

IMAMAT

الإمامة

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Be reminded briefly of the idea of leadership and that leadership is essential to society
- Understand the meaning of Imamat
- Be reminded briefly of the basic beliefs regarding Imamat, including that they are 12 in number, they are sinless through divine protection (ma'sūm), and they are appointed by Allah
- Be introduced to the idea that Imams have other unique characteristics, one being the fact that they were the most superior in all aspects at their time
- Know the names of the 14 ma'sūmīn
- Be reminded briefly to the incident of Ghadīr
- Memorise the two āyāt that were revealed regarding the incident of Ghadīr
- Understand briefly the story of Mubāhalah

FUNDEMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 3

LESSON 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO IMAMAT

In our previous lessons, we discussed the prophets and their roles. In this lesson, we will talk about the leaders of the Muslims after the Prophets. Once Prophet Muḥammad, who was the last prophet, passed away, the Muslims needed a leader, and Allah (SWT) is too Wise and too Merciful to leave them without a leader. Therefore, Allah (SWT) appointed Imams to lead the Muslims after the Prophet (saw) passed away.

IMAMAT

The word 'Imāmat' literally means leadership, but in religious sciences we use it to refer to the people who were chosen by Allah (SWT) to be the leaders of the Muslims after the Prophet (saw) passed away. So we call a leader who is chosen by Allah an 'Imam'. Just like we needed prophets to guide us and teach us how to live our everyday life, we need Imams to do the same thing after the Prophet has passed away.

The Imams have access to the same knowledge that the Prophet (saw) had. They protect this knowledge and teach it to us, so that we can follow the true teachings of the Prophet. The main difference between a Prophet and an Imam is that a prophet receives revelation from Allah (SWT), but an Imam does not. So the main job of the Imam (as) is to protect the revelation that the Prophet (saw) has taught us.

To live our life the way Allah (SWT) wanted, we must follow the Imams and obey them. To do this, we first have to know who they are.

WHO ARE THE IMAMS?

We have discussed the reasons why the community needed Imams. Now, let us see who these twelve Imams are. Allah (SWT) ordered the Prophet to appoint twelve Imams after himself.

"...The Imams will be twelve according to the number of the (Twelve) Leaders of Bani-Israel..."ⁱⁱⁱ

These Imams were:

1 st Imam	Imam 'Ali (as)
2 nd Imam	Imam Ḥasan (as)
3 rd Imam	Imam Ḥusayn (as)
4 th Imam	Imam 'Ali Zainul 'Abidīn
5 th Imam	Imam Muḥammad al Bāqir
6 th Imam	Imam Ja'far al Ṣādiq
7 th Imam	Imam Musa al Kādim
8 th Imam	Imam 'Ali al Riḍa
9 th Imam	Imam Muḥammad al Jawād
10 th Imam	Imam 'Ali al Hādī
11 th Imam	Imam Ḥasan al 'Askari
12 th Imam	Imam Muḥammad al Mahdi

THE IMAMS WERE THE BEST PEOPLE OF THEIR TIME

The Imams were the best and most superior people of their time in all aspects, such as faith, morals, knowledge and bravery. This was because they were chosen by Allah, the Exalted and were always connected with Allah (SWT). In particular, the Imams were the most knowledgeable and the bravest people of their time.

KNOWLEDGE

Imam 'Ali (as) was superior in knowledge to all those at his time and he would demonstrate this on numerous occasions. As the Prophet (s) had stated:

"I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate"ⁱⁱⁱ

This was true for all of the Imams (as). Each of them was the most knowledgeable of their time.

BRAVERY

This could be seen in so many incidents at the times of all of the Imams (as). The story of al-Ma'mūn's (the king of the time) first meeting with Imam Muḥammad al-Jawād, the young son of Imam Ali al Riḍa (as) is interesting. Once, when our ninth Imam was only nine years old, he was walking down a street of Baghdad, when al-Ma'mūn and his soldiers came by. All the other children on the street ran away but the Imam did not.

Noting this, the king stopped his carriage and asked, "Young man, why did you not run away like the other children?"

Imam al Jawād (as) replied calmly, "I have not committed a crime, nor was I blocking the way. Why should I have run away or be afraid? And I also know that you will not cause any unnecessary trouble when your way is not blocked."

The king was surprised with this mature reply and asked, "What is your name?"

"Muḥammad...the son of Imam Ali al Riḍa (as)."

THE IMAM OF OUR TIME

The twelfth and final Imam is our current Imam, Imam Muḥammad Al-Mahdi. He is alive with us on this Earth, but hidden from us. He is in hiding because the Muslim community is not ready for him. He is protected by Allah (SWT) and will reappear when Allah wills. Just like Prophet Jesus (as) was protected by Allah and is to come at the end of days, so is the Imam of our time. However, we must not forget that he is living and amongst us. It is important to have love for the Imam and to know as much as possible about him, because he is the Imam of our time.

Review Questions

Q1. The name of our ninth Imam is:

- Imam al Riḍa
- Imam al Jawād
- Imam 'Ali

Q2. The Imams:

- a. Were very knowledgeable but not the most knowledgeable of their time
- b. Were the most knowledgeable of their time
- c. Had average knowledge

Q3. An Imam is chosen and appointed by:

- a. The people of his time
- b. Allah (SWT)
- c. The Imam before him

Allah (SWT) announces in the Qur'ān that he has purified these five people, and the narrations tell us that they are the best of all of Allah's creatures. The Prophet (saw) has taught us that if we want to be saved from going astray and remain on the right path, we should follow only the Ahlul Bayt (as):

The Holy Prophet (saw) said: "The likeness of my Ahlul Bayt amongst my Ummah (followers) is similar to Noah's Ark. Those who embarked on it were rescued and those who rejected it perished..."^{iv}

LOVE FOR AHLUL BAYT

Allah, the Exalted wants the hearts of the believers to be connected with those whom He loves. This is because we will take those people who we love as role models and so if we love the Ahlul Bayt we will take them as role models and follow them. This is why love for the Ahlul Bayt is considered the very best form of worship.

One way of developing love for the Ahlul Bayt (as) is to be happy when they are happy and sad when they are sad. Imam 'Ali (as) said:

"Surely, Allah has chosen for us followers (Shī'a), who assist us and are happy at our happiness and are sad in our sadness."^v

So in times of sadness for the Ahlul Bayt, such as the anniversary of the martyrdom of the Imams, we should try to respect these occasions and feel sad at this time. In times of happiness, such as the anniversaries of the births of Imams, we should try to celebrate and feel happy.

TRUE LOVE FOR THE AHLUL BAYT

True love for Ahlul-Bayt (as) should not just be in words, but should also be seen in action. At the time of Imam Ḥusayn (as), the people of Kufah sent 24,000 letters to the Imam saying that they were prepared to support and defend him. At the end however, there were only 100 or so loyal companions with the Imam. The others all betrayed the Imam either because they were greedy or because they were scared. This shows us that words alone are not enough and that we should prove that we love the Imams through our actions. When we perform good deeds, we are making our Imams happy. When we commit a sin, we are hurting the Imam of our time. Therefore, we should show our true love by pleasing our Imam and making him happy, and not hurting him by sinning.

LESSON 2: THE AHLUL BAYT

Revision Activity

Last week we learned the names of the twelve Imams. Let us see how many of us can remember the names of all twelve Imams.

List the names of the twelve Imams (as):

1.	2.
3.	4.
5.	6.
7.	8.
9.	10.
11.	12.

THE AHLUL BAYT

In our last lesson, we learnt about the twelve Imams and we learnt that they were from the family of the Prophet. While the Prophet himself was alive, there were four other members of his family who were Ma'sūm. Three of them were Imams, while the fourth, Sayyeda Fāṭimah (as) was not an Imam but still a role model and example for us all. These five people (including the Prophet) have a very high status in the eyes of Allah (SWT). They are:

- Prophet Muḥammad (saw)
- Imam 'Ali (as)
- Sayyeda Fāṭimah (as)
- Imam Ḥasan (as)
- Imam Ḥusayn (as)

In a poem by one of our great scholars it is said:

“Our sins strike him like arrows.

When he examines the scrolls of our deeds,

He weeps at our sins.”

If we really love our Imam, we will not hurt him with our sins and we will try our best to avoid sinning. Truly loving the Ahlul Bayt is the very best form of worship.

Imam al Ṣādiq (as) said: "Verily, there are various degrees of serving Allah, but love for us, the Ahlul Bayt, is the highest one."^{vi}

THE AHLUL BAYT ARE THE PUREST EXAMPLES OF ISLAM

During the life of the Prophet (saw), there was one particular event that showed the status of the Ahlul Bayt and their closeness to the Prophet. This was the event of Mubāhalah. In the early days of Islam, Najran was a place in which many Christians lived. The Holy Prophet (saw) sent letters to the heads of different countries inviting them to Islam. The people of Najran decided to send a group of their most knowledgeable scholars to the Prophet, to study the claim of his prophecy. When they came they were amazed and silenced by the logic and truth of the Prophet, as he responded to each of their arguments.

But they continued to argue because they were not willing to enter Islam. Then the following ayah was revealed:

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا
نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا
وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ فَنَجْعَلْ لَعْنَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ

“But whoever disputes with you in this matter after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: Come let us call our sons and our sons and our women and your women and ourselves and yourselves, then let us be earnest in prayer, and pray for the curse of Allah on the liars.” (3:61)

This was an order to the Prophet (saw) to challenge the Christians to Mubāhalah. This is when two people both pray to God and ask Him to curse the one who is lying.

The Christians consulted each other and announced their acceptance of the challenge. At the arranged time, the Prophet (saw) presented himself to the Christians. With him were some blessed people. He held Imam Ḥusayn (as) in his arms and he held Imam Ḥasan (as) by his hands. As ordered in the āyah, these were his ‘sons’. Sayyedah Fāṭimah (as) came behind him, as his ‘women’, and Imam ‘Ali (as) came behind her as the ‘self’ of the Prophet (saw).

The Christian leaders, on seeing the beautiful and shining faces in front of them became spellbound. Their hearts trembled and they began to shake on seeing the power radiating from Ahlul Bayt (as). Their leader asked someone, "who are these persons, who have come with Muḥammad?" The man told him the names and their relationship with the Holy Prophet (saw).

He could hold his patience no longer and he cried out,

"By God, I am seeing such faces that if they were to pray to God to move the mountain, God Almighty would move the mountain for them. O’ you people of Najran, if you contest with Muḥammad in this prayer of invoking curses on the liars, then I warn you that all of you will be destroyed and not a single soul of you will remain on this earth. I feel that it would be better to surrender to them and obey them."

So you can see that when the Prophet (saw) wanted to bring the most pure and good people and the people he loved most, he brought no one but the Ahlul Bayt (as).

Review Questions

Q1. In the event of Mubāhalah, who did the Prophet (saw) bring as ‘his self’?

- Himself
- Imam ‘Ali (as)
- Imam Ḥasan (as)

Q2. The five members of the Ahlul Bayt are all:

- Imams
- Ma’sūm (divinely protected from sinning)
- Neither of the above

Q3. True love for the Ahlul Bayt means:

- Taking them as role models
- Doing good deeds which please them and avoiding sins which hurt them
- Both of the above

LESSON 3: INTERCESSION

In this lesson, we will continue our discussion about *Imamat* and discuss intercession, one of the more important aspects of *Imamat*.

WHAT IS INTERCESSION?

Imagine that you have a very special request from your father. However, you are too shy to tell him yourself, or think that if you ask him then he might not agree. But you know that if your mother was to ask him for you then there is more of a chance he would accept your request and get you that special gift or give you permission to go on that special excursion. So you go to your mother and get her to ask your dad. This is an example of intercession between humans.

Intercession with Allah (SWT) is when we want something from Allah (SWT) and in addition to asking him directly, we also ask people who are very close to Allah (SWT) to ask on our behalf, so that the chances of our request being accepted are greater. So, if we want Allah (SWT) to forgive us for a mistake or sin, or we have a special need in our life, we should ask Allah (SWT) directly, but also ask him through people who are very close to him and have a special status with Him. Allah (SWT) is more likely to listen to their request and to grant our needs if they intercede for us and ask Allah (SWT) to help us.

Intercession also applies to the Hereafter. On Judgment Day, the Prophets and Imams can intercede on our behalf. God may overlook or forgive the sin of a person upon the request of a Prophet or Imam, out of honour for that Prophet or Imam.

WHO CAN INTERCEDE FOR US?

The people who have a very high status with Allah (SWT) are the *Ahlul Bayt* (as). They are the very best people who can intercede for us. As we learnt in the last lesson, Allah (SWT) has purified them from all sins and has a special love for them. Therefore, if we want our requests to be granted, we should ask Allah (SWT) through the *Ahlul Bayt*. Here is an example of asking Allah (SWT) through the Prophet (saw). It is from *Du'ā' al-Tawassul*.

"O Allah I ask you and turn to You through Your Prophet, the Prophet of Mercy, Muhammad (saw). O Abul Qāsim, O Messenger of Allah, O Imam of Mercy, Our Master and

Leader, we turn to Allah, and seek intercession and seek the help of Allah through you..."

EXAMPLES OF INTERCESSION BY THE AHLUL BAYT

There are many examples where the *Ahlul Bayt* (as) have come to people's rescue by praying to Allah (SWT) on behalf of those people. They can intercede for us both in this world and the needs we have here and in the Hereafter.

Let us look at an example from the Hereafter. On the Judgment day, Sayyedah Fāṭimah (as), just before she enters paradise, will stand at its door of paradise and ask Allah (SWT) to allow her to take with her anyone who had love for her in their heart. Allah (SWT) will then command her:

"Daughter of My beloved! Go back and look for everyone in whose heart was love for you or for any of your progeny; take their hand and lead them into paradise!"

Imam al-Bāqir (as) then says: "By Allah...she will pick her Shi'ah (followers) and those who love her just like a bird picks good seeds from bad seeds..."

As you can see, Sayyedah Fāṭimah (as) will intercede for us in the Hereafter if we have love for her and the Imams (her children).

Now let us look at an example of how the Imams can intercede for us in this world. A man who lived at the time of Imam al-Hādi (as) faced a big problem. He was a jeweller and the king of the time, who was a ruthless man, had given him a very precious stone and asked him to decorate it. The king, however, warned the man that if he would damage the stone, he would punish him very severely. Unfortunately, while the man was working on the stone, he accidentally broke it in half. He was petrified now and was sure the king would kill him or throw him into prison.

He went straight to Imam al-Hādi (as) and asked for help desperately. The Imam (as) simply said to him: 'go home and your problem will be fixed'. The man was still very scared and said: 'but what should I do?' Imam al-Hādi (as) said: 'because you have asked me for your need, consider it done'. The man went home and soon after the king called him to his castle. The man arrived at the castle extremely scared. Then something amazing happened.

The king said to the man: ‘my two daughters have been fighting about this jewel that I gave you and they will not stop. It is driving me mad. I want you to cut the jewel into two equal halves, decorate each half and bring it to me’. The jeweller, amazed at this request, agreed and went home very happy. He went straight to the Imam (as) to thank him and thanked Allah (SWT) very much for helping him through the holy Imam (as).

SINCERITY

Now that we know the importance of Imam, let us learn one of the main lessons that the Imams taught us. One of the main teachings of the Imams was to do things purely for the sake of Allah, and to not wreck our intention by doing things for the wrong reasons such as pride, a good reputation or money. One of the main reasons that the Imams have such a high status and are able to intercede for others is that they were sincere and did things only for the sake of Allah (SWT).

It is not how much we do, but the quality of what we do. So for example, if someone goes to the Mosque and prays 1000 prayers but only so others can praise him, then this action is nothing and is not sincere. But someone who prays only one prayer but sincerely for the sake of God, this person’s prayer is worth more than one who prayed a lifetime but for the wrong reasons.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) tells us that those who are best in their deeds are those who are the most sincere and not those who do the most. Then he tells us:

“It is harder to continue performing an action until it becomes sincere than to do the action itself. Sincerity is when you should not want anyone to praise you for your action except Allah, the Almighty...”

There are many examples in the lives of the Imams (as) where those who claimed to be the Shi’ah of the Imam were tested. When these tests came, it was seen that they were not sincere- that is, they were not doing things for the sake of God only and so they went astray.

At the time of Imam Ḥasan (as) thousands had pledged allegiance to defend the Imam. There were up to 20,000 soldiers on the side of the Imam, while on the side of Mu’āwiyah there were possibly 60,000. But when Mu’āwiyah, May the curse of God be upon him, deluded them with the simple pleasures of this life they stopped supporting the Imam. The state of the ‘followers’ of Imam

Ḥasan (as) was so dreadful that his own army began to steal and destroy his own camp, with narrations telling us that the prayer mat of the Imam was ripped off from underneath him during his prayer! Why did all this occur? Because the people at the time of the Imam, said mere words, they announced that they loved the Imam, but they were not sincere. When things became difficult, they showed they were not doing things purely for the sake of Allah, and actually had other motivations which stopped them from doing the right thing.

One day, a man came to Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) and said: “O Imam, you have ten thousand supporters just waiting for you to rise up, and they will support you”. The Imam (as) responded: “Are you sure of this,” and the man said that he was. There was a large furnace burning near where the Imam (as) was sitting. The Imam (as) asked this man who had come to see him “to prove your support to me, follow my orders and enter this large burning furnace”. The man was stunned and began to make excuses. He was amazed at how the Imam (as) could ask him to simply enter a large burning furnace and he refused.

Soon after, one of the Imam’s close students entered. The Imam (as) asked him to “enter the furnace”. The student simply took off his shoes and entered the burning furnace. The man who had been sitting with the Imam (as) was stunned by this. He ran over to the furnace to check on the Imam’s student, and to his amazement, found him sitting comfortably in the furnace. The fire had disappeared and he was safe and sound.

The Imam (as) said: “You claim I have ten thousand supporters, but how many supporters do I have who are like this man?”

This student of the Imam (as) showed his real sincerity. His intentions were purely for the sake of Allah and he was willing to do anything for the sake of his religion without thinking of any other motivations. However, most other people would not be able to do such a thing, because they are not so sincere.

We should all try to be as sincere as we can in our actions and try to do things for the sake of Allah (SWT). As much as we can, we should practice doing things for Him and not for own benefits and interests, especially when it comes to religious issues.

That is why Imam al-Jawād (as) said:

“Sincerity is the best worship.”

Review Questions

Q1. Sincerity means:

- a. Doing things correctly
- b. Doing a lot of something
- c. Doing things purely for the sake of Allah (SWT)

Q2. We ask the Ahlul Bayt (as) to intercede for us:

- a. Because they are the closest people to Allah (SWT)
- b. Because if they pray for us with Allah, our request is more likely to be answered
- c. Both of the above

Q3. The Ahlul Bayt (as) can intercede for us:

- a. Only in this world
- b. Only in the Hereafter
- c. Both in this world and the Hereafter

ⁱ Ehawza, Semester 1, Course 3 (Lectures 10-11)
The Message, by Ayatollah Ja'farSubhani pg. 200-202
http://www.jafariyaneews.com/articles/2k4/20mar_azadari.htm
The Holy Qur'an
ⁱⁱ[al-Majlesi, Beharul-Anwaar, vol. 36 p.290]

ⁱⁱⁱDua al-Nudba, Mafatiful Jinan
^{iv} *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 27, p. 113
^v (Ghurur al-Hikam, Vol: 1/ pg.: 235)
^{vi} *Bihar-ul-Anwar*, vol. 27, p. 91