



'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī

SHI'ITE ISLAM

by
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Translated from the Persian
and Edited with an Introduction and Notes
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NOTES

CHAPTER VI

1. *Editor's note:* By this reference the author means especially the writings of Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) and the later Islamic philosophers of Persia, who have discussed the question of the soul and its becoming much more thoroughly than the earlier philosophers. Yet, in the question of the immateriality of the spirit, substantial intellectual proofs are also offered in the writings of Ibn Sina (Avicenna).

2. *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. III, p. 161, from the *I'tiqādāt* of Ṣadūq.

3. *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. IV, *Bāb al-barzakh*.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Editor's note:* As it has been mentioned before this metaphysical principle should not in any way be confused with the modern theories of evolution or progress as these terms are usually understood.

6. *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. XIV, p. 79.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

CHAPTER VII ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE IMAM (IMAMOLGY)

The Meaning of Imam

Imam or leader is the title given to a person who takes the lead in a community in a particular social movement or political ideology or scientific or religious form of thought. Naturally, because of his relation to the people he leads, he must conform his actions to their capabilities in both important and secondary matters.

As is clear from the preceding chapters, the sacred religion of Islam takes into consideration and gives directives concerning all aspects of the life of all men. It investigates human life from the spiritual point of view and guides man accordingly, and it intervenes on the plane of formal and material existence from the point of view of the life of the individual. In the same way it intervenes on the plane of social life and its regulation (i.e., on the plane of government).

Thus the imamate and religious leadership in Islam may be studied from three different perspectives: from the perspective of Islamic government, of Islamic sciences and injunctions, and of leadership and innovative guidance in the spiritual life. Shi'ism believes that since Islamic society is in dire need of guidance in each of these three aspects, the person who occupies the function of giving that guidance and is the leader of the community in these areas of religious concern must be appointed by God and the Prophet. Naturally, the Prophet himself was also appointed by Divine Command.

The Imamate and Succession

Man through his God-given nature realizes without any doubt that no organized society, such as a country or city or village or tribe or even a household consisting of a few human beings, can continue to subsist without a leader and ruler who puts the wheel of the society in motion and whose will governs each individual's will and induces the members of that society to perform their social duty. Without such a ruler the parts of this society become dispersed in a short time and disorder and confusion reign. Therefore, he who is the ruler and governor of a society, whether it be great or small, if he is interested in his own position and the continued existence of his society, will appoint a successor for himself if he is to be absent from his function temporarily or permanently. He will never abandon the domain of his rule and be oblivious to its existence or annihilation. The head of a household who bids farewell to his house and household for a journey of a few days or months will appoint one of the members of the household or someone else as his successor and will leave the affairs of the house in his hands. The head of an institution, or the principal of a school, or the owner of a shop, if he is to be absent even for a few hours will select someone to represent him.

In the same way Islam is a religion which according to the text of the Holy Book and the Sunnah is established upon the basis of the primordial nature of things. It is a religion concerned with social life, as has been seen by every observer near and far. The special attention God and the Prophet have given to the social nature of this religion can never be denied or neglected. It is an incomparable feature of Islam. The Holy Prophet was never oblivious to the problem of the formation of social groupings wherever the influence of Islam penetrated. Whenever a city or village fell into Muslim hands he would, in the shortest time possible, appoint a governor or ruler in whose hands he would leave the affairs of the Muslims.¹ In very important military expeditions ordered for the Holy War (jihad), he would appoint more than one leader and commander, in order of succession. In the war of Mu'tah he even appointed four leaders, so that if the first were to be killed the

second would be recognized as the head and his command accepted and if the second were to be killed, then the third, and so on.²

The Prophet also displayed great interest in the problem of succession and never failed to appoint a successor when necessary. Whenever he left Medina he would appoint a governor in his own place.³ Even when he migrated from Mecca to Medina and there was as yet no idea as to what would occur, in order to have his personal affairs managed in Mecca for those few days and to give back to people what had been entrusted to him, he appointed Ali—may peace be upon him—as his successor.⁴ In the same way, after his death Ali was his successor in matters concerning his debts and personal affairs.⁵ The Shi'ites claim that for this very reason it is not conceivable that the Prophet should have died without appointing someone as his successor, without having selected a guide and leader to direct the affairs of Muslims and to turn the wheels of Islamic society.

Man's primordial nature does not doubt the importance and value of the fact that the creation of a society depends on a set of common regulations and customs which are accepted in practice by the majority of the groups in that society, and that the existence and continuation of that society depend upon a just government which agrees to carry out these regulations completely. Anyone who possesses intelligence does not neglect or forget this fact. At the same time one can doubt neither the breadth and detailed nature of the Islamic Shari'ah, nor the importance and value the Prophet considered it to possess, so that he made many sacrifices for its application and preservation. Nor can one debate about the mental genius, perfection of intelligence, perspicacity of vision or power of deliberation of the Prophet (beside the fact that this is affirmed through revelation and prophecy).

According to established traditions in both Sunni and Shi'ite collections of hadith (in the chapter on temptations and seditions and others) transmitted from the Prophet, the Prophet foretold seditions and tribulations which would entangle Islamic society after his death, and the forms of corruption which would penetrate the body of Islam, and later worldly rulers who would sacrifice

this pure religion for their own impure, unscrupulous ends. How is it possible that the Prophet should not neglect to speak of the details of events and trials of years or even thousands of years after him, and yet would neglect the condition that had to be brought into being most urgently after his death? Or that he should be negligent and consider as unimportant a duty that is on the one hand simple and evident and on the other significant to such a degree? How could he concern himself with the most natural and common acts such as eating, drinking and sleeping and give hundreds of commands concerning them, yet remain completely silent about this important problem and not appoint someone in his own place?

Even if we accepted the hypothesis (which Shi'ism does not accept) that the appointment of the ruler of Islamic society is given by the Shari'ah to the people themselves, still it would be necessary for the Prophet to give an explanation concerning this matter. He would have had to give the necessary instructions to the community so that they would be aware of the problem upon which the existence and growth of Islamic society and the life of religious symbols and observances depended and relied. Yet there is no trace of such a prophetic explanation or religious instruction. If there had been such a thing, those who succeeded the Prophet and held the reins of power in their hands would not have opposed it. Actually, the first caliph transferred the caliphate to the second caliph by bequest. The second caliph chose the third caliph through a six-man council of which he was himself a member and whose order of procedure he had himself determined and ordered. Mu'awiyah forced Imam Hasan to make peace and in this way carried away the caliphate. After this event the caliphate was converted into an hereditary monarchy. Gradually many religious observances identified with the early years of Islamic rule (such as holy war, commanding what is lawful and prohibiting what is forbidden, the establishment of boundaries for human action) were weakened or even disappeared from the political life of the community, nullifying in this domain the efforts of the Prophet of Islam.

Shi'ism has studied and investigated the primordial nature of man and the continuous tradition of wisdom that has survived among men. It has penetrated into the principal purpose of Islam, which is to revivify man's primordial nature, and has investigated such things as the methods used by the Prophet in guiding the community; the troubles which entangled Islam and the Muslims and which led to division and separation; and the short life of the Muslim governments of the early centuries, which were characterized by negligence and lack of strict religious principles. As a result of these studies Shi'ism has reached the conclusion that there are sufficient traditional texts left by the Prophet to indicate the procedure for determining the Imam and successor of the Prophet. This conclusion is supported by Quranic verses and hadiths which Shi'ism considers as sound, such as the verse on *walayah* and the hadiths of Ghadir, Safinah, Thaqalayn, Haqq, Manzilah, Da'wat-i 'ashīrah-i aqrabīn and others.⁶ But of course these hadiths, most of which are also accepted by Sunnism, have not been understood in the same way by Shi'ism and Sunnism. Otherwise the whole question of succession would not have arisen. Whereas these hadiths appear to Shi'ites as a clear indication of the Prophet's intention in the question of succession, they have been interpreted by Sunnis in quite another way so as to leave this question open and unanswered.

To prove the caliphate of Ali ibn Abi Talib, Shi'ites have had recourse to Quranic verses, including the following: "Your friend [wali] can be only Allah; and His messenger and those who believe, who establish worship and pay the poor-due, and bow down (in prayer) [or, and this reading is accepted by 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī: "... pay the poor-due while bowing down (in prayer)"]" (Quran, V, 55). Shi'ite and Sunni commentators alike agree that this verse was revealed concerning Ali ibn Abi Talib, and many Shi'ite and Sunni traditions exist supporting this view. Abu Dharr Ghifari has said: "One day we prayed the noontime prayers with the Prophet. A person in need asked people to help but no one gave him anything. The person raised his hands to the sky saying, 'Oh God! Be witness that in the mosque of the Prophet

no one gave me anything.' Ali ibn Abi Talib was in the position of genuflection in the prayers. He pointed with his finger to the person, who took his ring and left. The Prophet, who was observing the scene raised his head toward heaven and said: 'Oh God! My brother Moses said to Thee, "Expand my breast and make easy my tasks and make my tongue eloquent so that they will comprehend my words, and make my brother, Harun, my help and vizier" [cf. Quran, XXVIII, 35]. Oh God! I am also Thy prophet; expand my breast and make easy my tasks and make Ali my vizier and helper.'" Abu Dharr says, "The words of the Prophet had not as yet finished when the verse [cited above] was revealed."'⁷

Another verse which the Shi'ites consider as proof of the caliphate of Ali is this: "This day are those who disbelieve in despair of (ever harming) your religion; so fear them not, fear Me! This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favour unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM" (Quran, V, 3). The obvious meaning of this verse is that before that particular day the infidels had hopes that a day would come when Islam would die out, but God through the actualization of a particular event made them lose forever the hope that Islam would be destroyed. This very event was the cause of the strength and perfection of Islam and of necessity could not be a minor occasion such as the promulgation of one of the injunctions of religion. Rather, it was a matter of such importance that the continuation of Islam depended upon it.

This verse seems to be related to another verse which comes toward the end of the same chapter: "O Messenger! Make known that which hath been revealed unto thee from thy Lord, for if thou do it not, thou will not have conveyed His message. Allah will protect thee from mankind." (Quran, V, 67). This verse indicates that God commanded a mission of great concern and importance to the Prophet which if not accomplished would endanger the basis of Islam and prophecy. But the matter was so important that the Prophet feared opposition and interference and in awaiting suitable circumstances delayed it, until there came a definite and urgent order from God to execute this command without delay and not to fear anyone. This matter also was not just a particular

religious injunction in the ordinary sense, for to preach one or several religious injunctions is not so vital that if a single one of them were not preached it would cause the destruction of Islam. Nor did the Prophet of Islam fear anyone in preaching the injunctions and laws of religion.

These indications and witnesses add weight to the Shi'ite traditions which assert that these verses were revealed at Ghadir Khumm and concern the spiritual investiture (walayat) of Ali ibn Abi Talib. Moreover, many Shi'ite and Sunni commentators have confirmed this point.

Abū Sa'id Khudari says: "The Prophet in Ghadir Khumm invited people toward Ali and took his arm and lifted it so high that the white spot in the armpit of the Prophet of God could be seen. Then this verse was revealed: 'This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed My favor unto you, and have chosen for you as religion AL-ISLAM.' Then the Prophet said, 'God is great (*Allāhu akbar*) that religion has become perfected and that God's bounty has been completed, His satisfaction attained and the walayat of Ali achieved.' Then he added, 'For whomever I am the authority and guide Ali is also his guide and authority. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of Ali and the enemy of his enemies. Whoever helps him, help him, and whoever leaves him, leave him.'"⁸

In summary we can say that the enemies of Islam who did everything possible to destroy it, when they lost all hope of achieving this end, were left with only one hope. They thought that since the protector of Islam was the Prophet, after his death Islam would be left without a guide and leader and would thus definitely perish. But in Ghadir Khumm their wishes were brought to nought and the Prophet presented Ali as the guide and leader of Islam to the people. After Ali this heavy and necessary duty of guide and leader was left upon the shoulders of his family.⁹

Some of the hadiths pertaining to Ghadir Khumm, the investiture of Ali, and the significance of the Household of the Prophet are cited here:

Hadith-i ghadir: The Prophet of Islam upon returning from the farewell pilgrimage stopped in Ghadir Khumm; assembled the

Muslims and, after delivering a sermon, chose Ali as the leader and guide of Muslims.

Barā' says: "I was in the company of the Prophet during the farewell pilgrimage. When we reached Ghadir Khumm he ordered that place to be cleaned. Then he took Ali's hand and placed him on his right side. Then he said, 'Am I the authority whom you obey?' They answered, 'We obey your directions.' Then he said, 'For whomever I am his master (*maulā*) and the authority whom he obeys, Ali will be his master. Oh God! Be friendly with the friends of Ali and enemy of the enemies of Ali.' Then Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said to Ali, 'May this position be pleasing to you, for now you are my master and the master of all the believers.'"¹⁰

Hadith-i safinah: Ibn 'Abbās says, "The Prophet said, 'My household is like the ship of Noah; whoever embarks upon it will be saved and whoever turns away from it will be drowned.'"¹¹

Hadith-i thaqalayn: Zayd ibn Arqam has recounted that the Prophet said, "It seems that God has called me unto Himself and I must obey His call. But I leave two great and precious things among you: the Book of God and My Household. Be careful as to how you behave toward them. These two will never be separated from each other until they encounter me at Kawthar (in paradise)."¹² Hadith-i thaqalayn is one of the most strongly established hadiths, and has been transmitted through many chains of transmission and in different versions. Shi'ites and Sunnis agree concerning its authenticity. Several important points can be deduced from this hadith and its like: (1) In the same way that the Holy Quran will remain until the Day of Judgment, the progeny of the Holy Prophet will also remain. No period of time will be without the existence of the figure which Shi'ism calls the Imam, the real leader and guide of men. (2) Through these two great trusts (*amānat*), the Prophet has provided for all the religious and intellectual needs of the Muslims. He has introduced his Household to Muslims as authorities in knowledge and has pronounced their words and deeds to be worthy and authoritative. (3) One must not separate the Holy Quran from the Household of the Prophet. No Muslim has a right to reject the "sciences" of the members of the Household of the Prophet and remove himself from

under their direction and guidance. (4) If people obey the members of the Household and follow their words they will never be led astray. God will always be with them. (5) The answers to the intellectual and religious needs of men are to be found in the hands of the members of the Household of the Prophet. Whoever follows them will not fall into error and will reach true felicity; that is, the members of the Household are free from error and sin and are inerrant. From this it can be concluded that by "Members of the Household" and "progeny" is not meant all the descendants and relatives of the Prophet. Rather, specific individuals are meant who are perfect in the religious sciences and are protected against error and sin so that they are qualified to guide and lead men. For Shi'ism these individuals consist of Ali ibn Abi Talib and his eleven descendants who were chosen to the imamate one after another. This interpretation is also confirmed by the Shi'ite traditions. For example, Ibn 'Abbās has said, "I said to the Prophet, 'Who are your descendants whose love is obligatory [upon Muslims]?' He said, 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn.'"¹³ Jabir has transmitted that the Prophet has said, "God placed the children of all prophets in their 'backbone' but placed my children in the backbone of Ali."¹⁴

Hadith-i haqq: Umm Salmah has said, "I heard from the Prophet of God who said, 'Ali is with the Truth (haqq) and the Quran, and the Truth and the Quran are also with Ali, and they will be inseparable until they come upon me at Kawthar.'"¹⁵

Hadith-i manzilah: Sa'd ibn Waqqāṣ has said, "The Prophet of God said to Ali, 'Are you not satisfied to be to me what Harun was to Moses except that after me there will not be another prophet?'"¹⁶

Hadith-i da'wat-i 'ashīrah: The Prophet invited his relatives for luncheon and after the meal told them, "I know of no one who has brought to his people better things than I have brought to you. God has commanded me to invite you to draw toward Him. Who is there who will assist me in this matter and be my brother and inheritor (*wasi*) and vicegerent (*khalifah*) among you?" All remained silent, but Ali, who was the youngest of all, exclaimed, "I shall be your deputy and aide." Then the Prophet put his arms

around him and said, "He is my brother, inheritor and vicegerent. You must obey him." Then the group began to depart laughing and telling Abu Talib, "Muhammad has ordered you to obey your son."¹⁷

Hudhayfah has said, "The Prophet of God said, 'If you make Ali my vicegerent and successor—which I do not think you will do—you will find him a perspicacious guide who will direct you toward the straight path!'"¹⁸

Ibn Mardūyah has said that the Prophet said, "Whoever wishes that his life and death be like mine and that he enter paradise should after me love Ali and follow my household, for they are my descendants and have been created from my clay. My knowledge and understanding have been bestowed upon them. Therefore woe unto those who deny their virtues. My intercession [on the Day of Judgement] will never include them."¹⁹

Affirmation of the Previous Section

Much of the argument of Shi'ism concerning the succession to the Prophet rests on the belief that during the last days of his illness the Prophet in the presence of some of his companions asked for some paper and ink²⁰ so that something could be written which, if obeyed by the Muslims, would prevent them from going astray. Some of those present considered the Prophet to be too ill to be able to dictate anything and said, "The Book of God is sufficient for us." There was so much clamor raised over this matter that the Holy Prophet told those present to leave, for in the presence of a prophet there should not be any noise or clamor.

Considering what has been said above about hadiths concerning succession and the events that followed upon the death of the Prophet, especially the fact that Ali was not consulted in the question of selecting the Prophet's successor, Shi'ites conclude that the Holy Prophet had wanted to dictate his definitive views about the person who was to succeed him but was not able to do so.

The purpose of the utterances of some of those present seems to have been to cause confusion and prevent this final decision from

being clearly announced. Their interruption of the Holy Prophet's discourse does not seem to be what it appears outwardly, that is concern with the possibility that the Prophet might utter incongruous words due to the intensity of his illness. For, first of all, throughout his illness the Holy Prophet was not heard to have uttered any meaningless or incongruous words and no such thing has been transmitted concerning him. Moreover, according to the principles of Islam the Prophet is protected by God from uttering delirious or senseless words and is inerrant.

Secondly, if the words mentioned by some of those present on that occasion before the Prophet were meant to be of a serious nature there would have been no place for the next phrase, "The Book of God is sufficient for us." In order to prove that the Prophet might utter incongruous words under unusual circumstances the reason of his serious illness would have been used rather than the claim that with the Quran there was no need of the Prophet's words. For it could not be hidden from any Muslim that the very text of the Book of God considers the obedience to the Holy Prophet to be obligatory and his words to be in a sense like the Word of God. According to the text of the Holy Quran, Muslims must obey the injunctions of both God and the Prophet.

Thirdly, an incident involving illness occurred during the last days of the life of the first caliph, who in his last will and testament chose the second caliph as his successor. When Uthman was writing the will according to the order of the caliph, the caliph fainted. Yet the second caliph did not repeat the words that had been uttered in the case of the Prophet according to the hadith of "Pen and Paper."²¹ This fact has been confirmed in a hadith related by Ibn Abbas.²² And it has been accounted of the second caliph that he said, "Ali deserved the caliphate but the Quraysh would not have been able to bear his caliphate, for had he become caliph he would have forced the people to accept the pure truth and follow the right path. Under his caliphate they would not have been able to transgress the boundaries of justice and thus would have sought to engage in war with him."²³

Obviously according to religious principles one must force him who has deviated from the truth to follow the truth; one must not

abandon the truth for the sake of one who has abandoned it. When the first caliph was informed²⁴ that some of the Muslim tribes had refused to pay religious tax, he ordered war and said, "If they do not give me the tithes which they gave to the Prophet, I shall fight against them." Evidently by this saying he meant most of all that truth and justice must be revived at all costs. Surely the problem of the legitimate caliphate was more important and significant than tithes, and Shi'ism believes that the same principle applied by the first caliph to this matter should have been applied by the whole early community to the problem of succession to the Holy Prophet.

The Imamate and Its Role in the Exposition of the Divine Sciences

In the discussion of prophecy it was mentioned that, according to the immutable and necessary law of general guidance, each created species is guided through the path of genesis and generation toward the perfection and felicity of its own kind. The human species is not an exception to this general law. Man must be guided through the very "instinct" of seeking reality and through thought concerning his life in society in such a way that his well-being in this world and the next is guaranteed. In other words, to attain human happiness and perfection, man must accept a series of doctrines and practical duties and base his life upon them.

It has, moreover, already been said that the way to understand that total program for life called religion is not through reason but through revelation and prophecy, which manifests itself in certain pure beings among mankind who are called prophets. It is the prophets who receive from God, through revelation, the knowledge of men's duties and obligations as human beings and who make these known to men, so that by fulfilling them men may attain felicity.

It is evident that in the same way that this reasoning proves the necessity for knowledge to guide men to the attainment of happiness and perfection, it also proves the necessity for the existence

of individuals who preserve intact the total body of that knowledge and who instruct the people when necessary. Just as the Divine Compassion necessitates the existence of persons who come to know the duties of mankind through revelation, so also it makes it necessary that these human duties and actions of celestial origin remain forever preserved in the world and as the need arises be presented and explained to mankind. In other words, there must always be individuals who preserve God's religion and expound it when necessary.

The person who bears the duty of guarding and preserving the Divine message after it is revealed and is chosen by God for this function is called the Imam, in the same way that the person who bears the prophetic spirit and has the function of receiving Divine injunctions and laws from God is called the Prophet. It is possible for the imam²⁵ and prophecy (nubuwwat) either to be joined in one person or to be separate.

The proof given previously to demonstrate the inerrancy of prophets, also demonstrates the inerrancy of the Imams, for God must preserve His true religion intact and in such a state that it can be propagated among mankind at all times. And this is not possible without inerrancy, without Divine protection against error.

The Difference Between Prophet and Imam

The previous argument about the reception of Divine injunctions and laws by the prophets only proves the basis of prophecy, namely the receiving of Divine injunctions. The argument does not prove the persistence and continuity of prophecy, even though the very fact that these prophetic injunctions have been preserved naturally raises the idea of persistence and continuity. That is why it is not necessary for a prophet (nabi) always to be present among mankind, but the existence of the Imam, who is the guardian of Divine religion, is on the contrary a continuous necessity for human society. Human society can never be without the figure whom Shi'ism calls the Imam whether or not he is recognized and

known. God, the Most Exalted, has said in His Book: "So if these disbelieve in it, We have already entrusted it to a people [i.e., the Imams] who do not disbelieve in it" (Quran, VI, 90).²⁶

As mentioned above, the functions of prophecy and imamate may be joined in one person who is then appointed to the functions of both prophet and Imam, or to both the reception of the Divine law and its preservation and explanation. And sometimes they can be separated, such as in periods during which there is no prophet living but when there is a true Imam living among men. It is obvious that the number of God's prophets is limited and the prophets have not been present in every period and age.

It is also of significance to note that in God's Book some of the prophets have been introduced as Imams such as the Prophet Abraham, about whom is said, "And (remember) when his Lord tried Abraham with (His) commands, and he fulfilled them, He said: Lo! I have appointed thee a leader [imam] for mankind. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring (will there be leaders)? He said: My covenant includeth not wrongdoers" (Quran, II, 124). And God has also said, "And We made them chiefs [imams] who guide by Our command . . ." (Quran, XXI, 73).

The Imamate and Its Role in the Esoteric Dimension of Religion

In the same way that the Imam is the guide and leader of men in their external actions so does he possess the function of inward and esoteric leadership and guidance. He is the guide of the caravan of humanity which is moving inwardly and esoterically toward God. In order to elucidate this truth it is necessary to turn to the following two introductory comments. First of all, without any doubt, according to Islam as well as other Divine religions the sole means of attaining real and eternal happiness or misery, felicity or wretchedness, is by means of good or evil actions which man comes to recognize through the instruction of Divine religion as well as through his own primordial and God-given nature and intelligence. Second, through the means of revelation and prophecy God has praised or condemned man's actions according to the

language of human beings and the society in which they live. He has promised those who do good and obey and accept the teachings of revelation a happy eternal life in which are fulfilled all desires that accord with human perfection. And to the evildoers and the iniquitous He has given warning of a bitter perpetual life in which is experienced every form of misery and disappointment.

Without any doubt God, who stands in every way above all that we can imagine, does not, as we do, possess "thought" moulded by a particular social structure. The relations of master and servant, ruler and ruled, command and prohibition, reward and punishment, do not exist outside our social life. The Divine Order is the system of creation itself, in which the existence and appearance of everything is related solely to its creation by God according to *real* relations and to that alone. Furthermore, as has been mentioned in the Holy Quran²⁷ and prophetic hadith, religion contains truths and verities above the common comprehension of man, which God has revealed to us in a language we can comprehend on the level of our understanding.

It can thus be concluded that there is a real relationship between good and evil actions and the kind of life that is prepared for man in eternity, a relation that determines the happiness or misery of the future life according to the Divine Will. Or in simpler words it can be said that each good or evil action brings into being a real effect within the soul of man which determines the character of his future life. Whether he understands it or not, man is like a child who is being trained. From the instructions of the teacher, the child hears nothing but do's and don'ts but does not understand the meaning of the actions he performs. Yet, when he grows up, as a result of virtuous mental and spiritual habits attained inwardly during the period of training, he is able to have a happy social life. If, however, he refuses to submit to the instructions of the teacher he will undergo nothing but misery and unhappiness. Or he is like a sick person who, when in the care of a physician, takes medicine, food and special exercises as directed by the physician and who has no other duty than to obey the instructions of his doctor. The result of this submission to his orders is the creation of harmony in his constitution which is the source of health

as well as every form of physical enjoyment and pleasure. To summarize, we can say that within his outward life man possesses an inner life, a spiritual life, which is related to his deeds and actions and develops in relation to them, and that his happiness or misery in the hereafter is completely dependent upon this inner life.

The Holy Quran also confirms this explanation.²⁸ In many verses it affirms the existence of another life and another spirit for the virtuous and the faithful, a life higher than this life and a spirit more illuminated than the spirit of man as we know it here and now. It asserts that man's acts have inner effects upon his soul that remain always with him. In prophetic sayings there are also many references to this point. For example, in the Hadith-i mi'rāj (hadith of the nocturnal ascension) God addresses the Prophet in these words: "He who wishes to act according to My satisfaction must possess three qualities: he must exhibit a thankfulness that is not mixed with ignorance, a remembrance upon which the dust of forgetfulness will not settle, and a love in which he does not prefer the love of creatures rather than My love. If he loves Me, I love him; I will open the eye of his heart with the sight of My majesty and will not hide from him the qualities of My creatures. I will confide in him in the darkness of the night and the light of the day until conversation and intercourse with creatures terminates. I will make him hear My word and the word of My angels. I will reveal to him the secret which I have veiled from My creatures. I will dress him with the robe of modesty until the creatures feel ashamed before him. He will walk upon the earth having been forgiven. I will make his heart possess consciousness and vision and I will not hide from him anything in Paradise or in the Fire. I will make known to him whatever people experience on the Day of Judgement in the way of terror and calamity."²⁹

Abū 'Abdallāh—may peace be upon him—has recounted that the Prophet of God—may peace and blessing be upon him—received Ḥarīthah ibn Mālik ibn al-Nu'mān and asked him, "How art thou, Oh Harīthah?" He said, "Oh Prophet of God, I live as a true believer." The Prophet of God said to him, "Each thing possesses its own truth. What is the truth of thy word?" He said,

"Oh Prophet of God! My soul has turned away from the world. My nights are spent in a state of awakedness and my days in a state of thirst. It seems as if I am gazing at the Throne of my Lord and the account has been settled, and as if I am gazing at the people of paradise who are visiting each other in heaven, and as if I hear the cry of the people of hell in the fire." Then the Prophet of God said, "This is a servant whose heart God has illuminated."³⁰

It must also be remembered that often one of us guides another in a good or evil matter without himself carrying out his own words. In the case of the prophets and Imams, however, whose guidance and leadership is through Divine Command, such a situation never occurs. They themselves practice the religion whose leadership they have undertaken. The spiritual life toward which they guide mankind is their own spiritual life,³¹ for God will not place the guidance of others in someone's hand unless He has guided him Himself. Special Divine guidance can never be violated or infringed upon.

The following conclusions can be reached from this discussion:

(1) In each religious community the prophets and Imams are the foremost in the perfection and realization of the spiritual and religious life they preach, for they must and do practice their own teachings and participate in the spiritual life they profess.

(2) Since they are first among men and the leaders and guides of the community, they are the most virtuous and perfect of men.

(3) The person upon whose shoulders lies the responsibility for the guidance of a community through Divine Command, in the same way that he is the guide of man's external life and acts, is also the guide for the spiritual life, and the inner dimension of human life and religious practice depends upon his guidance.³²

The Imams and Leaders of Islam

The previous discussions lead us to the conclusion that in Islam, after the death of the Holy Prophet, there has continuously existed and will continue to exist within the Islamic community (ummah), an Imam (a leader chosen by God). Numerous prophetic

hadiths³³ have been transmitted in Shi'ism concerning the description of the Imams, their number, the fact that they are all of the Quraysh and of the Household of the Prophet, and the fact that the promised Mahdi is among them and the last of them. Also, there are definitive words of the Prophet concerning the imamate of Ali and his being the first Imam and also definitive utterances of the Prophet and Ali concerning the imamate of the Second Imam. In the same way the Imams before have left definitive statements concerning the imamate of those who were to come after them.³⁴ According to these utterances contained in Twelve-Imam Shi'ite sources the Imams are twelve in number and their holy names are as follows: (1) 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib; (2) Ḥasan ibn 'Alī; (3) Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī; (4) 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn; (5) Muḥammad ibn 'Alī; (6) Ja'far ibn Muḥammad; (7) Mūsā ibn Ja'far; (8) 'Alī ibn Mūsā; (9) Muḥammad ibn 'Alī; (10) 'Alī ibn Muḥammad; (11) Ḥasan ibn 'Alī; and (12) the Mahdī.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LIVES OF THE TWELVE IMAMS

The First Imam

Amīr al-mu'minīn Ali³⁵—upon whom be peace—was the son of Abu Talib, the Shaykh of the Banū Hāshim. Abu Talib was the uncle and guardian of the Holy Prophet and the person who had brought the Prophet to his house and raised him like his own son. After the Prophet was chosen for his prophetic mission, Abu Talib continued to support him and repelled from him the evil that came from the infidels among the Arabs and especially the Quraysh.

According to well-known traditional accounts Ali was born ten years before the commencement of the prophetic mission of the

Prophet. When six years old, as a result of famine in and around Mecca, he was requested by the Prophet to leave his father's house and come to the house of his cousin, the Prophet. There he was placed directly under the guardianship and custody of the Holy Prophet.³⁶

A few years later, when the Prophet was endowed with the Divine gift of prophecy and for the first time received the Divine revelation in the cave of Ḥirā', as he left the cave to return to town and his own house he met Ali on the way. He told him what had happened and Ali accepted the new faith.³⁷ Again in a gathering when the Holy Prophet had brought his relatives together and invited them to accept his religion, he said the first person to accept his call would be his vicegerent and inheritor and deputy. The only person to rise from his place and accept the faith was Ali and the Prophet accepted his declaration of faith.³⁸ Therefore Ali was the first man in Islam to accept the faith and is the first among the followers of the Prophet to have never worshiped other than the One God.

Ali was always in the company of the Prophet until the Prophet migrated from Mecca to Medina. On the night of the migration to Medina (hijrah) when the infidels had surrounded the house of the Prophet and were determined to invade the house at the end of the night and cut him to pieces while he was in bed, Ali slept in place of the Prophet while the Prophet left the house and set out for Medina.³⁹ After the departure of the Prophet, according to his wish Ali gave back to the people the trusts and charges that they had left with the Prophet. Then he went to Medina with his mother, the daughter of the Prophet, and two other women.⁴⁰ In Medina also Ali was constantly in the company of the Prophet in private and in public. The Prophet gave Fāṭimah, his sole, beloved daughter from Khadijah, to Ali as his wife and when the Prophet was creating bonds of brotherhood among his companions he selected Ali as his brother.⁴¹

Ali was present in all the wars in which the Prophet participated, except the battle of Tabūk when he was ordered to stay in Medina in place of the Prophet.⁴² He did not retreat in any battle nor did he turn his face away from any enemy. He never disobeyed

trusted agents and judges to the house of the Imam to be with him and observe his condition and the situation within his house at all times. After the death of the Imam, they had the house investigated and all his female slaves examined by the midwife. For two years the secret agents of the caliph searched for the successor of the Imam until they lost all hope.⁹⁶ The eleventh Imam was buried in his house in Samarra next to his noble father.

Here it should be remembered that during their lifetimes the Imams trained many hundreds of scholars of religion and hadith, and it is these scholars who have transmitted to us information about the Imams. In order not to prolong the matter, the list of their names and works and their biographies have not been included here.⁹⁷

The Twelfth Imam

The promised Mahdi, who is usually mentioned by his title of Imām-i 'Aṣr (the Imam of the "Period") and Ṣāhib al-Zamān (the Lord of the Age), is the son of the eleventh Imam. His name is the same as that of the Holy Prophet. He was born in Samarra in 256/868 and until 260/872 when his father was martyred, lived under his father's care and tutelage. He was hidden from public view and only a few of the elite among the Shi'ah were able to meet him.

After the martyrdom of his father he became Imam and by Divine Command went into occultation (*ghaybat*). Thereafter he appeared only to his deputies (*nā'ib*) and even then only in exceptional circumstances.⁹⁸

The Imam chose as a special deputy for a time Uthman ibn Sa'id 'Umari, one of the companions of his father and grandfather who was his confidant and trusted friend. Through his deputy the Imam would answer the demands and questions of the Shi'ah. After Uthman ibn Sa'id, his son Muhammad ibn Uthman Umari was appointed the deputy of the Imam. After the death of Muhammad ibn Uthman, Abu'l Qāsim Husayn ibn Rūḥ Nawbakhti was the special deputy, and after his death Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari was chosen for this task.⁹⁹

A few days before the death of Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari in 329/939 an order was issued by the Imam stating that in six days Ali ibn Muhammad Simmari would die. Henceforth the special deputation of the Imam would come to an end and the major occultation (*ghaybat-i kubrā*) would begin and would continue until the day God grants permission to the Imam to manifest himself.

The occultation of the twelfth Imam is, therefore, divided into two parts: the first, the minor occultation (*ghaybat-i ṣuḡhrā*) which began in 260/872 and ended in 329/939, lasting about seventy years; the second, the major occultation which commenced in 329/939 and will continue as long as God wills it. In a hadith upon whose authenticity everyone agrees, the Holy Prophet has said, "If there were to remain in the life of the world but one day, God would prolong that day until He sends in it a man from my community and my household. His name will be the same as my name. He will fill the earth with equity and justice as it was filled with oppression and tyranny."¹⁰⁰

On the Appearance of the Mahdi

In the discussion on prophecy and the imamate it was indicated that as a result of the law of general guidance which governs all of creation, man is of necessity endowed with the power of receiving revelation through prophecy, which directs him toward the perfection of the human norm and the well-being of the human species. Obviously, if this perfection and happiness were not possible for man, whose life possesses a social aspect, the very fact that he is endowed with this power would be meaningless and futile. But there is no futility in creation.

In other words, ever since he has inhabited the earth, man has had the wish to lead a social life filled with happiness in its true sense and has striven toward this end. If such a wish were not to have an objective existence it would never have been imprinted upon man's inner nature, in the same way that if there were no food there would have been no hunger. Or if there were to be no water there would be no thirst and if there were to be no repro-

duction there would have been no sexual attraction between the sexes.

Therefore, by reason of inner necessity and determination, the future will see a day when human society will be replete with justice and when all will live in peace and tranquillity, when human beings will be fully possessed of virtue and perfection. The establishment of such a condition will occur through human hands but with Divine succor. And the leader of such a society, who will be the savior of man, is called in the language of the hadith, the Mahdi.

In the different religions that govern the world such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Islam there are references to a person who will come as the savior of mankind. These religions have usually given happy tidings of his coming, although there are naturally certain differences in detail that can be discerned when these teachings are compared carefully. The hadith of the Holy Prophet upon which all Muslims agree, "The Mahdi is of my progeny," refers to this same truth.

There are numerous hadiths cited in Sunni and Shi'ite sources from the Holy Prophet and the Imams concerning the appearance of the Mahdi, such as that he is of the progeny of the Prophet and that his appearance will enable human society to reach true perfection and the full realization of spiritual life.¹⁰¹ In addition, there are numerous other traditions concerning the fact that the Mahdi is the son of the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari. They agree that after being born and undergoing a long occultation the Mahdi will appear again, filling with justice the world that has been corrupted by injustice and iniquity.

As an example, Ali ibn Musa al-Rida (the eighth Imam) has said, in the course of a hadith, "The Imam after me is my son, Muhammad, and after him his son Ali, and after Ali his son, Hasan, and after Hasan his son Hujjat al-Qā'im, who is awaited during his occultation and obeyed during his manifestation. If there remain from the life of the world but a single day, Allah will extend that day until he becomes manifest, and fill the world with justice in the same way that it had been filled with iniquity. But when? As for news of the 'hour,' verily my father told me, having

heard it from his father who heard it from his father who heard it from his ancestors who heard it from Ali, that it was asked of the Holy Prophet, 'Oh Prophet of God, when will the "support" (qa'im) who is from thy family appear?' He said, 'His case is like that of the Hour (of the Resurrection). "He alone will manifest it at its proper time. It is heavy in the heavens and the earth. It cometh not to you save unawares" (Quran, VII, 187).'¹⁰²

Şaqr ibn Abī Dulaf said, "I heard from Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Ali al-Rida [the ninth Imam] who said, 'The Imam after me is my son, Ali; his command is my command; his word is my word; to obey him is to obey me. The Imam after him is his son, Hasan. His command is the command of his father; his word is the word of his father; to obey him is to obey his father.' After these words the Imam remained silent. I said to him, 'Oh son of the Prophet, who will be the Imam after Hasan?' The Imam cried hard, then said, 'Verily after Hasan his son is the awaited Imam who is "al-qā'im bi'l-ḥaqq" (He who is supported by the Truth).'¹⁰³

Musa ibn Ja'far Baghdādī said, "I heard from the Imam Abu Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Ali [the eleventh Imam] who said, 'I see that after me differences will appear among you concerning the Imam after me. Whoso accepts the Imams after the Prophet of God but denies my son is like the person who accepts all the prophets but denies the prophethood of Muhammad, the Prophet of God, upon whom be peace and blessing. And whoso denies [Muhammad] the Prophet of God is like one who has denied all the prophets of God, for to obey the last of us is like obeying the first and to deny the last of us is like denying the first. But beware! Verily for my son there is an occultation during which all people will fall into doubt except those whom Allah protects.'¹⁰⁴

The opponents of Shi'ism protest that according to the beliefs of this school the Hidden Imam should by now be nearly twelve centuries old, whereas this is impossible for any human being. In answer it must be said that the protest is based only on the unlikelihood of such an occurrence, not its impossibility. Of course such a long lifetime or a life of a longer period is unlikely. But those who study the hadiths of the Holy Prophet and the Imams will see that they refer to this life as one possessing miraculous qualities.

Miracles are certainly not impossible nor can they be negated through scientific arguments. It can never be proved that the causes and agents that are functioning in the world are solely those that we see and know and that other causes which we do not know or whose effects and actions we have not seen nor understood do not exist. It is in this way possible that in one or several members of mankind there can be operating certain causes and agents which bestow upon them a very long life of a thousand or several thousand years. Medicine has not even lost hope of discovering a way to achieve very long life spans. In any case such protests from "peoples of the Book" such as Jews, Christians and Muslims are most strange for they accept the miracles of the prophets of God according to their own sacred scriptures.

The opponents of Shi'ism also protest that, although Shi'ism considers the Imam necessary in order to expound the injunctions and verities of religion and to guide the people, the occultation of the Imam is the negation of this very purpose, for an Imam in occultation who cannot be reached by mankind cannot be in any way beneficial or effective. The opponents say that if God wills to bring forth an Imam to reform mankind He is able to create him at the necessary moment and does not need to create him thousands of years earlier. In answer it must be said that such people have not really understood the meaning of the Imam, for in the discussion on the imamate it became clear that the duty of the Imam is not only the formal explanation of the religious sciences and exoteric guidance of the people. In the same way that he has the duty of guiding men outwardly, the Imam also bears the function of walayat and the esoteric guidance of men. It is he who directs man's spiritual life and orients the inner aspect of human action toward God. Clearly, his physical presence or absence has no effect in this matter. The Imam watches over men inwardly and is in communion with the soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes. His existence is always necessary even if the time has not as yet arrived for his outward appearance and the universal reconstruction that he is to bring about.

The Spiritual Message of Shi'ism

The message of Shi'ism to the world can be summarized in one sentence: "To know God." Or in other words, it is to instruct man to follow the path of Divine realization and the knowledge of God in order to gain felicity and salvation. And this message is contained in the very phrase with which the Holy Prophet commenced his prophetic mission when he said: "Oh men! Know God in His Oneness (and acknowledge Him) so that you will gain salvation."¹⁰⁵

As a summary explanation of this message we will add that man is attached by nature to many goals in this worldly life and to material pleasures. He loves tasty food and drink, fashionable dress, attractive palaces and surroundings, a beautiful and pleasing wife, sincere friends and great wealth. And in another direction he is attracted to political power, position, reputation, the extension of his rule and dominion and the destruction of anything that is opposed to his wishes. But in his inner and primordial, God-given nature man understands that all these are means created for man, but man is not created for all these things. These things should be subservient to man and follow him and not vice versa. To consider the stomach and the region below it as a final end of life is the logic of cattle and sheep. To tear up, cut and destroy others is the logic of the tiger, the wolf and the fox. The logic inherent in human existence is the attainment of wisdom and nothing else.

This logic based upon wisdom with the power which it possesses to discern between reality and the unreal, guides us toward the truth and not toward things our emotions demand or toward passions, selfishness and egoism. This logic considers man as a part of the totality of creation without any separate independence or the possibility of a rebellious self-centeredness. In contrast to the current belief that man is the master of creation and tames rebellious nature and conquers it to force it to obey his wishes and desires, we find that in reality man himself is an instrument in the hand of Universal Nature and is ruled and commanded by it.