

To

IMAM ALI

امام علي (ع)

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand that Islam is a religion of submission
- Be able to discuss at least two events exemplifying the Imam's submission to Allah (SWT)
- Understand consequences of submission to Allah
- Discuss the proofs for the leadership of Imam 'Ali (as)
- Learn one more of the titles of Imam 'Ali (as)
- Appreciate Imam Ali's contributions to the growth of Islām

FUNDAMENTALS OF ISLAM

LEVEL 4

LESSON 1: IMAM 'ALI, THE IMAM OF THE PIOUS

Imam 'Ali (as) is a great and peerless personality whose qualities have been recognised by friends and foes alike. He had the unique distinction of being born in the Holy Ka'bah. He first opened his eyes in this world to see the beautiful face of our beloved Prophet (saw), and was brought up under the care of the Prophet (saw). For this reason, the Imam's heart absorbed the actions and the exemplary character of the Prophet (saw). In his early days, our first beloved Imam dedicated himself to the task of spreading Islam and he became a pillar of support for the Prophet. He was neither scared of the hardships nor the threats of the enemies of Islam.

It is only by studying the lives of such holy personalities that we begin to realise how to deal with all the hardships and sufferings of life. The ability to cope with these turmoils of life can only be achieved if one has fully submitted to Allah (SWT). We can liken the Imam's submission to Allah (SWT) to a strong tree trunk giving rise to several different branches, each growing leaves bearing sweet fruits. Virtues such as courage, generosity, kindness and humility- all virtues that our Imam had, are but a few examples of many such fruits, all of which were results of that submission.

In this unit, we will focus on Imam 'Ali's submission to Allah (SWT) and the consequences of that submission.

THE IMAM OF THE PIOUS

Imam 'Ali (as) had many titles that described his various great qualities. One of these was the title of 'the Leader of the Pious'.

Imām al-Muttaqīn (the Leader of the Pious). Being pious means performing all the obligations that God has commanded, and staying away from everything that God has forbidden. Imam ‘Ali (as) was one of the greatest examples of a pious person. No one after the Holy Prophet (saw) can ever claim to be more deserving of this title.

We see many instances in the Imam’s life where he was extra careful to avoid forbidden or dubious actions. For example, during his time as a Caliph, two people visited him to speak about official government business. It was night-time and the Imam had lit a candle so he could see them and be able to write. Soon they finished their business, and were about to begin talking about personal matters. At this point, the Imam blew out the candle and replaced it with another one. When they asked him why he had done so, he told them that the first candle was purchased with public wealth, while the second was his own candle. He did not want to use the candle purchased from public wealth for personal reasons. The two visitors were shocked, yet this story shows the extent of care the Imam (as) showed in avoiding forbidden acts and practising piety.

CONSEQUENCES OF SUBMISSION

As mentioned in the beginning, submission to Allah (SWT) is like a strong trunk of a tree which has several branches. Each branch in turn has several leaves which bear a variety of sweet fruits. The fruits are knowledge, truthfulness, generosity, bravery, satisfaction and so on. All these qualities were elaborately manifested in the Imam’s life. In this section we shall briefly look at some fruits that the tree of submission bore for Imam Ali (as).

HUMILITY

On the battlefield Imam ‘Ali (as) showed matchless bravery and aggression such that no one would dare to challenge him. However, it is this same person that was very often seen dining with the poor and feeding them with his own hands. Moreover, when he used to engage in private communications with his Lord, he would be seen crying and in absolute awe of Allah. There is enough evidence for this in his famous supplications such as *Duā’ Kumail*, *Duā’ Mashlūl* and *Duā’ Šabāh*. For instance in *Duā’ Kumail* we read:

“O Allah! Accept my apology and have pity on my intense sufferings and set me free from my heavy chains. My Cherisher! Have mercy on the infirmity of my body, the delicacy of my skin and the brittleness of my bones”

SATISFACTION

Despite all the hardships that the enemies of Islam and the hypocrites imposed upon him, Imam ‘Ali (as) never complained nor did he appear like one who had given up hope in the affairs of this world. This is because his heart had deeply submitted to the will of Allah (SWT) and therefore, whether he received good or bad, it all seemed beautiful since the source of it all is the possessor of all beauty. Hence he was always satisfied with what Allah wanted. As a result, when the Imam was struck with a poisonous blow in the mosque of Kufa, he said: “I swear by the Lord of the Ka’ba that I have been successful”. The Imam (as) explains how he achieved this high level of satisfaction:

“The source of satisfaction (contentment) is trust in Allah”

ISLĀM: A RELIGION OF SUBMISSION

This is the true meaning of the word Islām: complete submission to what Allah wills and not what our desires wish. Imam ‘Ali is the perfect example of true submission.

Review Questions

Q1. The word Islām means:

- Submission
- Peace
- Love

Q2. According to Imam ‘Ali (as), the source of being satisfied with whatever occurs in our life is:

- Being wealthy
- Being cheerful
- Having trust in Allah (SWT)

Q3. Being pious means:

- Praying and fasting
- Avoiding all impermissible things and performing all obligatory acts
- Being brave

LESSON 2: IMAM 'ALI: THE GREAT WARRIOR

In our last lesson, we discussed Imam 'Ali's submission to the commands of Allah (SWT). We also discussed some of the consequences of submission, including bravery. In this lesson, we will look at three main examples of how Imam Ali's bravery helped Islam advance and spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula.

THE HERO OF THE BATTLE OF BADR

This was the first battle that the Muslims fought against the polytheists of Mecca. At the time, Imam 'Ali (as) was just a youth with not much war experience. Despite this, his valour and courage in fighting for the sake of Allah (SWT) was matchless. He killed three eminent persons of the infidels first off and this developed fear and chaos in the ranks of the enemies as to who should fight him in single combat. Imam 'Ali in this battle scared the enemies similar to a lion running towards a flock of sheep. The Imam did all this not for any fame or physical luxury but for the sake of removing any obstacles in the path of the religion of his Lord. Once again, the Imam's bravery became manifest – a result of true submission to Allah (SWT).

THE BATTLE OF ŪHUD

In this battle, the Muslims did not follow the instructions of the Prophet (saw). Wishing to cover their rear in view of their small numbers, the Muslims posted themselves at the foot of Mt. Ūhud. Their right flank and rear were covered by the mountains, but their left flank lay in open ground and was thus exposed to a charge by the enemy cavalry. To guard against this, the Prophet posted fifty archers on this flank, with orders not to leave their post in any situation. At some point during the battle, the Muslims, upon seeing that many of the disbelievers have been killed, began to sense victory and therefore lost their discipline. The archers, who had been posted by the Prophet at the strategic pass, also imagined that the enemy had already been beaten, and was in retreat. Against the direct orders of the Prophet, they descended into the plain below to capture their share of the booty. Their head, Abdullah ibn Jubayr, ordered them not to abandon the post but they paid no attention, and descended into the valley. Their love of booty cost the Muslims victory in the battle of Ūhud! The enemy took

advantage of this and decided to attack the Muslims from the rear. As a result of this disarray and fear, majority of the Muslims began fleeing from the battlefield as soon as they smelled defeat. The Prophet was calling for their help but they ignored his cries.

It was at this time that Imam 'Ali was the one to come to the forefront. Although he was fatigued as a result of constant fighting throughout the day and had several injuries too, his spirit to protect the Messenger of Allah (SWT) was indomitable. Imam 'Ali says that at a time when everyone deserted the prophet, I was moving like a butterfly around the prophet endeavouring to protect him. Such is the submission of our holy Imam to the Prophet (saw) and hence to Allah (SWT). Would we protect our Imam (as) when he reappears in this same manner? Or would we run away like the other Muslims?

THE BATTLE OF AHZĀB

In this battle, there was an exceptionally strong and daring fighter by the name of 'Amr in the ranks of the enemy forces. No one dared to fight him because of his extraordinary skill and power. The faith of Muslims was tested when he shouted at their camp demanding that someone stand up and fight him one-on-one. At a time when all those in the Muslim army were afraid, it was Imam 'Ali (as) who with no hesitation sought permission from the Prophet to fight 'Amr. The battle began and it was not long before the master of the believers had gained an upper hand over his enemy. The Muslims heard Imam 'Ali (as) exclaim: "Allāhu Akbar." The scenario reached a point such that the Imam (as) was sitting on the chest of this vicious enemy just about to sever his neck when 'Amr spat at him. At once, Imam 'Ali (as) walked off, leaving 'Amr on the ground. The Imam walked around the body of 'Amr for a while before returning to kill him with a final blow.

When the Imam returned to the Muslim camp, a few of the companions asked him of his strange delay in finishing off his enemy. The Imam's reply was astounding! He said that if he would have killed 'Amr immediately after he was spat at, it would have been as a result of his own anger and not for the sake of Allah (SWT). To avoid this, he let his anger subside and then carried the action out later solely for the sake of God. This was the level of submission that our Imam showed. Every action in his life was dedicated to the pleasure of Allah (SWT) and not for his self.

SUBMISSION TO ALLAH (SWT)

Similarly, whenever we are doing any action for the pleasure of Allah, however difficult the situation becomes, we have to endeavour to make sure that our intention remains purely for the sake of Allah and not for our own good. Once we do this, Allah elevates our status and gives us the full reward of that action.

Review Questions

Q1. In which of the battles did the Muslims disobey the Prophet's orders and then abandon him?

- Badr
- Uḥud
- Aḥzāb

Q2. Why did Imam 'Ali not kill 'Amr after he spat at him?

- To make him suffer more
- To make sure that when he killed him it was for the sake of God only
- Both of the above

Q3. Which was the first battle the Muslims fought against the Meccans?

- Badr
- Uḥud
- Aḥzāb

LESSON 3: PROVING IMAM 'ALI'S LEADERSHIP AFTER THE PROPHET (SAW)

The first Imam and successor of the Prophet (saw) was Imam 'Ali (as). The Prophet (saw) announced this many times throughout his life. Unfortunately, after the Prophet passed away, many Muslims ignored the instructions of the Prophet and followed other leaders besides Imam 'Ali (as).

Imam 'Ali (as) was patient when his right was taken away. He remained silent so that there would not be division among the Muslim community. He did what he could to help the Muslim community in all situations. However, when it was appropriate, he spoke about his right and the fact that he was chosen by God and the Prophet to be the next leader of the Muslim community. An example of this comes from his famous sermon of al-Shiqshiqyah in Nahjul Balaghah:

“Beware! By Allah, the son of Abu Quhafah (Abu Bakr)² dressed himself with it (the caliphate) and he certainly knew that my position in relation to it was the same as the position of the axis in relation to the hand-mill. The flood water flows down from me and the bird cannot fly up to me. I put a curtain against the caliphate and kept myself detached from it.

Then I began to think whether I should assault or endure calmly the blinding darkness of tribulations wherein the grown up are made feeble and the young grow old and the true believer acts under strain till he meets Allah (on his death). I found that endurance thereon was wiser. So I adopted patience although there was pricking in the eye and suffocation (of mortification) in the throat”

As followers of Imam 'Ali (as), it is important for us to know how and when the Prophet (saw) announced that Imam 'Ali (as) would be his successor. In this lesson, we will look at the main instances in which this happened, so that we can have firm knowledge regarding this fundamental belief of ours.

THE PROPHET INVITES HIS FAMILY TO ISLAM

One incident where the Prophet announced that Imam 'Ali (as) would be the first Imam after him was an event known as Da'wat Dhul 'Ashrah. When the Prophet (saw) first received the revelation he was ordered by Allah, to not announce the message publicly and to only preach to those closest to him. This is when Imam 'Ali (as), Khadījah, and some other people very close to the Prophet (saw) became Muslims. The next stage was that the Prophet had to present the message to his relatives—the family of Bani Hāshim. So the Prophet (saw) invited them to his house for a meal and explained to them the belief of Islam and asked them to become Muslims. Some of them responded in a positive way, while others made fun of the Prophet and were arrogant. One of the Prophet's uncles, Abu Lahab (as we have learnt in previous lessons) mocked the Prophet in a hurtful way.

During this gathering, one very important event occurred that shows that even at the beginning of the message, the Prophet (saw) was mindful about who will be his successor and the Imam after him. It is for this reason that the Prophet (saw) asked in this gathering: “which one of you will be my supporter so that he may become my brother (*akhi*), vicegerent (*waṣī*) and successor (*khalifah*)?”

When the speech reached this point there was perfect silence. All of a sudden 'Ali, who was then a young boy of about twelve or thirteen, broke the silence. He stood up and said in a forceful tone: "O Prophet of Allah! I am prepared to support you". The Prophet ordered him to sit down. He repeated the words three times and each time only Imam 'Ali rose with the same response. He then turned to those present and said: "People! This young man is my brother, vicegerent and successor amongst you. Listen to his words and follow him"

THE EVENT OF GHADIR

The Prophet (saw) made it very clear to the Muslims that his first successor was Imam 'Ali, peace be upon him. We have already seen what happened in the incident of the gathering of the family of the Prophet (saw). There is another major event in the life of the Prophet which happened towards the end of his life after the last Hajj. After this there would be no doubt as to who Allah (swt) and His Prophet (saw) had chosen as the first Imam.

As the Prophet (saw) was returning from the Farwell Pilgrimage (the Hajj which the prophet performed a few months before passing away), an āyah was revealed to the Prophet where he was ordered to do complete a very important task. This task was so important that if he did not do it, it would have been as if he did not reveal the entire message of Islam! This was the following verse:

"O Messenger! Proclaim that which has been sent down to you from your Lord. And if you do not, then you have not conveyed His Message. Allah will protect you from mankind. Verily, Allah guides not the people who disbelieve." (5:67)

When this verse was revealed, the Prophet (saw) immediately gathered all those that were in front of him and all those behind him. Now, he was to reveal to the people the important news that he was ordered to announce by Allah (swt). As we see from the āyah the issue that the Prophet was to announce might not be taken well by some people, so Allah (SWT) tells his Prophet that He will protect him from the people.

What was this important news?

The following is a narration of the event. This event has been recorded by 110 companions and 360 scholars, from both Shi'a and Sunni sources:

The Prophet stopped at Ghadir Khumm, offered midday prayers and then called all the people. He then held the hand of Imam 'Ali (as) and said: 'Do you not know that I have

superior authority over the lives of the faithful than the faithful themselves?' 'Yes you have,' they replied. He again inquired: 'Do you not know that I have superior right to the life of every believer than the believer himself?' 'Surely, you have,' they answered. Then he grasped the hand of 'Ali and said: "'Ali is the Maula (master) of all those of whom I am the Maula (master). O Allah! Befriend those who take him as their master and forsake those who forsake him.

*...Then 'Umar came to 'Ali and said: 'Congratulations to you the son of Abu Tālib. You have become the maula (master) of all the faithful men and women.'"*ⁱⁱ

After the Prophet delivered the news, the following Ayah was revealed to the Prophet (s):

"This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." (5:3)

Through the appointment of Imam 'Ali (as) as the successor of the Prophet in front of all of the people, the religion of Islam was now complete. Imam 'Ali had been clearly and undoubtedly been appointed as the successor of the Prophet (saw) in front of all the Muslims. Unfortunately, this event was later forgotten or misinterpreted by most Muslims.

As the followers of Imam 'Ali (as), we refer to this event to prove that Imam 'Ali was the rightful leader of the Muslim after the Prophet (saw) without any doubt. The reason that we emphasise this point is that the progress, health and safety of Islam depended on Imam 'Ali (as) being the leader and taking his rightful position. The Imam was appointed by God to lead the Muslims to greater success. Unfortunately, God's orders were ignored and the Muslims eventually suffered a great loss by turning their back on Imam 'Ali (as).

TO MEMORISE:

فقال : من كنت مولاه ، فعلي مولاه ، اللهم وال من والاه ،
والاه ، وعاد من عاداه

"The Messenger of Allah (saw) said: "Whoever I am his Maula (master), 'Ali (as) is his Maula (master). O Allah befriend the one who takes him as his master, and forsake the one who forsakes him"."

Review Questions

Q1. The Prophet appointed Imam 'Ali as his successor:

- a. Only at Ghadīr
- b. Only at Ghadīr and at the gathering with his family
- c. At Ghadīr, at the gathering with his family, and many other instances

Q2. Who ordered the Prophet (saw) to appoint Imam 'Ali as his successor?

- a. He decided himself
- b. The Muslim community voted
- c. Allah (SWT)

Q3. The event of Ghadīr happened:

- a. At the beginning of the Prophet's message
- b. At the end of the Prophet's life
- c. In the middle of the prophet's life

ⁱ (Mizānul Hikmah, p.458 no. 2613)

ⁱⁱ Musnad Imam Ahmad, v. 4, p. 281

Multiple other sources from both Shi'a and Sunni sources