

IMAMAT

الإمامة

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the incident of Saqīfah and the incidents just prior to the death of the Holy Prophet including the incident of the 'Black Thursday'
- Be reminded of the unique characteristics of the Imams including their knowledge, leadership and divine protection
- Understand the concept of sincerity in belief using examples of the hypocrisy of some of the companions of the Holy Prophet
- Be reminded of the concept of sincerity in Islam highlighting the fact that sincerity means being true to God
- Be reminded of the characteristics of the hypocrites as a means to identify them (with the emphasis of identifying these characteristics in ourselves and trying to overcome them)
- Understand the benefits of being sincere and the evil consequences of hypocrisy
- Outline some ways of trying to attain sincerity as recommended by the Qur'ān and narrations

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

LESSON 1: DISCUSSIONS ON IMAMAT

In previous years, we have learnt some general facts about Imamat, and discussed the roles of the Imams. In this lesson, we will review these discussions briefly and also discuss the importance of the Ahlul Bayt (as).

THE MEANING OF IMAMAT

As we discussed in previous lessons, Imamat literally means leadership. However, we use it to specifically refer to divinely appointed leaders: people who were appointed to lead the Muslim community by God.

As Shi'ah, we believe that the position of leadership of the Muslim community is one of the most important issues in Islam. Without the most qualified leader, the Muslim community would stray from the right path and Islam itself would be compromised. When the Prophet (saw) was alive, he was obviously the leader of the Muslim community. However, after his death, there was much dispute and controversy about this position.

Unlike other Muslims, we believe that Allah and His Messenger would not leave the Muslim community without a leader who was chosen and appointed by Allah. In fact, we believe that Allah (SWT) instructed His Prophet to appoint twelve successors, each of whom in turn would lead the Muslim community.ⁱ We argue that it is impossible for the Prophet, who instructed the Muslims on the smallest of issues (such as which side to sleep on and which foot to walk out of the bathroom with) would not instruct them on who should be the leader after himself. Therefore, the Prophet definitely appointed leaders after himself, chosen by Allah, whom we refer to as Imams.

There is a significant amount of documented historical evidence for this from all Muslim sects, evidence from the Qur'ān itself and logical reasoning as seen above, all of which leave this matter beyond doubt.

Further References:

We have provided you with references for further research. These references are useful for learning factual information about our belief in Imamat and the differences between the Shi'ah belief and the belief of other sects.

- Then I was Guided- Sayed Tijani Simawi- available online at al-islam.org
- Al-Muraj'āt, Sayyed Sharaful Din al-Musawi- available online at al-islam.org
- Al-Nass wal Ijtihad, Sayyed Sharaful Din al-Musawi, available in English as hard copy
- Peshawar Nights, available online at al-islam.org

TWELVE IMAMS

The Prophet appointed twelve Imams after himself. The first of these was Imam 'Ali (as). The last of these Imams is Imam al-Mahdi (atfs), who is still alive today. He was born over 1200 years ago, and lives in occultation. We will have further discussions on Imam Mahdi (atfs) in future lessons.

THE IMAMS ARE DIVINELY PROTECTED FROM SIN (MA'ŠŪM)

One of our major beliefs is that the Imams, just like the prophets, were sinless (ma'šūm). We have discussed in previous lessons that the prophets were sinless, why they must be sinless and we have refuted any objections against this belief. To quickly recap:

- We need a role model to follow, and the Imams are our greatest role models along with the prophets. If they were not sinless we would have no point of reference to check our actions against.
- Secondly, if they were not sinless, we would not be sure that what they are telling us is in fact the command of Allah or otherwise as they could be lying. This would therefore shake the very foundations of our faith.

The Imams choose not to sin because of the special divine protection that God has blessed them with.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMAMS

The leader of the Muslim community must have the following characteristics.

1-The highest level of faith: for example, it is unanimously agreed that Imam 'Ali (as) never prostrated before any idol whilst Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān indisputably all worshipped idols at some time in their lives. Eight years had passed since the rise of Islam and 'Umar (the second Caliph) was still an idolater! Even after embracing Islam he would question the Prophet's decisions and cast doubt on them on various occasions. ⁱⁱ

2-The highest level of knowledge: is also necessary for the leader of the Muslim community.

"Say: Are those who know equal to those who know not?"
[39:9]

The Prophet said about Imam 'Ali (as):

*"I am the city of knowledge, and Ali is its gate. Whoever wishes to enter the city, should enter it from its gate."*ⁱⁱⁱ

In contrast to this, 'Umar would often be corrected in his Islamic knowledge, such as when a woman stood up in the mosque one day to correct 'Umar's ruling on dowries and when Imam 'Ali (as) stopped a woman from being wrongly executed due to 'Umar's mistake.^{iv} An insane woman was taken advantage of and became engaged in an illegitimate relationship. 'Umar ordered that she be executed. Imam 'Ali (as) saw that this was about to happen and stopped the guards from taking her to be executed. He explained that he heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) saying that an insane person is not responsible for their actions unless or until they become sane.

3-The best in Jihād: this is another necessity of leadership mentioned in the Qur'ān:

"Allah has preferred in grades those who strive hard and fight with their wealth and their lives above those who sit." [4:95]

There is no doubt that no one came close to Imam 'Ali (as) and his progeny in this category. The examples of the Battles of Khaybar and Ūḥud are two of the most famous.

Review Questions

Q1. We believe that the twelve Imams of the Ahlul Bayt are:

- Appointed by God
- Appointed by the Prophet (saw)
- Appointed by the Muslim community

Q2. The Imams are *ma'sūm*, which means:

- They are not able to sin
- They choose not to sin because of special divine protection given by God
- They do not have the desire to sin, like angels

LESSON 2: THE EVENT OF SAQIFAH- THE FIRST DIVIDE WITHIN ISLAM

We have learnt in the previous lesson about the basic beliefs of the Sunni and the Shi'ah with regards to the major division between these two groups of Muslims: Imamat, or leadership after the Prophet (saw). In this lesson we will briefly discuss the roots of this division. We will learn about the first incident after the death of the Prophet which caused a division amongst the Muslim community. This event has been referred to as 'The Tragedy of Thursday' or 'Black Thursday'.

THE INCIDENT OF THE TRAGEDY OF THURSDAY

The political divide amongst the Muslims began very early in the history of Islam. As Islam had grown very powerful during the last few years of the Prophet's (saw) life, many people were lured by the promise of power, wealth and material success. This disease spread even to the very companions of the Prophet (saw). One of the most painful incidents that demonstrated the betrayal of some of the companions of the Holy Prophet happened just prior to the demise of the prophet (saw).

Ibn 'Abbās, a close companion and cousin of the Prophet said: "Thursday, and what a Thursday that was! The Messenger's pain became very severe, and he said, "Come here, I will write you a document which will prevent you from straying from the right path." But 'Umar said about the Prophet: 'the man is speaking nonsense', and that the Qur'ān was sufficient as a guide.

The companions then differed and quarrelled amongst themselves, some of them agreeing with what the Prophet said, while others supported 'Umar's view. When the debate became heated and the noise became louder, the Messenger of Allah said to them, "*Leave me alone.*"

Ibn 'Abbās said: 'The disaster was that the disagreement among the Companions prevented the Messenger from writing that document for them^v.'

THE INCIDENT AT SAQIFAH

As we have learnt previously, there were numerous occasions where the Prophet (saw) introduced Imam 'Ali (as) as his successor. One famous occasion is when the Prophet gathered his entire family to invite them to Islam. At the end of this gathering, he introduced Imam 'Ali (as) as his eventual successor. Another famous occasion is when the Prophet (saw) left Medina in preparation for a battle and asked Imam 'Ali (as) to stay back in Medina to protect it from the plots of the hypocrites, saying to him: 'You are to me as Aaron was to Moses, except that there will be no prophet after me.'

Despite this, some of the companions of the Prophet (saw) decided to ignore the command of the Prophet and later even claimed that the Prophet never mentioned a successor.^{vi}

The Muslims at the time were in two major groups: the Anṣār (the 'helpers' — natives of Medina) and the Muhājirīn (the immigrants from Mecca who had followed the prophet to Medina). After the Prophet's death and even before his burial, the Anṣār gathered in Saqifah and proposed to declare a person from among themselves as the new leader of the Muslims. Some among them started a discussion about how they should respond if the Muhājirīn disputed with them in the issue of leadership.

While this discussion was going on among the Anṣār in Saqifah, 'Umar ibn Khaṭṭab (one of the Muhājirīn) was informed about it. He sent for Abu Bakr who left the Prophet's funeral proceedings and joined 'Umar. In Saqifah, Abu Bakr gave a speech in which he exhorted the virtues of the Muhājirīn and proposed that the leader should be from the Muhājirīn. He ended his speech as follows: "*So we are the rulers, and you are the ministers and the counsellors. We will not do anything without consulting you.*"

After this, a quarrel occurred between the two groups of Muslims. In the middle of all this chaos, `Umar swore allegiance to Abu Bakr. Then Bashir ibn Sa`d, leader of the `Aws tribe of Anṣār, swore allegiance to Abu Bakr as well. Seeing this, the rest of the Anṣār also pledged allegiance so as not to lose favour in the eyes of Abu Bakr. This is how Abu Bakr became the Caliph of the Muslim community.^{vii}

A SHORT REVIEW OF SAQIFAH

The event narrated above, which is based on Sunni historical sources, shows that what happened at Saqifah was not a consultation among the Muslims, but a plot to usurp the leadership of Imam `Ali (as).

Firstly, while on his way to Saqifah, `Umar sent word only to Abu Bakr, and not to anyone else. Then Abu Bakr, who was in the house of the Prophet with the great companions and Imam `Ali, did not tell anyone about the plot of Saqifah and left the funeral proceedings of the Prophet (saw).

Secondly, the best comment on Abu Bakr's leadership can be found in the words of `Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb himself. During his own leadership, which came later, `Umar said, *“We have heard that one of you said that if `Umar dies I shall swear allegiance to so-and-so. Someone said to him that the allegiance to Abu Bakr was without consultation. It is true that allegiance to Abu Bakr took place all at once without much thought, but Allah protected us from mischief. However, no one should give you the example of Abu Bakr to follow.”*^{viii}

Thirdly, `Umar himself said, *“After the Prophet, `Ali, Zubayr and their companions rose up against us, and assembled in Fāṭimah's house.”*^{ix}

Finally, if the matter of leadership was to be resolved on the basis of consultation, the Prophet of Islam would certainly have explained before his death the way it should have been done. Is it feasible that the Prophet would explain some small and minor issues, but make no mention of such a great matter as the leadership?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE IMAMS OF AHLUL BAYT

Our belief, based on the teachings of the Qur`ān and the Prophet (saw), is that leadership is a matter determined by God, and therefore the people in that position must be divinely appointed. For a person to be divinely appointed, they have to have the required characteristics. We discussed some of these in our previous lesson, and here we discuss a couple more:

- 1- **Sinlessness (al-`Iṣma)**: as discussed in our previous lesson, the Imams were given special knowledge by God which protected them from sinning. The Imams would see the reality of sins and therefore they would avoid sin altogether. All our Imams, like the Prophets, were sinless.
- 2- **Karāmāt**: all our Imams performed miracles of one form or another. Miracles performed by the Imams are called *karāmāt*.
- 3- **Exalted character**: all our Imams (as) have the highest level of etiquette and manners which they learnt directly from the Holy Prophet (saw). They practiced and taught *Makārimul Akhlāq* (noblest of moral traits).
- 4- **Justice**- They all practiced and taught the highest forms of justice.

Unfortunately, because of these very characteristics, all our Imams (as) were very badly treated, tortured and killed. The people around them had immense jealousy, hatred and malice toward them, and feared that their power would be challenged by the Imams and their followers. The major enemies of the Imams were always hypocrites; people who pretended to be Muslims and care about Islam but who had only personal interests in mind. In our next lesson, we will learn about the qualities of hypocrites, and try to make sure that we purify ourselves from these characteristics.

Review Questions

Q1. Abu Bakr was appointed:

- a. By an election involving all Muslims
- b. By all the companions who were close to the Prophet
- c. By a few random companions who happened to be at Saqifah

Q2. The incident of Saqifah occurred while:

- Imam 'Ali was present in Saqifah
- Imam 'Ali was outside Medina
- Imam 'Ali was attending to the funeral proceedings of the Prophet (saw)

Q3. Miracles performed by an Imam are called:

- Mu'jizāt
- Karāmāt
- Both of the above

LESSON 3: SINCERITY

Perhaps the most important value that our Imams exemplified in their lives was sincerity. Sincerity is to do things for the sake of Allah alone, without caring about the opinion of anyone else, or what material benefits an action may have. One of the greatest examples of this was Imam 'Ali (as).

Imam 'Ali (as) lived purely for the sake of Allah alone. He did not care what people thought or said about him, as long as God was pleased with him. In *Du'ā' Nudba*, Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) describes Imam Ali (as) in the following way:

“When it came to God, he did not care about the chastisement of anyone.”

Due to Imam 'Ali's complete and absolute sincerity, the Prophet (saw) used to say:

“Truth is with Ali, it turns with him as he turns”

The Prophet (saw) also used to say that whoever loved 'Ali was a true believer and whoever opposed 'Ali was a hypocrite or disbeliever. This is why on the Day of Ghadr the Prophet (saw) prayed to Allah:

“O Allah be a friend to whoever follows 'Ali, and be an enemy to whoever opposes 'Ali...”

Imam 'Ali (as) used to dig many wells and donate them to poor families. One day, a person asked the Imam (as): 'you have donated over a thousand wells, and you yourself are still poor, is this not enough?' The Imam (as) replied: “if I knew for sure that even one of them was accepted by Allah, that would be enough”. This story demonstrates clearly that the Imam (as) had only one

thing in mind, and that was the Pleasure of Allah, the Exalted.

In another story, the Prophet (saw) invited all his companions to a challenge. He said that if anyone could completely and fully concentrate only on their prayer for a whole two-rak'ah prayer, he would gift them one of the two very valuable camels that he had received as a gift. All the companions tried but could not manage this feat. Finally, Imam 'Ali (as) tried. At the end of his prayer, the Prophet (saw) smiled and said that Imam 'Ali (as) had concentrated fully until he had reached the *salām* of his prayer. When he had reached the *salām*, he had started thinking about which of the camels was better to take. Imam 'Ali (as) admitted that this was true. However, the Prophet (saw) smiled again and said that Imam 'Ali (as) deserved the camel anyway, because he was thinking which camel was better so that he would pick the better one to give away as charity. The Prophet (saw) explained that this was still an act of sincerity and attention to God, and thus it had not spoiled 'Ali's prayer, and so he deserved the gift anyway.

HYPOCRISY

Hypocrisy is the opposite of sincerity. A hypocrite is someone who does things for his own sake and for the sake of people, while pretending to be a real believer.

The word hypocrite (*munāfiq*) is derived from the Arabic word “*nifāq*”. The term hypocrite refers to a person whose inward reality differs from his outward appearance, one who is two-faced. Hypocrite is the most dangerous of enemies. He sneaks his way into our communities and destroys them from the inside. The Prophet of Islam (saw), in one of his treasured speeches, introduced the hypocrites as Islam's most dangerous enemy. He said:

“I have never been frightened of any nation conquering Islam. I only worry about one group of people: the unbelievers who pretend to be Muslim, the two-faced hypocrites. They are with you in their words, but they would never take a step with you.”^{xx}

Imam 'Ali also said:

“I warn you about the hypocrites. They are misguided and they misguide as well. They have appeared in society in different colours and with different faces. Their speech is eloquent, profitable and is even a cure for pain. But their actions are like incurable diseases.”^{xxi}

HYPOCRITES

The following signs of the hypocrites are characteristics we should look for in ourselves so that we do not become hypocritical in our actions and words. Allah (SWT) in the Qur'ān says:

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ تُعْجِبُكَ أَجْسَامُهُمْ وَإِنْ يَقُولُوا تَسْمَعُ لِقَوْلِهِمْ
كَأَنَّهُمْ خُشْبٌ مُسَنَّدَةٌ يَحْسَبُونَ كُلَّ صَيْحَةٍ عَلَيْهِمْ هُمُ
الْعَدُوُّ فَاحْذَرُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ اللَّهُ أَنْيُّ يُؤْفِكُونَ

“When you look at them, their exteriors please you. When they speak, you listen to their words. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. The curse of Allah be on them! How deluded they are (from the truth)!”(6:3:4)

In short their characteristics are:

- 1- **They have the ability to hide their true face-** the hypocrites hide their true face in front of the believers. The way that they conduct themselves would please anyone. Believers think them to be righteous individuals.
- 2- **They are outspoken and eloquent speakers:** Often hypocrites learn the customs and language of believers, and try to deceive them with eloquent words which seem to be in agreement with Islamic values.
- 3- **They are as worthless as hollow pieces of timber propped up:** hypocrites, although they may be within the Muslim community, they do not and cannot benefit from all the goodness Islam offers.
- 4- **They are frightened by any calamity:** The Qurān mentions that fear and agitation dominates the hearts of hypocrites. They are scared of any commotion, change or sound which they think is to their detriment.

SIGNS OF HYPOCRISY

Our Imams (as) have taught us some of the signs of sincerity and hypocrisy. The purpose of discussing this is so that we can examine ourselves and see whether we have the signs of hypocrisy or the signs of sincerity, or some from each group. We should endeavour as much as we can to remove the signs of hypocrisy from our personalities, and instil the signs of sincerity. Here, we discuss the most important of these signs:

- A sincere person does not like to be praised for actions that He performs for the sake of Allah^{xii}
- A sincere person only has hope in Allah and only fears Allah^{xiii}
- A sincere person prefers to attain things through his own work rather than asking people^{xiv}
- A sincere person trusts Allah enough to spend in the way of Allah^{xv}
- A hypocritical person is lazy when they stand for prayers^{xvi}
- A hypocritical person does not make a firm decision and does not take a firm side, he is torn between this side and that^{xvii}
- A hypocritical person remembers Allah (SWT) very little^{xviii}
- A hypocrite announces his actions and boasts about them^{xix}
- A hypocrite breaks his promises^{xx}
- A hypocrite lies most of the time^{xxi}
- A hypocrite betrays trusts^{xxii}
- A hypocrite is not likeable and is arrogant^{xxiii}

Review Questions

Q1. A sincere person:

- a. Likes to be praised but only for their good actions
- b. Does not like to be praised for their good actions performed for the sake of Allah
- c. Breaks promises but only to non-believers

Q2. A hypocrite:

- a. Lies most of the time
- b. Betrays trusts
- c. Both of the above

Q3. The Qur'ān describes hypocrites as:

- a. Hollow
- b. Frightened and paranoid
- c. Both of the above

ⁱ References for these narrations can be found in the books recommended below. However, upon those who are insane (among others) and so she could not be punished. Again, Umar we have also provided some specific references for you here: admitted his mistake and confessed that if it were not for the advice of Imam Ali (as), he would have perished.

-Bukhari 8:127 ^v Al-Tafsir al-Kabir by al-Fakhr al-Razi

-Muslim 3:1452 ^{vi} For more details please read- THEN I WAS GUIDED by Muhammad Tijani as-Samawi

-Refer to eHAWZA, semester 2, course 6, lecture 2 for more details ^{vii} Al-Nass wal Ijtihad, p.198-202. The story is regarding the treaty of Hdaybiyah. The Peshawer Nights by Sultanu'l-Wa'izin Shirazi and many other books on this topic.

ⁱⁱ Al-Nass wal Ijtihad, p.198-202. The story is regarding the treaty of Hdaybiyah. The Prophet had a dream that the Muslims would perform Hajj and so they all set out towards Mecca. Before they reached there, the Quraysh confronted them in an aggressive manner and the Prophet (saw) decided to enter into a treaty with them rather than engage in war. So the Muslims stopped their journey to Mecca and the Prophet asked them to shave their heads and to slaughter their animals of sacrifice, for they were not going to Hajj that year. Umar was very upset by this and would not stop objecting to the Prophet's decision and even personally confronted the Prophet. However, the Prophet told him that he promised they would go to Hajj, but not that year.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dua al-Nudba, Mafatihul Jinan ^{viii} Tabari, Ta'rikh, vol. 4, p. 1820-1823

^{iv} The two stories are as follows: ^{ix} Ibid

-one day, Umar had become upset about the rising dowries within the Muslim community and so he ordered that there should be an upper limit on dowries. A woman stood up in the crowd and quoted the ayah: 'and if you had given her a heap of gold', which clearly showed that it was permissible to give a woman a very large dowry. Thus, Umar was mistaken in his ruling and he admitted to this.

-One day, Imam Ali (as) saw an insane woman being prepared for execution. He enquired why this was happening and they said that she had committed adultery and was being punished. He stopped all the proceedings and brought the woman back before Umar. He reminded Umar of the narration which says that the pen (i.e. responsibility) is lifted from

^x Imām 'Alī (a), Nahj al-Balāghah, volume 3, page 29

^{xi} Imām 'Alī (a), Nahj al-Balāghah, speech 192

^{xii} The Scale of Wisdom, narration no. 1880

^{xiii} Ibid, no. 1881

^{xiv} Ibid. no. 1883

^{xv} Ibid. no.1883

^{xvi} The Holy Qur'an

^{xvii} Ibid.

^{xviii} Ibid.

^{xix} The Scale of Wisdom, narration no. 6208

^{xx} Ibid.

^{xxi} Ibid.

^{xxii} Ibid.

^{xxiii} Ibid, no. 6210