

Aqáid **(Beliefs)**

Lesson 1

The Need for Religion

Religion is called “Deen” in Arabic. But the understanding behind these two words is not the same. *Deen* has a vaster meaning than religion. Religion is usually defined as ‘a system of beliefs’ or ‘the recognition and worship of a higher power’. Deen however is more than just the worship and obedience of a higher Power or following a set of beliefs and rules. It is a complete way of life that guides humans on how to be happy and successful in this world and the Hereafter. In this lesson, when we use the word ‘religion’, we mean ‘deen’.

Some people ask why we should follow a particular religion. They argue as long as we believe there is a God and we are “good” then there is no need to follow any organized way of life or set of rules and therefore there is no need to follow a particular religion or argue which religion is the true religion of God.

This however is a naïve argument. If we think about it carefully we will see it makes no sense.

What is the Need for Deen?

There are many reasons why humans need deen:

- a) Deen ensures our understanding of God is correct and it helps us understand why God created us and what our purpose in life should be.

Even those who are ‘good’ at heart, wish to become better spiritually and would love to worship and serve their Creator. So they need someone to guide them. Love alone can only create extremism and innovative practices. A person who tries to find God on his or her own is only guessing like a man fumbling in the dark. Without Deen, people’s understanding of God is like a group of people in a dark room with an elephant, trying to understand what an elephant looks like. The person who touches its trunk will say, ‘an elephant is like a big hose pipe!’ The person who is near the foot of the elephant will say, ‘an elephant is like a tree trunk!’ The person near the tail of the elephant will say, ‘an elephant is like a feather duster!’ And the person sitting on the elephant will say, ‘an elephant is like a mountain!’ while the person near its head and touching its ears will say, ‘an elephant is like a bird with two large wings that flap about!’

None of these are correct. The only person who truly knows what the elephant looks like is the one who has seen it with the lights turned on. Similarly, without Deen, everyone makes up his own understanding of God and the universe. Only a Nabi who communicates with Allāh can really tell people the truth about Allāh.

- b) Deen gives us laws that we can use to govern our societies.

We know that humans are social creatures and cannot live on their own. In order to survive, they need to interact with other humans and to live with family and society. But we also know that once humans come together, laws must be established and upheld so that the rights of each individual is preserved and there is no injustice in that society. When these laws are made by people, there is always self-interest involved. Even if a group of people make decisions, their lack of knowledge of the future as well as their lack of objectively understanding the true nature of human beings makes it impossible for them to come up with laws that are truly fair and just. Only the Creator can truly tell His creatures what's best for them and Deen is a means through which we know and follow these laws.

- c) Deen stops crime and immorality.

In societies where the laws of Deen are not upheld, crime is prevented by having law enforcement officers (police) and judges and courts. But people will often only obey the law when they know they will be caught. For example, car drivers may jump the traffic light if they think no one is watching them. Someone may even steal something from a shopping mall if he or she thinks no one will find out. Deen teaches people that Allāh is always watching and every action is being recorded and will be accounted for on the Day of Judgement. So people police their own selves. A religious person does not need a police officer to be honest. Their faith is their police and watches them. There would be a lot more crime and chaos in the world if no one believed in God or the Hereafter.

- d) Deen teaches us how to live with moderation and how to organize ourselves socially.

Deen emphasizes the next life and teaches human beings to be moderate in their lives (eating, dressing, spending, and so on) and not to be materialistic. It also encourages people to be selfless and charitable and to think of others first. Deen also teaches us not to be wasteful and not to destroy the environment or hurt other creatures of God. Without deen, people would have no reason not to be selfish and materialistic and they would live on the principle of 'survival of the fittest'.

- e) Deen frees us from superstitions and baseless fears that enslave us and prevent human progress.

Whenever people live without deen, they are driven by greed and fear and they don't give importance to knowledge. The rise in ignorance then encourages people to become superstitious about everything. When a human being does not fear Allāh, he or she will fear everything else. A person who becomes Allāh's slave is truly free and no one can enslave them. But a

person who rejects Allāh will be a slave of everything else: wealth, career, relationships, those in power and authority, and so on.

- f) Deen helps us take our rightful place in the world as Allāh's representatives.

Without deen, human beings see themselves as insignificant creatures amongst millions of others just trying to survive. Their goal in life becomes only to become a professional in this field or that career. They go about everyday from sleeping to work to eating to sleeping again without questioning why they are here or where they are going. Deen gives people a higher purpose. It shows them that life is more than just eating and sleeping. It also makes people realize that Allāh created human beings to represent Him and gave them the ability to become masters of the universe. Imām Ali ('a) used to say, *'Do you think you are an insignificant life form when within you is contained the entire universe?'* The more importance we give to deen the nobler our thoughts and more meaningful our lives become.

- g) Deen connects us to our Creator, gives us knowledge of the Hereafter and leads us to eternal bliss.

Those who do not believe in the Hereafter are always afraid of dying and disappearing into oblivion. And those who believe in life after death but do not believe there is a need for deen, are not sure of what to expect after death. Deen gives us this knowledge of what to expect and how to prepare for eternal life through the anbiyā and rusul who teach us deen.

Some people say even an atheist can be a moral and good person and obey the laws of society. Why then do we need to believe in God or have any deen?

It is a mistake though to think that an atheist can have morals without deen. Firstly, if we believe that humans evolved from animals and everything came about by accident, then how did humans gain a conscience of right and wrong? Where does the atheist get his or her sense of what is good or bad?

If an atheist says he does not steal or kill only because it is necessary to allow people to live in society, then we must ask him: supposing you can steal or loot or kill without anyone knowing or without affecting the order in society, does it mean it is not wrong? He will admit it is still wrong. So we must then ask: where did we get that idea of justice vs. injustice? It is of course the instinct from God.

Also, without deen, an atheist will only obey the law when things are going well for him and her. But if he or she becomes desperate e.g. if he or she loses his or her job and is poor or if there is a civil war, then they have no reason not to break the law or become immoral because they don't believe in God or any consequences for their actions. On the other hand, a person with deen will remain moral and chaste even when they are suffering because they still know they are accountable before Allāh.

Misconceptions about Deen (Religion)

Those who are against religion, usual give the following reasons why they don't like religion:

1. Religion is anti-science and holds back intellectual progress. It is outdated and irrelevant in this modern era.
2. Religion was invented by the rich and powerful only to control the poor and weak so that they would not complain about their pitiful condition. In other words it was to silence the majority and to control them.
3. Religion promotes hatred and violence.

Let us now examine these allegations. All these statements and ideas first came from European thinkers who had known a particular religion only, i.e., Christianity. They assumed that all religions (including Islām) must be the same.

For example, until the 16th century most Christians believed their King was God's representative on the earth and that the earth was flat and the centre of the universe. They also believed that it was the Sun that went around the earth. And they believed that women were evil and it was Eve (Sayyida Hawwa ('a)) who tempted Nabi Adam ('a) to eat from the forbidden fruit tree that caused them to be taken out of Paradise. They also believed that God was a physical being in the image of a man and He sat on throne up in the heavens.

When scientists like Copernicus and Galileo challenged these beliefs and proved that the earth was round and not flat and that it was not at all the centre of the universe, both the Catholics and the Protestants reacted violently against them. The Church behaved like a tyrant whose power is threatened and they began persecuting and torturing scientists ruthlessly.

It is therefore natural that any intelligent person who comes from a Christian background (but does not study other religions) will assume that religion is anti-science, against human progress, and violent.

Some people quote the fights between various religious groups today: Muslims and Jews, Muslims and Hindus, Protestants and Catholics, Hindus and Sikhs, Shi'ahs and Sunnis, and so on. They argue that if there was no religion there would be no hatred and violence.

Actually, the people who fight for "religion" are not religious themselves. If they had understood religion, they would know that religion always calls for peaceful dialogue. Islām for example teaches us:

﴿ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ...﴾

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good advice and debate with them in a manner that is best.

- Surah an-Nahl, 16:125

And even if a person refuses to accept the truth, Islām teaches to let them be. It is for Allāh to guide people. We should only deliver the message so that no one can say they never heard of it:

﴿قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ. لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ. وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ. وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَا عَبَدْتُمْ. وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ. لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينٌ﴾

*Say, 'O faithless ones! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship; nor will I worship what you have worshipped nor will you worship what I worship. **To you your religion, and to me my religion.**'*

- Surah al-Kāfirun, 109:1-6

﴿قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ﴾

*Say, 'O People of the Book! Come to a word common between us and you: that we will worship no one but Allāh, and that we will not ascribe any partner to Him, and that we will not take each other as lords besides Allāh.' **But if they turn away, say, 'Be witnesses that we are Muslims.'***

- Surah Aal-i Imrān, 3:64

In other words those who are intolerant and violent towards people of other religions are actually ignorant or evil. They only wish to use religion as an excuse. Shaytān makes them fight for their own desires but uses religion as an excuse so that others may blame religion. If there had been no religion, such people would still fight, but for different reasons. They would fight others because of their differences in culture, race or ethnicity or the sports team they support or how they do business.

We should therefore never fall for the idea that religion promotes hatred. Religion actually teaches peace and love and it is what gives us hope of one day having a world that is free of evil and injustices.

In Book 7 (Aqāid Lesson 3) we already saw how the Qur'ān is actually in favour of science because the more science progresses, the more it proves that the Qur'ān is the Word of Allāh. And Islām encourages people to progress in science and to make new discoveries. Islām also teaches the weak and poor to stand up for their rights and for justice so that they are not controlled by the few who are rich and powerful. And last but not least, Islām insists that we should understand our religion and not follow it blindly.

Lesson 2

Islām – Allāh’s Only Religion

In the previous lesson we reviewed the need for deen (religion) in our lives and discussed some of the common misconceptions about religion. In this and the next lesson, we will now look at the qualities that a true religion from Allāh must have and then discuss why Allāh has only one religion for the human race (that we call Islām). We will also briefly compare the key beliefs of the two major sects in Islām: the Shi’ahs and the Sunnis.

Why Follow One Religion Only?

There are so many religions in the world and the followers of each religion believe theirs to be the true and perfect religion. Some people argue that all religions are true and from God. It may be true that all religions teach people to be honest and not to hurt others, but thereafter, when we start asking who God is, what principles we should live by, what happens after death, the meaning of justice and who deserves leadership amongst humans, and so on, we immediately realize that all religions cannot be right. It would be unfair for Allāh to confuse people by asking them to believe in contradictory beliefs and still believe that all are correct. For example, how can Allāh tell some people that Jesus is His son (*wal ‘iyādhu billah – we seek refuge with Allāh from blasphemy!*) and tell others that it is a great sin to believe Allāh has a son? We therefore realize that Allāh has only one religion that He has chosen for the human race but people have modified this one true religion and created their own versions. Some of the core beliefs remain the same but they are not all the same religion that Allāh chose for human beings.

One may ask, ‘why do I have to find and follow the original religion of Allāh? Why can’t I follow the religion I was raised in if the core beliefs are all the same and all religions teach us to be good?’ The simple answer is that we all want to succeed in the Hereafter and live in Jannah (Paradise) for eternity. And we know that religion is a **Path** of Way of life that leads to Jannah. And we also know that the Path that Allāh has chosen for us is the shortest and the fastest way to Jannah. If someone never finds out about this Path, it is possible that they may eventually get to Jannah through a lot of hardship and struggle. But if someone knows of this Path, then it is wrong to stubbornly refuse to get on this Path and to insist that the longer and more difficult path is equally good and pleasing to Allāh.

In other words, even if other religions have some truth in them that is left over from the original religion of Allāh, there is only One religion and path and that is the original religion that Allāh intended for humans to follow and that all the prophets and messengers came to guide people to. Every time people went off this Path, another prophet or messenger was sent to lead people back on to this Path. If all religions were true and it didn’t matter which one we followed, then why did Allāh

keep sending more prophets? If, for example, worshipping idols as intermediaries to Allāh was ok, then why does Allāh praise Nabi Ibrāhim (‘a) for breaking the idols in the temple of his city?

As we shall see, this one and only religion of Allāh is called Islām. And the proof that Allāh does not want humans to follow multiple paths is the following verse of Qur’ān:

﴿وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ﴾

Should anyone follow a religion other than Islām, it shall never be accepted from him, and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:85

Qualities of a True Religion

So how do we distinguish the one and only true religion of Allāh?

If a religion is to fulfil the needs that we mentioned in the previous lesson, it must have the following qualities:

- A true religion must be established by a Nabi (Prophet) or Rasul (Messenger) sent by the Creator. It cannot be started by an ordinary person, no matter how wise or saintly he may be.
- A true religion caters for the needs of all classes of people, male or female, rich or poor, white or black.
- A true religion treats all human beings equally based on their needs and does not discriminate, regardless of their gender, race, caste, disabilities, etc.
- A true religion allows its followers to ask questions and understand. It does not demand blind faith without questioning. It must satisfy the intelligence of human beings and not ask them to ‘believe first’.
- A true religion promotes peace and love and not violence and hatred.
- A true religion stands for justice and fights injustice. It does not teach people to ‘turn the other cheek’ and accept tyranny.
- A true religion does not have any contradictions even after a long period of time has passed. For example, for Islām to be a true religion, the Qur’ān must be free of contradictions forever.
- A true religion does not allow or ask its followers to do anything unnatural. For example, it is natural for a man to marry a woman. A true religion will not encourage people to remain celibate or allow a man to marry a man, or allow a man to get married again if his wife dies but forbid a widow from getting married again, etc.
- A true religion does not change its basic rules and principles with time.

- A true religion does not contradict reasoning, common sense or what is proven beyond doubt.
- A true religion applies its rules to all and can be practised by any human being. It does not have a separate set of rules for priests and a separate set of rules for others.
- A true religion is full of wisdom. It encourages morality and virtues and discourages immorality and vices.
- A true religion is not just spiritual in content. It also has laws that show human beings how to behave socially, politically, economically, etc. It not only addresses the relation of man to God but also man to other human beings.
- A true religion follows in the footsteps of all previous prophets who were sent by Allāh. It acknowledges them and does not teach anything contradictory. For example, all prophets taught that God is One and it is wrong to worship idols.
- A true religion is not replaced by another religion. Every Nabi and Rasul who comes after another, preaches the same religion and acknowledges the previous Nabi and Rasul as following the same Path that he is preaching. Some of the laws of practice may change from one prophet to another (i.e. in matters that are halāl and harām) but the fundamental beliefs (usul) regarding Allāh and the Day of Judgement and the Hereafter does not change. In other words, the shari'ah may change but deen is only one and universal – it never changes.
- A true religion fights myths, superstitions and materialism. It frees humans from fear and greed and teaches them to be liberated by fearing and surrendering to Allāh only. It does not, for example, encourage people to degrade and humiliate themselves by prostrating before pictures, statues, fire and animals, or to believe in 'bad luck', astrology, and so on.

Lesson 3

Islām - Allāh's Only Religion (cont'd)

Islām – Allāh's Only True Religion

The word Islām means 'peace' but also 'to surrender'. Islām, as taught by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) is the only religion in the world that fulfils all the qualities of a true religion listed in the previous lesson. Here are some examples of how Islām fulfils these qualities:

1. Islām is not a new religion established by Nabi Muhammad (s). It is the same religion that Nabi Adam ('a) and all Anbiyā after him preached. Rasulullāh (s) is simply the last Nabi.
2. Islām does not teach that a man is superior to woman, instead it teaches all are equal and one person is only better than the other if he or she is more Godwary:

﴿... إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ...﴾

Indeed the most honoured of you in the sight of Allāh is the most Godwary among you. Indeed Allāh is all-knowing, all-aware.

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:13

3. Islām does not have a caste system of priests and 'untouchables'.
4. Islām, as taught by the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), forbids people from believing without understanding. Hence there is no taqlid in Usul al-Din (aqāid). We have to understand why Allāh is One, why there is a Day of Judgement, etc.
5. Islām forbids the killing or harming of innocent civilians even during times of war. Islām forbids the cheating of others even if they are non-Muslims and enemies of Islām.
6. Islām forbids keeping quiet to injustice. A victim who keeps silent when he or she is oppressed is equally guilty in Allāh's view as the oppressor. The Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in particular taught us never to keep quiet to oppression.
7. The Qur'ān challenges people to find any fault in it or to come up with anything like it and this challenge remains unanswered for the last 1400 years.
8. Islām does not encourage celibacy. It forbids indecency and shamelessness like adultery and leading a gay lifestyle. Islām does not demand anything unnatural from people such as not allowing a married couple to divorce even when there is intolerable hardship or not allowing widows to get married again, and so on.

9. Islām forbids superstitions and meaningless rituals where people celebrate and do things every year for silly reasons. Islām also forbids people to believe in horoscopes, ‘good’ luck and ‘bad’ luck, magic and charms, witchcraft and any practice of belief that holds a human being in fear of anything or anyone besides Allāh.
10. Islām is not just about worship, the masjid and spirituality. It has laws on physical, domestic, social, economic, political and all aspects of human life.
11. Islām encourages integrity, honesty and morality and forbids vices and immorality.
12. Islām, as taught by the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) teaches Allāh as the Creator and Source of all things and all goodness. In Islām, Allāh is not a physical being, sitting on a throne up in the heavens. Allāh is Nameless and Formless. He is beyond imagination. He is everywhere and permeates everything. He is Omnipresent (everywhere) and Omnipotent (All-Powerful). He cannot be known directly but His power and presence is recognized through His Signs (i.e. His Creation).
13. Islām teaches that humans were created to live forever and to be Allāh’s representatives. By surrendering to Allāh, humans can manifest the attributes of Allāh such as goodness, love, kindness, knowledge, power, generosity, and so on. Humans are very special because despite their freewill, they can know Allāh and surrender to Him by choice. And in doing so, they become free of all enslavements and addictions and become the most superior of all of Allāh’s creations. That is why Allāh created everything else to be in service of human beings (the Sun, the Moon, the mountains, oceans, forests, rain, animals, etc.).
14. There is no ‘priesthood’ in Islām. Even the preacher in a masjid (the Imām or Shaykh of the masjid) is governed by the same rules as everyone else. There are no separate rules for the ‘Ulamā. Every Muslim has to learn his or her religion and every Muslim is responsible to look out for and guide another Muslim.
15. Islām means ‘to surrender’ (i.e. to Allāh). It is the most natural and most universal way of life and understanding of religion. It is not named after a place or a person such as Christianity (named after Christ), Judaism (named after a place called Judea), Hinduism (named after Hind, the name for India), Buddhism (named after the Buddha), and so on.

Allāh tells us in the Qur’ān, that He has chosen Islām for human beings and that it is He that named us as Muslims now and even before when other anbiyā were sent and other scriptures were revealed:

﴿إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ...﴾

Indeed, with Allāh religion is Islām

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:19

﴿هُوَ سَمَّاكُمْ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا...﴾

...He named you 'Muslims' before, and in this (the Qur'ān)...

- Surah al-Hajj, 22:78

We should therefore thank Allāh that we follow the original Path of guidance that He always wanted human beings to follow.

In fact, Islām is so natural, that the whole universe follows Islām i.e. surrenders to Allāh. When we say we are 'Muslims' we are simply surrendering by choice and our own freewill and becoming a part of the natural path followed by the entire universe:

﴿أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ

يُرْجَعُونَ﴾

Do they, then, seek a religion other than Allāh's, while to Him submits whoever there is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him they will be brought back?

- Surah Al-i Imrān, 3:83

And for this blessing of being Muslims, we should share the message of Islām with others. The message of Islām that we share with others is not a complicated one. It doesn't require people to change their culture and who they are. Islām is simply this: to believe that there is only One God, who has no partner, and to surrender to and worship none but Him. This surrender to God is done by accepting all His prophets and messengers, all the Books He revealed and all the angels. Loyalty to Islām is shown by following the teachings of the Qur'ān as taught by Rasulullāh (s) through his successors, the Imāms from the Household (Ahl al-Bayt).

A Jew once asked Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a), 'what is Islām?' Imām Ali ('a) replied him that Islām is:

التَّعْظِيمَ لِأَمْرِ اللَّهِ وَالشَّفَقَةَ عَلَى خَلْقِ اللَّهِ

To respect the command of Allāh and to have love and compassion for the creatures of Allāh.

In other words, Islām is about service to the Creator and service to His creation. Allāh's creation includes all human beings, regardless of their faith or race and all animals, birds and everything we perceive as living or non-living around us and in the universe.

If we ever wish to see how much of a 'Muslim' we are, we should ask ourselves: 'how much do I respect Allāh's orders and how much love do I have for His creation?'

Lesson 4

Imāmah in Qur'ān & Hadīth

Why must Imāms be Divinely Appointed?

Shi'ah Muslims are often asked for proof from the Qur'ān that Imāms must be appointed by Allāh. There are in fact lots of proofs from the Qur'ān that no one can appoint an Imām except Allāh and these are in addition to logical proofs and proofs from the ahādith of Rasullāh (s).

Before we look at these proofs however, it is important to bear in mind that no Muslim will argue, 'why do we need an Imām?'. All Muslims agree that a spiritual leader to guide the Muslim Ummah (nation) is always needed. Firstly because even the Sunni Muslims who believe that Rasullāh (s) never appointed a successor, agree that it was necessary for the Muslims to appoint their own leader rather than leave the community without an Imām. And secondly, all Muslims believe in the authentic (sahih) hadith of Rasullāh (s) that says:

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَمْ يَعْرِفْ إِمَامَ زَمَانِهِ مَاتَ مِيتَةَ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ

One who dies and does not know the Imām of his time, dies the death of ignorance (jāhiliyya).

Of course 'jāhiliyya' refers to the Age of Ignorance when most people were disbelievers. Therefore 'death of jāhiliyya' means 'death of kufr (disbelief).'

The Wahābbis say the hadith above is forged and not authentic but they still accept that in Sahih Muslim (the most authentic Sunni book of hadith after Sahih Bukhāri), it is recorded that Rasullāh (s) said:

وَمَنْ مَاتَ وَلَيْسَ فِي عُنُقِهِ بَيْعَةٌ، مَاتَ مِيتَةَ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ

One who dies without having pledged allegiance (to an Imām) dies the death of Jāhiliyya.

And besides, in several Sunni books of Hadith such as Musnad Ahmad b. Hanbal, it is recorded that Rasullāh (s) said:

مَنْ مَاتَ بِغَيْرِ إِمَامٍ مَاتَ مِيتَةَ جَاهِلِيَّةٍ

One who dies without an Imām, dies the death of ignorance (jāhiliyya)

So if we agree on the need for an Imām, we only have to prove whether this Imām can be elected by people or whether he must be appointed by Allāh.

Proofs from Qur'ān that an Imām is Divinely Appointed

First, according to the Qur'ān, anyone who claims to invite people towards Allāh either as a Prophet (Nabi) of Allāh or a representative (khalifa or wasi) of the Nabi sitting in the place of the Prophet (s), needs Allāh's permission. Rasulullāh (s) is introduced as a Rasul who summons people only by Allāh's permission:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَاهِدًا وَمُبَشِّرًا وَنَذِيرًا وَدَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَسِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا﴾

O Prophet! Indeed We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and as a warner and as a summoner to Allāh by His permission, and as a radiant lamp.
- Surah al-Ahzāb, 33:45-46

﴿... كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ لِتُخْرِجَ النَّاسَ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ﴾

[This is] a Book We have sent down to you that you may bring mankind out from darkness into light, by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the All-mighty, the All-laudable.

- Surah Ibrāhim, 14:1

Second, Allāh says only He has the right to choose:

﴿وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَتَعَالَى عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ﴾

Your Lord creates whatever He wishes and chooses. They have no choice. Immaculate is Allāh and exalted above [having] any partners they ascribe [to Him].
- Surah al-Qasas, 28:68

Third, when Allāh created Nabi Adam ('a), He informed the angels that He was going to appoint a representative (khalifa) on the earth. The angels tried to object but Allāh told them, 'I know what you know not!':

﴿وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

When your Lord said to the angels, 'Indeed I am going to set a khalifa on the earth,' they said, 'Will You set in it someone (i.e. human beings) who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?' He said, 'Indeed I know what you do not know.'

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:30

So if Allāh did not accept the objections of angels who are sinless and made of pure light, how can non-masum humans expect to take the whole authority of such appointment in their own hands?

Some Muslims argue that the caliphs after Rasulullāh (s) did not see themselves as God’s representatives or even Rasulullāh (s)’s representatives but were only political leaders of the Muslim nation (Ummah). But we know from history that this is not true. Those who claimed to be caliphs did not say they were only political leaders. Abu Bakr, the 1st Caliph, called himself, ‘The representative (khalifa) of Rasulullāh (s)’; ‘Umar, the 2nd Caliph, called himself, ‘The khalifa of the khalifa of Rasulullāh (s)’; and the 3rd Caliph Uthmān onwards, they all called themselves ‘The representative (khalifa) of Allāh’. The Caliph Uthmān for example used to say, ‘I am the servant of Allāh and His deputy (khalifa)’ and the Umayyad Caliph Mu’āwiya (the father of Yazid) said, ‘The earth belongs to Allāh and I am the deputy (khalifa) of Allāh’. Later caliphs even printed this title on the gold coins they minted that are found in museums today.¹ We must ask: who gave them the right to appoint themselves as Allāh’s representative without Allāh’s permission, when the Qur’ān clearly shows that Allāh always chooses His own khulafā?

For example, Allāh Himself appointed Nabi Dāwud (‘a) and Nabi Ibrāhim (‘a) as Khalifa and Imām:

﴿يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ...﴾

O Dāwud! Indeed We have made you a caliph (khalifa) on the earth.

- Surah Sād, 38:26

﴿وَإِذْ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

﴿ذُرِّيَّتِي قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

And when his Lord tested Ibrāhim with certain words, and he fulfilled them, He said, ‘I am making you the Imām of mankind.’ Said he, ‘And from among my descendants?’ He said, ‘My pledge does not extend to the unjust.’

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:124

Notice that when Nabi Ibrahīm (‘a) asked if his descendants will also be made Imāms, Allāh said He will not make the unjust Imāms. This means those who claimed to be khulafa and aimmah but were unjust, were not appointed by Allāh. But we know also that some of the progeny of Nabi Ibrāhīm (‘a) were given a special status i.e. the status of Imāmah because of this verse:

¹ A list of every Umayyad Caliph’s claim to be Allāh’s Caliph is given in the book “God’s Caliph” by Crone & Hinds, p. 6-11 (University of Cambridge, 2003 Edition).

﴿أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ فَقَدْ آتَيْنَا آلَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْكِتَابَ
وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَآتَيْنَاهُمْ مُلْكًا عَظِيمًا﴾

*Or do they envy the people for what Allāh has given them out of His grace? We have certainly given **the progeny of Ibrāhim** the Book and wisdom, and We have given them a great kingdom.*

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:54

And of course, all the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) are descendants of Nabi Ibrahim ('a).

Fourth, when Nabi Musa ('a) wanted a vizier to help him in his mission, he did not appoint someone by his own authority. He first prayed to Allāh:

﴿وَاجْعَلْ لِي وَزِيرًا مِنْ أَهْلِي . هَارُونَ أَخِي﴾

Appoint for me a vizier from my family, Aaron, my brother.

- Surah Tā Hā, 20:29-30

And Allāh then granted him his request.

Fifth, Allāh also told Rasulullāh (s):

﴿فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ﴾

So when you are done, appoint.

- Surah ash-Sharh, 94:7

Meaning, appoint your successor to lead the community after you.

Lastly, Allāh also declares that as a general rule, He appoints Imāms:

﴿وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أُمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا ...﴾

We made them Imāms, guiding by Our command...

- Surah al-Anbiyā, 21:73

What we understand from the Qur'ān therefore is that the universal practice of previous prophets has been to nominate their successors on Allāh's orders and approval without any interference from the Ummah.

The history of the previous prophets does not offer a single instance in which a prophet's successor would have been elected by a voting of his followers.

There is no reason why in the case of the successors of the Last Prophet (s) this established Divine Law and Practice should change. In fact, Allāh says:

﴿سُنَّةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا﴾

[It is] Allāh's practice that has passed before, and you will never find in Allāh's practice any change.

- Surah al-Fath, 48:23

So in Islām, the government is not 'for the people, of the people, by the people'. An Islāmic government is 'for the sake of Allāh, of Allāh, by Allāh' and if that is the case, then the person leading the Islāmic government must also be from Allāh or a representative of the one who is from Allāh.

It doesn't make any sense that Allāh should guide human beings for over 10,000 years continuously since Nabi Adam ('a) and then after sending the final Messenger (s), everything goes silent and there is a complete disconnection between the Creator and His creatures and they are left to figure out what to do next on their own. And if we are convinced that Allāh and His Messenger (s) had an opinion, then we must find out what their opinion was because:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ وَمَنْ يَعْصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا﴾

A faithful man or woman may not, when Allāh and His Messenger have decided on a matter, have any choice in their matter, and whoever disobeys Allāh and His Messenger has certainly strayed into manifest error.

- Surah al-Ahzāb, 33:36

Logical Proofs that an Imām is Divinely Appointed

We have given many proofs from the Qur'ān as to why a divine guide must be appointed by Allāh. But there are many logical reasons as well:

The same reasons that prove that the appointment of a Nabi can only be from Allāh are also the reasons that prove that the successors of a Nabi must also be appointed by Allāh only. And there is no sane Muslim who will argue that people can also appoint a Nabi. So all we need to do is ask those who reject the divine appointment of Imāms, 'why can't people appoint their own Nabi?' The most likely reply will be that a Nabi receives revelation from Allāh. If people appoint someone as their Nabi, how will he initiate communication with Allāh? Now it is true that an Imām who is a successor to Rasulullāh (s) does not receive *wahy* (revelation) from Allāh, however Allāh guides him through the special knowledge that is given to him from birth and what he learns from Rasulullāh (s) or the previous Imām. This knowledge is not ordinary knowledge yet it is required in order for a leader of the Ummah to guide the people and to be a guardian to the Qur'ān and its meaning. So if people choose their own Imām, he may be a good administrator or political leader but how will they

ensure he has the knowledge of Rasulullāh (s) and the Qur'ān to continue preserving and spreading the message of Islām?

Also, if we accept a leader or guide that is appointed by people, his first loyalty will not be to Allāh but to the person or people who appointed him and supported his authority. He will always try to please people because if they were to withdraw their confidence in him he would lose his position. Fulfilling the duties of an Imām requires one to have neither fear nor favour, with no political considerations. We only have to study history to see tons of evidence how this influenced every leader in Islām appointed by people, except for Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) and the brief rule of Imām Hasan b. Ali al-Mujtaba ('a).

And even if we suppose that people can make a good judgement on whom to choose as a leader, how do they know the inner feelings and thoughts of the person and his true nature? How often do we hear of a person whom everyone thought was 'good' and then he surprised everyone with his behaviour and actions? Take for example, the case of Abd al-Malik bin Marwān who used to spend all his time in the masjid in salāh and recitation of the Qur'ān. He was reciting Qur'ān when news reached him of the death of his father and that the people were waiting to pledge their allegiance to him as the next Caliph. He closed the Qur'ān and said to the Qur'ān, 'This is the parting between you and me!'

If Allāh is perfect and His Book is perfect and His Messenger (s) and Message is perfect and the purpose is to guide people to perfection and to eternal bliss, then the spiritual development and souls of people is a very serious matter. It cannot be left to politics and to people's greed and fears to choose their own leaders and rule as they please. Even when people do that, there has to be an Imām who is the true guide and leader and who represents Allāh's Cause on the earth, whether people follow him or not. We, the Shi'ah of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), believe these true guides were the twelve Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

All Muslims believe that the hadith of Rasulullāh (s) that says, 'there shall be twelve Imāms after me' is an authentic one. But no sect of Islām has only twelve Imāms except the Shi'ah Ithnā Ashari Muslims.

Others have tried to pick their twelve 'best' Imāms of Khalifas but have still failed to show anyone even close to the excellence and perfection of the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt, may the blessings and peace of Allāh be on His Messenger and on them, forever. Amen.

These are the chosen ones of Allāh, about whom Allāh has said:

﴿... إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا﴾

Indeed Allāh desires to keep away all impurity from you, O People of the Household (Ahl al-Bayt), and to purify you with a thorough purification.

- Surah al-Ahzāb, 33:33

Lesson 5

Imāmah in Qur'ān & Hadīth (cont'd)

Proofs of Imāmah from Hadith

There are numerous proofs in both Shi'ah and Sunni hadith books for the validity of Imāmah in Islām as well as the appointment of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) as the first Imām of Islām. Many of these ahādith have a history or incident behind them that is discussed under Tārikh lessons. For this lesson, we will only review the ahādith with brief comments.

The Imāms are Twelve in Islām

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'I am the chief of the Prophets and Ali b. Abi Tālib is the chief of successors, and after me my successors shall be twelve, the first of them being Ali b. Abi Tālib and the last of them being al-Mahdi.'

Ahmad b. Hanbal² in his Musnad reports that Rasulullāh (s) said, 'after me there shall be twelve khalifa, all from the Quraysh.' Then he returned to his home and the Quraysh came to him and asked, 'then what will happen?' and he replied, 'then there shall be turmoil' (i.e. the end of the world).

The Hadith of Thaḡalayn

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'O People, I leave among you two important matters (thaḡalayn), which if you hold on to, you will never go astray. They are the Book of Allāh and my family ('itrah), my Ahl al-Bayt; and these two will never separate until they return to me at the Fountain (of Kawthar on the Day of Judgement).'

This hadith is widely reported by both Shi'ah and Sunni authentic books of hadith.

The Hadith of Safina

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'The example of my Ahl al-Bayt is like the example of the ark of Nuh. One who got on it was saved and one who turned away from it, drowned and was destroyed.'

² The Sunni Imām and founder of the Hanbali sect.

Other Ahādith

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'My Ahl al-Bayt are a safety for the people of this world just like the stars are a safety for those who live in the heavens.'

In other words, without the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), the world would perish. And by Ahl al-Bayt ('a), Rasulullāh (s) meant the Imāms who are guides for mankind after him.

Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) said, 'By Allāh, we are Allāh's treasure-keepers in His heaven and on His earth. We are the treasure-keepers, not of gold and silver, but of His knowledge.'

Zurārah reports from Imām al-Bāqir ('a) who said, 'The Imāms are twelve. Among them are al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and then the Imāms are from the children of al-Husayn.' And Abu Basir reports that Imām al-Bāqir ('a) said to him, 'We are twelve Imāms.'

The Right of Imām Ali ('a) in Qur'ān and Hadith

Now that we know there are twelve Imāms in Islām and that these Imāms are from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), we must prove that the first Imām is Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) and thereafter the eleven Imāms would come from him.

We know from history that after Rasulullāh (s) passed away a group of people got together and after a lot of fighting amongst themselves, elected Abu Bakr as their Caliph. The majority of Muslims today are Sunni Muslims and they believe that Rasulullāh (s) never appointed any successor after him therefore those who ruled as caliphs and Imāms in history are the rightful leaders of Islām.

We, the Shi'ah of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), insist that the rightful Imām was Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) and he was declared by Rasulullāh (s) as his successor on many occasions including the very first time Rasulullāh (s) addressed people (at Da'wah Dhul Ashirah) and the very last time that Rasulullāh (s) addressed a large number of Muslims (at Ghadir Khum).

The truth about whether Rasulullāh (s) appointed Imām Ali ('a) as his successor or not is very easy to find by studying the books of hadith and history carefully and thinking this through logically. For example:

We know that Rasulullāh (s) did not pass away suddenly from this world. When he went for his final pilgrimage to Makkah, three months before he passed away, he told all the Muslims at Ghadir Khum that he was leaving the world soon.

We also know that it is impossible that Rasulullāh (s) never even thought about who would guide the Muslims and lead them after him. Even the Muslims who do not believe in Imāmah agree that as soon as Rasulullāh (s) passed away, it was necessary

to appoint the next Imām even before Rasulullāh (s) was buried. And all the Caliphs who could appoint their successors before dying did so because they knew it was impossible for a society to exist with a leader.

So Rasulullāh (s) would have had three choices before passing away:

1. Not to appoint a successor.
2. Describe the qualities of a successor but not appoint anyone.
3. Appoint a successor by Allāh's will.

There is no hadith from Shi'ah or Sunni Muslims to say that Rasulullāh (s) said he was not appointing a successor or that Allāh asked him not to or that he would only tell people the qualities of a true leader and they should decide themselves. This absolute silence is very strange. It doesn't make sense that Rasulullāh (s) would be ill for many days and would pass away without saying anything about his successor and no one would ask him as well.

And we know that all Muslims agree that Rasulullāh (s) declared Imām Ali ('a) as the master (mawla) of everyone at Ghadir Khum and Imām Ali ('a) represented Rasulullāh (s) on many occasions during his lifetime.

The only possible and reasonable belief we can conclude is that Rasulullāh (s) did in fact inform the Muslims who to follow but they disobeyed his orders after him.

All Muslims agree that Rasulullāh (s) passed away on a Monday and on the Thursday before that, he asked people to bring a paper and pen so he could dictate something to them so that they would never go astray after him. But Umar b. al-Khattāb (who later became the 2nd caliph) said the Prophet (s) was talking nonsense (God forbid!) and all the people started arguing and shouting amongst themselves and so nothing was written. This is well known in Muslim history as 'The Calamity of the Thursday' (Raziyat Yaum al-Khamees).

Imām Ali ('a) in Qur'ān

Allāh commands the Muslims in the Qur'ān:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ ...﴾

O you who have faith! Obey Allāh and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority (ulil amr) among you...

- Surah al-Nisā, 4:59

The above verse of Qur'ān is known as the Ayah of Ulil Amr. Both Rasulullāh (s) and the Ulil amr (one with authority) are mentioned by one verb: "obey". This means Allāh wants the Ulil Amr to be obeyed in the same way as Rasulullāh (s).

If this is so, then the person who is obeyed like Rasulullāh (s) must also be like Rasulullāh (s) in his knowledge, courage, justice, infallibility, and all virtues. This is because Allāh also says:

﴿مَنْ يُطِعِ الرَّسُولَ فَقَدْ أَطَاعَ اللَّهَ...﴾

Whoever obeys the Messenger certainly obeys Allāh...

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:80

In other words, obeying the Ulil Amr is also like obeying Allāh and disobeying him is like disobeying Allāh. And we know that no one after Rasulullāh (s) was more knowledgeable and courageous than Imām Ali ('a).

In another verse of the Qur'ān, Allāh says:

﴿إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ

رَاكِعُونَ﴾

Your guardian (wali) is only Allāh, His Messenger, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakāt while bowing down.

- Surah al-Māidah, 5:55

This is known as the Ayah of Wilāyah (religious guardianship). All historians have recorded that this verse refers to Imām Ali ('a) because he gave his ring to a beggar while he was performing ruku' in a mustahab salāh.

On the night when Rasulullāh (s) had to leave Makkah for Madina i.e. the night of Hijrah, Imām Ali ('a) put his life in danger and slept in the bed of Rasulullāh (s) pretending to be him while Rasulullāh (s) himself left for Madina. Allāh praises Imām Ali ('a) saying:

﴿وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَنْ يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاةِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ﴾

And among the people is he who sells his soul seeking the pleasure of Allāh, and Allāh is most kind to [His] servants.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:207

Imām Ali ('a) is praised in very many āyāt of Qur'ān including the ayah of mubāhala (3:61), the ayah of tathir (33:33), and the ayah of salawāt (33:56).

Imām Ali ('a) in Hadith

Rasulullāh (s) said to Imām Ali ('a), 'O Ali, you are to me as (Nabi) Hārun was to (Nabi) Musa except there will be no prophet after me.'

This hadith is known as the Hadith of Manzila and is mentioned by Shi'ah and Sunni authentic books of hadith. It clearly shows that Rasulullāh (s) wanted Imām Ali ('a) to be his successor. This hadith also proves that there is no Nabi after Rasulullāh (s) and that he was the last Nabi and Rasul from Allāh.

Another widely-accepted and well-known hadith is the Hadith of Ghadir when Rasulullāh (s) took hold of Imām Ali ('a)'s hand and told a large crowd of Muslims – over one hundred thousand, 'whoever's master (mawla) I am, then this Ali is his master too' (*man kuntu mawlāhu fa hādha Aliyyun mawlāhu*). In other words, Rasulullāh (s) was saying that Imām Ali ('a) was now the master of the Muslims in the same way that he, Rasulullāh (s), was their master.

Other well-known ahādith from Rasulullāh (s) that both Shi'ah and Sunni scholars have reported include:

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate. So whoever wants to come to the city (of knowledge), let him come to it from its gate.'

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'Ali is with the Truth and the Truth is with Ali. O Allāh, turn Truth wherever Ali turns!'

Rasulullāh (s) said to Imām Ali ('a), 'You are from me and I am from you' and he also said, 'Loving Ali is faith and hating him is hypocrisy.'

Some famous Sunni books of hadith like Mustadrak al-Hakim, Kanz al-'Ummāl and Yanābi al-Mawaddah report that Rasulullāh (s) said, 'whoever wishes to live and die like me and to live in Paradise after death should accept Ali as his master and follow the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) after me, for they are my Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and they have been created out of the same knowledge and understanding as myself. Woe to those followers of mine who disregard their (the Ahl al-Bayt's) relationship to me. May Allāh never let them benefit from my intercession.'

A question may come to mind: If so many Muslims heard the Hadith of Ghadir and all these other ahādith from Rasulullāh (s), then why did they still follow others and not insist that their Imām was Imām Ali ('a) after Rasulullāh (s)? Why didn't anyone raise an objection when Abu Bakr was elected as the Caliph? There are several reasons for this:

1. Following the Crowd: The group that elected Abu Bakr was not a large crowd. However they included influential individuals like Abu Bakr, 'Umar and Sa'd b. 'Ubādah. When they returned to Madina and announced what they had decided at Saqifa, many people accepted this without question and before thinking it through. For many, it was traditional to pay allegiance to anyone whom their tribal leader paid allegiance. So once one person (the tribe elder) did that, all the rest would follow without question. For example, once the leaders of the Aws and Khazraj tribes in Madina paid allegiance to Abu Bakr, their entire tribes did the same. This is also why the majority of Muslims

today are regarded as being 'Sunni'. In reality, we can see that the majority in every country, even today, simply follows the government and does not fight it even if they know they are things that are wrong. Either they feel powerless or they cannot be bothered. The rulers of the Muslims for the most part were the Banu Umayya and the Banu Abbās, who were known for their hatred for the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and their attempts to hide the rights and position of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) in Islām. The majority of the Muslims always followed them as rulers of the time and it was their interpretation of Islām that came to be the Islām of the majority that non-Muslims call Islām today. Any scholar or Imām who didn't agree with the rulers of the time was tortured or killed. The preachers and Friday prayer Imāms in all cities were expected to say and preach whatever the rulers wanted them to do that. That is true even today in most Muslim countries where preachers are not free to say the truth if it is against the government.

2. Jealousy against Imām Ali ('a). Many companions of Rasulullāh (s) were jealous of Imām Ali ('a) because of his merits. He was younger to many of them but had proven time and again that he was superior to them in knowledge, piety, swordsmanship, courage, and so forth. Rasulullāh (s) had loved him dearly and raised him like his own son and married him to his only daughter, Sayyida Fātima ('a). This jealousy even changed to hatred in the case of some and they could not tolerate to see him sitting in place of Rasulullāh (s).

There were a few brave and sincere companions of Rasulullāh (s) who spoke out in favour of Imām Ali ('a) and were known as his Shi'ah because they refused to take the easy and convenient path of keeping quiet and just going with the majority. These companions included Salmān, Ammār b. Yāsir, Miqdād and Abu Dharr amongst others (may Allāh bless them all). But they also were not tribal leaders and neither could they get a large number of people to follow them nor were they able to defend themselves when they were persecuted by the caliphs.

One who seeks the truth today should also not be lazy and just go with the crowd. He or she should take the time and understand the need for Imāmah and ponder on the ahādith that all Muslims have reported from Rasulullāh (s) that 'one who dies without an Imām dies the death of Jāhiliyya' i.e. of kufr.

How we discuss the right of Imām Ali ('a) with other Muslims is very important. It should never be to incite hatred and cause division. Imām Ali ('a) himself would never want that. But Imām Ali ('a) can become the source of unity for Muslims if his true place in Islām is recognized by one and all.

The love of Imām Ali ('a) and acknowledging him as the rightful Imām after Rasulullāh (s) is a sign of faith (imān) and that is why, in our kalima to show our faith, we don't just recite:

Aqāid

La ilāha ilallāh
Muhammadur Rasulullāh

There is no god but Allāh,
Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh.

We also insist on reciting three other lines that ensure we not just ordinary Muslims or disloyal Muslims who betrayed the trust of Rasulullāh (s) after him. Rather we are Muslims of the highest level of faith and loyalty to Allāh and Rasulullāh (s). These additional three lines are:

Aliyyun waliyullah
Wasiyyu Rasulullāh
Wa khalifatahu bila fasl

Ali is the Wali of Allāh,
(and he is) the trustee of Rasulullāh (s),
and (he is) his immediate successor.

Lesson 6

The Human Soul

Death of the Body & Immortality of the Soul

Most people are terrified of death. This is because they don't know what lies ahead for them after death. The fear of death has a purpose however. It ensures that all creatures struggle to survive and to preserve themselves from harm and destruction.

Islām wants Muslims to protect themselves from death but it also does not want them to love this world over the Hereafter.

﴿بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى﴾

Yet you prefer the life of this world, while the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

- Surah al-A'la, 87:16-17

﴿... يَوَدُّ أَحَدُهُمْ لَوْ يُعَمَّرُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِمُزَحَّزِحٍ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ أَنْ يُعَمَّرَ ...﴾

Each of them is eager to live a thousand years, though it would not save him from the punishment, were he to live [that long].

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:96

And the only way to get to the Hereafter is through death, which is a bridge between this world and the next. Islām teaches us that our physical body is only a shell and vehicle that allows us to move about and live on this planet but our real self is the soul that survives after the body stops functioning. In other words, Muslims must believe that humans are not created for extinction – they are created to live forever. However the physical body cannot live forever and therefore Muslims are asked to accept death as something natural. If a Muslim gives importance to the life after death and to the eternal life in the Hereafter after which there is no death again, then he or she will spend their time on the earth wisely; and having prepared for the Hereafter, they will see death of the body as only a bridge that must be crossed in order to move to the next Life.

The Qur'ān confirms that nothing will ever escape death:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ...﴾

Every soul shall taste death...

- Surah Aal-I Imrān, 3:185

﴿أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرِكُكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ...﴾

Wherever you may be, death shall overtake you, even if you were in fortified towers.'

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:78

Imām Ali ('a) was asked to describe death. He said, 'it will be one of three things: either it will bring you good news of eternal bliss, or bad news of eternal punishment or a state of uncertainty where you don't know if you are of the good or the evil.'

Imām Hasan ('a) was asked about death and he said, 'It is the greatest joy that comes to a believer when he is transported from a world of misfortunes to eternal happiness. And it is the greatest ruin that comes to a faithless when he is transported from his paradise to a fire that neither stops nor ever ends.'

Imām Husayn ('a) said to his companions in Karbala: 'Patience O children of nobility! For what is death except a bridge that you will cross from misery and harm to wide gardens of bliss and eternal blessings? Who amongst you hates moving from a prison to a palace? It is your enemies who will cross from palaces to prisons and painful punishment. My father narrated to me from Rasullāh (s) that he said: "the world is a prison for the faithful (mu'min) and paradise for the faithless (kāfir) and death is a bridge that takes those to their gardens of paradise and these to the (fire of) Hell"... I have never lied nor been lied to.'

Imām Ali b. al-Husayn Zayn al-Abidin ('a) said about death and leaving the body, 'For a faithful it is like removing lice-infested clothes and breaking off heavy handcuffs and chains and exchanging them with the most beautiful clothes and fragrances.' And the opposite is for the faithless.

When Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) was asked about death, he said, 'it is like the sleep that comes to you every night except that this is a long sleep that only ends on the Day of Resurrection.' And he said for some sleep brings beautiful dreams and for others it brings nightmares. And the same is for death.

The other Imāms said similar words. When Imām Muhammad al-Jawād ('a), our ninth Imām, was asked why Muslims fear and hate death, he said, 'that is because they are ignorant of it and so they hate it. If they understood it and if they were truly the friends of Allāh, they would love it and they would know that the Hereafter is far better than this world.'

So death of the body is not the end of life. It is the start of a new life for our true self – the soul.

Rasullāh (s) said:

مَا خُلِقْتُمْ لِلْفَنَاءِ بَلْ خُلِقْتُمْ لِلْبَقَاءِ، وَإِنَّمَا تَنْقَلِبُونَ مِنْ دَارٍ إِلَى دَارٍ

You were not created to perish; rather you were created to remain forever. You will only be transported from one world to another.

The human soul resembles the physical body of the person it lives in. If we were able to see a soul outside the body, we would recognize the person whose soul we are looking at. Sometimes however, because of our actions, our souls look much better or much worse than our physical appearance. That is why on the Day of Judgement, some people will appear to be extremely handsome or beautiful as youthful individuals with a profound personality. And some people will look like animals or even a deformed creature that resembles the mix of various animals, whose traits they had in this world.

We must therefore never forget that we are really a soul and not a body, even if we have a body in this world and in the Hereafter Allāh will give us other, ever-lasting bodies. To put this differently, we are not physical beings who experience spirituality. Rather we are spiritual beings who are undergoing a physical experience in this world so as to learn and perfect our true souls.

Once we have learnt the lessons of life in this world and prepared our souls for Paradise, Allāh either keeps us alive to teach others or takes us away so that we can shed our physical bodies like old clothes and start our next journey towards Jannah (Paradise).

Sakarāt al-Mawt

Sakarāt al-Mawt means 'Pangs of Death'. It is the pain and agony that is felt when one is about to die. If a person is good and of the people of Jannah, then his experience of *sakarāt al-mawt* is not painful. He may have a high fever or sweat or breathe heavily but in the end, he sees the beauty of the next world and he or she is happy to leave this world and longs to go to the next world.

On the other hand, if a person was evil, then his or her endless suffering starts with *sakarāt al-mawt*. As he or she dies, they may scream in pain or rub their heels together and struggle as their soul leaves the body.

The Qur'ān says:

﴿وَجَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنْتَ مِنْهُ تَحِيدُ﴾

Then the agony of death will bring the truth: 'This is what you used to shun!'

- Surah Qāf, 50:19

﴿كَلَّا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ التَّرَاقِيَ. وَقِيلَ مَنْ رَاقٍ. وَظَنَّ أَنَّهُ الْفِرَاقُ. وَالتَّفَّتِ السَّاقُ بِالسَّاقِ. إِلَى رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمَسَاقُ﴾

No indeed! When the soul reaches up to the collar bones, and it is said, 'Who will take him up?'³ and he knows that it is the [time of] parting, and each leg intertwines the other leg,⁴ that day he shall be driven toward your Lord.

- Surah al-Qiyāmah, 75:26-30

Rasulullāh (s) said, 'one pang (*sakrah*) from the *sakarāt al-mawt* is more severe than three hundred strikes of the sword.'

And of course for those that are evil, this is just the beginning. Imām as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'between this world and the Hereafter there are a thousand mountain-passes (i.e. challenges to cross). The easiest of them is death.'⁵

One of the sufferings of *sakarāt al-mawt* is that a person becomes very thirsty. It is therefore recommended to give water to a person who is dying and if he or she is a believer, we should turn their feet towards qibla and recite Surah Yā Sin and other surahs of the Qur'ān and duas, to calm them down.

How the Soul Leaves the Body for Believers and Unbelievers

Some people die suddenly but others fall sick and lie in bed for a few days before dying.

A person dying may show various signs during *sakarāt al-mawt*, such as sweating, his or her eyes rolling, breathing becoming heavy, voice raised, tongue sinking back, and so on. But when it is finally time to die, a person sees the Angel of Death (Malak al-Mawt) who commands the soul to leave the body and as this begins to happen, a person begins to lose control of his or her limbs one by one. First his or her legs go numb from the toes up to the waist. Then he or she loses the ability to move his or her arms and thereafter he or she cannot speak any more. Then the ears can no longer hear any sounds and as the soul reaches the throat, the eyes see the world and its people for the last time and finally the soul comes out from the nose and mouth and a person takes his or her last breathe. This is the end of the physical body but not the person, whose soul lives on.

The soul of a person who is dead hovers around the dead body and watches his or her family crying and also as the body is washed, shrouded and buried.

³ That is, by the angels of mercy and the angels of wrath present at the side of the dying person, as to which of them will take charge of him.

⁴ Due to great hardship and the pangs of death.

⁵ Mulla Fayd Kashani, '*Aalam ma ba'ad al-Mawt*, p. 42

For those who are good, even though they are afraid of death at first, they are delighted when they see the next world and how beautiful it is.

In a hadith al-qudsi, Allāh (s.w.t.) says: 'I do not hesitate to do anything except taking the soul of My servant, a mu'min. He or she hates death and I dislike causing him or her anything he or she dislikes. But it is inevitable.'

For one who wasted his or her life, there is immense regret when dying and they plead with Allāh to give them more time:

﴿حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ. لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ
كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾

When death comes to one of them, he says, 'My Lord! Take me back, that I may act righteously in what I have left behind.' 'By no means! These are mere words that he says.' And ahead of them is a barrier (barzakh) until the day they will be resurrected.

- Surah al-Mu'minin, 23:99-100

﴿وَأَنْفَقُوا مِنْ مَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي
إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ. وَلَنْ يُؤَخَّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهَا
وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

Spend from what We have given you before death comes to any of you, then he will say, 'My Lord, why did You not leave me for a short time so that I might have given charity and become one of the good!' But Allāh shall never leave a soul when its time has come, and Allāh is well aware of what you do.

- Surah al-Munāfiqun, 63:10-11

To make us realize how helpless we are, Allāh challenges us to stop a person from dying if we can:

﴿فَلَوْلَا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْحُلُقُومَ. وَأَنْتُمْ حِينِيذٍ تَنْظُرُونَ. وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْكُمْ وَلَكِنْ لَا
تُبْصِرُونَ. فَلَوْلَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ غَيْرَ مَدِينِينَ. تَرْجِعُونَهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ﴾

So when it (i.e. the soul) reaches the throat [of the dying person], and at that moment you are looking on [at his bedside] - and We are nearer to him (i.e. the dying person) than you are, though you do not realize - then why do you not send it back, if you are not truly dependent [on us and] if you are truthful?

- Surah al-Wāq'ah, 56:83-87

A person whose soul has left the body begins to see a whole new world with things he always doubted but now is sure about: the angels, the devils, the reality of his or her actions, and so on. He may have extreme joy if he was very good or may experience extreme regret if he wasted his life by running after worldly things and wasting time by playing useless games and engaging in meaningless pleasures.

Hence Imām Ali (‘a) said, ‘people are asleep. When they die, they wake up!’

If a person always loved Allāh and his or her greatest pleasure in life was to remember Allāh, to worship Allāh and his or her love for Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) then there will be no one happier than him or her after death. Because he or she will realize that all their suffering is now over and there is nothing but happiness and joy forever. But if his or her love was other than Allāh then he or she will feel ashamed and regret that they gave importance to things that don’t really matter after death and they neglected what matters the most.

Imām Ali (‘a) said, ‘it is forbidden for any soul to leave this world until it knows if it is from the people of paradise or from the people of hellfire.’

Imām as-Sādiq (‘a) said, when a true and sincere Shi’ah is about to die and his soul reaches the throat, then he sees Rasulullāh (s) and Imām Ali (‘a) and the other Imāms. And he sees the angels Jibrāil (‘a), Mikāil (‘a) and Malak al-Mawt (the Angel of Death) (‘a). Then Jibrāil comes near to Malak al-Mawt (‘a) and says, ‘this person used to love Rasulullāh (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) so be kind and gentle with him’.

Then the Angel of Death comes to the man and asks him, ‘O servant of Allāh, have you freed your neck (from Hell)? Have you taken your guarantee of safety? Did you take hold of the Greatest Protection in this world?’

And Allāh inspires the person and he says, ‘Yes’.

‘And what is that?’ asks the Angel of Death.

‘The love and loyalty (wilāyah) of Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib (‘a),’ the Shi’ah replies.

‘You have spoken the truth’ remarks the Angel of Death, ‘you are now safe from what you feared and you shall have what you hoped for. Rejoice in the company of Rasulullāh (s) and Ali (‘a) and the Imāms (‘a).’

In one hadith we are taught that the soul of a mu’min (believer) leaves the body as gently as pulling a hair out of soft butter. And the soul of one who is evil (and who rejected the truth) leaves the body like placing a delicate silk cloth on a bush of thorns and then violently pulling the cloth out of the thorn-bush.

Imām Ali (‘a) has also said that every dying person sees him, whether he is a believer or a hypocrite. If he is faithful, he is pleased to see Imām Ali (‘a) and if he is a hypocrite he is frightened to see Imām Ali (‘a).

Rasulullāh (s) told Imām Ali (‘a) that those who love him will be glad on three occasions: first at the time of death when he will visit them; second at the time of questioning in the grave when he will help them to answer the questions, and lastly at the time of coming before Allāh, when he will introduce them and intercede for them.

In conclusion then, death is inevitable (cannot be stopped or escaped). And since we have to die, rather than ignoring it or pretending it is never going to happen, we should learn about it and prepare for it so that when it is time to die, we are happy to return to Allāh and we look forward to a better life than this world that is also eternal.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Sufi Comics **Ali & Ali**



Lesson 7

Intercession (Shafā'ah)

What is Shafā'ah?

Allāh, out of His Mercy, has opened many doors for human beings to seek His pleasure and forgiveness. Two very important doors are Tawbah (Repentance) and Shafā'ah (Intercession).

Shafā'ah is the Islāmic belief that on the Day of Judgement, Allāh will permit His special servants and the angels to intercede on behalf of sinful believers and ask Allāh to forgive their sins to save them from the fire of Hell.

It is true that Allāh can forgive His servants directly and without an intermediary but one of the purposes of shafā'ah is to honour the Anbiyā, Rusul, Aimmah and special servants of Allāh and to reveal their status before Allāh by giving them permission to ask Allāh on behalf of others.

Of course, shafā'ah does not mean that Allāh plans to punish someone but the intercessors will interfere and change Allāh's mind. It means that Allāh will already plan to forgive them but instead of doing it directly, He will do it through the intercession of His chosen servants. This is to honour His chosen and special servants and to show mankind their special status. In other words, the intercessors also, will only intercede for those whom they know Allāh wishes to forgive. They will not ask Allāh to be unjust and unfair and forgive someone who is undeserving.

Some Sunni Muslims (e.g. the Wahābbi) deny the concept of Shafā'ah and say that on the Day of Judgement no one will be able to intercede on behalf of another. All the Shi'ah and many Sunni Muslims believe in Shafā'ah.

For Whom & By Whom

Intercession (shafā'ah) will only be for the sincere believers who tried their best in this world but still cannot make it to Jannah without additional mercy and forgiveness from Allāh. And in fact, no one will be able to make it to Jannah only based on their actions. If Allāh was to judge people by their actions alone and with strict justice, all would fail. We therefore hope for Allāh's kindness, mercy and grace and not our actions alone. That is why we are taught to pray to Allāh in duas:

اللَّهُمَّ عَامِلِنَا بِفَضْلِكَ وَلَا تُعَامِلْنَا بِعَدْلِكَ

O Allāh! Judge us by Your Grace and not by Your Justice!

And Luqmān the Wise (‘a) said to his son:

*‘My son, the world is a fathomless ocean in which many learned people have drowned. So make your ship in the world, faith (imān) in Allāh and let your provisions be Godwariness (taqwa). Let the sail of your ship (i.e. what drives you in this world) be trust in Allāh (at-Tawakkul ‘ala Allāh). **Then if you are saved, it shall be only by Allāh’s mercy and if you perish it will be because of your sins.***⁶

Shafā’ah will not be for unbelievers, polytheists, hypocrites and those who did not believe in Shafā’ah in this world.

On the Day of Judgement many will be allowed to do shafā’ah (i.e. to intercede) for others. For example, a scholar (‘ālim) will be allowed to intercede for some of his students and followers, a pious parent may intercede for his or her children and vice versa, all the prophets and messengers will also intercede for their faithful followers. But by far, the greatest power of intercession will be given to Rasulullāh (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). Everyone will wish they can get close to Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) so they can ask them to intercede on their behalf.

Rasulullāh (s) was always concerned about his nation (Ummah) and the sincere Muslims. On the Day of Judgement, Allāh will allow Rasulullāh (s) to intercede for as many people as he wishes and in whom any good can be found, until Rasulullāh (s) himself is pleased and fully satisfied.

We should therefore always pray to Allāh (s.w.t.) to bless us with the opportunity to visit Rasulullāh (s) and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) in this world and to be blessed with their shafā’ah on the Day of Judgement. We can pray to Allāh for this as follows:

اللَّهُمَّ ارْزُقْنَا زِيَارَتَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَشَفَاعَتَهُمْ فِي الآخِرَةِ

O Allāh grant us their ziyārah in the world and their shafā’ah in the Hereafter.

Shafā’ah in the Qur’ān

The reason why some Muslims reject the concept of shafā’ah is because they recite only some of the verses of the Qur’ān on shafā’ah without look at other verses on the same subject.

For example, here are two verses of the Qur’ān that seem to suggest that no one will be able to intercede on behalf of another:

⁶ Shaykh Saduq, *Aqāid ash-Shi’ah al-Imāmiyah*

﴿وَاتَّقُوا يَوْمًا لَا تَجْزِي نَفْسٌ عَنْ نَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُقْبَلُ مِنْهَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَلَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْهَا عَدْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ﴾

Beware of the day when no soul shall compensate for another, neither any intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any ransom shall be received from it, nor will they be helped.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:48

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعٌ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا شَفَاعَةٌ...﴾

O you who have faith! Spend out of what We have provided you before there comes a day on which there will be no bargaining, neither friendship, nor intercession.

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:254

On the other hand, there are many verses of Qur'ān that confirm there will be intercessors. For example:

﴿... لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ...﴾

To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that may intercede with Him except with His permission?

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:255

﴿... مَا مِنْ شَفِيعٍ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ إِذْنِهِ...﴾

There is no intercessor, except by His permission.

- Surah Yunus, 10:3

﴿... وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ ارْتَضَى...﴾

...and they do not intercede except for someone He approves of...

- Surah al-Anbiyā, 21:26-28

﴿وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ...﴾

Intercession is of no avail with Him except for those whom He permits...

- Surah Sabā, 34:23

﴿وَكَمْ مِنْ مَلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ
يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَى﴾

How many an angel there is in the heavens whose intercession is of no avail in any way except after Allāh grants permission to whomever He wishes and approves of!

- Surah an-Najm, 53:26

Explaining the Verses of the Qur'ān

If Allāh intends to allow His awliya (special servants) to intercede for others on the Day of Judgement, then why does He say there will be no intercession on the Day of Judgement, in some of the verses in the Qur'ān?

The reason is that the verses that reject intercession are referring to the tyrants who have influence in this world but will not be able to use their influence to help themselves or others on the Day of Judgement.

To understand this better, think about those who hold power in this world (e.g. kings, presidents, governments, etc.). They sometimes intercede for others even when it is wrong. For example, a judge might know that a criminal deserves to be punished but decides not to punish him. The criminal may rouse in the judge an overwhelming feeling of pity by his passionate appeal for mercy. Or he may win him over with a bribe. Or an influential man intercedes with the judge on behalf of the criminal and the judge cannot ignore that intercession. Or the criminal becomes a state-witness leading to the conviction of even greater criminals, and is himself, therefore, released without any punishment. Or his colleagues get him freed from the clutches of the authorities. Whatever the cause may be, it is a well-established custom in the worldly governments and human societies to let the wrong-doers go free at times. In its simplest form, cause and effect teaches humans to seek intercession of everything. For example, hunger seeks the intercession of money to get food. Cold seeks the intercession of shelter to get warmth. A university graduate seeks the intercession of a manager in a company to get a job. And so on.

The idol-worshippers in Arabia, before Rasulullāh (s) began preaching Islām, believed that in the life after death the same can be done. For example, they offered sacrifices to their gods seeking assistance in their needs; the offerings were supposed to intercede on their behalf. Sometimes help was even sought by offering a human sacrifice. They carried this idea of continuation of the life so far that they would bury a man with all types of necessities of life, including his ornaments and arms, in order that he might use them on his onward journey; sometimes even his wives and soldiers were buried alive with him to keep him company. You will see a lot of such findings in archaeological museums around the world e.g. from the tombs of the Egyptian Pharaohs. Some such ideas have persisted even among the Muslims - with all their diverse cultures and languages, but in modified forms.

The Qur'ān has clearly rejected all such superstitious beliefs and baseless ideas:

﴿يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ﴾

It is a day when no soul will be of any use to another soul and all command that day will belong to Allāh.

- Surah al-Infitār, 82:19

﴿وَلَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا فُرَادَى كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَتَرَكْتُمْ مَا خَوَّلْنَاكُمْ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِكُمْ وَمَا نَرَى مَعَكُمْ شُفَعَاءَكُمُ الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ أَنَّهُمْ فِيكُمْ شُرَكَاءُ لَقَدْ تَقَطَّعَ بَيْنَكُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْكُمْ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَزْعُمُونَ﴾

Certainly you have come to Us alone, just as We created you the first time, and left behind whatever We had given you. We do not see your intercessors with you—those whom you claimed to be [Our] partners in [deciding] you[r] [fate]. Certainly all links between you have been cut, and what you used to claim has abandoned you!

- Surah al-Anfāl, 6:94

There are many similar verses; and they all show that in the Hereafter such 'intercession' is not accepted.

So the verses of the Qur'ān that reject intercession are refuting this idea that people can have their own independent intercessors. But on the other hand, it does not mean that Allāh Himself will not allow or accept His chosen servants to intercede for others. In fact, He actually plans for it to honour these servants and use it as an opportunity to forgive others believers.

Another point to note:

The Qur'ān has a unique style where it first reject any false idea that anyone has independent knowledge, control, power, etc. and then it acknowledges those whom Allāh has given power, knowledge, etc. and whose abilities are dependent on Allāh.

For example, take the issue of hidden knowledge ('ilm al-ghayb). First Allāh rejects anyone having it except Him:

﴿قُلْ لَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ الْغَيْبَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ...﴾

Say, 'No one in the heavens or the earth knows the Unseen except Allāh,

- Surah an-Naml, 27:65

﴿وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ...﴾

With Him are the treasures of the Unseen; no one knows them except Him.

- Surah al-Anfāl, 6:59

Then Allāh acknowledges those blessed with hidden knowledge from Him (not independent of Him):

﴿عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا إِلَّا مَن ارْتَضَىٰ مِن رَّسُولٍ...﴾

Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, except to a messenger He approves of.

- Surah al-Jinn, 72:26-27

The same is the case with various verses on the subjects of creating, sustaining, giving death, authority and similar things. Some verses reserve them for Allāh alone then other verses clarify that others too may do these things with Allāh's permission. This is a well-known style of the Qur'ān.

Shafā'ah in Hadith⁷

1. Rasulullāh (s) said, 'if a person does not believe in my shafā'ah, then Allāh will not let him reach my shafā'ah (on the Day of Judgement).'
2. Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) said, 'whoever denies three things is not one of our Shi'ah: the Mi'rāj (of Rasulullāh (s), that it was a physical and not spiritual journey only), the questioning in the grave, and Shafā'ah.'
3. From Imām Ali b. Musa ar-Rida ('a) who said, 'one who disbelieves in the shafā'ah of Rasulullāh (s) will not receive it.'
4. From Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) who said, 'a faithful (mu'min) will be allowed to intercede for his loved ones unless they are Nāsibi (i.e. they hate the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)). If a person is a Nāsibi, even if every prophet and every angel were to intercede for him, he will still not be forgiven.'
5. Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) advised his Shi'ah: 'Do not ask our enemies for favours because it will give them an excuse to ask us for help on the Day of Judgement' (i.e. they will come to the Imāms and say, 'we helped your Shi'ah, so help us now.')
6. From Rasulullāh (s), he said, 'I will intercede on the Day of Judgement and I will be granted, Ali will intercede and he will be granted and my Ahl al-Bayt will intercede and they will be granted.'
7. From Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a), who said, 'by Allāh, we will intercede for our Shi'ah; by Allāh, we will intercede for our Shi'ah; by Allāh we will intercede

⁷ Taken from *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 8, the section on Shafā'ah & from *Tafsir al-Mizan* of Allamah Tabatabai.

for our Shi'ah until people will say: "we have no one to intercede for us (like this) nor any close friend!"

8. 'Ubayd b. Zurārah said: Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was asked whether a believer would have the right of intercession. He said: 'Yes.' Then someone said: 'Will even a believer need the intercession of Muhammad (s) on that day?' He said: 'Yes. The believers too will come with wrongs and sins; and there will be none but he shall need the intercession of Muhammad on that Day.' ('Ubayd) said: 'And someone asked him about the words of Rasulullāh (s): "I am the Chief of the children of Adam, and I say this without boasting." He said: "Yes." (Then) he said: "He will hold the chain-link of the door of Paradise and open it; then he will fall in sajdah, and Allāh will say to him 'Raise your head and intercede, your intercession shall be granted, and ask, you shall be given.' Thereupon he will raise his head and intercede – and his intercession will be accepted; and he will ask and be given.'"
9. Bishr b. Shurayh al-Basri narrates: I said to Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a): 'Which verse in the Book of Allāh is the most hope-inspiring?' He said: 'And what do your people say?' I said: 'They say, (it is the verse),

﴿قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ

يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

Say [that Allāh declares,] 'O My servants who have committed excesses (i.e. sins) against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Indeed Allāh will forgive all sins. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:53

He said: 'But we, the Ahl al-Bayt, do not say so.' I said: 'Then what do you say about it?' He said: 'We say (it is the verse),

﴿وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ﴾

Soon your Lord will give you [that with which] you will be pleased.

- Surah al-Duha, 93:5

Then Imām al-Bāqir ('a) said, '(It means) the intercession, by Allāh the intercession, by Allāh the intercession.'

10. And from Sunni sources, ad-Daylami reports from Abu Hurayra who said, Rasulullāh (s) said, 'the intercessors are five: the Qur'ān, kinship, trustworthiness (al-amānah), your Prophet (Nabi) and the family (Ahl al-Bayt) of your Prophet.'

The Objections to Shafā'ah and Replies to Them

First Objection: Allāh has threatened to punish the wrongdoer; now suppose He waives the punishment on the Day of Judgment. It means either it is unfair and unjust to forgive the one who should be punished or Allāh broke His promise (wal 'iyādhu billah!).

Reply: Then what do we say about Allāh's orders given to test the loyalty of Nabi Ibrahim ('a) that were changed at the last moment i.e. not to kill his son Ismā'il? It was a waiver too. Likewise, it may be that Allāh has always planned to punish the sinful disbelievers but to rescue the sinful believers who sincerely try their best but still need to be forgiven. Therefore intercession is not a break of a promise. It is a provision planned for in advance to help the sincere believers.

Second Objection: It is the established practice of Allāh that His actions never contradict. Whatever He decrees and orders, without any exception, runs on an established pattern. And this is the foundation that the system of cause and effect has been built upon. Allāh says:

﴿... فَلَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَبْدِيلًا وَكَنْ تَجِدَ لِسُنَّةِ اللَّهِ تَحْوِيلًا﴾

Yet you will never find any change in Allāh's practice, and you will never find any revision in Allāh's practice.

- Surah al-Fātir, 35:43

Intercession would create a contradiction in the action of Allāh. If intercession caused waiver of punishment from all the sinners, of all their sins, then it would defeat the very purpose of the shari'ah and would turn the whole system into a joke. And if only some of the sinners, or only some of their sins were forgiven, then there would occur contradiction in Allāh's rules and system of justice. Intercession is used by humans in this world to exert influence, favour some over others, bribe, etc. But Allāh is just to all. He cannot favour some over others.

Reply: No doubt Allāh's actions are based on justice. But Allāh has created a system of cause and effect and He does not deal with all issues in one way only. There are many contradictory effects based on their causes. For example, Allāh feeds everyone. But some are poor and some are rich. Allāh gives death to everyone. But some live a short life and some long. It is because of different causes. E.g. one works harder and deserves more than another. Some results are good for one person's eternal life but bad for another e.g. beauty, health, wealth, intellect, strength, etc. Similarly, intercession is not given indiscriminately to anyone who wants it or claims it. It is only for the deserving and there is no contradiction even if only some benefit from it.

Third Objection: In this world, intercession causes a judge to change his original will e.g. to punish a criminal. A just judge may not accept an intercession unless he finds new evidence and his original decision and knowledge changes. An unjust judge will accept and change his judgement (e.g. for a bribe) even if he knows it is wrong (i.e. his knowledge has not changed). Now Allāh's knowledge never changes. It is impossible for Him to make a mistake. So if Allāh knows a person deserves to be forgiven, then He can forgive him with no need for intercession. And if Allāh knows a person deserves to be punished, then if He accepts intercession, it means He had to revise His judgement and knowledge!

Reply: Intercession has nothing to do with change of will or knowledge. What actually changes is the thing willed about or known. Allāh knows that a certain man will pass through various stages in his life; for a time his condition will be excellent - and Allāh wills about him a certain will, and He knows that later his condition will change - and He wills about him another will. The same happens with our knowledge and will. We know that soon night will come and we will not be able to see in darkness, but a few hours later the sun will rise dispelling the darkness. When night comes, our will is directed to light a lamp, and later when the morning comes our will is directed to extinguish that lamp. In this case, there was no change at all in our knowledge and will; what changed was the objects of that knowledge and will.

What is impossible is for Allāh not to know that a person's condition will change in the future. Or for Him to will something to change and the thing remains unchanged. In other words, it is impossible for Him to be mistaken in His knowledge or for His will to be ineffective. We see an apparition far away and take it to be a man; on coming nearer we find that it was a horse. In this case, our "knowledge" was incorrect and we were mistaken. Likewise, we intend to do a certain work, then we realize that it would be wrong to do so; here our "will" was cancelled and became ineffective. Such disagreement is certainly impossible for Allāh. So Allāh knows even now who will be a sinner, who will need intercession and who will receive it and who won't deserve it and won't get it.

Fourth Objection: Had Allāh promised intercession, or had His prophets brought this message to their nations, the people would be encouraged to disobey the commandments of Allāh, and to transgress the limits of the shari'ah. It would have defeated the whole purpose behind religion.

Reply: How then will we explain verses showing that Allāh's mercy and forgiveness is all-encompassing? For example:

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ...﴾

*Indeed Allāh does not forgive that any partner should be ascribed to Him, but **He forgives anything besides that** to whomever He wishes.*

- Surah an-Nisā, 4:48

And also:

﴿قُلْ يَا عِبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا مِن رَّحْمَةِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ
الذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ﴾

Say [that Allāh declares,] ‘O My servants who have committed excesses (i.e. sins) against their own souls, do not despair of the mercy of Allāh. Indeed Allāh will forgive all sins. Indeed He is the All-forgiving, the All-merciful.

- Surah az-Zumar, 39:53

And even polytheism (*shirk*) is forgiven with repentance. Secondly, intercession would only encourage people to sin if: (a) people were told by their names that they will have intercession regardless of what they do, or (b) intercession was promised for everyone and every kind of disobedience or even specific types of sins.

But Allāh has kept both things vague. He has never said what sins or which sinners might benefit from intercession, nor has He said whether all or only some of the punishment would be waived; nor has He made it clear whether or not the intercession would be effective in every condition and at all times. In view of this, it would be foolish for anyone to assume he/she will definitely deserve intercession regardless of what sins he/she commits. To give people hope, Allāh says:

﴿إِن تَجْتَنِبُوا كَبَائِرَ مَا تُنْهَوْنَ عَنْهُ نَكْفُرْ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَنُدْخِلْكُمْ مُدْخَلًا كَرِيمًا﴾

If you avoid the major sins that you are forbidden, We will absolve you of your misdeeds, and admit you to a noble abode.

– Surah an-Nisā, 4:31

Does this mean that this verse encourages people to sin? No. It means if you try your best and keep yourself as pure as possible, then do not lose hope in the mercy of Allāh. In fact intercession gives hope to people in Allāh’s mercy and kindness.

