

Imamate: One of the Fundamentals of Faith

By:

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Is Imamate Included in the Fundamentals of Faith?

Raghib Isfahani in his book Mufradatul Qur'an has given the meaning of Imam as leader, that is the one who should be followed and obeyed. That one may be a book or a man, whether it or he is right or wrong. Now that we have understood the meaning of the word Imam we venture to answer the above quoted question. It will be better to quote the verses of the Holy Qur'an as well as the traditions of the Holy Prophet and leave the matter to the readers to decide for themselves.

On the occasion of Ghadir-i Khum the Holy Qur'an addresses the Holy Prophet and says: O Messenger, declare what is revealed to you from your Lord. If you will not declare, it would be as though you have not conveyed My Message. Allah protects you from men. He does not guide the unbelieving people. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:67)

This should be borne in mind that al-Ma'idah is the last surah that was revealed upon the Holy Prophet in his last days. It should also be borne in mind that the Holy Prophet had been preaching monotheism, prophethood, Day of Judgement, prayers and matters relating to polytheism, iconoclasm, etc. For a long time and further that the injunctions regarding Jihad, Fasting, khums and zakat were enforced in 2 A.H. and at the time when Surah al-Ma'idah was revealed it was 10 A.H. in which this particular verse was revealed with so much emphasis. It should again be remembered that the Holy Prophet was not a person who could be daunted or intimidated, else he would have become scared during the early days of his prophethood, when he was all by himself, and not in the last days of his life when he had hundreds and thousands of his followers. This Qur'anic verse tells the Holy Prophet, "Do not be frightened! Allah Protects you ! "

We should also bear in mind that the place where this verse was revealed was the place where the caravans were going to be dispersed towards their respective destinations in different directions. The wind was hot. Those were last days of the life of the Holy Prophet. From this it is proved that the message that he was going to give to the people related to a very important matter and that the Holy Prophet had become aware of the disruptive activities of the hypocrites. However, from all canons of justice we are constrained to believe that the 67th verse of the Surah al-Ma'idah bore a message of utmost importance and that was regarding the succession of the Holy Prophet and the leadership of an infallible Imam for guiding the Muslim Ummah. Many such notable companions of the Holy Prophet who are held in very high esteem of all the muslims and are popular among them have narrated this event of Ghadir-i Khum which pertains to the succession of the Holy Prophet.

Imamate is One of the Fundamentals of Faith

1. In the verse of the Holy Qur'an quoted above Allah reminds the Holy Prophet that if he did not make an announcement regarding the appointment of his successor for the security of the society from the evils of the hypocrites and disruptionists, he would not fully justify his mission of conveying to the people the message of Allah. In view of the strong wording of the relevant verse of Surah al-Ma'idah and his life long teachings, we consider the appointment of the successor as an integral factor of religion.

2. There are 29 hadith in Wassailush Shi'ah, vol. I and 17 hadith in Mustadrakul Wasa'il which establish that the basis of Islam rests on a few principles, and the most important among them is that of Wilayat (the succession of the Holy Prophet). We should like to explain this principle.

Imam Muhammad Baqir says: "The basis of Islam depends on Prayers, zakat, hajj, fasting and wilayat". Zurarah, a devoted follower and companion of the Holy Imam asked him, "Out of these fundamental principles which one is most important".

The Holy Imam replied, "Wilayat is the most important of all". Thereafter, he elaborated, "Since succession or mastership is the key to prayers, fasting and hajj, the successor or the vicegerent is supposed to be the leader and guide". Thus by succession it is meant that the infallible Imam or the vicegerent and successor to the Holy Prophet must be followed and obeyed. In certain narrations Wilayat or succession means obedience of the infallible Imam.

It is interesting to note that in case of prayers, fasting, hajj and zakat each one is affected by physical or financial reasons but the principle of accepting the authority of the Imam remains intact in all circumstances. Besides, it can be further explained that the Holy Prophet never before assembled the people at one place nor did he proclaim his message about prayers, hajj, zakat etc. at the top of his voice, but for the purpose of introducing his successor to the people he had to do it at Ghadir-i Khum and had to wait for the people to assemble there on that deserted place, and when all the people had assembled there, he declared the appointment of Imam Ali as his vicegerent and successor.

Leaving aside the fact that the people have forgotten the basic matter, I fully recollect that while performing circumambulation of the Holy Ka'bah I was lost in the thought that the House of Allah served as a maternity home to the esteemed mother of Imam Ali and a cradle to him who demolished the idols at the ceiling of the Holy Ka'bah by mounting on its walls, and threw them down. Besides, I was also looking at the people who were busy in circumambulating the Holy Ka'bah but what a travesty of fact it was that these people had dislodged the inmate of this cradle and by disowning him were indulging in the formal rite of performing circumambulation.

3. The third argument that can be put forward in support of the importance of Imamate is the famous hadith of the Holy Prophet: "If someone dies without knowing the Imam of his time he dies the death of an ignorant man of the Days of Ignorance prior to Islam".

4. It is stated in the third volume of al-Kafi that if people take the trouble of performing all their obligations without acknowledging the Imam of their time as their guide, their deeds will not be accepted by Allah. It is just like a man, who without having the representative position of an organization, and without informing it or taking its sanction makes certain purchases for it. In that case he will not deserve any sympathy from the management. Thus in Islam the question of motivation, objectives, course of direction and leadership occupies an extra. ordinary position.

Conclusion: After carefully viewing the four arguments given above the readers can easily make out whether in Islam Imamate is the primary thing or it is secondary. In short, the belief in monotheism will not flourish if the leader of the society is not the infallible guide because monotheism will be taken over by evil forces of the devils and transgressors. The principles and the teachings of the Prophets and the institution of prophethood will be secure as long as it is protected and safeguarded by the infallible Imam otherwise the Divine laws and commandments will lose their sanctity and innovations, alterations and personal whims and fancies will take their roots and the Divine revelations will lose their credibility.

Besides, the matters relating to the Day of Judgement and its spiritual implications cannot be fully comprehended without the guidance of the Imam. If we apply our commonsense we shall realize that the society without an Imam, will be nothing short of a jungle as it cannot be properly run without a leader, discipline, rules, and regulations. Thus the leader and the laws are inseparable in any given society. Hence the importance of the role of the Imam as a guide and protector of the social system and its laws cannot be denied.

Direct Link of Imamate with Monotheism

Once when Imam Ali Riza was passing by the city of Nishapur, his followers surrounded him and requested him to narrate a hadith. The Holy Imam narrated the following hadith which he had heard from his father and his father from his grandfather and he from his father in a regular order of son hearing from his father up to the first Imam who heard it from the Holy Prophet and he from the archangel Jibra'il and he from the Almighty Allah "Monotheism is My fortress. Whoever enters it will be saved from My wrath". The Holy Imam moved forward and then paused and said, "That is, Monotheism with its prerequisites is the Divine fortress and I myself am one of its pre-requisites". (Biharul Anwar, vol. III)

Thus the Holy Imam established an inseparable link between Monotheism and Imamate just as it exists between a motor car and its wheels or between Prayers and ablutions. In other words without the support of Imamate the concept of Monotheism will not be complete. As long as Monotheism is discussed, Imamate will also be referred to in the discussions, and that Imamate will ever remain viable and effective.

Example: If a physician has asked his patient to take either an injection or a capsule, the patient will understand that the injection and the capsule contain the same ingredients and that's why both would be effective in curing the disease. The following hadith has also been quoted in the books of ahadith:

"The Imamate of Ali is a fortress and whoever enters it will be in safety". (Tafsir Nuruth Thaqaalayn; Safinatul Bihar)

Now it is worth considering that Monotheism means a fortress and Imamate of Imam Ali also means the same that is ;he protection from the wrath of Allah. This is one explanation of the close link between Monotheism and the Imamate.

Thus if we accept the Imamate of Imam Ali it is evident that he will lead us to Allah or if we seek the guidance of Allah, He will direct us to Imam Ali for guidance.

The Need of an Imam

From the same argument, from which we realize the need of a Prophet we also need an Imam. If man had been self-sufficient in seeking the right path, he would never have felt the necessity of the Prophets. We have already dealt with the necessity of the Prophets in our discussions on Prophethood.

Is the Holy Qur'an Not Sufficient?

The Holy Qur'an is such a Book that all Muslims of every sect and belief consider it authentic and everybody selects a few verses of the Holy Qur'an and for the sake of his interest deduces their meanings. Then how can it be said that the Holy Qur'an can be sufficient to lead us to the right path without the Imam? Can a book on medicine help cure the patient without the presence of a physician? Can a certain law be just enough without an authority on it or without the existence of its maker and interpreter?

Can there be any ideology without its preceptor?

Can it be accepted that the purpose of man's creation is to worship Allah and to follow the Divine path, but there will be no necessity of any guide in that respect?

Can it be accepted that in principle man desires to attain the position of higher human qualities but he does not happen to have any ideal before him to follow?

Is it not a fact that for one's inherent desires and aspirations there must exist an external source for their fulfillment?

As for example when we feel thirsty we have an answer in water which is an external source to extinguish our thirst. Similarly, we have the answers of all our internal feelings from external sources. Thus we cannot concede that man has the feeling and desire to attain progress and virtue but there is no external thing in existence which can answer that feeling or satisfy that desire.

How can this be possible that a host invites some people to his home and he does not give them his address or does not send somebody to guide particularly when there are people to mislead him. Thus the host should send a guide with the sign of identification so that he may lead them to the correct destination, and, if the occasion warrants, fight against the mischief-makers, who try to misguide them.

How then can we accept that in matters of world affairs man is dependent on someone to guide him but for spiritual guidance and crossing the Divine path and real progress he may not need a guide especially when his knowledge is limited and he is surrounded by Satanic influences?

Have you ever heard about a society in which its individuals do not have the need of a leader?

Have the bees not appointed one amongst them as their chief called the Queen Bee?

Have you ever heard of any instance in government or in politics, in peace or in war that success was achieved without the existence of a leader or commander? Thus who will accept a wayward society without the guidance of an Imam?

Imam Ali says, "It is a must for a nation to have a guide, whether he is good or bad".

In other words for the eradication of evils the existence of a leader is necessary. We need not go too far into discussing the necessity of having an Imam, because it will amount to trying to prove the existence of the sun or some other thing like that, which is self-evident and does not need proving. Instead we should ponder over the attributes and merits of the Imam and discuss the standard and criterion as basis of the appointment of the Imam. We should also discuss the question of his appointment or dismissal. We should distinguish a true leader from the false leader. Therefore, we now conclude the discussion on the necessity of the Imam because there is still a lot more to be said on this subject. In short, the question of the necessity of having an Imam is not in dispute as everybody knows that without a leader a healthy society cannot be established. Everybody knows that for the enforcement of Divine laws and commandments and for their protection, authority and

power are needed and to achieve that purpose there must be an able leader. Thus under the circumstances when everybody cannot reach the Holy Prophet and when one has accepted the Holy Prophet as the last Prophet of Islam, the necessity of having an Imam after him cannot be denied. Can it be possible that Almighty Allah sends His Prophet who through his sincere efforts enforces the Divine commandments in the society and then leaves it without delegating his authority to some capable man to guide the Ummah? It will indeed not be a wise thing. Can the action of the Prophet leaving the Ummah without a guide be compatible with his great concern and devotion to his mission about which we all know?

In fact those who think that the Prophets despite bearing hardships and difficulties for the sake of establishing the religion and law and order among their people left this world without appointing a successor to lead them are in manifest error. They will have to account for their conduct before Allah as they doubted the wisdom of Allah and the sincere devotion of the Prophets to accomplish the task of Prophethood.

In principle, Islam and its teachings should either be compatible with the inner feelings and external conditions and progressive, or alternatively should be left alone in the books so as to be forgotten with the passage of time.

Thus if any school of religious thought possesses a leader with the special attributes of an Imam that will be of the first kind described above that is, viable and progressive otherwise it will be of the second kind that is listless, static and ineffective.

Based on this reasoning Imam Ali Riza said: "By correct leadership religion and its teachings are strengthened and the Islamic society founded by the Imam gives an impetus to Islam in its expansion and development so much so that he fulfils all the individual and collective needs, material as well spiritual of the people". (Safinatul Bihar)

From this narration we note that the Holy Imam has explained to us that without the guidance of an Imam, Islam cannot progress and becomes lifeless and degenerate.

It is a fact that mankind is faced with one or the other problem every day, and if the Islamic society does not seek the help of Allah's commandments, the revelations and the true Imam, people will lose their peace of mind and each one of them will follow his own course and the Islamic society will be in a state of chaos and confusion. Hence the presence of a guide is necessary side by side with the code of teachings.

Is it not necessary to learn swimming from an expert for swimming across the river? Does a man not need a boat to transport him from one bank of the river to the other? Similarly in every walk of life a guide or a leader is needed. Is it not correct that according to the Holy Imams this world is like a deep ocean or a river in spate? Are not the ahlul bayt and the infallible Imams the Ark of Salvation? Therefore, how can it be possible that Allah creates this world like a stormy river and sees the people drowning in it when there are dangerous animals in it, and does nothing for them? As this is contrary to the Wisdom of Allah, the necessity of an infallible Imam becomes imperative. How can it be possible that Allah gave the control of human body to the mind so that an eye or an ear or any other organ may not err, and yet for the guidance of a great human society Allah leaves it alone without the guidance of the infallible Imam to solve the people's problems and to lead them to the right path?

The purpose of creating the Universe is that mankind may take benefit. The Holy Qur'an says:

It is He Who created everything on earth for you. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:29)

Allah has made the day and the night, the sun and the moon and all the stars subservient to you by His command. (Surah an-Nahl, 16:12)

Thus man is a superior being among all the creations and the purpose of creation of man is that he should worship Allah, look toward Allah and work for the cause of Allah.

In short, for every material or spiritual function a few things are needed some of which are as follows: The Path, the Means, the Objective and the Guide.

In this context the role of the guide or a leader is the most important one because without the guide we shall forget our path and all our means and objectives will become meaningless. From this it is proved that the Universe is created for us and we have been created to worship Allah and to return to Allah. For journeying towards Allah we need a guide and the guide of that journey is the Imam.

The Conduct of the Imam

Man needs an illustration so that he should know where he is heading to, what actually he is,

and what he should be like. Imam is that kind of man like whom every man should be. Imam is an ideal, a specimen or a living example. Without the guidance of an ideal, man will lose his way. If this ideal is not there to lead him to Allah the temporal desires and the Devils will create models for him. If we do not talk of good and noble things, do not remember our real models, do not keep them in our vision all the time, and do not look to them with highest esteem and love by practically following them, the Devils will distract us and introduce others to us, with false propaganda, so that we may be inclined towards them. The Holy Qur'an mentions only those things of the personalities which are worthy of being followed by others just as the iconoclasm of Prophet Ibrahim but it does not mention the name of his wife, the number of his children, and their birth and demise.

Imam is not only a guide, he is an Imam. He is not only a guardian, he is an Imam. That is to say, his every action including worship, eating, drinking, struggling, talking and remaining silent, is a lesson and model for us.

Imam gives practical shape to the standing instructions. Imam stresses that Islam is not a whim but it is a reality; it is not a speculation but it is a truth; it is not a name only but it is a practical code of life. Imam with all his special attributes and human qualities is the Imam everywhere, at every place and at every time. Thus we recognize Prophet Ibrahim as an Imam, though not of our time.

Under Imam's Protection: The Holy Qur'an says that on the Day of Judgement each group will be called with its Imam:

On the day when We call every nation with their leaders. (Surah Bani Isra'il, 17:71)

Punishment Doubly Awarded: The Holy Qur'an addressed the wives of the Holy Prophet saying that if anyone of them committed any wrong she would be awarded a double punishment. It says:

Wives of the Prophet! If anyone among you commits indecency, her torment will be double. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:30)

In fact, the wife of the Holy Prophet is supposed to be a model for the people and as such she should prove herself to be a guide to others, not to speak of committing sin herself.

A tradition says that before the remission of one sin of a scholar seventy sins of an ignorant person will be remitted. (Usul Kafi; Kitab: fazlul 'ilm)

Since a scholar is supposed to set an example to others by his deeds, his minor shortcoming is considered to be great.

Some of our scholars say that if a scholar or a wise man commits even a minor sin, it is regarded as a major sin because his deeds have a direct influence on others. Accordingly the sin or the innovation made by those who are supposed to be the leader of the society is several times greater than that of an ordinary person. This is due to the fact that people start following a corrupt Imam.

An Interesting Narration: Some people asked Imam Ali Naqi as to why Imam Ali used to spare the wounded ones in the Battle of Jamal but in the Battle of Siffin he used to kill even the wounded ones? The Holy Imam explained that in Siffin its leader or commander was alive. The wounded ones used to flock round him. The enemy reinforced the army, encouraged the weaker ones and attended upon the wounded with consoling words, and above all the root of the discord was still in their minds to gain strength and thus in order to wipe out the total menace it was better to kill all of them. But in case of the Battle of Jamal, Talha and Zubayr had been killed already, and after the camel of Ayesha had sat down, those who were fleeing were not pursued, and since they had no refuge they were spared their lives. (Tuhaful 'Uqul, p. 508)

From this example it can be fully understood that what a great role a leader has to play against the forces of evil and how differently he acts in varying circumstances.

The Remembrance of the Imam: The great influence of the expansionists lies in their attempt to distract our people from our ideal Imams and to mislead our younger generation through brain-washing and talking merits of other people. It is for this reason that the ziyarat (homage) to the Imam is necessary so that by presenting oneself before him one may be able to discover his faults and deficiencies.

The reason for organizing the mourning ceremonies on the martyrdom of Imam Husayn is the same so that one may be able to revive in his memory the great sacrifice the Holy Imam made for keeping Islam alive and hear the facts about the Holy Imam's patience and steadfastness in his hour of trial, and finally to apply himself to follow the Imam in his day to day life and adopt better way of life and die an honourable death.

The Stress on the Meaning of Imam

The word "Imam" has very interesting meanings. It is so splendid and heartening that no other word such as 'teacher', 'patron', 'leader', 'preacher' and 'sermonizer' has such a wide meaning as the word 'Imam' has, as all these words connote teaching and training but not carrying a movement. But an Imam is one who moves himself with his deed and action and makes others follow him.

An Example of Imam's Conduct: It is narrated of a battle that Caliph Umar wanted to go to the battlefield himself but the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali advised him not to do so. The Holy Imam explained that as he was the Caliph the enemy would be justified to think that the Muslim army had lost strength and that was why the Caliph himself had to come to the battlefield and thus whatever force or strength was left with them had been brought there in the person of their Caliph. In that way the feeling of awe that they had of their army would be diminished.

On the Day of the Judgement the sceptics would say to their leaders that if they had been left to themselves they would have not come to that pass and by natural inclinations would certainly have turned believers. The Holy Qur'an says:

The oppressed among them will say to their oppressors, had it not been for you we would certainly have been believers. (Surah as-Saba, 34:31)

The Holy Qur'an calls upon the Muslims to make the leaders and commanders of the infidels their target in battle and Jihad, that is to fight against the leaders of the infidels; it says:

Fight against the leaders of the unbelievers if they violate their pledge and revile your faith, to force them to stop their aggression against you. (Surah at-Tawba, 9:12)

We read similar pronouncements of our Imams that people do not become as much influenced by their parents as they do by their leaders.

Imam Ali said: "People are as much influenced by their rulers as they are by their parents".

Similarly, we read another well-known saying: "People follow the religion of their kings".

The Holy Prophet said: "When two groups of my followers go astray the whole Ummah will go astray, and when they become virtuous and noble they would influence all others and then all will become noble and virtuous". The two groups referred to in this tradition are the rulers and the jurists. (Bihar Anwar)

Hence, the importance of the conduct of a leader and its influencing force becomes quite evident.

The Role of Imam in Hadith

Imam Muhammad Baqir says: "Any group of people who accepts a tyrant ruler will face the wrath of Allah even if it happens to be pious. On the contrary those, who accept a just Imam appointed by Allah, deserve His forgiveness and mercy even if they happen to be of bad conduct". (al-Kafi, vol. I.)

From this important tradition it is proved that the thing which is more important than deeds is the method and the path. Suppose a driver who is experienced, wise, and healthy will drive his bus safely to its destination irrespective of the fact that some of the passengers have thrown peels of oranges and bits of cigarettes in the bus and are in dirty clothes with torn shoes etc. If the bus driver happens to be a blind or insane person then the passengers of the bus despite wearing good clothes and shoes will be heading towards disaster. Thus in any journey the importance is of the leader who leads one to the destination. The Holy Qur'an says:

Who strays more than one who follows his lust without guidance from Allah. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:50)

In the context of this verse we come across a tradition which says: "Whoever adopts his religion according to his own inclination and opinion and does not follow a true Imam, according to this verse is a misguided person". (al-Mizan, vol. XVI, p. 56)

Another tradition says: "One, who worships much, but does not follow a true Imam, is certainly a misguided person, and Allah does not accept his worship". (al-Kafi, vol. I.)

The Purpose of Imamate and Leadership

In the eyes of Islam, world, wealth, status, authority and the government are the means and not the end. That is the reason why the devotees of Allah, who assume some authority do not give up leading a simple life nor do they become self-conceited, arrogant and proud. The Holy Qur'an says:

It is the life of Hereafter which We have prepared for those who do not want to be haughty in the land nor do they spread corruption. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:83)

Ibn Abbas says: "Once when I visited Imam Ali, he was mending his shoes. The Holy Imam asked me, 'What do you think will be the price of this shoe?' I said, 'It has no value at all'. The Holy Imam then said, 'By Allah! To my mind this torn shoe is more valuable than my ruling over the people provided I enforce truthfulness and eradicate the untruth'".

Indeed, Imamate and leadership are not for comfort and luxuries but they are meant for delivering the people from polytheism, tyrannies, ignorance and dissensions and not for enabling the leader to lead a life of comfort and selfishness. The purpose of acquiring authority by the infallible Imams was to enforce the Divine commandments. In Islam Imamate is not a secondary thing but it is an important responsibility. It is not a bed of roses but it carries a heavy burden of responsibilities. Thus the Imams used to lead a very simple life. At times of need they used to go to the court like ordinary citizens. They used to earn their own livelihood and never accepted any favour or concessions.

Imam Ali in one of his letters wrote to Ibn Abbas: "Do not amass wealth because of the authority of ruling the people that you have got. It is not fair for you to take wrong advantage of the position you are holding and oppress your enemies and the opponents. Your article of faith should be to institute truth and keep it alive and eradicate the evil". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XL, p. 328)

When Imam Ali after assuming the authority of ruling over the people visited a city, he said, "I have come down to your city in my old dress, with this asset and this horse. If after a few days you find that I depart from your city in different clothes you should conclude that I misappropriated the public property". (Biharul Anwar, vol IX, p. 500)

On another occasion Imam Ali said: "I swear by the Creator of this Universe that had they not sworn unconditional allegiance to me; had they not manifested profound gratitude for my accepting their rulership; had not the presence of helpers and supporters made it incumbent upon me to defend the faith; and had Allah, the Almighty not taken a promise from the learned to put a check upon the luxurious and vicious lives of Oppressors and tyrants as well as to try to reduce the pangs of poverty and starvation of the oppressed and downtrodden, and had He not made it incumbent upon them to secure back the usurped rights of the weak from the mighty and powerful oppressors, I would even now have left the rulership of this State as I did earlier and would have allowed it to sink into anarchy and chaos. Then you would have seen that in my view the glamour of a vicious life of your world is no better than the sneezing of a goat". (Sermon—7, Peak of Eloquence)

Imam Ali further says: "Almighty Allah by entrusting your affairs to me has given me right over you. And as I have a right over you, so you too have a right over me. This incumbency between us is mutual". (Sermon—221, Peak of Eloquence)

From this we have now understood that the aim of rulership is not comfort and luxuries otherwise Imam Ali for passing his day to day life would not have been constrained to sell his sword and say, "By Allah! Had I some money to spend over buying simple clothes for me I would have not sold my sword".

Similarly, when Imam Ali Riza was the heir-apparent in Mamun's time he used to sleep on a jute mat and sit with his slaves partaking the meals together. And Prophet Sulayman despite his exalted position of being the Prophet of Allah lived with the poor and loved them too". (al-Hayat)

The Signs and the Attributes of the Imam

Since the leadership of the Ummah, i.e. the Imamate, is of paramount importance and since the people are likely to fall under the trap of false leaders, the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet have shown the signs of an Imam who can guide mankind to distinguish between a straight path and a ditch. Here we enumerate such signs very briefly:

1. A beggar entered the Masjid of the Holy Prophet and asked the people for alms, but the people paid no attention to him. After all the beggar said, "O Allah! Be a witness to this. These people have disappointed me". Imam Ali was offering his prayers and was in the bowing posture. He stretched his hand and the beggar came forward in front of him. The Holy Imam gave away the ring to the beggar. At this moment the following Qur'anic verse was revealed:

Only Allah, His Messenger and the true believers who are steadfast in prayers and pay alms while they kneel down during prayers, are your guardians. (Surah Ma'idah, 5:55)

That was the sign by which the people fully understood that the guardian who is referred to in the revelation besides Allah and His Holy Prophet was none except Imam Ali. There is no doubt about it that before this incident, the exalted position of Imam Ali had already been

fully shown to all concerned, but the reference with regard to the incident of giving away alms in prayers was pointedly a sign of Imam Ali's Imamate and guardianship that after Allah and His Holy Prophet he had the exalted position of the guardianship and patronage of the entire Ummah, otherwise mere giving away of the ring in bowing posture during prayers cannot be a sign of Imamate and guardianship without a direct reference being made through Divine revelation.

Example: If you send somebody to your home to fetch the key of the store from your wife, and for the satisfaction of your wife you tell him a sign that he should tell her that you have decided the previous night to give some money to such and such person so that your wife could take it as a sign of genuineness of the message. Just think it over that fetching a key from one's wife through a messenger, and message regarding the decision of helping somebody by money, has no relevancy. The giving away of the ring in prayer is also like this as it was used to serve as a sign of the Imam because only giving away something in alms does not ordinarily make anyone exalted in the eyes of Allah.

The Imamate of Imam Ali had already been established but this incident was only to emphasize it as a sign from Allah.

2. The Holy Prophet got himself busy for 23 years in his mission of Prophethood. Each year has 365 days and the total number of days involved in preaching comes out at 8395.

The following revelation was made in the Holy Qur'an:

Today the unbelievers have lost all hope about your religion. On this day I have perfected your religion. Completed My favours to you. And have chosen Islam as your religion. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:3)

You just glance over these thousands of days of the Holy Prophet's mission and find out only one single day to which the above-mentioned revelation aptly applies. It is certain that all days were not alike but of course one out of such days will be the special day of utmost importance. We, therefore, review the days so as to mark that special day.

(i) Was this day the first day of the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet? No, because on that day neither the unbelievers had become disappointed nor the religion was completed. Therefore, it cannot be that special day.

(ii) Was that the day when the Holy Prophet was asked to preach openly after three years of preaching in secrecy? No, this cannot be that special day because that day was the beginning of preaching of Islam and it had not reached the stage of completion.

(iii) Was that the day of migration of the Holy Prophet from Makkah to Madina or was it a day of the birth of Fatima the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet or the day of victory at Badr? No, because after the migration and the birth of Lady Fatimatuz Zahra and the victory of the Battle of Badr the Qur'anic revelation were made on the Holy Prophet for several years and therefore none of these days can be regarded as a day when religion was completed.

(iv) Was that the day about which Allah has specified four special distinctions i.e. the day of the Conquest of Makkah in 8 A.H. or the day of granting concessions to the unbelieving pilgrims? No, it is not so, because on the day of the conquest of Makkah only the unbelievers of Makkah had become disappointed and not all the unbelievers, and further that from 8 A.H. to 10 A.H. until the demise of the Holy Prophet (in these two years) several verses were revealed and commandments were made and, therefore, no day of the year of 8 A.H. can be considered as the day of the completion of religion or favours.

(v) Is it possible that that day was the day of 'Arafa' (the day preceding the day of performing hajj) when the Holy Prophet was busy in performing the rites of pilgrimage? No, it is not so, because the performance of the rites of pilgrimage by the Holy Prophet was a part of religion and not the entire religion but the Holy Qur'an says on that day when the religion was completed.

In short if we continue our search to know that day we find that that was the Day of Ghadir-i Khum which falls on the 18th of Zilhajja. That year was the last year of the life of the Holy Prophet when he with thousands of Muslims performed the rites of hajj and before returning to Madina when he arrived at a point from where people were to disperse to different directions to their respective destinations (Yemen, Madina, Iraq and Abyssinia etc.). That was the place of Ghadir, where the commandment regarding the appointment of Imam Ali as the Imam and the successor to the Holy Prophet came from Allah. Then the Holy Prophet with special attention and arrangement according to the command of Allah, appointed Imam Ali as the Imam for the guidance of the Ummah.

1. On that day the unbelievers lost all hope as on that day their allegations against the Holy

Prophet (being the poet, the magician or the insane) were falsified. The Battles of Badr, Khaybar, Trench etc. had all been finished and all conspiracies and intrigues had been nullified. But the unbelievers only hope rested on the day of the demise of the Holy Prophet because they had calculated at their own that since the Holy Prophet had grown old and had no son to succeed him either, nor had he appointed a successor, the forceful impact of Islam would diminish but when they saw on the day of Ghadir that a person by the name of Ali who was ablest of all had been appointed as a successor to the Holy Prophet, it frustrated all their hopes. Thus on that day the unbelievers had become disappointed.

2. It was the day when religion was brought to completion, when with the laws and commandments, the appointment of the ruler was settled when with the laws its enforcer had been appointed; when with the plan the model was also introduced; and when the leader for expanding the Islamic movement had been appointed. The Holy Qur'an says:

On this day I have perfected your religion. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:3)

Hence the above-mentioned verse means the religion cannot be considered to be complete without the appointment of the leader.

3. On that day when Allah said: I have completed My favours to you. But in truth all the favours will be of no avail if the favour of having the leadership of the Imam is denied by the people because it is the Imam who by his guidance and teaching enables the people to make use of the Divine favours. It means that refusing to accept the leadership of Imam nullifies all other favours.

In clear terms it means today when you have got an able ruler and guide who will enforce the Divine commandments and when in all respects Islam has been perfected, I have chosen Islam as your religion.

We have seen that how the Holy Qur'an in its unique style has described the thing which people read every day about the importance of the day which is applied only on one particular day of the entire period of the Prophethood of the Holy Prophet.

Since we are writing it in brief we conclude this topic here. We should now like to trace the circumstances pertaining to the endeavours of the Holy Prophet to indicate the importance of the leadership and Imamate.

The Holy Prophet's Endeavours

The Holy Prophet right from the beginning of his Prophethood had introduced his successor. When on the first day of the preaching the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

Warn your nearest relations. (Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26:214)

When this verse was revealed and Allah commanded him to warn his near relations, the Holy Prophet arranged a feast and invited all his relatives he said to them, "I do not know of any person who may have brought for his nation anything better than what I have brought for you. Allah has commanded me to invite you to Him. Who amongst you is there to help me in my mission and be my brother, successor, and vicegerant?" (Tarikh Abul Fida, vol. I, p. 116)

It was Imam Ali who stood up every time to support the Holy Prophet while all others remained defiant.

The Holy Prophet time and again spoke about Imam Ali. On the occasion of the Battle of Tabuk, he deputed him as his successor and said to him, "O Ali! You are to me as Prophet Musa was to Harun". (Sahih Bukhari and Tafsir Namuna, vol. VI)

The Holy Prophet urged the people how they should treat his beloved daughter, Lady Fatima after him and said: "The support of Fatima of a man is the proof of his truthfulness".

Sometimes the Holy Prophet made Abuzar a standard and said: "His tongue is pious and his words are truthful. It means, "O People! Find out with whom Abuzar sides in the matter of guardianship and Imamate".

Sometimes he said to Ammar Yasir, "O Ammar! Those, who persecute and kill you, will belong to the group of rebels". This remark was a direct hit on Mu'awiya because when in the Battle of Siffin Ammar Yasir was martyred at the hands of Mu'awiya's troops, the people at once recollected the prophecy of the Holy Prophet which he made about Ammar Yasir and realized that his killers were oppressors and rebels and believed that Mu'awiya's claim was false and thus they dissociated themselves from Mu'awiya's forces.

Therefore, Mu'awiya on the advice of Amr bin 'As cleverly started giving a different interpretation to the Holy Prophet's prophecy about Ammar Yasir and adopted means to counteract the indiscipline and chaos prevailing in his army.

Sometimes the Holy Prophet through figures of speech drew the attention of the people to the guidance of the infallible ahlul bayt as for example likening the ahlul bayt to the Ark of

Prophet Nuh, he said, "My ahlul bayt are like the Ark of Prophet Nuh; whoever boarded it were saved and the infidels who did not embrace the faith and did not board the Ark were drowned". (al-Ghadir, vol. II, p. 301)

Sometimes the Holy Prophet spoke of the infallibility and high virtues of the infallible Imams and reminded the people about their wisdom and leadership by saying, "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate". (Tafsir Burhan, vol. I, p. 191)

Even up to the last days of his life the Holy Prophet did not give up his endeavours as he asked for the pen and paper so that he might write something for the Ummah but alas! he was given such a reply which was against all manner of etiquette, religion, and the Holy Qur'an, and the very people who thought they deserved the reins of caliphate prevented the Holy Prophet from writing down something on a piece of paper as they put an excuse that the "man" was in a state of delirium because of his acute illness and said, "innar rajula la yahjur" (The man is talking nonsense) Allah forbid! Would that these people had known that the Almighty Allah said about His Prophet that he never spoke anything out of his desire. The Holy Qur'an says:

He does not speak out of his own desires. It is a revelations which has been revealed to him. (Surah an-Najm, 53:3, 4)

Well, it was our intention to emphasize that the Holy Prophet made every endeavour to guide his followers and to make arrangement for Imamate. On the first day also he invited the people to realize that anyone who helped him in his mission of Prophethood would become his vicegerent and Imam and on the last days of his life also he asked for pen and paper, and on the day of Ghadir Khum also by giving the signs that to whom his loving daughter Lady Fatima Zahra, great men like Abuzar and Ammar Yasir approved would be the Imam.

In short the Holy Prophet spared no effort from his side but it is an irony of fate that the very wishes of the Holy Prophet were flagrantly flouted. Let Allah, Almighty punish those who from the very beginning sabotaged the interest of the Imamate and the guidance of the Ummah.

A Question: Why despite all the high virtues, abilities and attributes and support of the Holy Prophet, the people overlooked Imam Ali for a long period?

Answer: The flouting of the Divine commands is not a new thing. The Holy Qur'an has taught us to be pious and trustworthy and yet piety and trustworthiness are very rare. And why did Satan not prostrate himself before Adam? Did not the followers of Prophet Musa after he went out of sight and lost contact with them, go astray? Forgetfulness, and indifference are human weaknesses. Of course only those who build up their own character and by self-discipline make themselves deserving of Allah's kindness are the exceptions. Besides, old feuds and enmity which the people were harbouring against Imam Ali became the cause of people's refusal to accept him as their Imam. Those of the people who got killed in the Battles of Badr, Uhud, Khayber and Hunayn belonged to one or the other tribes so how could their relatives be prepared to accept him as their Imam, who had killed their people. Another reason of people's refusal to accept Imam Ali as the Imam or renouncing after once accepting him as the Imam was the question of the Holy Imam's justice and concept of good conduct. This fact becomes quite clear when we see the people, who had severed their allegiance to him but after the assassination of Uthman had gathered round the Holy Imam, and those very people again broke their allegiance to the Imam and triggered off the Battle of Jamal against him. These people had great hopes of receiving extraordinary benefits, financial and social, but when they saw that the Holy Imam was not partial to anybody in any matter, they got disappointed. Besides, when some selfish and notable people suggested to the Holy Imam that they should be consulted by him in the State affairs, he replied that in any matter in which he would not find any express command of Allah and His Prophet, he would no doubt consult the people, and they would be included among them.

In short, these people had their own interest before them and they found that the Holy Imam was very strict in safeguarding the property of the poor people so much so that he was not going to spill even a drop of milk to go waste and was not prepared to pay any heed to their unreasonable demand; hence they turned hostile to him.

One another reason of the people's turning against Imam Ali was his strict justice and acute observation. Of course, an Imam who does not spare a single public property to be misused or usurped by anyone and instead would retrieve it back to public treasury, would not be popular among the people, who are mostly evil-minded and hence they would go against him.

However, the people did not abide by the wish of the Holy Prophet, overlooked the Divine appointment of the Imam and altered for themselves the method of guidance and rulership. These people, of course will be answerable before Allah as they fall under the category of the people within the meaning of the following Qur'anic revelation:

And as for those who speak ill of the Messenger of Allah will face a painful punishment. (Surah at-Tauba, 9:61)

What would be a greater sin than to ignore the bequest of the Holy Prophet?

Expression of Truth and Endeavours for it

Besides the expression of the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet Imam Ali himself on several occasions made a clear statement of his truthfulness, abilities and qualities as for example it is in his sermon in Nahjul Balaghah that when a fellow asked the Holy Imam as to how much ambitions he had of ruling the people, he replied that he only demanded that much of his right which was only his. He says: "By Allah, that man snatched the caliphate as if it was an insignia, which could be put on by him; though he knew very well that I was as indispensable to the caliphate as the pivot to the grindstone (upon which its revolvings depend).

The eminence of my position among those men was such that I was like a fountainhead from which wisdom flowed and nobody could aspire to rise to the heights of my knowledge. But I was forced to bear this usurpation and turn my face away from the calamity; I was in serious straits. There were two alternatives before me: either to fight for my rights without the help of supporters, or to patiently endure the bereavement; the endurance was going to be of such a sad and long duration that during this period young men would become old, the old would lose their vitalities and the faithful would end their days unsuccessfully trying to improve the situation". (Sermon—7, Peak of Eloquence)

In that way the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali explains to the people about the position of the Imam and the Divine guidance.

Some Attributes of the Imam

I fail to understand from where I should begin and what I should write on this important subject. After having gone through the narrations about the attributes of the Imam I am simply wonder struck. Apart from this my esteemed readers also would not bear it, if I may dwell upon the subject in detail. But it is the wish of everybody to get himself acquainted with some of the attributes of the Imam and I too have decided to describe some of the attributes of Imam.

(i) Imam Must be Infallible: Infallibility does not mean that one does not commit any sin but it means that one should not even conceive of committing a sin.

We are saved from committing many sins and in other words we are in a state of infallibility, that is neither we have committed any sin nor have we conceived of committing it, e.g. the sin of going nude in the streets, the sin of committing suicide, the sin of killing somebody etc. Therefore, we do have a knowledge of many sins but we never think of committing them. Similarly, Imam because of his immense knowledge and faith has the knowledge of all sins but their attitude not towards one or a few but towards all of them is such that they do not even think of them.

(ii) Large-heartedness: Strong soul and large-heartedness are the means of rulership. Narrow-mindedness, irritable temperament and hastiness are not good for running the administration of a society or a State or for leading and guiding the people to progress and prosperity.

When Allah selected Prophet Musa for the guidance of the people, he asked for a few things from Him, the first one among them was high courage, self-control and magnanimity. The Holy Qur'an says:

He said, O my Lord! Enlarge my breast for me. And make my mission easy to me. (Surah Ta Ha, 20:25—26)

And it is about our Holy Prophet that when the believers wanted to avenge tortures given by the unbelievers, he did not give them permission and instead said, "Today is the day of mercy not of revenge".

And it is about Imam Hasan who after hearing the highly insolent and despicable remark of a syrian about him said: "Why have you become so angry with me? If you need money I will make you happy with enormous money. If you need a house, I will provide you a house". The Holy Imam treated him so politely that the fellow became ashamed of his behaviour and finally confessed by saying, "It is Allah's secret as to whom He makes the Imam and the

leader".

(iii) **Justice:** When all the people expect justice, Imam should be the emblem of justice. Let us go back to the life of Imam Ali for a while, and have a glimpse of his justice. We have already mentioned many interesting incidents in our discussions on social justice. However, we will simply mention one or two examples of the words and deeds of the Holy Imam:

- Imam Ali in a letter to one of his officials warned him thus: "If I heard that you misappropriated the public treasury, by Allah I will deal with you severely". (Letter—20, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1 984)
- Regarding the policy matter of the State, Imam Ali wrote to Malik Ashtar: "The share for the far-flung areas should be the same as for the nearby ones". (Letter—53, Peak of Eloquence)
- About his assassin, Ibn Muljam, Imam Ali said, "Do not kill anyone other than my assassin". He further went on to say, "And that you should do it by one stroke only as he did in my case and thus do not exceed the limit of justice". (Letter—47, Peak of Eloquence)
- In the case of flogging a culprit when Qambar awarded him three extra lashes in addition to the prescribed number of lashes, Imam Ali whipped Qambar with three lashes as in this case he did not show any leniency or favour because of Qambar being very much attached to the Holy Imam in devotion, service and regards. (Qisarul Jumal, vol. II, p. 21)
- Imam Ali said, "By Allah, if all the seven continents with all that they contain are offered to me as a remuneration or bribe for depriving an ant of the husk of a grain of barley carried by it, I will never do it". (Sermon—228, Peak of Eloquence)
- In another incident when the Holy Imam heard that non Muslim woman was unjustly deprived of her ornaments and no usual protection was given to her, he became so annoyed that he said that for this shameless act if a Muslim dies he would not mind it.

An Incident: Once the people asked a preacher to say something on the attributes of Imam Ali. He mounted the pulpit and said, "Imam Ali was a man of knowledge and wisdom". He paused and then heaved a sigh and said, "Ali was pious". He sighed again and said, "He was brave and worshipped Allah". He again sighed, and came down from the pulpit. People asked him, "It was not a speech at all" He replied, "The position of Imam Ali is highly exalted. I do not possess enough knowledge and time, and, therefore, I thought that there was nothing better than that I should heave a sigh, give the hints, and then retire". We are also giving passing reference only.

Imam Should Subdue His Passions: Imam Ali says: "What a bad thing it would be if my passions overcome me and distract me from the path of truthfulness and justice!" (Biharul Anwar, vol. XXV, p. 164)

Imam Ja'far Sadiq narrates from the authority of Imam Ali: "There are many conditions for Imamate and one out of them is that temporal and worldly affairs do not engage the Imam's attention".

Imam Should be Brave: Imam Ali says: "No battle has ever frightened me nor has it influenced me". (Peak of Eloquence)

Imam Ja'far Sadiq narrates from the authority of Imam Ali. "The Imam should be the bravest of the brave". (Biharul Anwar)

Another narration says: "Imam should not be timid". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XXV, p. 172)

The question of death and martyrdom should be quite apparent to the Imam. Imam Ali says: "By Allah! I have such fondness for death as an infant has for its mother's breast".⁴⁴⁸

Imam Should be Perfect Par Excellence: Imam Ali in his letter to Mu'awiya writes, "O Mu'awiya! Were you ever entrusted with the noble status of administering justice to, and ruling over mankind? Have you the necessary knowledge for that work? Do you really know the canons of equity and justice as laid down by Islam. May Allah protect and withhold me from behaving towards mankind the way you have behaved and from tyranny, exploitation, and murders that you commit". (Letter—10, Peak of Eloquence)

Some Other Attributes of the Imam

(i) **Acts According to the Holy Qur'an:** The Imam should act and pass judgements according to the Holy Qur'an. Imam Ali says: "I swear by my soul that the Imam of the people can be the one who gives orders according to the Holy Book of Allah and should have his belief in the true faith and he should restrain his desires". (al-Irshad by Shaykh Mufid)

(ii) **Imam's Kindness:** About the merits of the Imam, Imam Ali Riza says: "The Imam is more kind to his people than their parents". He further says, "The Imam should possess political acumen so that he may organize the society with correct plans and schemes. He should be in a position to discharge his Divine obligations. The Imam should be so learned that he can

speak to the people in their various languages and dialects". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XXV)

(iii) Devotion: One of the attributes of the Imam is his piety, and his indifference towards worldly things. Imam Ali about the patches stitched on his dress says, "Look at me, I have got so many patches on my dress that I feel ashamed to hand it over to somebody for putting any more patches on it". (Sermon—163, Peak of Eloquence)

At another place he says, "By Allah! I have no yearning and desire for the caliphate". (Sermon—200, Peak of Eloquence)

About devotion, simplicity and living like a poor man we hear from Imam Ali: "Indeed Allah has made it obligatory that the true and just Imams should lead their lives in a simple way and keep their souls under check so that they go side by side with the poor people, who may not suffer from a feeling of deprivation". (Sermon—204, Peak of Eloquence, ISP 1984)

(iv) Imam Never Doubts: Imam Ali says: "Since Truth dawned upon me I never entertained any doubt". (Letter—183, Peak of Eloquence, ISP 1984)

And he further said: "I never lied and the thing revealed to me was not false. I never misled anybody nor was I misled". (Letter—184, Peak of Eloquence, ISP 1984)

(v) The Imam Remains Unaffected by Aspersions: The Imam remains unaffected by aspersions or abuses. Imam Ali says, "I belong to that group on which aspersions and bad remarks have no effect at all". (Peak of Eloquence)

(vi) Imam Should Take the Lead: Anyone who considers himself to be the Imam of the people should before teaching the people and leading them should take the lead himself by educating his soul and before training others by speech should train himself by his deeds. (Peak of Eloquence)

(vii) Imam should be Frank and Above Formalities: Almighty Allah says to Prophet Muhammad:

Tell then: 'I do not seek any reward for my preaching you for I am not a pre tender. It (the Qur'an) is nothing but a reminder to you from the Lord of the Universe. You will certainly know its truthfulness after a certain time. (Surah Sad, 38:86—88)

There are several signs of being formal, for instance, man is not prepared to accept the invitation of unknown people; he does not apologize for his wrong doing; he does not ask people about things he does not know and he does not consult people whenever occasion arises. Anyone who indulges in formalities oppresses the inferior one and remains overawed by his superiors. All these things are the signs of formality, affectation, deceit and wrong methods. The Imam is hospitable, kind and affectionate to all the people. That is why when people ran along with the mount of Imam Ali out of love and respect for him, the Holy Imam forbade them to do that and said: "That is not the correct thing". Similarly, when the people did the same thing with the Holy Prophet he also did not allow them to do it. In the life of the Prophets and the infallible Imams we come across many such incidents of their simplicity and sincerity.

(viii) The Imam is Tolerant But Not Sycophant: A Divine leader should for the sake of educating the people be tolerant but should not placate them by overlooking their crimes because tolerance is for correcting the people's affairs and to ignore the importance of his own exalted position but placating will amount to ignoring the commands of religion and for safeguarding one's position or attaining some higher rank.

Tolerance means that one should make allowances for the people's lapses and condone their shortcomings and waywardness so that they may be drawn towards religion. Placating means that we have no set principles, and maintain liaison with good and bad people as a matter of expediency and diplomacy for the sake of our personal interest. Tolerance emanates from one's broad-mindedness, while flattery comes from personal greed and weakness.

Thus by differentiating the meanings of tolerance and flattery we have to say that the Imam should be tolerant, broadminded, large-hearted and forgiving, so that the unguided people, who have gone astray because of personal weakness and fault, should not be disappointed, but should be attracted to and follow the Imam's teachings. Prophet Yusuf had told his brothers that they would not be questioned about their past misdeeds as the Holy Qur'an says:

He said, 'There shall be no reproof against you this day Allah may forgive you and He is the most Merciful of the merciful' (Surah Yusuf, 12:92)

Of course the Imam and the Guide should be tolerant and enduring as the Holy Prophet said, "I have been made Prophet so that I may be tolerant". (Nahjul Fasahat, hadith, No. 1093)

In another tradition, the Holy Prophet said, "Allah has commanded me to continue being tolerant just as I go on performing my obligatory functions of offering five daily prayers. (Nahjul Fasahat, hadith No. 677)

In a famous tradition we read that the Holy Prophet used to talk to the people according to their mental level. In many other traditions the religious scholars have been told not to speak out all that they know but while doing that they should consider the overall nature, mental horizon and the intelligence of their listeners.

In short tolerance is necessary for all, but for the Imam it is an obligatory condition.

(ix) Imam is Well-conversant with the Philosophical Approach of History. Imam Ali says to his son, Imam Hasan: "My dear son! Though the span of my life is not as large as that of some other people, who have passed away before me, yet I took great care to study their lives assiduously; I went through their activities I contemplated over their deliberations and—; I studied their remains, relics and ruins; I pondered over their lives so deeply that I felt as if I have lived and worked with them from early ages of history down to our times, and I know what did them good and what brought harm to them". (Letter—31, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984)

(x) Imam Does Not Take Undue Advantage of His Position: In this context the Holy Qur'an says about the Holy Prophet:

Allah would never give the Book, authority or prophethood to any man who would tell others to be his servants instead of being the servants of Allah. He would rather tell them to worship Allah for they had been teaching and studying the Book. (Surah Ale Imran, 3: 79)

(xi) Attending the Complaints: Imam Ali used to arrange the complaints in written order and the person against whom the complaint was lodged was summoned to the court of law and was questioned about the complaint and his financial assets were put to scrutiny. The Holy Imam often used to instruct his governors to send him their report on their activities and financial statement of account.

(xii) Patience and Conviction: One of the attributes of the Imam is his patience and conviction. The chief characteristics of Imam include his observation, conviction and faith.

The Holy Qur'an says about the people of Bani Isra'il:

We gave the Book to Musa (Do not have any doubt about the Day of Judgement) and made it a guide for the children of Isra'il. We appointed some of the Isra'ilites as leaders for their exercising patience to guide the others to Our commands. They had firm belief in Our revelations. (Surah as-Sajdah, 32:23, 24)

(xiii) Free from Prejudices: The Imam should be free from all prejudices and attachments of worldly nature, as for instance consideration of tribal, racial and parochial affiliations and all such matters as leave a bad influence on man.

(xiv) Sincerity of Purpose and Indifference to Worldly Gains: Imam Ali wrote to one of his governors in Azarbaijan: "You have not been entrusted with the governorship so that you amass wealth; nor is it a tasty and juicy morsel to be swallowed up". (Letter—5, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984)

The Holy Qur'an also says about the Prophets that they do not expect any gains from anyone. It records the statement of 2, Prophets Nuh, Hud, Saleh, Lut and Shuayb. The Holy Qur'an says about these Prophets as follows:

And I do not ask you any reward for it, my reward is only with the Lord of the Worlds. (Surah ash-Shu'ara, 26: 109, 127, 145, 164, & 180)

Some More Attributes of Imam

- The Imam is the proof of Allah and he tells us what we should be like.
- The Imam is the light which reveals truth and realities, and banishes oppression, polytheism and ignorance.
- The Imam is trustworthy. He does not absorb man's potentialities within himself but invites the people towards Allah.
- The Imam possesses all kinds of knowledge, perfections and ancestral characteristics.
- The Imam is the vicegerent of Allah on earth. He is like a sacred and pious blood in the life of the society that is to say it serves as life-blood for rejuvenating the insipid society.

Imam Ali says, "Actually for the Imamate and guidance of the people the most suitable is he, who is the ablest of all the people and who has the greatest knowledge of the Divine Commandments". (Peak of Eloquence)

Thus the Imam should possess knowledge, ability, and capacity for everything. Imam Ali further says, "The standard of Imam can be borne only by that person who is fully

conversant with all matters pertaining to truth, knowledge and wisdom and who possesses patience of the highest degree.

Imam and Equality of Rights: Imam Ali says, "I am one amongst you and a human being like you. Whatever is for you is for me also. The command of Allah is as much applicable to you as it is to me. The hardships in the mortal world are for you and me alike and above all, all of us have equal rights".(Commentary on Nahjul Balagha by Ibn Abil Hadid)

Safeguarding the Interest of Islam: Imam Ali was deprived of his due rights but he remained patient. He used to say that if the affairs of the Muslims were going to be managed satisfactorily he would not mind and instead would bear the injustice done to him.

Imam Ali says, "By Allah ! If I had not been afraid of dissensions among Muslims, I would certainly have adopted a different line of approach and would have retrieved my rights by force". (An Approach to Nahjul Balagha by Murtaza Mutahhery)

Ibn Abbas suggested to Imam Ali that he should not join the advisory council set up by Umar because the plan had been such that he would be deprived of his rights. The Holy Imam said, "Since I have been invited I will definitely go. I do not wish that because of me the meeting should be ineffectual ".

The Method of Appointing the Imam

In today's society the best way of selecting a leader or a man to an important position is by election. Though election may be the solution of this problem, yet this method cannot be correct in every situation, because election cannot alter the reality; it cannot make right as wrong or wrong as right. If the truth is truth it can never be untruth despite the limited number of people supporting it. Nobody can say that a thing selected by 51 persons can be better than the one selected by 49 persons. True, for practical purposes the opinion of the majority can be considered but can majority opinion points towards truth or realities? No, in principle the Islamic government is established on Divine principles and the majority or the minority opinion has no value because this government in fact is the government of Allah. Would it not be better that Allah Who is Omniscient and most Merciful of the merciful should Himself appoint the Imam for the guidance of mankind.

If you care to know you will find that in the Holy Qur'an at about eighty places the opinion of the majority has been condemned. It says:

If you obey most of the people in the land they will lead you astray from Allah's path for they only follow their own conjectures and preach falsehood. (Surah al-An'am, 6:117)

Thus it follows that majority of the immature and untrained people should not be accepted and in Islam the mutual consultation does not apply to the making of laws and the appointment of the Imam, but it only concerns the enforcement of the social laws. In fact, can there be any room for consultation in respect of number of rak'ats in prayers? Can a pebble turn into a pearl if the people gather round it? Can a piece of gold turn into a brick if people ignore it?

Apart from it the Qur'anic verses about consultation or counseling are not the proof of acceptance of the opinion of the majority, but on the contrary we take counseling as a means of arriving at a correct decision and not what the majority of people hold as their opinion. Consultation or counseling is meant for finding the opinion of the people and to sort out the correct opinion. About counseling, the Holy Qur'an presents a triangle, one angle of which pertains to obtaining opinion, the other one to man's own inclination, and the third one dependence upon Allah. Suppose if the majority of people secure power would that be content with its rights or would start oppression Is the majority of people generally honest? Does the majority look to its interest and that of the other people with the same angle? It is a fact that wise and sensible people have accepted this reality that the opinion of the majority of people in a given society is most often wrong but they are compelled to accept it because in other methods there are comparatively more flaws than in the method of selection by election.

But those who have firm belief in Allah do not consider it necessary, in the light of distinct commandments of Allah, revelations and clear-cut narrations, except in case of their enforcement, to follow the majority, and as such they have accepted the Commands of Allah and without fear and doubt are following them with perfect satisfaction.

I would repeat it here again that the opinion of the majority can be a solution of a problem but this method cannot be correct at every place and in every situation. We shall discuss matters about election afterwards.

Unpleasant Experiences

History has revealed that people got themselves elected by vote of majority but sooner or later its defects began to dawn upon them. We had considered those elected people as the best ones, and had prepared ourselves to lay our lives for their sake, and they on their part acted in such a manner by deceit, fraud and diplomacy, that we could not become aware of our wrong decision, and the later events established that they were other than what we had supposed them to be, as their position and status had changed them altogether. Actually we do not possess the knowledge of the unseen and thus as we are unaware of the coming events and the nature of the people's disposition we cannot form a definite opinion about them.

Are man's circumstances not apt to change? Is it not a fact that certainty changes into doubt and vice versa? Does fear not change into faith, and does faith sometimes not change into atheism? We have before us many instances of people about whom we had great hopes but they disappointed us. We also know of instances of people about whom we could not imagine that they would become so virtuous and pious, but all of a sudden they changed and became the source of virtues and blessings. Did the paid magicians of Fir'aun not come out to disgrace Prophet Musa and did they not all of a sudden become the followers of Prophet Musa?

Was Bal'am Ba'ur not a wise man who for the love of worldly things lost all his merits?

By citing these instances it is not our intention to denounce altogether the method of election or the verdict of the people, but our aim is to prove that election can be a means of solving a certain problem but it cannot be a correct, sure and Divine means. Therefore, the best means to solve all problems is the means of Islam. Perhaps we can liken the means of election to the process of drawing the lots but this too can be on some occasions a source of solving a problem but it can not always a practical and sensible means.

To elaborate the above-mentioned discussion we reproduce below an interesting narration of Imam Zaynul Abidin:

The Holy Imam says, "If you come across a man who is courteous, appears to be of good character, possesses the signs of devotion and worship, and is quite humble and modest, you should wait for some time, so that he may not deceive you".

The Holy Imam giving the reasons for patience says: "There are many people who are unable to gain worldly benefits not because of their faith and piety, but because of their physical infirmity, mental incapability, lack of personality, or fear. Thus that person who is incapable, timid and characterless uses religion as a shield to gain the world and he always deceives the people by his pretensions and affectation, and, if circumstances permit he would plunge himself into corruption and immorality".

In the latter part of this narration the Holy Imam says, "If you see that a person is also away from unlawful property, even then you should wait, and not make a hasty decision about his being a good person because a man has varying desires. There are many people who avoid unlawful property but they become inclined to other undesirable and unlawful deeds".

Would that we were able to comprehend the true meaning of the Imam's saying.

The Holy Imam continues to say, "When you see that a man abstains from all evil deeds and does not deceive you also, you should watch his intelligence, because there are many people who are away from evils and yet they do not have commonsense and intelligence, as a result of which they become inclined towards evil instead of good".

In the last portion of his narration Imam Zaynal Abidin continues to say, "If you see that a person possesses good intelligence and does not deceive you also, even then you should wait and see whether he lets his desires overpower his intelligence or with the help of his intelligence he is dominated by his desires, and how much ambitious he is of acquiring false leadership, because there are persons who are losers in this world and also in the Hereafter. They do not forsake the world for the love of Allah but for the sake of achieving the false power and authority. To them the pleasure of having the authority is more important than the pleasure of the world and its bounties.

The Holy Imam at last says: "In fact a noble man is he, who considers disgrace with truth better than honour coming through evil". (Biharul Anwar, vol. LXXIV, p. 184)472

The gist of this long narration is that the question of selecting a leader of the Ummah by means of election cannot be settled when all the influencing factors of deceiving the people and of the people being deceived are predominant.

I again repeat that election can be a means of solving a problem to a certain extent but it

cannot be effective at all places and in all circumstances.

Imam Ja'far Sadiq says, "If a friend of yours has reached a high position or status and he still has one-tenth of his attachment and love that he had for you before, he is not a bad friend". (Biharul Anwar, vol. LXXIV, p. 157)

Just imagine how power changes man's attitude. Therefore many good-natured and sincere people become changed in their attitude and behaviour after attaining a position of authority. That is why we say that the appointment of the leader should come through Divine authority as Allah is All-Knowing and He knows the unseen. Allah alone knows better as to who should be endowed with Prophethood. The Holy Qur'an says:

Allah knows best where to direct His Message. (Surah al-An'am, 6:125)

People's Decision is Not Always Correct

Imam Muhammad Baqir said to Jabir bin Abdullah Ansari: ' O Jabir! You cannot be a friend of ours until you make yourself such that if all the people of the town say about you that you are a bad man and you do not grieve and gumble or if they say that you are a good man and you do not feel happy about it and that to know your own-self and submit yourself to the scrutiny of the Holy Book". (Buzurg Salan, vol. I, p. 431)

From this narration it becomes evidently clear that the common opinion or decision of the people is not always correct.

After it has been proved that Imamate is an important principle of the belief and is the source of guidance and development of the social order and that without following the Imam worship is not accepted despite one's day and night worshipping of Allah. The Holy Imam says: "By Allah! If some one engages himself in prayers during the night, and fasts during the day, but does not accept our leadership, will, on the Day of Judgement, either face a great torment of Allah or at-east Allah will not be pleased with him". (Biharul Anwar, vol.XXVI, p. 190)

We read in history that the question of Imamate has greatly influenced the people. It left a particular effect on their destiny and thereafter they were involved in threats, intimidation, temptation, and suspicions by which they for themselves installed fictitious leaders and Imams and thus brought various sections of the population on the brink of disaster.

Now it is appropriate that after all these discussions we should trace the means and method of appointment of the Imam from the Holy Qur'an and traditions. Before that it is better that we review the various prevailing methods in vogue and then compare them with that of the Islamic method and know the Islamic values.

Various Methods of Appointing the Leader

In this world people acquire leadership through revolt, force, power and oppression or through a committee or a parliament. It is also through general elections or through inheritance that a leader is appointed.

Obviously, armed revolt is a transgression and for practical purposes it thrusts the authority of a minority ignoring the views of the majority. This method thrusts one person on the people. The system of election is also not without defects as it also comes under the definition of force or compulsion. The only flawless means therefore is the Divine method by which only flawless means therefore is the infallible Imam is appointed.

The Imam is Appointed by Allah

After Almighty Allah tested Prophet Ibrahim's endurance in life, loss of property and separation from wife etc. and he came out successful in all of them He appointed him to the position of Imamate and leadership. The wordings of the Divine command according to the Holy Qur'an are, "inni ja 'iluka linnasi imama". The Holy Qur'an says:

When his Lord tested Ibrahim's faith and he satisfied the test, He said, 'I am appointing you as the leader of men'. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:124)

From the wordings "I am appointing you" it is indicated that the appointment of the Imam is in the Hands of Allah and thus Imam should know all the laws and commandments which are applicable to man and the world.

The Imam should be aware of the ultimate result of the course of action which he adopts. Imam should not look for his self-interest and should not be influenced by internal and external factors. The Imam should possess the human qualities and virtues of the highest order. Obviously, such prerequisites are not found in ordinary men and the people too are unaware of these qualities.

The weak, ignorant and misguided people should seek the guidance of the Imam. But when

the Imam himself happens to be ignorant, misguided, and uncertain, haughty, timid or miserly what would become of the nation?

It is for this reason that the handing over of the people to a fallible Imam is cruelty and insult to humanity and entrusting the responsibility of Imamate to those who are ignorant who do not know of the unforeseen, who do not possess intelligence and insight but are only guided by their apparent eyesight only, is cruelty to them also.

Let us not go too far; even in the present day progressive society if anyone says that such and such person, who is not very well-known, is more capable and experienced than the known politicians and experienced ones, possesses the ability of leading the society to progress and development, no one will accept it, because man is the slave of his own inclination and there are extremely few people who are completely just and justice-loving and it is also not possible that a leader or a ruler should be above favouritism, nepotism and the feeling of partiality.

We read in the Holy Qur'an that the people used to ask as to why the Holy Qur'an was not revealed to the two famous persons of Makkah and Ta'if. The Holy Qur'an says:

And they say: 'Why was not this Qur'an revealed to a man of importance in two towns?' (Surah az-Zukhruf, 43:31)

Those people thought that since such and such person was well-known, wealthy and man of means, the revelation should also have been made to them. This is the example of the thinking of the majority people. When Talut was appointed by Divine Will as Commander of the Army, many people refused to accept his authority because of his poverty. The Holy Qur'an says:

And when their Prophet said to them: 'Allah has appointed Talut as a king for you '. They replied, 'How can he rule over us when we deserve more to be king than he; besides he does not have abundant wealth'. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:247)

Is it not a fact that, when the Holy Prophet was busy in delivering the Friday prayer's sermon, the sound of the beating of the drum rose high after the arrival of the merchandise and people left listening to the sermon, rushed to the market and got themselves busy in making purchases, and hardly a few people had remained in the Masjid? This too is an example of the thinking of the majority.

In short after such bitter experiences how can we leave the question of the appointment of the Imam in the hands of the people? This is one argument in favour of our belief regarding the Imamate that like the Prophet the Imam is also appointed by Allah.

In this context we quote a statement of Martyr, Ayatullah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr. After dealing with a few preliminary things he deduces that the method of the appointment of the Imam should be the nomination made by Allah and His Prophet. And its early stages are these:

(i) On the one hand the Holy Prophet was responsible for bringing about a radical change and an everlasting religious, intellectual, and political revolution and to convert the system of ignorance to the Islamic system of human affairs.

(ii) On the other hand, the period of 23 years of the Prophethood was such that the Muslims were under hardships and torture, fear and deprivation in Makkah, and in Madina too they were facing hardships and were busy in waging wars against the enemies of Islam. Still, these 23 years were very small as compared to the big revolution that these years brought about.

(iii) Another important point that one should not lose sight of is that the Holy Prophet did not depart from this world all of a sudden so that we may say that for the guidance of the Ummah he had very little time at his disposal.

In short, since the duration of 23 years for changing the social structure according to Islamic standard is very small, it was necessary that this process of Islamization of the social order should have continued after the passing away of the Holy Prophet. Here we discuss a few aspects of this process.

(i) One point of view may be that (Allah forbid) the Holy Prophet was not careful to arrange the continued guidance and the stability of the radically viable religion and left us in the lurch.

This view is quite unacceptable because when even an ordinary person cannot think of leaving his whatever little accomplishment he has achieved without being taken care of by somebody who is responsible to maintain it, then how could the Holy Prophet in view of his extreme concern for Islam and devotion and sincerity of purpose, have left his achievements

unattended? About the Prophet's extreme concern and great worry for Islam the Holy Qur'an says:

A Messenger from your own people has come to you. Your distress and suffering is extremely grievous to him. He really cares about you and is very compassionate and merciful to the believers. (Surah at-Tauba, 9:128)

Perhaps you will kill yourself out of grief because they disbelieve this Book. (Surah al-Kahf, 18:6)

The Holy Prophet who was so much concerned about the people and the consolidation of Islamic order could not leave the people to themselves. Did the Holy Prophet not during the course of the Battle of Tabuk which lasted for 80 days leave his deputy in Madina? Was Abu Bakr prepared to leave the people to themselves and not to entrust them to Umar? Can this be accepted that Abu Bakr was concerned about the people after him but the Holy Prophet was not? Thus this point of view cannot be accepted.

(ii) In this context there is another point of view. Suppose we say that the Holy Prophet at the time of his departure from this world left the matter of the guidance and the leadership of the Ummah to the people themselves for mutual consultation and adopting the method of election.

On this point of view an objection can be raised as to why Abu Bakr, like the Holy Prophet did not leave the question of his succession to the advisory council and instead nominated Umar. And then why did Umar not seek the people's verdict by means of their votes and instead set up an advisory council comprising six persons and that council in fact was a dictatorial body as he had laid down the condition that anyone who was selected as a caliph by this council must be supported by Abdur Rahman bin 'Awf? What kind of an advisory council it was that only one of its members was given the right of veto and the decision would be acceptable of that group, to which the member with the power of veto belonged? Was this anything other than dictatorship and despotism?

Another question regarding this point of view is about the explanation of the event of Ghadir-i Khum.

Now that since both the first and the second points of view are not acceptable, the only course that is left open is that the Holy Prophet who was so much concerned about his people should select an able person to lead and guide the Ummah and introduce him to the people as the most capable of all persons in matter of his understanding of the religion. And accordingly he introduced Imam Ali, who had the capability of performing his deeds, had strength of character in leading and guiding the people, could work for the welfare and progress of the society and above all had to his credit the merits of knowledge, wisdom and foresight as well as remarkable achievements.

An Interesting Point: A very important point worth noting is that in the matter of Imamate the Holy Qur'an has mentioned with one word "right" or the "covenant" as when Prophet Ibrahim asked for the leadership of his offspring the Almighty Allah replied as is mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:

Ibrahim asked, 'Will this leadership also continue through my descendants'. The Lord replied, 'The unjust do not have the right to exercise My authority. (Surah al-Baqarah, 2:124)

Thus since Imamate is the covenant of Allah we should not decide it by consultation or by counseling, because it does not relate to the covenant of Allah but it pertains to the affairs of the people. Therefore, in the Holy Qur'an at two different verses where this word "Consultation" or "Counseling" has been mentioned it relates only to the affairs of the people or to the command to the Holy Prophet or when Allah commands the Holy Prophet to consult the people in their own affairs. It can well be noted that counseling is only related to the affairs of the people in the society and not to the question of appointing the Imam, which is only related to the covenant of Allah. The two verses of the Holy Qur'an indicated above are as follows:

Only through the Divine Mercy have you (Muhammad) been able to deal with your followers so gently. If you had been stern and hard-hearted they would all have deserted you a long time ago. Forgive them and ask Allah to forgive (their sins) and consult with them in certain matters. But when you reach a decision trust Allah. Allah loves those who trust Him. (Surah Ale-Imran, 3:159)

Those who are steadfast in prayers, conduct their affairs with consultation among themselves. (Surah ash-Shura, 42:38)

Some More Unpleasant Experiences: Prophet Musa selected 70 men from Bani Isra'il and

took them to Mt Sinai, but, for one silly question of theirs, all of them became the target of Allah's wrath, and thus the choice of such a distinguished Prophet was brought to naught.

The Holy Qur'an says:

Musa selected seventy men from his people to attend Our appointment. (In Our Presence) when an earthquake jolted them to death, Musa said, 'Lord, had you wanted to destroy them, why did you not destroy them and me before? Are you destroying us for what the fools among us have done? This (destruction) is only a trial through which you cause some to go astray and guide others. You are our Guardian. Forgive us and have mercy on us; You are the best of those who forgive'. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:155)

It is because of such unpleasant happenings that we do not feel satisfaction at the method of selection by election and therefore it is better that we should entrust the system of election to that Being Who knows better than all of us the realities, mysteries, and unseen events, that is, Almighty Allah, the Lord of the worlds All-Knowing, All-Seeing, All-Hearing.

Natural Flaws of Election System

Election that is, taking the opinion of everybody serves a good purpose for solving a certain problem on certain occasions but basically it entails such defects and flaws as one cannot help to ignore. These flaws are of the following kinds:

(i) Every man selects one person of his choice but it gives rise to rancour and jealousy with the result that bad blood, animosity and feeling of revolt are created between the people and the man who is elected.

(ii) Every elected person naturally takes sides with the people who got him elected and only they become important in his eyes. The elected person takes into consideration the wishes of his electors and tries to please them by being partial, contrary to the truth, and this sort of attitude in itself would be like polytheism, because man will be forsaking Allah and will be trying to please others.

(iii) As a result of the selection of a leader by election, uncertainty, errors, forgetfulness and desires may lead us to the wrong path and detract us from truth.

(iv) There is no guarantee that the elected persons would not change their mind and adopt a new course of action out of expediency.

Hence, all these possibilities should be given consideration while supporting the system of election for selection of a leader.

The Right Method for Selecting the Imam

The only right path for selecting the Imam is the same one which the Holy Qur'an tells us as we consider and believe the Imamate to be like Prophethood; we believe the Imam to be like the Prophet and we feel the necessity of the Imam as we feel the necessity of the Prophet. The Imam's function is also like the Prophet's in the matter of guiding the human society to the right path. Therefore, we quote the same Qur'anic verse here which we quoted in our discussion on Prophethood. The Holy Qur'an says:

Surely, in Our Hands is the guidance. (Surah al-Layl, 92:12)

Thus just as the Prophet is appointed from Allah, the Qur'anic verses point to the fact that appointment of the Imam also is from Allah as the Imam's appointment is primarily concerned with the covenant of Allah as well as with the function of guiding the people to the right path.

In this context Abu Ali Sina says: "The Imam should be infallible and highly virtuous. Since it is not possible for an ordinary person to know such spiritual and intellectual characteristics in man and even if he knows something of it, he knows it in a defective way or through the aid of signs. Thus it is evident that the appointment of the Imam should come from Allah as He alone knows all the secrets of human beings and the unseen matters as well as things which are of good value to us".

Election is Forbidden

The Holy Qur'an says:

No believing men and women have any choice in a matter after Allah and His Prophet have decided it. Whoever disobeys Allah and His Prophet has clearly lost the way and gone astray. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33.36)

Your Lord creates and chooses whom He pleases. The good is not for them to choose, Glory be to Allah, and exalted be He above what they associate with Him. (Surah al-Qasas, 28:68)

In Tafsir al-Safi there are many narrations which say that when Allah has chosen somebody for leadership the people should not follow anybody except him. In another narration we

read that because of the possibility of error and wrong judgement, the very worth of election goes. Thus the real value lies in the selection, which comes from Allah as it is He alone Who knows the man's secrets and the unseen matters.

Nomination is the Only Correct Method

We have already mentioned that the correct method of choosing is the one which comes from Allah only as it has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and the traditions and its example is found in the event of the Ghadir-i Khum. The year of 10 A.H. was the final year of the life of the Holy Prophet. In this year it was decided that the Holy Prophet should proceed from Madina to Makkah for performing the hajj. As soon as the Muslims came to know of it, they prepared themselves to perform the hajj in company with the Holy Prophet. Therefore, in the journey to Makkah, a large caravan accompanied the Holy Prophet. When these people were returning to Madina after performing the pilgrimage, they arrived at the cross-road, from where they were to disperse and move to their respective destinations. From here a road led to Madina in the North, to Iraq in the East, to Egypt in the West and to Yemen in the South. At this point of journey, the Holy Prophet ordered the Muslims to stop. The name of this place was Ghadir-i Khum. That day was Thursday and it was the eighth day after Idul Azha i.e. 18th of Zil Hijjah.

At the command of the Holy Prophet all the people stayed there and those who had already gone ahead were asked to return and wait so that those who were coming from behind could also arrive. It was a congregation of about 100,000 people. The day was very hot and the people's feet were burning in the scorching sand. All of them offered the afternoon prayers in company with the Holy Prophet and thereafter an important announcement began. The litters from the camels' back were placed one above the other for the purpose of erecting a raised platform. The Holy Prophet then went up to the pulpit and said, "Can you hear my voice?" All replied, "Yes, O Holy Prophet!"

The Holy Prophet then glorified Allah and reaffirmed the belief in Monotheism, Prophethood and the Resurrection Day, and told the people about his mission. Everybody praised him for his mission. Thereafter, he said: "Death is busy in its function. Very soon I may be recalled. I do submit myself to the call of Allah. I am also accountable and you are also accountable".

After this he took the fresh affirmation of people on Monotheism, Prophethood and the Resurrection Day and then said "I am leaving amongst you two most precious things, one the Holy Qur'an and the other my ahlul bayt. Both these things shall never get separated from each other. You should endeavour hard not to go ahead of them nor lag behind them"

Then the Holy Prophet looked all around himself and after spotting Imam Ali he beckoned him to come to the Pulpit. He then raised Imam Ali's hand so high that everybody recognized Imam Ali, and then the Holy Prophet in a loud voice asked: "Who is the ablest of all among the Muslims?" All in one voice replied, "Only Allah and His Prophet know it better". The Holy Prophet said, "Ali is the master and leader of those whose master and leader I am". The Holy Prophet repeated this and blessed those who took Imam Ali as their friend and condemned those who took him as their enemy.

I had decided that since the event of Ghadir-i Khum is absolutely clear I should better not repeat it here but I thought it worthwhile to mention it briefly.

To elaborate the event of Ghadir-i Khum is like saying something about the sun and its light, because it is an event which has been quoted by hundreds of both Shi'ah and Sunni traditionalists and dozens of books have been written on it in proof of its authenticity. That is one reason why we have given a brief account of it.

The Nomination of the Best Person

The nomination of Imam Ali was not without reason and wisdom, because his devotion, bravery, virtues, moral attributes, piety, dedication to Allah and his sincerity were evident to everyone so much so that even his enemies were not able to point out even the slightest weakness in him. It was only he who never prostrated himself before false gods but right from his very childhood he believed in Allah.

It was Imam Ali who, when on the night of the migration of the Holy Prophet his enemies had planned to kill him during his sleep, slept in the bed of the Holy Prophet and the Holy Prophet then safely migrated to Madina.

It was Imam Ali who carried with him the Divine decree contained in the first six verses of Surah at-Tauba forbidding the idolaters of Makkah to join the ceremonies of hajj, and boldly announced to the polytheists at the top of his voice that from then onward no infidel would ever enter the precincts of the Holy Ka'bah.

It was Imam Ali about whom the Holy Prophet has narrated hundreds of his supreme merits. There are several books of Shi'ah and Ahlus Sunnah in which the merits of Imam Ali have been recorded. We would quote some of them afterwards.

Some of the Attributes of Imam Ali (A.S.) and Ahl al-Bayt (A.S.)

There are many attributes of Imam Ali and ahlul bayt but for the purpose of establishing the identity of the Imam we reproduce a few of them below.

Ibn Abbas narrates that Imam Ali on the advice of the Holy Prophet made a vow to observe fast for three days with Lady Fatimatuz Zahra and Fizza (her maid-servant) after the recovery of his two beloved sons, Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn from illness. When both the sons returned to their normal health there was nothing to eat in the house while fulfilling the vow. Imam Ali borrowed three Sa' (about 9 kilos) of barley from a Jew, Sham'un by name. Lady Fatimatuz Zahra grinded 3 kilos of barley into flour and baked them in fine breads for breaking fast on the first day. But as soon as the time of breaking fast approached a beggar appeared and said, "Peace be on you, O ahlul bayt of the Holy Prophet! I am an indigent Muslim, give me some food, Allah will reward you with the dishes of food in Paradise". Hearing this all the inmates of the house handed over to the beggar their respective breads and instead broke their fast with water only.

On the second day they observed their fast again, and when the time after sunset prayers came for breaking the fast, an orphan came and asked for food. Everybody in the house again handed over their share of bread to the orphan and broke their fast with water only. Likewise on the third day of fasting at the time of breaking fast a captive asked for food and they did the same and gave him their breads and instead broke fast with water only.

On the fourth day the Holy Imam took both of his sons to the Holy Prophet. The Holy Prophet observed that the faces of his grandsons were pale with weakness. He enquired about the reason of this and proceeded to the House of Lady Fatima. There the Holy Prophet saw his beloved daughter in the worship of Allah and noticed that her eyes were sunken on account of weakness. When the Holy Prophet after seeing their condition became very unhappy. The Archangel Jibra'il came with Allah's revelation of glad news and said to the Holy Prophet. "O Prophet of Allah! Congratulations. Allah for paying compliments to these people has revealed a surah for them. These people despite intense hunger have given their food to a beggar, an orphan, and a captive for the love of Allah only and they had no desire in their heart of hearts save their gratitude to Allah. They never wanted to take any advantage by this extraordinary noble deed. Their only aim was to please Allah". The Holy Qur'an says:

And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. They say: 'We only feed you for Allah's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks'. (Surah ad-Dahr, 76:8-9)

This narration has been quoted by all the Shi'ah scholars. Late Allama Amini has drawn references from twenty-four Sunni scholars also. (See: al-Ghadir, vol. III, p. 111; Tafsir Kashshaf, vol. III, p. 239, Egypt Publication; Tafsir Bayzawi etc.)

Another Incident: Once when Imam Ali passed by Shiba and Abbas he heard Shiba saying, "I am the architect and the key bearer of the Holy Ka'bah" and Abbas saying, "My function was to provide the drinking water to the pilgrims". By this each one of them were bragging about their superiority. Imam Ali said, "Though I feel abashed to say, but still I will have to say that despite my tender age the superiority that I possess is not possessed by you that is, after I took my sword and made a jihad you people embraced belief in Allah and His Holy Prophet". This remark however, did not please them.

Abbas after becoming annoyed went to the Holy Prophet and complained. The Holy Prophet asked Imam Ali, "Why did you say such thing to your uncle Abbas?". Imam Ali answered, "O Holy Prophet! My remark was not wrong". At this moment the Archangel came with the following Divine revelation.

Do you think that giving a drink of water to the pilgrims and the guarding of the sacred Masjid, is the same as one who believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement and strives hard in Allah's way? (Surah at-Tauba, 9:19) (Tafsir Namuna)

Even the Angel Could Not Do

When the Holy Prophet decided to migrate to Madina, he entrusted Imam Ali in Makkah to pay off his debts and to return the entrusted properties to their rightful owners and said to him, "Tonight the enemies have planned to besiege my house and to kill me. Go and sleep in

my bed". Thus on that fateful night Imam Ali slept in the bed of the Holy Prophet. Allah asked Jibra'il and Mika'il, "I have prolonged the life of one of yours. Who is prepared to give priority to life of another over that of his life? ' None of them consented. Then they were told to see how Imam Ali got himself prepared to lay his life for the sake of saving the life of the Holy Prophet. This famous fateful night is called "laylatul mabit" And the revelation that came down is as follows.

Among men there is one who gives his life to seek Allah' pleasure. Allah is affectionate to His creatures. (Surah al-Baqarah 2:207)

Imam's House is the Place of Angels' Visits

At this time of writing these lines it is the night of 21st of Ramazan 1404 A.H. It will not be out of order if I mention a few things which I have understood from the traditions:

"The laylatul Qadr" (the night of Destiny) comes not for once in several years but every year. According to Qur'anic verse the angels descend down on earth on this night In the time of the Holy Prophet the angels used to visit him in this night. Whom after the Holy Prophet did the angels visit? Did they come to every ordinary man or to him, who was nearest to Allah and the Holy Prophet?

From the narration of Imam Ja'far Sadiq it is proved that in all times the presence of a living Imam is necessary and as he is the centre of attraction of the angels it is one of the very highly exalted attributes of the Imam. (Vide: al-Kafi, vol. I)

Some Other Attributes of Imam Ali

The Holy Prophet on several occasions addressed Imam Ali as his brother. (Vide. al-Ghadir, vol. III, p. 115, 124)

In the Battle of Trench one single stroke of Imam Ali inflicted on the enemy was far greater in value than the entire worshipping of all the people and geni'i.

Imam Ali was the first to declare his faith in the Holy Prophet.

In Islam the first thanks-giving prostration was that which Imam Ali performed and that was when he was offered a Divine opportunity to sleep in the bed of the Holy Prophet who safely came out of his house besieged by his enemies and migrated to Madina.

In many of the narrations of the Holy Prophet Imam Ali has been introduced as a model of a perfect man. He never got himself separated from truth nor the Holy Qur'an. He is the chief of the world and the Hereafter. To look at his face is an act of worship, and his followers are the best specimens of human beings.

Mutual Rights of the Imam and His Followers

From the narrations mentioned in Biharul Anwar, we reproduce a few of them which throw light on the rights of the Imam on the people and the people's rights on the Imam.

Imam Ali said to the people, "You and I have rights on each other. My rights on you are:

- (i) You should stick to your oath of allegiance to me.
- (ii) You should remain my well-wisher both in my presence.
- (iii) You should answer me as soon as I summon you, and your rights on me are:

- (i) Sympathy with and wishing well to you
- (ii) Security of the Public treasury
- (iii) Education and training". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XXVII)

In another tradition Imam Ali said, "You have as much rights on me as I have on you". Elaborating this point the Holy Imam continued: "The greatest of all the rights that Allah has made obligatory on mankind are the same mutual rights which are incumbent upon the Imam and the people".

Imam Sajjad in his treatise on the rights, considers the right of the Imam as the most important.

Imam Ali said to the people, "You should not talk with me as you talk with the despots and the tyrants. Also do not indulge in false modesty by placating me or ignoring me. Do not consider that your reminding me of things will be unpalatable to me. When you feel the truth and wish to give some advice, do not hesitate to tell me that. If Allah had not protected me I too would not have been free from errors". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XXVII, p. 253)

Islam has taken great care and precautions about the qualifications and attributes of the Imam, but after the appointment and installation of the Imam and after identifying the Imam it has made it obligatory to follow and abide by his orders. (al-Kafi has quoted several narrations on this subject).

Imam Ja'far Sadiq in the matter of court decision recommends the people to refer to the

jurists and in the end of the narration says, "Anyone who refuses to accept the decision and decrees of the jurists (fuqaha) is like the one, who has rejected us, and whoever rejects us is like the one, who professes polytheism".(al-Kafi, chapter: ikhtalaf al-hadith)

A tradition says: "Anyone who offers prayers during the night, observes fast during the day, performs hajj every year, and distributes his wealth in the cause of Allah but does not identify the vicegerant of Allah and does not perform his deeds under his guidance, has no right on Allah". (Safinatul Bihar)

Obligations of the Ummah

It is narrated in the traditions that the people have three obligations towards their infallible Imam.

(i) Identifying the Imam and that too with clear-cut signs, reasonings and high merits which are present in an infallible Imam.

(ii) To follow the commands of the Imam by heart and soul, that is by speech and conduct.

(iii) To refer to the Imam in matters of disputes and to make them the judge and arbiter.

(al-Kafi, vol. II)

The Last Purpose of the hajj

We read in one of the narrations of Imam Baqir that he saw some people who were circumambulating the Holy Ka'bah. He said to them, "Circumambulation was being done in the days of the Age of Ignorance also. When Islam came, it defined the rules and rituals of circumambulation as well as the hajj, so that people performing the hajj should gather round us and profess their allegiance to us in matter of love, regard and guardianship". Thereafter, the Holy Imam recited the following verse from the Holy Qur'an:

Lord, I have settled some of my off-springs in a barren valley near Your Sacred House so that they could be steadfast in prayers. Lord, fill the hearts of the people with love for them and provide fruits for their sustenance so that they may give thanks. (Surah Ibrahim, 14:37)

Prophet Ibrahim had not entreated Allah to turn the hearts of the people toward the Holy Ka'ba but he entreated Him to turn the people's heart towards the love of his infallible offsprings. (al-Kafi)

Thus one of the purposes of the hajj is to turn the people towards the Imam.

There are however some signs, which go to show how the mutual obligations of the Imam and the people are fulfilled. Imam Ali describes these signs as follows:

(i) Establishment of love and affection.

(ii) Protection of religion from changes, innovations being made in it, apathy of the people, and dangers of all kinds.

(iii) The untruth is expelled from all spheres of activity and because of the people's attachment and love for the Imam the foundation of truth becomes firm and sound.

(iv) The paths of religion become bright and clear.

(v) Justice is firmly rooted.

(vi) Everything goes on functioning smoothly.

(vii) The consideration of mutual rights from both the sides (of the Imam and his followers) consolidates the government, frustrates the designs of the enemies, and accordingly the Imam and the people act according to set rules, laws and regulations. The possibility of enemy's influence is eliminated and the evil-doers do not get chance to cause any damage.

(Biharul Anwar)

These however are some of the results of the mutual faith between the Imam and his followers.

The Zealous Shi'ah

A man from Khorasan suggested to Imam Ja'far Sadiq to initiate an armed campaign as the Holy Imam had with him about 100,000 followers. In order to test the fidelity of that man the Holy Imam said: "Just get down into this burning oven". He became hesitant to obey the command of the Holy Imam. Meanwhile, a person came and greeted the Imam and the Holy Imam said to him, "Will you get down into this burning oven!" That man without any reluctance and with pleasure got into the burning oven. The Holy Imam then said to that Khorasanian man, "We have with us a few of those men, who can get into the burning oven on our command. Others are not real Shi'ahs. There is a lot of difference between one's words and deeds". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XI, p. 139)

It is to be noted that the man who got into the burning fire of the oven remained unaffected and was hale and hearty like Prophet Ibrahim when he was thrown into the burning fire.

False Shi'ah

We read in the narrations that anyone, who claims to be a true Shi'ah and follower of Imam Ali, but attaches himself to others, in fact, tells lies.

How the Imamate of the Infallible Imams Got Weakened?

There is a narration of Imam Ja'far Sadiq who says. "If Bani Umayya had not produced men who wrote what they were ordered to do, amassed war booty, and fought for their sake, Bani Umayya would not have usurped our rights. The Imamate got weakened for lack of confidence and will-power of our so-called allies, who easily accept defeat". (Biharul Anwar, vol. XLVII, p. 383)

There are many people who are with the Imam but because of fear and greed they become the lackeys of others.

Sufferings of the True Believers

The true believers in Imamate and the teachings of the Holy Imams were subjected to such atrocities that I am at a loss to understand from where I should begin and where I should end them. But since our purpose is to refer to them, we should like to content ourselves with mentioning some of them.

(i) **Social Injustice:** By taking the Fadak, which yielded sufficient income in those days, from Imam Ali his financial condition was purposely weakened.

(ii) **Slandering:** Our oppressed Imams were subjected to slanders of the worst kind so much so that when the people of Syria heard of the martyrdom of Imam Ali in the Kufa mosque they started asking for what purpose he happened to go to the Masjid? Was he amongst those who went there to offer prayers?

(iii) **Patronizing the Imams' Enemies:** In order to weaken the position of the Imams, their enemies were given full support and encouragement.

(iv) **Injustice to Thinking and Understanding:** By raising the slogan "Qur'an is enough for us" the people were prevented from listening to the traditions of the Holy Prophet. The infallible Imam were forced to remain tight-lipped. By this the very source of knowledge and wisdom was cut off from the people.

(v) **Deprivation of the Well-wishers:** The kinsmen and the ahlul bayt of the Holy Prophet were deprived of their due share from the Public Treasury.

(vi) **Fictitious Traditions:** Through man like Abu Hurayra the traditions from the Holy Prophet were concocted and fictitious traditions were produced for the purpose of extolling Bani Umayyah and disparaging Bani Hashim. Fictitious traditions were concocted in such a large number that it became difficult to sort out the authentic and genuine traditions.

(vii) **Tampering with the Facts:** The narrations about Imamate and guidance were so tampered with and misinterpreted that the people failed to realize their importance.

(viii) **Distorted Concept of Imamate:** The institution of Imamate which was established according to the covenant of Allah, was degraded to such an extent that it was brought to the level of Yazid's barbaric rulership.

(ix) **The Ignorant Substituted for the Learned:** All the Divine values and standards were brought to naught. Everyone by dint of power and authority changed the course of society according to his own whims and wishes. Instead of following the leader who used to say, 'Ask me what you want, I will answer you' they followed the leader who used to say, 'Don't ask me; I don't know, leave me alone'. The people instead of going towards Imam Ali, the 'gate of knowledge' followed the caliph Umar, who after facing difficulties in all types of problems used to seek the advice of Imam Ali and used say, "If Ali had not come to my rescue, I would have been ruined".

(x) **Excuses and Animosity:** One excuse that was put forward was that Imam Ali was younger in age and of lively nature. Many Muslims had a grudge against Imam Ali because in the Battles of Khaybar, Badr, Uhud and Hunayn he had put the disbelieving ancestors of the converted Muslims to death. That deep-seated rancour and animosity had forced Imam Ali to go into seclusion so much so that he said that he was subjected to oppression from the very first day. The fact remains that the high attributes and virtues of Imam Ali have been so expressively and widely narrated that no other companion of the Holy Prophet can equal him in these attributes but despite this highly exalted position, he was ignored! Truly speaking, can a person of lively nature not be an able man? Did the Holy Prophet in his last days not depute Usama, an eighteen year old young man, as the Commander of the Army to lead the expedition to Syria despite the presence of Abu Bakr and Umar? Is the old age a condition

for becoming a leader? Has not the Holy Qur'an made knowledge, piety, jihad, migration, dedicated services, sincerity and honesty the criteria of human values and virtues? Then for what other reasons did we go against Divine principles of judging the merits and adopted a different standard altogether?

(xi) **Imam Himself Remained Aloof:** The most important thing is that the people say that Imam Ali had contented himself with the religious and spiritual leadership of the people only and left the political and military leadership to others. It is difficult to understand that the exhortations of the Holy Imam in Nahjul Balaghah (Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984) were only for the people coming to him for the solution of religious problems only. Does anyone need to owe allegiance for seeking an advice on religious matter? The Holy Imam several times complained of the violation of his political rights. He never complained that the people did not consult him on religious matters, for the people were compelled to ask him about religious problems.

(xii) **Reason Behind Forsaking the Imam:** It is highly painful to note that the people say how it was possible that all the people were in the wrong by forsaking the Imam and owing allegiance to others? They say that in fact when the people forsook the Imam there must have been some good reason behind it. The answer to this is that first of all not all the people forsook Imam Ali and secondly the majority is not the proof of truth. Should the clear-cut injunctions and commandments of the Holy Qur'an be abandoned and people's conduct should be viewed only? It seems that these people have totally forgotten the last verses of Surah Jumu'a which say that while the Holy Prophet was busy in delivering his Friday sermon a party of merchants arrived and on the beating of the drum, many of the people detached themselves from the congregation and swarmed round the merchants and only a few of the people remained there to listen to the Holy Prophet. Was leaving the Holy Prophet under such circumstances a correct thing?

Novel Forms of Tyrannies and Oppression

Imam Ali was subjected to continuous oppressions. From the time the Holy Prophet asked for the pen and paper and was insolently rebuffed the Holy Imam after the Prophet's demise, had been treated with excessive tyranny up to his last days. Let me be allowed to say that even up to the present time the position of Imam Ali has not been recognized and he remains still as the oppressed one. His words compiled in Nahjul Balaghah has also not been truly understood. Therefore, oppression to him was not confined to his lifetime only but it spreads round the entire period of history.

The persecutions that our infallible Imams had to suffer were from external sources as well as from their own unworthy people. The oppressions that were done to Imam Ali were not worth complaining because by that the very foundation of the Islamic government would have been demolished and, therefore, he kept patient like one who had a thorn in his eyes or whose throat was choked with a bone. The oppression that was done to the Holy Imam was not by heart, speech, action, or pen alone, but it was of all types which are beyond description. The oppression that was done to our Holy Imam was done in the name of religion and for the purpose of securing the proximity with Allah, so much so that the people in their sermons, on the pulpit, publicly and privately, and even in prayers used to abuse him. The oppression that was done to our Holy Imams was from the same source which they had obtained from them (the Imams) as they obtained strength, knowledge and position from them and used the same on them. The oppression to the Holy Imams was done by unwise friends as well as by wise enemies. On the one hand there were timid, ignorant and foolish friends and on the other there were clever and hypocritical enemies.

Oppression by Pen

It is not known as to why many famous scholars from Ahlus Sunnah who were contemporaries of Imam Musa Kazim never cared to quote any tradition of the Holy Prophet from his source. Was Imam Musa Kazim not better than an ordinary narrator? I also cannot understand that why an important book like Sahih Bukhari of Ahlus Sunnah which also includes many traditions originating from the Kharijites, and which contains traditions from over a hundred anonymous writers, and which gives them the stamp of authenticity does not quote any tradition of the Holy Prophet from Imam Ja'far Sadiq and the Holy Imams who followed him? Do all people not know that the Holy Prophet introduced to the people his ahlul bayt together with the Holy Qur'an?

Leaving aside these differences which are too many, we should overlook them and become

united against our common enemy. There are differences of opinion on religious matters among Ahlus Sunnah also, and so they are among the Shi'ah scholars, but these differences should not become the bone of contention and the seed of discord as the flame of disunity and discord may engulf the Ummah in a devastating inferno.

Allegations against the Shi'ah

It is also not understood why the people do not restrain themselves from impugning the Shi'ah and levelling false allegations against them. In reply to these innumerable allegations and calumnies that have been levelled against the Shi'ah we have defended our faith in the pages of thousands of books and in the Masjids and this humble writer, who is just a mere student, has also defended our faith on the Iran Radio and television and which I still repeat. I mean:

- (i) That the Shi'ah do not believe that the Holy Qur'an has been tampered with.
- (ii) That the Shi'ah do not consider their infallible Holy Imams as deities.
- (iii) That the Shi'ah do not consider Bahais and Babis (followers of Bahauallah and Muhammad Ali Bab) as Shi'ah.
- (iv) That the Shi'ah do not consider it obligatory to act upon the four books (al-Kafi, Man la yahzaruhul Faqih, Tahzib and Istabsar) though they consider them good among the good books but they do not believe that whatever is written in them is irrefutable.
- (v) That the Shi'ah do not consider all the companions of the Holy Prophet as renegades and apostate but they believe that just as during the lifetime of the Holy Prophet there were true Muslims and the hypocrites also in the same way they also existed after the passing away of the Holy Prophet. The passing away of the Holy Prophet cannot make the hypocrites as true believers. Thus, those, who claim that all the companions of the Holy Prophet were true believers and just, should tell us as to where the hypocrites of the time of the Holy Prophet disappeared.

Is It Possible For People to Give up Truth?

Those who have the understanding of the letter and spirit of the Holy Qur'an know it quite well that the people abandoned Prophet Harun, the brother of Prophet Musa and an accredited Prophet as well, and started worshipping the Calf.

In fact, as long as greed, desires, Devil and Satanic whisperings exist, there will be danger and disruption.

Why People are Distracted From Truth Despite Their Good Deeds?

The Holy Qur'an has answered this question because it does not want simply ritual worship, but it requires obedience and submission to Allah .Iblis (Lucifer, the rebel angel) worshipped Allah for thousands of years, but when the stage of affirming obedience to Allah came he became a rebel. The Holy Qur'an mentions the nullification of virtuous deeds. Is it not a fact that Bal'am Ba'aur was deprived of Allah's Mercy and became the target of Allah's wrath? The consequence of bad deeds is a terrific affair and it frightens everybody. We know that Prophet Yusuf was thrown into a well, was made a slave and was imprisoned, but he never felt any danger, and when he reached the high position of rulership, he implored Allah to let him die as a Muslim and never to let him go astray. Hence the consequence of any action is the main thing. Prophet Isa said, "In my view the basis of a work is not the first but the last thing which gives us wages".

Conformity between the Shi'ah and Ahlus Sunnah

If you happen to study a large number of books of the Shi'ah and Ahlus Sunnah, you will note that practically all the attributes and virtues of Imam Ali that the Shi'ah speak of are narrated by the scholars of Ahlus Sunnah, and if the Shi'ah have criticized some companions of the Holy Prophet the same criticisms are found in the books of Ahlus Sunnah also.

Lawful and Unlawful Guardianship

The Unlawful Guardianship: The Holy Qur'an has laid great emphasis on the subject of leadership, including its good as well as bad aspects. In regard to the good aspect of leadership the Holy Qur'an has made the obeying of the Holy Prophet and the men of lawful authority obligatory side by side with the obeying of Allah. It has also recommended the obedience to the jurists with the obedience of Allah, His Holy Prophet and the men authorized by them. That is to say, "If someone flouts the decrees of the qualified jurists he has actually flouted the commands of the Holy Prophet and the Imam, and has committed polytheism". (Wasa'ilush Shi'ah, vol. XVIII, p. 99)

It will not be out of place to list the type of the people who should not be the leader of various groups and Imam of the people, and the people should not obey them. In fact any sensible man with an ordinary intelligence free from any pressure or influence, will naturally understand that such people do not have the qualities of leadership. But since the Holy Qur'an is the Book of Warning it puts mankind on the alert against all dangers. Thus we reproduce below some of the verses which are pertinent to the subject under discussion:

Do not follow him whose heart We have made oblivious to Our remembrance, who follows his own lust and exceeds the bound. (Surah al-Kahf, 18:28)

Do not comply with those who deny the truth. Do not heed a contemptible swearer. Or backbiter, calumniator, Slanderer. Who hinders men from doing good, the transgressor, the iniquitous. Crude, and above all, mean and infamous. (Surah al-Qalam, 68:8—13)

And do not follow any sinner or disbeliever among them. (Surah ad-Dahr, 76:24)

Do not follow those who are extravagant. (Surah ash-Shuara, 26:151)

And do not follow the way of mischief-makers. (Surah al-A'raf, 7:142)

And do not follow the wishes of the ignorant. (Surah al-Jathiya, 45:18)

And follow not the wishes of a people who had erred before, and led many others astray, and wandered away from the right path. (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:77)

From the above-quoted verses of the Holy Qur'an, it becomes crystal clear that how certain people and the group of people are excluded from leadership on account of their sins, extravagance, quarrelsomeness, ignorance, transgression, infidelity, meanness and debased nature. Thus we understand that an Imam should be free from all these ills.

Similarly, in other verses of the Holy Qur'an the rulership of the Jews and the Christians over the Muslims has been made unlawful and similar is the case with the enemies of Allah, the hypocrites, and those who exercise unlawful authority in the name of religion. The Holy Qur'an says:

You will see among them many who rush into sin and wickedness, and devour unlawful gain. How evil are the things they do! (Surah al-Ma'idah, 5:62)

Who is the Qualified Leader and Guardian?

The Holy Qur'an says:

Believers, obey Allah, His Messenger and your qualified leaders. (Surah an-Nisa, 4:59)

Can the work of the qualified leaders not be in conformity with the commands of Allah and His Messenger according to this verse of the Holy Qur'an? Can it be possible that in one strain we are told to obey Allah and His Messenger and not to oppose them, and in another it is suggested that we should follow the leaders who, day in and day out, are flouting the instructions of Allah and the Holy Prophet? Is such a discrepancy in the same verse be reconciled?

Indeed, the qualified leaders should only be the infallible Imams whose obedience is the obedience of Allah and the Holy Prophet and in whose knowledge and actions there are no contradictions whatsoever. If the leader happens to be the one other than the infallible Imam then in fact it will not be incumbent on us to follow that person but it will be conditional as it is in the case of obedience to parents on certain conditions.

The explanation of this is that the people are enjoined to obey their parents and to treat them nicely but not in all conditions. That is if the parents want to distract their children from the belief in monotheism, in that case they should not obey their parents. The Holy Qur'an says.

We have enjoined on man to be kind to his parents; but if they try to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. (Surah al-Ankabut, 29:8)

If they try to force you to associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them (Surah Luqman, 31:15)

Hence, it becomes clear that obedience to parents is not necessary on every occasion; it is necessary on occasions where they do not force their children to oppose the commands of Allah. But obedience to the qualified leader is incumbent at every place and on every occasion. From the point of view of the Holy Qur'an, obedience to the qualified leaders is unconditional because these are the persons who do not err nor do they misguide or mislead their followers.

Thus according to the Holy Qur'an the qualified leaders are those infallible Imams whose number according to 300 traditions narrated by both Shi'ah and the Ahlus Sunnah scholars is twelve.

Guardianship of the Jurists (Fuqaha)

The guardianship of the Jurists is the process of continuity of Imamate. In this context according to several hundred traditions of the Holy Prophet which have been narrated by accredited companions of the Holy Prophet the number of infallible Imams is twelve. Eleven of the twelve exalted personages have been martyred after him through poisoning or with swords because they fought against the despots of their times. Our twelfth Imam, Imam Mahdi is in occultation and according to hundreds of reliable traditions he will reappear by Allah's command to establish a just government. Since people have not been able to accept his leadership, Allah has kept him in His Protection until an opportune time.

As for example when a certain government lights eleven lamps and the people extinguish them it will preserve the last lamp at a safe place and will not light it until people become so much mature and enlightened that they understand the utility of light.

Similarly when Allah sent eleven infallible Imams and the people tortured them, made them captives and martyred them, Allah has kept the twelfth Imam in His safe custody until the opportune time. On the other hand Allah has not left us to ourselves without guidance during the period of occultation of the twelfth Imam Mahdi but He has entrusted us to just, pious and virtuous jurists so that we may faithfully follow them.

Therefore, it is incumbent on all Muslims to protect the Islamic system and obey the commands of Allah which the just jurists issue.

Islam has such rules and regulations in different fields of activities, financial, economic, punitive, administrative and judicial that these cannot remain suspended, nor can they be controlled by ignorant and selfish people. Islam does not allow that a particular group of persons may start ruling the other. Thus Islam has entrusted the job of enforcing the rules and regulations to the jurists and pious people only so that they may issue decrees in accordance with the Divine Commandments. The obedience to these jurists by the people is as obligatory as it is to the Holy Prophet and the Infallible Imam.

The Role of the Jurist

Now a number of questions arises here. Do the Muslims need some system of Government? Should an Islamic State be protected and defended or not? Should the lands be safeguarded? Should laws be promulgated in an Islamic State? Should the right of the oppressed be restored to him? Should or should not the voice of Islam reach every nook and corner of the world? Were the teachings of the Prophets and the Imams confined to their time only or were they applicable to all places and all times? If the answer to these questions is in the affirmative and Islam has its own system of social structure and laws and regulations, and the rights should be honoured, and the land should be safeguarded then the form of government must be Islamic, because without a system based on just and correct lines, especially when the enemies of Islam have a big farcically alluring system with them, we cannot protect our religion, laws, country, life, property and honour.

If the government is necessary then the ruler is also necessary, because the government cannot be run without a ruler. Therefore, since Islam needs a government for enforcing its laws, we should find out the qualifications of the ruler and know whether he has a deep understanding of the Divine commandments, is just and competent, and can appreciate and face difficulties. If it is necessary that the ruler should be a true Muslim, well-informed, pious, virtuous and statesman, then that person must be a jurist, and his government will be called the government of the jurist.

Those, who do not believe in the concept of the guardianship of a jurist should study the following view-points and accept anyone of them.

- (i) Islam is confined only to prayers, fasting, individual worship, moral values only and it does not envisage the solution of social problems, justice, political and economic problems.
- (ii) Islam was only meant for the duration of the lifetime of the Holy Prophet only, and it was abandoned after him and now its important social problems are confined only in books.
- (iii) Important social laws should be enforced by the ignorant and wicked persons only.

If none of the above-quoted view-points is acceptable or appeals to reason, then we must accept the guardianship of the jurist, which means that the enforcement of Islamic laws and solution of difficult problems should be solved by eminent Muslim scholars and thus we must not think that the guardianship of the jurist is unjustifiable.

Is it not narrated from Imam Ja'far Sadiq that "in the Holy Qur'an all the individual and collective needs of the society have been described". (al-Kafi, vol. I, p. 59)

Hence, are the government, ruler, administration and various fields of human activities not

included among the important needs of the society?

The Holy Prophet said, "I am grateful to Allah that I have described all the requirements of the Ummah before my death".

Is there not the need of a ruler and the government during the occultation period of Imam Mahdi in the Islamic society?

Imam Ali Riza while dealing with the problem of guardianship says, "There is no nation which is without its leader and the social structure of a society is directly concerned with the leader and that people should manage the public treasury by keeping an account of its income and expenditure, organize the society, fight against the enemies and protect the society from internal dissensions and disunity. If there is not going to be any such leader, then the nation will break up into pieces and the Divine commandments and the teachings of the Holy Prophet will be tampered with at the command of despotic ruler". (Biharul Anwar, vol. VI, p. 60)

You will note that the question of leadership and the government has been stated to be the most important problem by Imam Ali Riza. It is obvious that for the benefit of the poor masses management of the public treasury, equitable distribution of wealth, struggle against enemies, administration of social institutions are not such that they are only concerned with the time of the previous infallible Imams and that the Ummah should be left to itself during the occultation of our living Imam Mahdi that is to say, there should be no need of a government or a ruler during the period of occultation.

Thus Islam acknowledges the existence of the society and the necessity of the government and its ruler, but what is important is that we should know the conditions and qualifications of the ruler, and what type of the government it should be and how it should carry on the administration.

According to common sense and keeping in view the various Islamic narrations, the responsibility of the government should be laid on the shoulders of the just jurist. We reproduce here excerpts from some narrations:

(i) The Holy Prophet considered the jurists as his caliph. 506

(ii) The living Imam Mahdi with his own hand wrote in reply to a letter: "You should refer to our narrators about your problems and difficulties for they are our argument and proof on you just as we are the argument and proof of Allah".

(iii) When Imam Ja'far Sadiq was asked about the problems which are referred to despotic administration for decision he said, "Referring to these departments is very bad because it is referring to the despot and if someone gets back his right from these despotic departments it becomes unlawful. On such occasions however, it is your duty to refer to those people who know our teachings and narrations fully well, because I declare them as the qazi (Judge) for you. Thus you should remember that if this jurist has given you his decision and you consider it worthless it is as if you have considered the Divine command as worthless. If anyone disobeys these jurists, it is as if he has disobeyed us, and whosoever disobeys us, has in fact disobeyed Allah and this action amounts to polytheism".

(iv) The Holy Prophet said, "Scholars are the successors of the Prophets". (Wasa'il, vol. XVIII, chapter 11)

(v) Imam Kazim said "Jurists are the fortresses of Islam". (Kitabal Bai', Ayatullah Khumayni)

(vi) Allah has taken an assurance from the scholars that they would not pass over the gluttony and oppression of the despots in silence and would not ignore the hunger of the poor. (Sermon—7, Peak of Eloquence, ISP, 1984)

Naturally in a society supporting the oppressed and crushing the tyrant do need a government or its operative agency.

(vii) In the Holy Qur'an we have been taught that in a society we should stick to justice. Can justice in a society be maintained without the existence of a government or a ruler?

(viii) Imam Husayn says, "Discharging of the duties and the enforcement of laws should be in the hands of the scholars, God-fearing and pious persons. These are the people who do not make any changes in the Divine commands pertaining to lawful and unlawful things, and who are the custodians of trusts". (Tuhaful 'Uqul, p. 242)

(ix) Imam Ali says, "Scholars are the rulers of the people". (Ghurarul Hikam, quoted from al-Hayat, vol. II, p. 293)

Thus it is deduced that in an Islamic society the head of the government should be a just jurist with all the prescribed qualifications. These very jurists are the authorized representatives of the infallible Imams during the period of the occultation of our living

Imam Mahdi. If the authority and guardianship of the jurist is terminated, the despots would raise their heads and the Divine commandments will be altered.

- **It is not known as to what is the objective of those people who oppose the jurist?**
- **Do they say that for Muslims no government and no administration is necessary?**
- **Do they say that some system is necessary but there is no necessity of an administrator, ruler or guardian?**
- **Do they say that guardians and the rulers of the people should be those who have no concern with Islam?**
- **Do they say that the ruler should be a jurist and Muslim but it is not necessary that he should be just and pious?**
- **Do they consider that guardianship of the jurist is some sort of a dominating force? Is the jurist a representative of a particular group or class of people?**
- **Does the selfishness of the jurist not nullify his sense of justice and fair-play by which his guardianship in the society will automatically cease to exist?**

Is the acceptance of the jurist's guardianship tantamount to setting up various centres of authority and domination?

When it is meant that the laws and commandments which have passed through the channel of a just jurist may not be diverted to divergent and un-Islamic directions, their representatives are delegated all the powers to exercise their authority on their behalf. Hence there is no question of setting up independent centres of authority and power, as actually the authority and power only emanate from the Divine commands which are enforced by the just jurist only.

We would ask those who oppose the guardianship of the jurist as to whom they want to entrust the affairs of the Ummah? We ask whether the Muslims should not follow someone in their affairs or is their following restricted to worship of Allah only? Is there not the possibility of a lawful or an unlawful thing in matters of social problems such as strikes, rehabilitation, travels, disputes, agreements, pacts, appointments, dismissal etc.? Should we not follow some jurist in all those matters where there is a question of lawfulness and unlawfulness? Should the leadership of the Muslims be entrusted to an un-Islamic leader? Will it not be like handing over the administration of a medical college to a man who is not a physician himself?

Is the handing over of the Ummah to an unjust ruler not a great injustice to humanity?

Has the time not come when we should protect ourselves from false leadership, unscrupulous politicians and professional opportunists, we should come under the Islamic protection, and accept only that leadership, which is compatible with the standard laid down by Qur'anic revelations.

However, the topic of Imamate has become a little lengthy but it would have been an injustice if we had not dealt with the leadership of the people and its way and means during the occultation period of our present Imam Mahdi.