophet, or were members of his household who lived with him, though these are true. It is

because we have very clear instructions from the Prophet asking us to refer to them. And this is why it is an important aspect of Imamate.

It is not very helpful in this day and age to dispute with our Sunni brothers about who was supposed to be the first caliph, though it is an important historical discussion. Even more important is discussing who the most legitimate successor in presenting Islam was. Even if we suppose that Abu Bakr was rightfully the first caliph and suppose that he was legitimately given this power, what still needs investigation is how to properly understand Islam in our day. And this is why we expect our Sunni brothers, those who believe in Abu Bakr as the legitimate successor, to refer to the Ahl al-Bayt. Today we all must refer to the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt in order to have a sound understanding of Islam.

Hadiths that indicate the authority of the Ahl al-Bayt

Hadith of Thaqalayn: The famous narration of the Prophet, the Hadith of Thaqalayn, is narrated in different versions by all Islamic schools of thought with regards to the Ahl al-Bayt. The Prophet may have mentioned it on different occasions due to its importance and to ensure that many can hear it:

O People, I leave among you two precious things:
the book of God and my household. As long as
you hold on to them, you will not go astray.

In another version, the Prophet ordered a similar command:

I leave among you two precious things. If you
hold on to them, you will not go astray after me:
the book of God, which is like a rope extended
between the heaven and the earth, and my
household. These two will not separate from each
other until they reach me near the fountain of

Kawthar on the Day of Judgment. Be alert with
how you treat them after me.¹

In the mid-1900s, Grand Ayatollah Borujerdi and the Shaykh of al-Azhar University, Mahmud Shaltut, established a Shi'a-Sunni journal for *Dār al-Taghrib Bayn al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyyh* called *Risālat al-Islam* published in Cairo. In the first issue of this journal, an article by a Sunni scholar was published in which the author had used the hadith "I left you the *Thaqalayn*: the book of God and my *sunnah*" instead of '*Itrati*, my progeny, which is narrated by all Muslims. Upon reading the article, Ayatollah Borujerdi asked a scholar in Qum to collect all the Sunni references for "the Book of God and my progeny." As a result, a booklet containing 200 Sunni sources was produced. Ayatollah Borujerdi then sent this to the scholars at the al-Azhar in Cairo who published it. Thus, the hadith of *Thaqalayn* is an indisputable and well-established hadith. Of course, even if we accept the version "the book of God and my *Sunnah*" which is narrated by only a few Sunni scholars, it will not cause any problem, because at best it can be taken equal to the version "the book of God and my household" and once the Prophet (s) never speaks in vain or in a contradictory way, the overall result would be that we need to refer to the book of God and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet in the way the household of the Prophet (s) have reported us. If the Prophet in many cases said "*Kitāb Allah wa 'Itrati*" and in some cases "*Kitāb Allah wa Sunnati*" *kitab Allah* is the same in both hadiths, so *sunnah* and '*Itra* of the Prophet must be harmonious too. Thus, to be able to understand the *Sunnah* you must refer to the Ahl al-Bayt. One cannot believe in *sunnah* alone. You need to refer to the Ahl al-Bayt to find the true *sunnah*. In any case, the following points can be inferred from the hadith of *thaqalayn*:

¹ These hadiths are mentioned in many Sunni sources. For example, see *Sahih* of Muslim, vol. 8, p. 25, number 2408, *Musnad*, No. 10720, *Sunan* of Dārimi, vol. 2, p. 432, *Sahih* of Tirmidhi, vol. 5, p. 6432, No. 3788. It is also found in other books, such as *Usd al-Ghābah* (the Lions of the Forest) on the biographies of the Companions of the Prophet, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā* and *Kanz al-'Ummāl*.

1. The book of Allah and the Ahl al-Bayt must be available until the end of this world. The Qur'an will always be available; thus, the Ahl al-Bayt must also continue. This is so because the Prophet said that if people appeal to *both*, they will never go astray until they meet him near the fountain of Kawthar. Thus, if the book of Allah or the Ahl al-Bayt (God forbid) is missing, how can we refer to them? Both must be available, not just one.

2. No one can say the book of God is enough by itself. When the Prophet wanted to dictate something while in his deathbed, he asked for something to write with and gave his reason ("So that you will not go astray"). The second caliph, Umar, was present, and according to Sunni sources, he said that the Prophet is not feeling well and does not have full control of what he is saying. He then said, "The book of Allah is sufficient," meaning that we do not need the instruction of the Prophet (s). However, according to the Qur'an itself, there must be someone as a teacher of the Qur'an. The Prophet (s) was the first one to teach the Qur'an to people and then this task was handed over to the Ahl al-Bayt and therefore the Prophet asked everyone to hold onto both the Qur'an and the Ahl al-Bayt. The Ahl al-Bayt must be there to interpret the Qur'an because among the seventy-three sects (which emerged after the demise of the Prophet) exist various debates on the interpretation of the Qur'an. For example, in a dispute about the visibility of God, the Ash'arites believed it is possible to see God with the physical eye.¹ And they argued from the verse of the Qur'an which states, "Some faces will be fresh on that day, looking at their Lord" (75:22). Muslims such as the Shi'a and Mu'tazilites who disagree with the Ash'arites argued from the Qur'an as well. Thus, there must be an interpreter of the Qur'an along with the Qur'an that can speak on behalf of the Qur'an to people.

¹ Ash'arites: followers of a theology founded by Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari in the mid-900s

3. The Ahl al-Bayt must be infallible. The Prophet's mention of the Ahl al-Bayt and the Qur'an as two things that will never separate from each other proves their infallibility. If the Ahl al-Bayt made mistakes, that would mean they are separate from the Qur'an. People cannot simultaneously appeal to a perfect Qur'an and imperfect leaders. Is it wise of the Prophet to ask us to unconditionally follow those who may make mistakes and sin? The Ahl al-Bayt will never go astray; this is why we can appeal to them. Moreover, we can be saved by following them. They must always be in line with the Qur'an, and since the Qur'an is the constant truth, the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt must also be true. Also, since the Qur'an is preserved by Allah until the end of the world, Ahl al-Bayt must have also been given a sort of continuity by Allah. This is why we believe that there must be a living member of the Ahl al-Bayt on this earth.

It should be noted that Sunnis accept whatever is there from the Ahl al-Bayt both in theory and practice, or at least in theory. Today, progress can be seen. For example, there are new rulings (*fatwās*) by our Sunni brothers about hajj, whether it is necessary to throw the stones only in the morning or it can be in the afternoon. They had the view that it must be in the morning, and because it caused problems, they recently said it can be done in the afternoon according to the narration of Imam Baqir (a). So they have accepted a Shi'a fatwa in this regard. There is no theoretical problem.

Hadith of *Safinah*: In a well-known hadith narrated by both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad (s) has likened his household to the ship, or *safinah*, of Prophet Noah:

Be aware that surely the parable of my household among you is like the ship of Noah. Whoever embarked on the ship of Noah was saved, and however refused so was drowned.

This hadith directly refers to being spiritually guided and saved versus being drowned. According to the Qur'an, people have two lives: one is the physical life which we can examine through medical tests; the other is spiritual life i.e. the life of guidance and faith. The Prophets and their followers, such as the Imams and spiritual scholars, invite people to take care of their second life, not only the first one. The Qur'an says:

O you who have faith! Answer God and the
Apostle when he summons you to that which will
give you life... (8:24)

We believe that faith is a life for us, and if we lose it, we die spiritually, though we may be physically alive, and this causes to be spiritually deaf, dumb, and blind, leaving our hearts numb:

Deaf, dumb, and blind, they will not come back.
(2:18)

According to the hadith of safinah, whoever refuses to appeal to the Ahl al-Bayt is spiritually destroyed. It is hopeless to be alive while having no leader, no direction in life.

There is another hadith in some Sunni sources like *Al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqah* by Ibn Hajar, in which after the Prophet likened his household to the ship of Noah, he likened them to the gate of Hittah as well.¹ This was the gate that the Israelites were asked by God to enter:

¹ For a Shi'a source, one may refer to *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 23, p. 105, where 'Allamah Majlisi cites the following hadith from the *Bishārat al-Mustafā*:

عَنْ رَافِعِ مَوْلَى أَبِي ذَرٍّ قَالَ رَأَيْتُ أَبَا ذَرٍّ رَجَمَهُ اللَّهُ أَخَذَ بِحَلْفَةِ بَابِ الْكَعْبَةِ وَهُوَ يَقُولُ
مَنْ عَرَفَنِي فَقَدْ عَرَفَنِي أَنَا جُنْدَبُ الْغِفَارِيِّ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَعْرِفَنِي فَأَنَا أَبُو ذَرٍّ الْغِفَارِيُّ
سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ مَنْ قَاتَلَنِي فِي الْأُولَى وَ قَاتَلَ أَهْلَ بَيْتِي فِي الثَّانِيَةِ حَشَرَهُ
اللَّهُ فِي النَّارِ مَعَ الدَّجَالِ إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي فِيكُمْ كَمَثَلِ سَفِينَةِ نُوحٍ مَنْ رَكِبَهَا نَجَا وَ
مَنْ تَخَلَّفَ عَنْهَا غَرِقَ وَ مَثَلُ بَابِ حِطَّةٍ مَنْ دَخَلَهُ نَجَا وَ مَنْ لَمْ يَدْخُلْهُ هَلَكَ

And when We said, ‘Enter this town, and eat thereof freely whencesoever you wish, and enter prostrating at the gate, and say, ‘‘Relieve [us of the burden of our sins],’’ that We may forgive your iniquities, and soon We will enhance the virtuous.’ (2:58)

And when they were told, ‘Settle in this town and eat thereof whence you wish; and say, ‘‘Relieve [us of the burden of our sins],’’ and enter prostrating at the gate, that We may forgive your iniquities, and soon We shall enhance the virtuous.’ (7:161)

Whoever entered the gate was forgiven and whoever refused to enter was punished. Similarly, those who follow the Ahl al-Bayt receive God’s mercy and forgiveness and those who arrogantly refuse to do so will be punished by God.

In yet another hadith the Prophet likens his household to stars. Stars are not just to lighten the sky or beautify it. The fixed stars are a source for guidance for those who travel in the oceans and deserts. The Prophet likened the Ahl al-Bayt to these stars, since they are guides that save people from going astray or from conflict. The hadith goes on saying that if a group of Arabs disagree with the Ahl al-Bayt, they will suffer with disagreements that bring about disunity and result in being a part of the party of Satan. In this way, the Prophet disapproves those who disputed against the Ahl al-Bayt.

Thus, referring to the Ahl al-Bayt to understand Islam is not optional; it is a must. These hadiths, namely the hadith of Thaḡalayn, the hadith of Safinah, the hadith of Hittah and the hadith of stars are some of the very well-known ones found in Sunni references. Similar narrations indicating the necessity of referring to the Ahl al-Bayt are found in Shi‘a collections of hadith.

Conclusion

Being one of the five principles of Shi'a Islam, the concept of Imamate holds such an importance that being oblivious of the Imam of our age is likened to a person who died before Islam. The different views among Muslim theologians concerning this subject relate to its significance, the Imam's role, and the characteristics the leader must hold. The Shi'a believe that a successor to the Prophet must continue his leadership as a teacher, a judge, and a political leader. Bearing this in mind, an Imam must be knowledgeable, pious, and capable of leadership. Indeed, when recognizing the status of Ahl al-Bayt as those to whom we appeal to alongside the Qur'an, we see that those revered infallibles are none other than Imam Ali, Fatima, and their two sons, Hasan and Husein. Upon reading several hadiths concerning this subject, the Prophet clearly instructed people to refer to them as a reliable and necessary source in understanding Islam.

Imam Mahdi (a) in Chapter al-Qadr

Mohammad Reza Hakimi

Translated by Mohammad Javad Shomali

ABSTRACT: Chapter al-Qadr (97) of the Holy Qu'ran is a short chapter containing five verses in which Allah (swt) promises a night during which the angels descend with God's command. In this paper, we will discuss some aspects of this blessed night and the relationship of these verses to the Imam of our Time (a).

1. Chapter al-Qadr

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ وَمَا
أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ تَنَزَّلُ
الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِّنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ سَلَامٌ هِيَ
حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ

In the Name of God, the All-Beneficent, the All-Merciful. Indeed We sent it down on the Night of Ordainment. What will show you what is the Night of Ordainment? The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months. In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with

every command. It is peace until the rising of the dawn.

2. Which night is the great night of Qadr?

A serious reading of this Chapter causes one to ponder about several questions whose answers are not literally available in the chapter itself. What is this great command? Which night is this night? Which night is the auspicious night during which God sent down the Quran? Which precious moments are the moments of the night that is better than a thousand months? Which night is the night of the descent of angels and the Spirit (Gabriel)? Which night is the night where all commands and destinies are taken to earth and are set according to wisdom? Which night is the night that all its moments and seconds are greeting, peace, mercy, health, safety, happiness and auspiciousness? What is this significant event that has been expressed in Chapter al-Qadr using present tense showing its continuation: "The angels and the Spirit descend" over and over? Where to?

Every year, on the nightfall of qadr, the angels and Spirit descend continuously and bring down all the commands and destinies by God's permission. How does this happen? To whom do these angels go and to whom do they give these commands and destinies? Where is the place the Spirit descends to? Where is the holy place and the centre of honour where all commands carried by angles, are brought down upon? Where and in which holy and purified site is the landing field of angels located?

3. It is the night of Qadr; the days of separation are over

When does the night occur? It is the night when we shall not complain about separation anymore and shall await the moment of meeting and joining while being joyful from the blessing of "peace" "until the rising of the dawn." Hafiz, a famous Iranian poet, inspired by the verses of Qur'an, counts the night of Qadr as the night of joining God and an end to days of separation.

When does this occur? It occurs on the night when we have to prove our love to God, remain awake, help the ones in need, and seek knowledge. It is the night when all the good deeds will be rewarded without any exception. The night when we should invoke our absent Imam (a), keep awake, ask God to let us see him, help the poor and seek knowledge.¹

شب وصل است و طی شد نامه هجر سلام فيه حتي مطلع الفجر
 دلا در عاشقي ثابت قدم باش که در این ره نباشد کار بی اجر
 برآی ای صبح روشن دل خدا را که بس تاریک می بینم شب هجر
 دلم رفت و ندیدم روی دلدار فغان از این تطاول آه از این زجر²

Hafiz uses Qur'anic words in some parts of this poem to point out some important points such as: the night of Qadr and its relation to the twelfth Imam (a) and his occultation, being firm on the direct path towards God despite all of the problems, including occultation of the twelfth Imam (a), wishing to meet the Imam (a) and finally complaining about the long days of separation. It is important to note that although Hafiz complains about the separation and the difficulties it causes, he tries to encourage everyone to be firm on the path towards God and about their love towards the twelfth Imam (a).

In addition to this poem, Hafiz has other poems in which he talks about the twelfth Imam (a), illustrating some beautiful and accurate points:

کجاست صوفی دجال فعل ملحد شکل بگو بسوز که مهدی دین پناه رسید³

.....

¹ Shaykh Saduq has said that “The best act in the night of Qadr is to seek knowledge.” *Mafatih al-Jinan*, chapter on A'maal of the night of Qadr.

² Ghazal no. 251.

³ Ghazal no. 242.

از غم هجر مکن ناله و فریاد که دوش زده ام فالی و فریاد رسی می آید¹

.....

ای پادشه خوبان	داد از غم تنهایی
دل بی تو بجان آمد	وقت است که باز آیی
مشتاقی و مهجوری	دور از تو چنانم کرد
کز دست بخواد شد	پایاب شکیبایی
یا رب به که شاید گفت	این نکته که در عالم
رخساره به کس ننمود	آن شاهد هر جایی
ساقی، چمن گل را	بی روی تو رنگی نیست
شمشاد خرامان کن	تا باغ بیارایی
ای درد توام درمان	در بستر ناکامی
وی یاد توام مونس	در گوشه تنهایی ²

4. A night which repeats every year

It can be clearly understood from the verses of Surat al-Qadr³ that there is a night every year which is better and more valuable than a thousand months.⁴ On this night, the angels along with their

¹ Ghazal no. 235.

² Ghazal no. 493.

³ The same is true about the beginning verses of Chapter Dukhan which will be cited later.

⁴ "Keeping awake, worshipping Allah and doing good deeds in this night, is better than doing the same in a thousand months in which there is no night of Qadr." *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 520. A thousand months is eighty three years and four months.

leader, the Spirit, come down and bring with them all the commands and destinies appointed by God for the coming year till the next night of Qadr.

The narrations explaining these verses and the beginning verses of surat al-Dukhan as well as some other verses show that at the night of Qadr, angels bring the ordained decisions of that year to God's vicegerent of the age and give them to him. This event has always occurred and will take place forever. At the time of Prophet Mohammad (s), angels descended to him. This fact is approved by all scholars. Another approved fact is that after the Prophet (s) there continues to be the night of Qadr as it is clearly stated in the surat al-Qadr and surat al-Dukhan that the night of Qadr occurs every year.

Rashid al-Din Meybudi, a famous Sunni scholar says:

Some have said that the night of Qadr was for the time of Prophet and ended after him. However, this is not true, since all companions of the Prophet and all Muslim scholars believe that the night of Qadr will exist till the resurrection day.¹

Shaykh Tabarsi has mentioned a narration from Abu Dharr Ghaffari as follows:

I told the messenger of God: O Prophet! Does the night of Qadr and the descent of the angels therein happen only at the time of Prophets and ends after they are gone? The Prophet (s) said: "No, rather it continues until the judgment day."²

Regarding this important issue, we have received a great number of narrations that explain and describe this Qur'anic subject. For

¹ *Kashf al-Asrār*, vol. 10, p. 559.

² *Majma' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 518.

example, in *Al-Kāfi* Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

Imam Ali (a) used to often say that two of the companions were with the Prophet (s) while he was reciting surat al-Qadr and crying in a state of humbleness. Upon witnessing this, they asked, “Why are you so sensitive towards this surah?” He replied, “This sensitivity is due to what my eyes have seen and my soul has tasted and after me the soul of this man (pointing to Imam Ali) will taste.” Then they asked, “What did you see and what will he see?” In reply, the Prophet (s) wrote on the ground, “In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command.” Then he said, “When God has said all the commands and destinies, will there be anything left [that I have not seen]? They would say: No.”¹

5. The master of the night of Qadr

After understanding that the night of Qadr comes every year, we will then realize that the master of the night of Qadr also has to exist forever - as it has been said in the narrations² - since otherwise to whom would the angels descend? Near whom would they open the book of destinies? To whom would they give the commands by God's permission?

Based on the teachings of the Prophet (s), the generative (*takwini*) guidance and guardianship (*wilāayah*) are in line with the legislative guidance and guardianship. Therefore, since the Holy Qur'an is applicable till the day of judgement and it is a proof of God (*hujjah*), then so is the master of the night of Qadr. After the Prophet (s), this position, i.e, the master of the night of Qadr, is

¹ *Usul al-Kāfi*, Kitab al-Hujjah, bab fi sha'n *Innā anzalnā ho fi laylat al-qadr wa tafsirihā*, Hadith no. 5

² *Ibid.* Hadith no. 7

assigned to the Prophet (s)'s successors. Imam Ali (a) points out these two realities (occurrence of night of Qadr every year and existence of master of the night of Qadr in all ages) as follows:

The night of Qadr exists every year. All affairs of the year (destinies) are brought down that night. After the death of the Prophet (s), still this night has masters...¹

It is interesting that sometimes even the Sunni scholars have stated this fact explicitly, for instance, while explaining the Hadith of Thaqalayn. Hadith of Thaqalayn is a famous narration that has been narrated by hundreds of Shi'ite and Sunni scholars and narrators and it is one of the most assured prophetic narrations and truths. The Prophet (s) says that:

Verily, I am leaving behind two precious things (*thaqalayn*) among you, you will not go astray if you get hold of both of them after I am gone, one part of it being more important than the other: the Book of God and my progeny.²

The Sunni scholars and researches have made several important remarks regarding this hadith. We will mention one of them as an example. Ibn Hajar Haytami Makki Shāfi'i, a famous narrator of hadiths and the author of many books such as *Al-Sawā'iq al-Muhriqah*, says:

From the narrations received from the Prophet that emphasize on getting hold of his progeny and obeying them, it can be understood that until the day of judgment there will always be a person from Prophet's progeny who is qualified for leadership and guidance, as the Qur'an is also a

¹ *Ibid.* Hadith no. 2.

² *'Abaqāt al-Anwār*, vol. on *Hadith Thaqalayn*.

guide until the day of judgement. And this is why they are the cause for the safety of people on the earth.¹

Later we will discuss two important rules of the universe: *wisāʿat dar fayḍ* and *ijmāl-u tafṣil dar khalgh-u taqdir*. But for now, we have to point out that the continuation of destinies and the continuation of existence of the one who receives the destinies is a certain fact and a divine law that will never change nor will it alter.² These two intertwined issues have been and will be true.

Imam Javad (a) has taught about this fact and constant reality:

God created the night of Qadr at the beginning of creation of the universe. He also created the first prophet and the first vicegerent at that night. The divine decision was made that every year there should be a night on which the details of affairs and destinies of that year would be sent down...

There is no doubt that prophets have had relations with the night of Qadr. After the prophets, the proofs (*hujjah*) of God shall exist as well, since the universe, from its beginning till its end, will never be without God's proof. At the night of Qadr, God sends down the destinies and decisions to the person He has chose (His vicegerent and proof). By God, at the night of Qadr, the angels and the Spirit were brought down upon Adam and carried the destinies of the affairs to him. And indeed, Adam chose a successor for himself before his death. After Adam, divine commands and decisions were sent down to all the prophets too and every prophet would entrust this position to

¹ *Ibid.* vol. 3, p. 151 and also: *Sharaf al-Din*, pp. 58-66.

² Refer to the Qur'an: 17:77, 33:62, 35:43, 48:23.

his successor.¹

Although we only mentioned a part of this great hadith, there are some important points in it that are ought to be taken into consideration and be deeply examined. It is impossible to lack this knowledge and be able to understand the reality of the universe. This is what the Qur'an says about people who lack this knowledge: "They know just an outward aspect of the life of the world" (30:7). Discovering features of different matters, metals and the chemical compounds, gaining some knowledge about the galaxies and inventing complicated machines and discovering new medicines are all parts of this outward aspect when compared to the reality of this world. Concerning the above hadith from Imam Javad (a), there are five points to be noted:

1. Necessity of order and measurements as the first thing that has been created from this universe is the night of Qadr, which is the time of regulating affairs and measurements.
2. Necessity of the performer of the orders, as we see that along with the orders the role of a performer has also been ordained.
3. Necessity of existence of a hujjah during the process. Hujjah is the performer of the orders by God's permission and he is the vicegerent of God i.e. a prophet or successor of a previous prophet.
4. Necessity of *wāsiteye fayd* (medium of grace) in inward relations of the universe, who is the vicegerent of God and his existence is prior to others.
5. Necessity of nonstop continuation of divine laws (precedents) till the day of judgement.

Therefore, we realise that the night of Qadr has existed since the

¹ *Usul al-Kāfi*, Kitāb al-Hujjah, bāb fi sha'n Innā anzalnā ho fi laylat al-qadr wa tafsihā, Hadith no. 2.

beginning of this universe. It has been said that knowledgeable people in the previous nations had also looked forward to the night of Qadr and had been aware of this night and its importance.¹

6. The Qur'an and the night of Qadr

Once someone asked Imam Sadiq (a) whether the night of Qadr has been only in the past [i.e. the age of the Prophet (s)] or is there a night of Qadr every year? Imam (a) replied: "There would be no Qur'an if the night of Qadr was not to occur."²

This statement of Imam Sadiq (a) refers to the ultimate reason for man's descent on earth. This universe was created for a man's living place so that he would be tested. The perfect ones would be separated from the imperfect ones, the blessed ones from the others and then man would progress and try to approach God. Therefore, in order for this to happen, this universe has to exist. In order for this universe to exist, wisdom, and measurements are needed and these are all related to the night of Qadr and the presence of God's vicegerent. When all of these are in place, then the book of knowledge and practice i.e. the Qur'an is required. Therefore, the factor that makes this material universe remain is man's progress towards perfection in relation with the book and the vicegerent of God. Hence, since removing the night of Qadr will lead to disarrangement of this universe, removing the night of Qadr will lead to removal of the Qur'an. Therefore, as long as universe exists, there is the night of Qadr and as long as the night of Qadr occurs the Qur'an will exist. And as long as these two exist, the vicegerent of God who is the master of the night of Qadr and the carrier of Qur'an will exist too.

In a way, this response of Imam (a) explains the close relation of generative guidance and legislative guidance. In other words, it

¹ *Kashf al-Asrār*, vol. 10, p. 559.

² *Nur al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 5, p. 621.

explains the direct relation of the silent proof of God i.e. the Qur'an to the talking proof of God, the Imam. This response is an explanation for the famous hadith of the Prophet (s), the hadith of *thaqalayn*, which was previously mentioned. Most versions of the hadith include this sentence:

These two (that I leave among you: the holy book and my progeny) shall not separate from each other till they come to me by the Pool (of *Kawthar*).

At this point, it is appropriate to point out another significant issue in relation of the knowledge of Imam to the night of Qadr on one hand, and to the holy Qur'an on the other. One needs to think about what is the relation of the holy Qur'an and its verses and words with the commands and destinies that are sent to Imam at the night of Qadr which he will then actualise. Understanding this relation is very important in understanding different aspects of the Qur'an, the potentials hidden in it, and the esoteric meanings verses. The verses of the Qur'an have true effects. Some of these effects have been pointed out in our narrations. All of these effects depend on this cognition and their actualisation relies on the scientific researches on this issue.

To further confirm this fact we shall notice that the revelation of the Qur'an has been mentioned to have taken place on the night of Qadr. Furthermore, in surat al-Qadr and al-Dukhān, the revelation of the Qur'an has been mentioned first and then the night of Qadr itself and its reality are expressed.

7. Imam Ali (a) and the night of Qadr

Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted as saying:

Once Imam Ali (a) was reciting surat al-Qadr and his sons, Imam Hasan (a) and Imam Husayn (a) were near him. Imam Husayn (a) asked his father: "Father, how come we feel a different sensation

when you recite this surah?” Imam Ali (a) replied, “O son of the Prophet and my son! I know things from this chapter that you are not aware of now. When this surah was sent down to the Prophet he asked me to go to him. When I went to him he recited this surah, then he put his hand on my right shoulder and said: O my brother and my successor! O the leader of my nation after me! O tireless fighter with my enemies! This surah is yours after me, and is for your two sons after you. Gabriel - who is my brother among the angels - informs me of the events of one year of my nation at the night of Qadr. And after me he will give this information to you. This surah will always have a shining light in your heart and in the heart of your successors until the rising of the dawn of the day of reappearance of Qā'im [the one who uprises, one of Imam Mahdi (a)'s titles].”¹

8. The blessed night

In addition to surah al-Qadr, the night of Qadr has also been mentioned in surah al-Dukhan. In the primary verses of this surah, issues such as the revelation of the Qur'an and the determination of all definitive matters have been pointed out:

Indeed, We sent it down on a blessed night, and indeed We have been warning [mankind]. Every definitive matter gets resolved in it, as an ordinance from Us. Indeed, We have been sending [apostles]. (44:3-5)

These verses are about the night of Qadr, the night of destinies and blessings, the revelation of the Qur'an and the descent of the angels. Here the Qur'an has used the present tense when saying

¹ *Tafsir "al-Burhan"*, vol. 4, p. 487.

that the matters get resolved, which shows the continuation of this process and that this always happens on the night of Qadr.

The process of regulating affairs for a period takes place at two levels. First, everything has to be generally specified and second, further details should be determined while executing the process for which the plan had been prepared. For example, you first specify your programs, costs, and duties for a year. Then during that year you will act regularly and carefully according to that planned program. This fact which is a necessity for having order and regulations and is related to matters getting resolved has been mentioned in a narration from Imam Sadiq (a):

God has said: 'Every definitive matter gets resolved at this night, since how can a matter be definitive if it has not been resolved?'¹

Therefore, regular and orderly progress of different matters in the universe with all its complexity, components, parts, and laws is possible because everything is first carefully regulated and wisely measured, and then it is actualised by means of the vicegerent of God on Earth who is the operant and the supervisor of all affairs. This is how these verses indicate the continuation of presence of the vicegerent of God on Earth. At present, the vicegerent of God on Earth is Imam Mahdi (a). He is the master of the night of Qadr and the angels and the Spirit descend to him on the night of Qadr. It has been said in a narration that:

On the night of Qadr, people are in the state of praying and asking for their needs from God, and the master of this night is attending the angels that have descended towards him. They take the

¹ *Al-Burhān*, vol. 4, p. 487.

ordained affairs and commands and the cases of next years' events to him.¹

9. Argumentation

In different verses of Qur'an there are words about the vicegerent of God:

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to set a vicegerent on the earth.' (2:30)

This issue needs to be discussed with more details separately, but for now it is important to mention that what is meant by *waliyy-e mutlaq*, *waliyy-e kāmīl*, *waliyy-e zamān*, *waliyy-e 'asr*, *hujjat-e nātiq* and the master of the night of Qadr is the vicegerent of God on the earth. After the death of Prophet Muhammad (s), this great position was for his successors: Imam Ali (a) and his eleven sons.

Having this Islamic and Qur'anic fact in mind, how can one believe that this relation with God, angels, the Spirit and the secrets of the destinies was for the Abbasid caliphs such as Mansur Dawāniqi, Hārūn al-Rashid, Mutawakkil, or for the Umayyad caliphs such as Yazid ibn Mu'āwiyah, Walid ibn 'Abd al-Malik or Marwān Himār? Can these people be the heir of the divine covenant and the vicegerent of God on the earth? Being a vicegerent is a divine covenant, and God's covenant is only for pure, good, innocent, and purified people. These are the ones who can be the heir of Prophets' knowledge and the carriers of God's covenant as the Qur'an says:

...He said: My covenant does not extend to the unjust. (2:124)

This is why the issue of the night of the Qadr, the vicegerent of God on earth, their constant presence, which in other words is the

¹ *Nur al-Thaqalayn*, vol. 5, p. 641.

continuation of existence of the Qur'an, is in direct relation with the necessity of existence of Imam. This explains how surah al-Qadr and al-Dukhān involve one of the most important proofs for the presence and necessity of true Imamate and divine vicegerent on the earth. It is according to this Qur'anic knowledge that Imam Javad (a), the ninth Imam, gives us this precious teaching:

O Shi'ites! Argue (with your opponents) by the chapter al-Qadr, and you will succeed. By God, after the Prophet Muhammad (s), it is the Proof of God over people.¹ It is the most excellent proof of your religion; it is the outer limit of our knowledge. O Shi'ites! Argue with your opponents by the verse: Hā Mim! By the Clear Book. We have sent it down in a blessed night, we are ever warning (therein every wise command determined as a command from Us, we are ever sending) (Qur'an 44:1-5). It is only for those who possess the authority after the Prophet Muhammad (s).^{2 3}

10. Criterion of humanity

Man's life on the earth is very similar to animals in many aspects of life. Animals breathe, move, eat, sleep, reproduce, hear, see, have emotions and pleasures, and feel pain and harm. Human beings are the same. The immoral and unguided man is in an even lower level than animals in some aspects of the material life:

¹ It means: Prove the necessity of Imam using this surat! Ask them what the meaning of this surat is! And to whom do angels descend?

² It means that this verse must have an instance or application after the Prophet (s) too. Who is that instance or application?

³ *Usul al-Kāfi*, Kitāb al-Hujjah, bāb fi sha'n innā anzalnāh-o fi laylat al-qadr wa tafsihā, Hadith no. 6.

Do you suppose that most of them listen or apply reason? They are just like cattle; rather they are further astray from the way. (25:44)

When will man pass the animal levels and reach human standards? Man is not any different from animals when he does not have a true understanding of the reality of the universe when all he cares about is the appearances of this universe and is a captive of food, sleep, anger, and lust. He can only pass this level by thinking, seeing, hearing, and attending beyond the appearances and reach and see the inside of matters and then have an innermost presence in the universe. In other words, he must reach beyond the material world (*mulk*) and sense the kingdom of God (*malakūt*), and then through realising his existential reality it is essential for him to discover the existential reality and *malakūt* of other things as well.

What we just mentioned briefly is dependent on a correct cognition of self and the universe. And this cognition relies on knowing the existential medium and the true nature of the things. Furthermore, this knowledge is based on knowing the *waliyy* of *zamān* (the Master of the Age; the Guardiann of the Age) who is inside the identity of the universe.

It is for guiding people to this knowledge that the Prophet (s) wants people to believe in the night of Qadr. From the theoretical aspect, this belief will enable man to have a real and true cognition that is in line with the divine laws of this universe, and from the practical aspect it will enable man to have the right attitude and correct policy and enjoy divinely appointed leadership.

Shaykh Mufid reports a hadith in which Imam Jawad (a) narrates from his father that he has narrated from his father and continues until it reached Imam Ali (a) who narrates from the Prophet (s) that he said to his companions:

Believe in the night of Qadr! For indeed, the commands of the year are sent down in it. This night has guardians after me. Its masters are Ali and his eleven sons.¹

A famous narration from the Prophet (s) points out the very same truth:

Whosoever dies without recognising the Imam of his time dies the death of the ignorance (or Jāhiliyyah - a period of time before Islam when people of Arabia used to worship idols and had uncivil customs).

A person who has not found the right path in his life will not have the behaviours and activities which are directed towards perfection. Man's progress towards perfection relies on following the right path of "obligation" and "destination." It is impossible to know this "straight path" without knowing its guide. Moving in any direction besides this is a waste of time and life and it will lead to deviation. In other words, a progressive movement is moving towards perfection and the highest and the best perfection is the absolute perfection. Absolute perfection is God. Indeed we have to say, the movement towards perfection is exclusive to the movement towards God: "*There is no god except Allah.*"

It is clear that we cannot move towards God unless we have cognition of the Proof of God who is the guide of this path. This is why Imam Rida (a) in his famous narration called "Chain of Gold" asserts that monotheism is only accepted when it is along with believing in Imams as vicegerents of God. Hence, lack of understanding about the Imam is the same as not knowing the path of progress and its features. This will either lead to stagnation and decline or to deviation and moving in the opposite direction of the path of progress. All of these indicate distance

¹ *Al-Irshād*, p. 348.

from divine guidance.

This is why in the narration of Thaqalayn, Prophet Muhammad (s) has introduced two things to be intertwined and inseparable, as well as being the factors of guidance, namely the Qur'an and his household. The Qur'an is the book and the program and the Ahl al-Bayt are the teachers and the guides. A book will be of no use when there is no teacher to teach it, and a teacher can do nothing when he has no book to teach. The book of truth¹ and the truthful teachers² are sufficient and only causes of guidance. Adhering to them and following them will lead to salvation and will take man out of ignorance and the darkness.

Shaykh Abbas Qummi has made significant remarks in this regard:

I hope it becomes obvious (for everyone) that none of the Muslim scholars doubt that the Prophet (s) has said, "Whosoever dies without recognising the Imam of his time dies the death of the ignorance.

This narration has been mentioned in the books of Shi'ite and Sunni scholars over and over that leaves no doubt in its validity. Furthermore, in most of the Sunni books including the *Sihāh* (six major collections of Sunni hadith that are believed to be all-authentic) it has been narrated as a definitely approved narration. On the other hand, Shi'ite believes that the earth will never lack a Proof of God - Imam and successor of the prophet - and if there was no Imam on the earth even for a single second, it would have dug all its habitants in. This is in coordination with the fact that a contingent existent in order to get its existence

¹ "That is so because God has sent down the Book with the truth" (Qur'an 2:176)

² "and be with the Truthful" (Qur'an 9:119)

from the necessary existent needs a link and a medium that is from God and is infallible. Therefore, any Muslim who wants to avoid ignorance has to know the Imam of his time, obey him completely and consider him as the medium of God's mercy and blessings. Anyone who believes in the Prophecy of Prophet Muhammad (s) and the Imamate of previous Imams, starting with Imam Ali (a) has to believe in the Imamate of Imam Mahdi (aj) the son of Imam Hasan Askari (a), the eleventh Imam of Shi'ites. Imam Mahdi (a) who is the awaited and the unseen one, has been introduced completely by the Prophet and previous Imams. His absence, attributes and description have been all foretold. Furthermore, all groups of Muslims agree that the Prophet (s) had informed people about the coming of Imam Mahdi (a) in the end of time. He has the same name as the Prophet (Muhammad) and will promote the religion brought by the Prophet and will bring justice and peace to the world.¹

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed several aspects of the night of Qadr and its relationship to the Imam of our time (a). Through this discussion, we saw that we have to try to know the reality of time, the secret of the age and the spirit of the universe as much as possible, so that our lives would be with vigilance and knowledge and our deaths would also be with knowledge, vigilance and ascent, and not with ignorance and descent (since man dies however he has lived). Then our death will also be the entrance to the world of the real life, the world where there is no perdition, change, or decadence, and all that can be found there is life, eternity, and presence.

¹ *Tatimmat al-Muntahā*, pp. 300 & 301.

Migration to Abyssinia

Shahnaze Safieddine

ABSTRACT: The first journey in the history of Islam was the migration of Muslims to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia). This article offers the reasons for this migration, when it occurred, why Prophet Muhammad (s) chose this country over others, and the actions that came about during the Muslims' stay there. Also, a brief explanation of the Prophet's contact with the king of Abyssinia after the hijrah is given, along with an analysis concerning the significance of this event. From this migration, we learn that 1) when persecuted, Muslims should migrate when the opportunity is available, and seek a land ruled by a just leader, and 2) Muslims have the responsibility of learning how to interact efficiently in clarifying and enlightening others about Islam.

Introduction

During the birth of Islam, the polytheists persecuted the Muslims, those who proclaimed belief in one God and God's messenger, the Prophet Muhammad (s). This resulted in Prophet Muhammad's suggestion to them to leave Mecca and seek protection in Abyssinia. Many questions arise with respect to this migration: What factors led to this migration? When did it happen? Why did the Prophet Muhammad choose this country over others? And what

events took place during the Muslims' stay there? In the following, I seek to answer these questions. Moreover, a brief account will be given on the Prophet's contact with the king of Abyssinia years after the *hijrah*, or the migration to the city of Medina that marks the Islamic calendar. A final analysis will be provided regarding the importance of this event in sustaining and spreading Islam, as well as its lessons in teaching the Islamic approach of interacting with other nations.

Factors that Led to the First Migration

During the first years of the Proclamation of Islam when the Prophet Muhammad (s) extended an open invitation to Islam, the polytheists were furious over the revolutionary ideas Islam brought forth. The Prophet taught people to worship the One God who is the Lord of the universe, to have faith instead of tribal and kinship pride, to provide for the poor, and to realize that all humans are equal regardless of race, geographical contiguity or a specific privilege. Islamic teachings applied to all individuals and this meant that the polytheists would feel propelled to give up their gods, share their wealth and humble themselves with the realization that they are not better than others due to specific privileges. Though Islam attracted people from the lower class economically, the leaders of Quraysh were enraged, worried that these ideas would cause an immense change in the system that gave them power.

Furthermore, the polytheists did not tolerate the Muslims' rejection of their gods and reacted with serious harassment and abuse. In the beginning, the maltreatment of Muslims by the polytheists was confined to jeers and insults. However, Muslims gradually became victims of physical violence in addition to insults.¹ The polytheists harmed the weaker Muslims by instigating others against them, defaming them, or cheating them. Muslims were also left hungry and thirsty until they verbally professed the divinity of the two

¹ Razwi, p. 49.

chief idols of the polytheists i.e. *Lāt* and *‘Uzzā*. And as refraining from hurting people of other tribes was their custom, each leader abused the Muslims of his own tribe and members of other tribes could not intervene. Of course, if they had wanted to do so. Muslims were persecuted by being imprisoned in their own homes (there were no public prisons during that era) and more so by being prevented from seeing the Prophet. In addition to mistreating lower class Muslims, the polytheists blackmailed the rich Muslims, causing a severe decline in business. However, during this period, the Prophet was not yet subject to the same maltreatment because he was under the protection of his uncle Abu Talib and enjoyed the support of the Bani Hashim tribe.

This severe abuse left some Muslims unable to stand firm against it and, full of remorse, they had no choice but to leave Islam. Others hid their monotheistic faith; in other words, they practiced *taqiyyah*, and preserved it thus. There were yet others who resisted and faced imprisonment, torture, and even martyrdom.¹

There were Muslims whose steadfastness made them notable characters in Islamic history. Those to be named and described here are Bilal al-Habashi, Ammar bin Yasir and his parents, and Abdullah bin Mas‘ud. Bilal’s parents were brought as captives from Ethiopia to Arabia. Bilal became a slave of Umayyah bin Khalaf, one of the sworn enemies of the Prophet (s). After learning about Prophet Muhammad and his teachings, Bilal converted to Islam. When Umayyah learned that Bilal had converted to Islam, he ordered that he be taken into to the scorching sun. A large rock was placed on his chest as he was told to give up his faith in monotheism and submit to *Lāt* and *‘Uzzā*. To Umayyah’s dismay, Bilal only replied “Ahad! Ahad!” (One! One!). Upon seeing his condition, Waraqah ibn Nawfil, a Christian Arab scholar, was brought to tears and swore to Umayyah that if Bilal is killed, he will make Bilal’s gravesite become a sacred pilgrimage site.² As

¹ Ja ‘fariya, pp. 339-342.

² Subhani, p. 217.

said in *Tabaqāt* by Ibn Sa‘d, a rope was tied around Bilal’s neck and Umayyah ordered children to drag him in the streets of Mecca.¹

Another group that was among the early Muslims is ‘Ammar and his parents, Sumayyah and Yasir. ‘Ammar’s parents were tortured to death, making them the first martyrs in Islam. Subsequently, ‘Ammar himself was tortured, so much so that he had no choice but to verbally renounce Islam to the polytheists. With great sorrow, he ran to the Prophet, admitted his action, and declared that his heart is still overflowing with faith. The Prophet then advised him to continue to hide his faith to save himself from further discrimination and torture.²

Abdullah bin Mas‘ud, a new convert, participated in a Muslim group discussion where a member suggested that since the people of Quraysh had never heard the verses of the Holy Qur’an, one of them should publicly recite the Qur’an in Masjid al-Harām. Abdullah was willing to do so. He proceeded to the Masjid while the people of Quraysh were assembled there and read in a loud, melodious voice, “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. It is the Merciful who has taught the Qur’an” (55:1-2). Upon reading the verses, the polytheists were struck with amazement, and in order to prevent the heavenly verses from affecting them, they pounded on him with their fists until he bled profusely. He ran back to the Prophet (s) in this condition, feeling overjoyed that the verses were heard.³

As a result of the persecutions experienced by the early Muslims, the following verses from the chapter *The Bee* (Al-Nahl) were revealed:

Those who migrate for the sake of Allah after
having been wronged, We will surely settle them

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

² *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³ *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* by Ibn Hisham, p. 314.

in a good place in the world, and the rewards of the Hereafter is surely greater, had they known. Those who are patient and put their trust in their Lord. (16:41-42)

According to historians, these verses were sent specifically as an instruction for migration to Abyssinia.¹ The threat of the polytheists became so serious that the Prophet decided to have the Muslims migrate to Abyssinia to save their lives and faith.

The moment the number of Muslims increased, faith in Islam became apparent, and they began to experience harassment and imprisonment with such intensity that some became apostates, the Prophet told them to scatter themselves on this earth. They asked, "Where should we go?" The Prophet replied, "Abyssinia."

Those who have analyzed this migration say that the actual reason was entirely due to saving the Muslims from the polytheists' harassments and preserving their faith. Urwat ibn Ishaq also confirms that Muslims' becoming apostates was due to the polytheists' abuse. Moreover, he says that the Prophet also knew that his protection was due to God and his uncle Abu Talib.² As a result, the Prophet told them to go to Abyssinia. They, due to fear of turning back to idol-worshipping and in hopes of preserving their faith, headed towards Abyssinia. This became the first migration in Islam. Concerned about this situation, the Prophet supplicated, "Oh Allah, accept my companions and do not let them return back to their previous state."

Rasul Ja'farian adds that had the immigrants stayed in Mecca, more conflicts would have emerged between them and the polytheists, and the Prophet wanted to prevent this. The Quraysh would also feel less threatened by the growing number of Muslims in their

¹ Ja'farian, p. 343.

² *Ibid.* p. 344.

city.¹ Furthermore, the Quraysh felt humiliated by the migration since foreigners may come to know of their persecutions.

Ja'farian points out that the primary reason for the migration is not entirely due to the polytheists' abuse; rather, in the long run, Islam was under the risk of being annihilated, had the Muslims continued to live in Mecca.² It is true that the Muslims were persecuted, and the verse was sent to advise Muslims to leave; however, not all the Muslim migrants left because of abuse. One of these people was Ja'far ibn abi Talib who was under the protection of the Bani Hashim tribe.

The Time of Migration

Historians agree that the migration took place on two different occasions. The first one occurred in the fifth year of the Proclamation of Islam in the month of Rajab. In this month, twelve to seventy men and women migrated to Abyssinia. They stayed there during the months of Sha'ban and Ramadan until some Muslims heard of the *Gharāniq* rumors and returned to Mecca. After learning that the *Gharāniq* reports were false, the Muslims headed back to Abyssinia.

The exact time of the second migration is unknown. However, Ja'farian states that there was only a short gap between the two migrations, because both migrations happened before the Quraysh drafted and signed in the 7th year after the Proclamation a document that ordered the Bani Hashim to surrender or they would be subjected to economic and social boycott.³ Therefore, the time in between the two migrations could not have extended for more than two to three years.

¹ *Ibid.* p. 345.

² *Ibid.*

³ Razawi, p. 67.

Ja'farian refutes Ibn Ishaq's view that the migration took place only once. Eighty people traveled with Ja'far ibn Abi Talib leading the group. Thirty-three people returned, although Ibn Ishaq does not believe in the fiction of *Gharāniq*. Biladhari compiled a list of those who migrated, and according to Ja'farian, this proves that some migrants went twice.

The members of this group did not belong to one family, and according to Ibn Hisham every one of these ten persons belonged to a separate family.¹ Ja'far the son of Abu Talib was the leader of the second migration. This migration was arranged with perfect freedom and some of the migrants were, therefore, successful in also taking their women and children with them. Consequently, the number of the Muslims in Ethiopia reached eighty-three and taking into account the children taken there or born there the number exceeds this figure.

According to Sayyid Ali Asgher Razvy in *A Restatement of the History of Islam and Muslims*, the king of Abyssinia welcomed the Muslim refugees from Mecca into his kingdom. He gave them sanctuary and they enjoyed peace, security, and freedom of worship under his protection. About a year later, the Muslims in Abyssinia heard rumors (*Gharāniq*) that the Quraysh in Mecca had accepted Islam. They were homesick and found no reason to live in exile: thus, they decided to return to Mecca. Upon their arrival, they found out that not only were the rumors they had heard false, but also that the Quraysh had intensified their abuse of the Muslims. For this reason, the Muslims left for Abyssinia once again. Many other Muslims also accompanied them. This new group comprised of 83 men and 18 women. All narrations agree that the Prophet Muhammad selected his first cousin, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, an elder brother of Ali, as the leader of this group. This second migration of the Muslims to Abyssinia took place in the

¹ *Al-Seerah al-Nabawiyyah* by Ibn Hisham, p. 245, cited in Subhani's *The Message*, chapter 17: The First Migration, p. 234.

sixth year of the Proclamation, or 616 C.E..¹ Ja'far appeared to be the only member of the Bani Hashim to leave for Abyssinia with the other refugees. All other members of Bani Hashim stayed in Mecca.²

Choosing Abyssinia

Upon searching for a solution to the persecution of the polytheists, the companions sought the Prophet's advice regarding migration and he (s) replied:

If you were to go to Abyssinia (it would be better for you), for the king (there) will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress.³

Thus, his companions went to Abyssinia, while afraid of apostasy and fleeing to God with their religion. This was the first *hijrah* (migration) in Islam.

The Prophet's words about the country encouraged his companions to move as soon as possible, mounted or on foot, without the enemies' awareness. He was familiar with Abyssinia, and in comparison to other countries with their oppressive rulers, this was a good choice. The Red Sea passed through Abyssinia and was close to Yemen. Business vessels passed through this path and Muslims made use of this when migrating to the country. The Muslims went to Jeddah, a developed trading port, where two trading vessels were ready to sail for Ethiopia. Though the

¹ *Ibid.* p. 58.

² *Ibid.* p. 59

³ *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* by Ibn Hisham, vol. I, p. 321. and *Tarikh al-Tabari*, vol. II, p. 70, cited in Subhani's *The Message*, chapter 17: The First Migration

Quraysh heard about their departure, by the time they reached Jeddah, the vessels had already left.¹

The Prophet's objective in sending his companions to this country was none other than giving them the freedom to perform their religious duties without insecurity and abuse. He knew that migration to any area inhabited by Arabs, who were idol-worshippers and reluctant to receive Muslims, was dangerous. Migrating to Christian and Jewish areas was also not recommended because conflicts of spiritual penetration between the two existed. In addition to their stance, they considered Arabs to be inferior.²

Yemen was not a preferred option because it was under the rule of Khusrow Parviz, the King of Iran who, upon receiving a letter from the Prophet inviting him to Islam in the year eight A.H., wanted him (s) arrested. Syria, on the other hand, was far from Mecca. Furthermore, Yemen and Syria were not chosen because they were markets for the Quraysh and they had close ties with them. If the Muslims had migrated to either of these areas, they would have been expelled at the request of the Quraysh.³

As the Prophet predicted, the Muslims found Ethiopia to be a prosperous country with a calm and free atmosphere. Umm Salamah, the Prophet's future wife, said, "When we settled in Ethiopia we found ourselves under the protection of the best supporter. We did not experience any trouble."⁴

Quraysh Sends Representatives to Abyssinia

When the chiefs of Mecca learned about the free and peaceful life of the Muslims in Ethiopia, they were furious. The Meccans were

¹ Subhani, p. 234.

² *Ibid.* p. 233.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 234.

terrified that the Muslims might have access to the Negus, and they were especially afraid of the possibility that the Muslims would succeed in attracting him to the religion of Islam. The Negus would then be able to invade the Arabian Peninsula with a well-equipped army.¹

The Quraysh were embarrassed before the Ethiopians because their own people fled to Abyssinia for safety. Thus, they decided to bring the Muslims back. It is also possible that the Quraysh wanted to prevent the spread of Islam in Abyssinia. In some narrations, two Qurayshis, 'Amr ibn 'Ās and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'ah, went to Abyssinia. In other narrations, it was 'Amr ibn 'Ās and 'Ammarah ibn Walid who took this responsibility. Ibn Sayyid al-Nas narrates that the Quraysh delegation was sent twice to Abyssinia: once after the first hijrah and the other time after the Battle of Badr.

The first two, 'Amr ibn 'Ās and Abdallah ibn abi Rabi'ah, were not successful in convincing the Negus. When the king gave audience to the emissary of the Quraysh, the latter claimed that the Muslims in Abyssinia were not refugees from persecution but rather fugitives from justice and law, and requested that the king extradite them to Mecca.²

According to Subhani, the ministers of Ethiopia met the representatives of Quraysh and the latter, after presenting gifts, spoke to them thus:

A group of our young men have abjured the creed of their forefathers and have invented a religion which is opposed to our religion as well as yours. They are now residing in your country. The elders and chiefs of Quraysh earnestly request the king of Ethiopia to expel them as soon as possible. Incidentally, we also desire that the council of

¹ *Ibid.* p. 235.

² Razvi, p. 58.

ministers may support us in the presence of the king. And as we are fully aware of the shortcomings and ways and manners of these persons it will be expedient that the matter is not discussed with them at all and the head of the State should not also grant them an audience.¹

The ministers gave the Quraysh full support. The Quraysh conveyed the message to the king, stating that the Muslims are propagating a religion that does not conform to their ancestors' religion or that of the official religion of Abyssinia. They added that the Muslims are taking advantage of the freedom in Abyssinia and requested that the Muslims return to Mecca.

As the ministers agreed with the Quraysh, the Negus would not hand the Muslims over until their situation was carefully investigated. The Muslims were brought to the king by his emissary and it was the courageous Ja'far ibn Abi Talib who eloquently defended the Muslims, saying thus:

O King! We were ignorant people and we lived like wild animals. The strong among us lived by preying upon the weak. We obeyed no law and we acknowledged no authority save that of brute force. We worshipped idols made of stone or wood, and we knew nothing of human dignity. And then God, in His Mercy, sent to us His Messenger who was himself one of us. We knew about his truthfulness and his integrity. His character was exemplary, and he was the well-born of the Arabs. He invited us towards the worship of One God, and he forbade us to worship idols. He exhorted us to tell the truth, and to protect the weak, the poor, the humble, the widows and the orphans. He ordered us to show respect to women,

¹ Subhani. pp. 235-236.

and never to slander them. We obeyed him and followed his teachings. Most of the people in our country are still polytheists, and they resented our conversion to the new faith which is called Islam. They began to persecute us and it was in order to escape from persecution by them that we sought and found sanctuary in your kingdom.

Afterwards, the king asked him to read some of the verses revealed to the Prophet (s). Ja'far read some verses from the chapter *Mary* and the king saw that these verses held much in common with the Christian Gospel. The Negus was impressed and convinced of the authenticity of this religion, and to 'Amr ibn 'As dismay, the king announced that Muslims are free to live in his kingdom for as long as they wish.

The polytheists did not cease to make their case. The next day, 'Amr returned to the king and declared that the Muslims reject the divine nature of Christ. The king asked for Ja'far once again, and after being asked about Islam's view of Christ, Ja'far replied, "Our judgment of Jesus is the same as that of God and His Messenger, viz., Jesus is God's servant, His Prophet, His Spirit, and His command given unto Mary."¹ With this, Negus approved of Ja'far's answer.

Muslims spent many years in Abyssinia. They returned to Medina thirteen years after the Prophet's migration there, synchronized with the Battle of Khaybar.

The Fiction of *Gharāniq*

As mentioned above, the migration to Abyssinia took place during the fifth and sixth years of the Proclamation. Some Muslims returned back to Mecca on account of a rumor that the Prophet (s) had verified the divinity of *Lāt* and *'Uzzā*. It was told that after he

¹ Razvi, p. 59.

read the verse from the chapter *The Star*, “Have you considered *Lāt* and ‘*Uzzā*? And *Manāt*, the third one?” (53:19), that he added the verse, “These are *Gharāniq* who are high in position and their intercession is acceptable.” He allegedly continued to recite the remaining verses until he reached the last verse, which required a prostration, at which point everyone, Muslims and idolaters, prostrated.

According to the *Gharāniq* reports, the polytheists later rejoiced at the “endeavour” the Prophet made to unite the two groups after much dissension and chaos. This news reached the Muslims in Abyssinia; thus, out of homesickness and simply waiting for the moment they could return home, they arrived in Mecca within the next year. Upon arrival, they were told that the conditions had undergone a change, that the Prophet once again opposed the idolaters and was instigated by Satan when that extra verse was read. When they realized it was a rumor, they returned to Abyssinia, making this the second migration to Abyssinia, with Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib as their leader.

The fiction of *Gharāniq* rests on the supposition that the Prophet was weary over the turmoil the polytheists had caused and sought to solve the problem by adding the verse. This cannot be true as the infallibility of the Prophets with all of their actions in harmony with the divine will, patience in guiding others to submission being one of those characteristics. Also, feeling tired of the chaos does not correspond with the Prophet’s past or future deeds.

But the author fails to take into account that the Qur’an is a witness to its falsehood. Allah (swt) says in the chapter ‘Elaborated’ (*Fussilat*), “Indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it” (41-42). Allah (swt) also says in the chapter ‘Stoneland’ (*Hijr*), “Indeed We have sent down the Reminder—the Qur’an—and indeed We will preserve it” (15:9).

These two verses testify that falsehood does not enter the Prophet's path, and that He would protect the Qur'an from all harms.¹

Moreover, the first verses of the chapter entitled 'The Star' (*Al-Najm*) reads, "Nor does he (the Prophet) speak out of his own desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed (to him), taught to him by One of great powers" (53:3-5). Thus, Satan did not instigate the Prophet to add a new verse. It also seems odd for the Prophet to have read these verses in the presence of the idolaters and yet they only heard the verse of *Gharāniq* and spread the rumour.

Ayatollah Subhani adds that according to the Egyptian scholar Muhammad 'Abduh, the word *Gharāniq*, which is plural for "aquatic bird" or "handsome youth," had never been used to refer to gods in the Arabic language or poetry.² The orientalist Sir William Muir also adds his reflection on this event. He states that it was necessary for the Prophet to make peace in Mecca and add the verse of *Gharāniq*. Subhani refutes this, stating that just as spreading false information is a common action, this rumour was set forth to do some damage. Also, if the Prophet truly wanted peace, he could have simply made a promise to discontinue addresses on their beliefs.³

The Aftermath: Contact between the Prophet and the Negus after the Hijrah

In the sixth year of the Prophet's migration to Medina, a pact was made between the Muslims and the Quraysh called the Peace Pact of *Hudaybiyyah*. After nineteen years of continuous conflict between the Quraysh and the Muslims, the agreement included several conditions, some of which were 1) that the two previous rivals no longer fight or abuse one another for the next ten years, 2) Muslims residing in Mecca are free to perform their religious rites

¹ Subhani. pp. 256-257.

² *Ibid.* pp. 258-259.

³ *Ibid.* p. 259.

without interference from the Quraysh's, 3) the life and property of Muslims in Mecca are to be protected, and 4) the two groups may conclude pacts with any tribe they deem necessary.

The outcome of this pact gave the Prophet the freedom to invite foreign kings and rulers towards Islam. With this, the message of Islam was no longer restricted to the Arabian territories; rather, it was to be made universal by the Prophet's invitation. Moreover, his approach to invitation is a complete method by which many Muslim leaders in the past and today have learned from and practiced in dealing with other nations.

The Prophet wrote a total of 185 letters. These letters were invitations towards Islam or pacts formed between the Prophet and the addressee.¹ The most popular invitations described by Ja'fariyan and Ayatollah Subhani were with the Emperor of Rome, King Khusrow Parviz of Iran, al-Muqawqis of Egypt, the Ghassanians of Syria, Bazan of Yemen, and the Negus of Ethiopia.

The Prophet's Letter to the Negus

The Prophet often used the method of clearly inviting the addressee to Islam, promising salvation in this life and the next upon accepting Islam, and then warning of the dangers of rejecting the faith. However, upon reading the letter sent to the Negus of Ethiopia, the same just ruler that accepted the Muslims into his country and treated them kindly, it is apparent that the Prophet used a softer tone. While greeting other rulers with, "Peace be upon the followers of guidance," the Prophet begins with a more personal greeting of "*Salāmun 'Alayk*" (Peace be upon you) to the Negus:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Merciful

¹ Haydarabadi & Ahmadi.

This is a letter from Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah to the Negus, the King of Ethiopia. Peace be upon you! I praise Allah except whom there is no god. He is Allah Who is free from all defects and faults; and His obedient servants are safe from His wrath. He sees and witnesses the conditions of His servants.

I testify that Prophet 'Isa ibn Maryam is a spirit of Allah and a 'word' (of Allah) which settled in the womb of pious Maryam. Allah created him in the womb of his mother without a father with the same Power with which He created Adam without parents.

I invite you to the One Allah Who has no partner, and require you to obey Him and to follow my religion. Profess faith in Allah Who has appointed me to the prophetic mission.

The King of Ethiopia should know that I am the Prophet of Allah. I invite you and all your soldiers to the Almighty Allah and I have, by sending this letter and my envoy, discharged the onerous responsibility which devolved upon me and have given you advice. Peace be upon those who follow guidance.¹

In this letter, the Prophet informed the ruler of Allah's attributes, specifying His Oneness. He also rejects the views of the church; that is, Jesus is not the son of God but rather he was created in a womb the same way Prophet Adam was. At the end of the letter, the Prophet clearly invites the Negus and his people to obey Allah.

¹ *Al-Seerah al-Halabi*, vol. III, p. 279, cited in Subhani's *The Message*, chapter 42: The Events of the Seventh Year of Migration, p. 558.

Conversation of the Envoy with the Negus

The envoy of the Prophet thus went to the Negus with the letter, expressed his gratitude to the Negus for his sympathy and kindness towards the Muslim migrants and advised him to believe that the Bible is a witness to the Prophethood of Muhammad. The envoy used the example of how the Jews did not accept the religion of Jesus, which was a continuation of Moses' teachings and warned the Negus not to do the same. Prophet Muhammad's message is a continuation of Jesus' teachings, and it would be wise, the envoy stated, if the Negus accepted the religion of Islam.

The Negus, full of confidence, testified that the Prophet Muhammad is indeed the same messenger awaited by the people of the Scriptures. He wrote a letter in response to the Prophet:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Merciful

It is a letter to Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah from the Negus. The blessings of One except Whom there is no god and the greetings of One Who guided me towards Islam be upon you. I have read your letter pertaining to the prophethood and human attributes of 'Isa. I swear by the Lord of the heavens and the earth that whatever you have said is absolutely correct and I do not have the least difference with this belief. I have also become acquainted with the reality of your religion and have rendered such services to the Muslim migrants as were expedient. I testify by means of this letter that you are the Messenger of Allah and a truthful person whose prophethood has been confirmed by the Heavenly Scriptures. I have performed the ceremonies of embracement of Islam and allegiance to you in the presence of your cousin (Ja'far ibn Abu Talib).

I am sending my son, Rarha, to your sacred presence to communicate my message and *embracement* of Islam. And I state clearly that I am not responsible for anyone except myself. In case, therefore, you order me I shall present myself to your august presence. Peace be upon you O Prophet of Allah.¹

The Negus affirms with the utmost confidence that the Prophet Muhammad is indeed the Messenger of Allah and is the same Prophet mentioned in the Bible. The Negus sent the letter and several gifts to the Prophet, and at a later time, he also sent 30 priests to Medina to gradually familiarize them with the Prophet's way of life and encouraging them to study Islam. The purpose was not only to learn the message, but to witness that the Prophet was a humble man who ruled with true justice.

Analysis

Muslims can reflect on a number of issues concerning the migration to Abyssinia, among them: 1) when Muslims are being severely persecuted and fear for their faith, they should migrate when they have the option to do so, 2) Muslims are to leave their land if Islam is under attack, 3) When migrating, Muslims must seek a land with a just ruler for protection, and 4) It is important for Muslims to learn to eloquently interact with non-Muslims in clarifying and enlightening others about Islam.

Ja'far ibn Abi Talib's method of invitation during the second migration demonstrates the importance of leadership and knowledge of Islamic doctrines when coming into contact with a foreign nation. He did not merely invited the Negus to Islam in his speech; rather, he described the Prophet, his character, Islam's rulings and its effect upon those who were under the influence of the *Jahiliyya* (or 'Days of Ignorance' which refers to pre-Islamic

¹ Subhani. p. 560.

Arabic) customs. He was also well-acquainted with the view of Jesus in Islam and was therefore able to explain it to the Negus. At the same time, he was able to defend himself after being attacked by the Quraysh.

Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad knew the value of this migration. He empathized with the sorrows of his companions' abuse, sent them to a safe land upon the revelation of the verse from the Qur'anic Chapter *The Bee*, and maintained connections with the Negus after the migration. Following the migration, the Prophet's relationship with the Negus indicates a special method of interaction with rulers of foreign nations. It demonstrates that Muslims are to deal with other nations while being fully aware of Islamic doctrines and values, to invite from a standpoint of honour and not humility, and to speak with intentions of improving the state of humanity from oppression.

The fact that the Prophet extended his hand outside Arab peninsula is a technique Muslims in later generations used to share Islamic teachings with people of other territories. During the Dark Ages of Europe, Muslims migrated to various lands, and instead of subjugating the societies of those regions, Muslims abided by the emphasis the Prophet made in seeking and sharing knowledge and were at the forefront in the sciences and education. The first schools, or madrasahs, were established by the Muslims. Arabic became the scientific and intellectual means of communication. Numerous books were translated from Arabic into Latin to enlighten the Europeans. In contrast with the Christian rule in the Middle Ages, freedom of intellectualism existed under Islamic governance. As a result, people of various faiths and nations – such as the Christians, Jews, and Africans – enjoyed this freedom. Moreover, Muslims made a plethora of contributions in the fields of language, law, education, medicine, philosophy, astrology, art, architecture, and agriculture. This contributed to the emergence of the Renaissance in Europe.

Muslims are to maintain their faith and persevere in doing so. For this to happen, Muslims must continue to seek knowledge as much as possible, and learn about the culture and tactics of the west in order to clearly, kindly, and diplomatically interact with them with confidence. Expanding one's knowledge is to be accomplished under the umbrella of faith and morality, in which Muslims must truly aspire for humanity what the slogan of all the Prophets, angels, and believers always was: Peace.

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