

What Do We Know About Imam Ali عليه السلام?

Highlights from the Biography of the Greatest
Leader Shaped by the Holy Prophet ﷺ




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the Beneficent, the Merciful**

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE MODELS IN OUR LIVES

Allah Almighty says: «The Day we shall call every people by their Imam».¹

Imam Aliؓ states: “Certainly, every follower has a leader whom he emulates and from whose knowledge's light he is illuminated. Your leader has sufficed himself in this world with his two garments, and with his two loaves for his meal. Be aware that you cannot do that, but help me with piety and diligence, [with chastity and correctness].”²

Recognizing the personality of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talibؓ is part of our endeavor to identify the ideal role model and example we wish to adopt and follow in life. Every person has an ultimate example they aspire to be like. It's rare to find someone who isn't looking for a real-life role model to emulate and imitate in critical life situations and events.

If you ask anyone about the ultimate goal they wish to

achieve, even if they feel it's out of reach, they'll express it through the name of a person who existed at some point and achieved that goal.

Therefore, fictional heroes, who haven't had a presence in real life, cannot become role models, no matter how much they are adored; because each of us needs the assurance and firm belief in the possibility of achieving what we aspire to, and fictional characters make such goals seem unattainable.

Every free person inherently longs for a great purpose and major goal, embodied in a real person who has achieved that goal; as if the goal and the role model are inseparable.

When a person loses this perception and longing for the goal and role model, they lose the essence of their humanity.

True humanity, which distinguishes us from other creatures, is manifested in the characters of heroes or perfect beings, or those who strive to reach the heights of glory and perfection. And no one can introduce us to our real humanity and connect us with it like those who have lived its meanings, experienced it, and applied it in its highest and purest forms.

Here, Imam Ali ibn Abi Talibؑ comes as one of these great figures of the world. This consideration doesn't take long, for as soon as you familiarize yourself with his biography and numerous heroic stances, you'll realize you are in the presence of a person who has reached the heights of greatness. This recognition doesn't require you to believe in what he believed or to be his admirer. Thus, friend and foe, lover and hater, those near and far, have recognized his human greatness and perfection, seeing in him qualities of knowledge, bravery, asceticism, mercy,

strength, and compassion, to the extent that a poet said about him:

“In your traits, opposites are united, thus, your peers are rendered inferior. A character so gentle it shames the breeze in its kindness, and a fierceness so intense, even solid matter dissolves before it.”

The character of Imam Aliؓ has occupied the minds of everyone who lived in his era or was present in the Muslim community, especially since the onset of Islam and up to our present day. He has become a major focal point for research, contemplation, agreement, dispute, debate, alliance, and opposition over the centuries. To this day, Imam Aliؓ continues to be the most significant pillar in understanding Islamic truths and the course of Islamic history.



ALI عليه السلام THE ROLE MODEL

The character of Imam Ali عليه السلام is like a vast and turbulent sea, with many dimensions and profound depths. To navigate this immense ocean, there are numerous ships of varying sizes, strengths, and speeds. Throughout history, scholars, poets, and writers have endeavored to dive into this rich sea to extract its treasures and pearls and present them to people, each using a ship according to their means and capabilities.

Some embarked on the ship of courage, war stances, and jihad; others on the ship of worship, supplication, and intimate prayers; some on the ship of great morals like asceticism and forbearance; others on the ship of knowledge or one of its boats; and some on the ship of eloquence and articulacy, and so on.

The variety of these ships reflects the diverse characteristics of Imam Ali's personality presented to us. Each explorer brings back a gem of his greatness, acknowledging that it is impossible to reach the ocean's depths or touch its most treasured secrets. However, if we ponder a little, we realize that the strongest, fastest,

and most expansive ship is that of leadership.

Through this vast ship, we can get a comprehensive view of Imam Ali's entire personality, his life, and understand the reality of the qualities and characteristics he possessed from the beginning of his life until its end. This allows us to grasp the remarkable contradictions that have baffled minds:

- How can one combine such asceticism with the significant responsibility of governance?
- How can one reconcile such knowledge with the remarkable silence over a quarter of a century?
- How can one merge numerous military heroics with his seclusion after Prophet Muhammadﷺ?
- How can one combine such zeal and pride in Islam with the submission to those who wronged the beloved daughter of the chosen Prophet, about whom he said: "Whoever hurts her, hurts me, and whoever hurts me, hurts Allah"?

Through analyzing Imam Ali's leadership biography, we can see his life, stances, and qualities as a single, harmoniously beautiful painting, especially when we know that this Imam was subjected from the beginning of his life to a precise and profound divine prophetic program to bear the responsibility of leading the divine, Islamic mission intended to change the entire world.

Those who understand Islam's system and values realize that all Islamic perfections must manifest in carrying the highest, most important, and most influential social responsibilities. Implementing Islam without concern for human conditions and the world's future is not deemed proper implementation.

Thus, we find this Imam progressing under prophetic education from an early age to ultimately become the

guardian of Islam, the conveyor of the Qur'an until the Day of Judgment, and Allah's proof over all beings. He becomes an example of one who has dissolved in Allah, as described by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: "Ali is with the truth, and the truth is with Ali; it turns with him wherever he turns."³





ALI عليه السلام THE LEADER

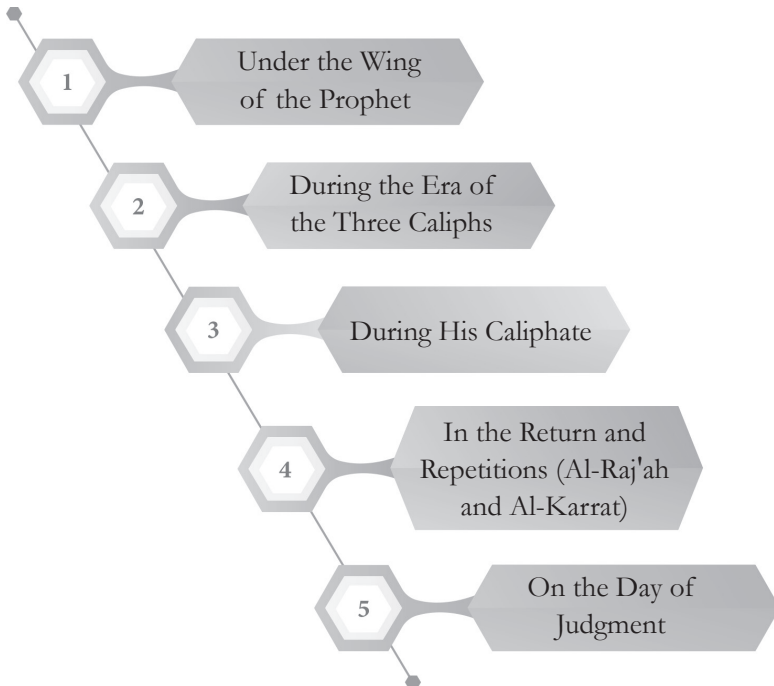
Imam Ali عليه السلام, before being known as a devout worshipper, ascetic, or learned jurist, was primarily a leader of a grand divine plan and project. This plan was marvelously integrated into the religion of Islam. Because he sincerely undertook this responsibility from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and gave everything that the greatest of leaders could give, Allah perfected him, and in him were manifested all the great characteristics and noble qualities!

Therefore, if we want to understand Imam Ali عليه السلام in his leadership role, we must acquaint ourselves with the religion of Islam in its divine plan and Islamic mission he was leading and implementing. To get closer to understanding his exceptional leadership experience, it is essential to learn about the social, political, cultural, and psychological conditions and circumstances that the Imam dealt with from the beginning of his association with the first leader and great founder of the divine project on earth.

Islam was the life program and project of the Imam; the environment in which he fought his struggles, stood

with honesty, and displayed heroism is what reflects his leadership abilities and characteristics. Without understanding Islam as it is, and the environment and history as they were, it is difficult to comprehend the Imam's leadership personality and the magnitude of his qualities.

Stages of Imam Ali's ﷺ Life





What is Islam?

The best definition of Islam as a divine religion is that it represents a plan reflecting Allah's will and intention in creating this world. This Earth and everything on it were created to achieve a great purpose, and Allah has made Islam the method to reach this significant goal.

Islam is the religion of Allah, but it is a religion interwoven with laws, obligations, and acts of worship that lead every creature to happiness in this world and the hereafter, provided they are implemented within a specific plan and program. When Islam is practiced as it should be, it creates a complete human society, transforming this Earth into a land illuminated by the light of its Lord.

When we talk about a plan, we are considering a goal and a phased path to reach it. If this plan is Allah's plan, then the goal is one of the greatest things, as it is linked to the Absolute Greatness, Glorified and Exalted be He. This means the goal will be far-reaching, encompassing, profoundly impactful, transformative, and magnificent. When the Arabs heard about this distant goal, they turned away from it despite its greatness and beauty, to the extent that Allah Almighty said about them: ﴿Were it an accessible gain or a short journey, they would have surely followed you; but the distance seemed too far to them﴾.⁴



HOW DID ALI عليه السلام BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH ISLAM?

Since the plan is Allah's and not a human's, who might err in his efforts, understanding it must come through direct connection and association with its original source, which is divine revelation. This connection must be pure, untainted by any form of injustice like idol worship, polytheism, sins, and wrongdoings. Thus, when Allah's friend, Prophet Ibrahim عليه السلام, asked Him to grant revelation to his offspring, Allah Almighty responded, saying: «My pledge does not extend to the unjust».⁵

Ali's childhood and upbringing were entirely free from injustice to himself and others. It was said about him by everyone: Ali, may Allah honor his face, for he never prostrated to an idol, at a time when everyone else was deeply involved in that. This nobility and high status of purity and integrity were achieved through his deep and close connection with Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the prophet where divine revelation descended and the repository of Allah's great will.

No Muslim in the early days of Islam was as close to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as Imam Ali عليه السلام. It wasn't just

kinship or blood relations that drew Ali towards the Prophet of Islam; many relatives of the honorable Prophet were there. Rather, it was a special spiritual connection manifested in intense love, the likes of which cannot be found between any two beings in existence. Because of this pure love, there was absolute following and complete merging, making Ali the soul of the greatest Messenger!

Despite his young age, Imam Aliؑ managed to receive all the knowledge of revelation from Prophet Muhammadﷺ at an early stage in his life. He became knowledgeable about this divine plan and its requirements over time, even if it were a thousand years later, and his noble soul became intertwined in all its dimensions and characteristics.

Thus, Ali became the first Muslim and believer; he was so close to the Prophet that he heard the revelation as he himself stated: "Every year, the Prophet would stay in Hira, and I was the only one who saw him. No one else did. No house in Islam at that time housed anyone but Prophet Muhammad, Khadija, and I was the third of them. I saw the light of revelation and the message and smelled the fragrance of prophethood. I even heard the ringing of Satan when the revelation descended upon himﷺ. I asked: 'O Messenger of Allah, what is this ringing?' He said: 'This is Satan, who has despaired of his worship. You hear what I hear and see what I see, except that you are not a prophet, but you are a minister, and indeed you are upon good'."⁶

This deep spiritual and metaphysical closeness to the Prophet, which extended to seeing and hearing what was revealed to the Prophet from Allah, indicated Imam Ali's immense readiness and capacity, which he utilized

to the fullest. He did not waste the potentialities and opportunities bestowed upon him by Allah. While many young people possess high potential, they often do not use or benefit from it adequately, thus depriving themselves of many opportunities for perfection. However, the young Ali knew well how to activate his capacities and exploit his latent talents, realizing where the source of greatness and perfection lay. Thus, he directed his entire being towards this source, becoming, as he himself said: "I followed him as a baby camel follows its mother's tracks. He raised for me every day a standard of his morals and commanded me to emulate him."⁷

Al-Asbagh ibn Nubatah narrated: "When Aliؓ became Caliph and the people pledged allegiance to him, he went to the mosque adorned with the turban of the Prophetﷺ, wearing the cloak of the Prophetﷺ, his sandals, and carrying the sword of the Prophetﷺ. He ascended the pulpit, sat firmly, interlocked his fingers, and placed them below his stomach, then said: 'O people, ask me before you lose me. This is the repository of knowledge, the essence of the teachings of the Messenger of Allahﷺ. This is what the Messenger of Allahﷺ imparted to me, little by little. Ask me, for I hold the knowledge of those who came before and those who will come after.'⁸

After predicting future events, some companions remarked to him, "O Commander of the Faithful, you have been given the knowledge of the unseen!" He laughed and replied, "O brother of Kalb, it is not the knowledge of the unseen; it is learning from the knowledgeable. The knowledge of the unseen pertains to the Hour, as Allah Almighty says: Indeed, the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah. He sends down the rain, and He knows what is in the wombs. No soul knows what it

will earn tomorrow, and no soul knows in what land it will die.” Thus, Allah Almighty knows what is in the wombs, whether male or female, ugly or beautiful, generous or stingy, wretched or blessed, who will be fuel for the fire, or in paradise accompanying the prophets. This is the knowledge of the unseen that none but Allah knows, and whatever else is knowledge taught by Allah to His Prophetﷺ, which he taught me, and he prayed that my heart would fully understand it and my being would deeply embrace it.”⁹

Imam Aliؑ said, “You know my close kinship and special position with the Prophetﷺ. He placed me in his lap when I was a child, embraced me to his chest, sheltered me in his bed, held me close to his body, let me smell his fragrance, and would chew food and then feed it to me. He never found me lying in speech or faltering in action. Since his weaning, Allah had attached to himﷺ the greatest of His angels to guide him on the path of noble character, day and night. The well-informed companions of Muhammadﷺ know that I never disobeyed Allah or His Messenger for a moment, and I supported him in situations where heroes faltered and feet lagged behind, a nobility granted by Allah. The Prophetﷺ passed away with his head on my chest, his soul left in my palm, and I passed it over my face. I was in charge of washing his body, assisted by angels. The house and courtyards were filled with a throng of descending and ascending angels, whose presence I constantly heard, praying over him until we buried him. So, who is more deserving of him, alive and dead, than me?”¹⁰

Thus, Imam Aliؑ was able to understand Islam in its purest and clearest form, thanks to his close connection

with the Prophet and his extensive learning and adherence to his commands. He said, "The Messenger of Allahؐ taught me a thousand doors of knowledge, each leading to a thousand more."¹¹ "Whenever I asked him, he answered, and when I was silent and my questions ended, he would initiate. Every verse of the Quran revealed to the Messenger of Allahؐ, he read to me, dictated, and I wrote it in my handwriting. He taught me its interpretation, explanation, abrogating and abrogated verses, its clear and ambiguous, specific and general parts, and prayed to Allah to give me understanding and memory of it. Thus, I forgot neither a verse of Allah's Book nor knowledge he dictated, and I wrote since he prayed for me; he left nothing that Allah taught him of lawful, unlawful, command, or prohibition, past or future, or any scripture revealed before him about obedience or disobedience, except he taught me; and I memorized it, forgetting not a single letter. Then he placed his hand on my chest and prayed to Allah to fill my heart with knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and light. I asked, 'O Prophet of Allah, my father and mother be your sacrifice, since you prayed for me as you did, I have forgotten nothing and missed nothing I didn't write. Do you fear I will forget in the future?' He said, 'No, I do not fear forgetfulness or ignorance for you.'¹²

Ali the Successor of Prophet Muhammadﷺ

Imam Aliؑ was that individual who thoroughly assimilated all details of the divine project and dimensions of the divine plan. His spirit and self were so interwoven with these teachings that he became the perfect model of a true Muslim. This was the beginning. Before anything, Imam Ali is the inheritor of the greatest Prophet, not in terms of wealth and position, but in knowledge and understanding.

When we consider the leadership of the divine project, we start with Prophet Muhammadﷺ, as he was the leader and founder of this prophetic mission. Without him, the mission would not have launched, progressed, or been established. Imam Aliؑ was able to carry this great legacy due to the qualities and qualifications he developed within himself. To truly understand Imam Aliؑ, it is a significant error to overlook this primary position.

Perhaps there is no description or word that does justice to Imam Aliؑ like the term “Successor (Wasi).” He was the rightful successor and caliph of Prophet Muhammadﷺ due to the qualities and characteristics he inherited from the Prophet, thus qualifying

him for the role of supreme caliphate. At that time, no one else could have fulfilled the role of Prophet Muhammadﷺ after him as Imam Ali ibn Abi Talibؓ did.

To understand Imam Aliؓ, one must first understand Prophet Muhammadﷺ. Neglecting this aspect leads to ignorance of the personality of Ali ibn Abi Talibؓ and deprives one of the chances to know the truth as it is.

Imam Aliؓ was the Successor, Caliph, and Inheritor who, by following the Prophet, became like his own soul. This is exemplified in the verse of Mubahala, "Come! Let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, our souls and your souls, then let us pray earnestly", where Ali is referred to as the Prophet's own soul.

In the famous story of Mubahala with the Christians, the Prophet brought from his family Fatimah al-Zahra, Hasan, Husayn, and Aliؓ. Ali does not fall under the category of women or children; he is implicitly included in the term "our souls."

Ali's soul merged with that of the Prophet, uniting in the light that combines all qualities of perfection and greatness. A significant avenue to understanding Imam Aliؓ opens through his spiritual relationship with Prophet Muhammadﷺ.

Prophet Muhammadﷺ had spiritual statuses of great magnitude, all emanating from his

closeness to Allah Almighty. He was the best of Allah's creation, the best of the prophets and messengers, and the most beloved of the creation to Allah. The Prophetﷺ was able to shape a unique personality that reached the level of closeness he had, and that was Ali ibn Abi Talib. When a capable mentor and a prepared mentee are present, the expected outcome is for the mentee to reach everything the mentor has reached. If you are a skilled teacher with a ready student, you will find that you impart all your knowledge to this student. This student might even surpass the teacher due to the teacher's quality education, especially if they are of a higher caliber not reached by the teacher. In our case, as there is no higher status than that of Prophet Muhammadﷺ, Imam Ali ؑ reached the spiritual status of the Prophet, even though he was not a prophet. This is indicated by the many hadiths issued by Prophet Muhammadﷺ that show the close spiritual and moral proximity of Imam Ali to him.

This caliphate, succession, and inheritance were born from this spiritual status, not from familial closeness or social bonds, as the ignorant might presume. Some who do not know what transpired or do not read history properly think that Prophet Muhammadﷺ appointed Ali as his successor because he was his cousin and had no surviving sons, as was



the Arab custom to pass authority to their children or close relatives. This is a superficial understanding that reveals a significant ignorance of the Prophet's personality and his reality.

The decisive social and political role in any society, according to Islamic theory, namely leadership, is not a worldly social status or a position that brings honor and privilege. It is a major divine responsibility, a profound trust. Therefore, when one of his companions asked the Prophetﷺ for a certain responsibility, he told him, "You are weak, and it is a trust, and it is shame and regret on the Day of Judgment."

The Prophetﷺ was able to establish the true meaning of leadership among his aware companions, who knew that the issue was not about honor or dignity, but responsibility and trust. For these companions, if Prophet Muhammadﷺ appointed someone to a position or a significant role, it indicated their capability and competence, not just their honor or distinction. Without understanding this, we cannot comprehend Imam Aliؓ, nor can we grasp the true meaning of his succession to Prophet Muhammadﷺ.



THE ARABIAN SOCIETY IN THE EARLY DAYS OF ISLAM

You now know that envisioning the social environment in all its dimensions is a fundamental condition for understanding the level of leadership and its achievements. The environment serves as the raw material on which the leader works to bring about changes and transformations. This material might be entirely compatible with his plan and will, making his work easier. On the other hand, it might be entirely resistant and lack any capacity for change, making his task difficult and challenging. It is in these circumstances that great leaders emerge.

Reflecting on history and the conditions of societies and nations, we do not find an environment like the Arabian one during the noble Islamic mission in terms of its ruggedness, opposition, and unpreparedness.

From this reality, an important and significant fact can be inferred: that Allah Almighty intended to establish the final prophethood in the most challenging human environments. This was to seal the argument against all prophets, messengers, reformers, and workers, so none of them could say that their environment was too difficult

and impossible to change. Here is the holy Messenger of Allahﷺ, who managed to transform this harsh, resistant environment into one conducive to spreading religion, preserving the Quran, and continuing the heavenly message.

To recognize the greatness of the leadership of Prophet Muhammadﷺ and Imam Aliؑ, it is essential to understand the conditions of the Arabian society before Islam. Then, we should look at the transformations that took place within it, and measure all of this in terms of available resources and the time frame. The clear result is that what these two divine men achieved reached the highest levels of leadership accomplishments, unparalleled in history and the present.

The Worst Society

Imam Aliؑ describes the conditions of the Arabian society throughout time until the revelation of the Quran as the worst a person could know:

“Indeed, Allah [Exalted] sent Muhammadﷺ as a warner to the worlds and a trustworthy guardian of the Revelation. And you, people of Arabia, were following the worst of religions and living in the worst of societies, settled among rough stones and deaf snakes. You drank muddy water and ate coarse food, shed your blood, and severed your kinship ties. The idols were erected among you, and sins were tied to you.”¹³

“And I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger. He sent him with the well-known religion, the enduring standard, the inscribed book, the shining light, the radiant illumination, and the resounding command, removing doubts, arguing with clear proofs, warning



with signs, and frightening with examples. The people were in trials, where the rope of religion was severed, the pillars of certainty were shaken, the course was divided, the affair was scattered, the exit narrowed, and the source became obscure. Guidance was neglected, and blindness was prevalent. The Merciful was disobeyed, Satan was supported, and faith was let down, causing its pillars to collapse, its signs to be unrecognizable, its paths to become obliterated, and its nets to wear out. They obeyed Satan, followed his paths, and drank from his springs. With them, his banners marched, and his standard was raised in trials that trampled them with its hoofs and stepped on them with its claws, standing on its tips. They are lost, bewildered, ignorant, and beguiled in the best of lands and the worst of neighbors, their sleep is heedlessness, and their makeup is tears, in a land where the knowledgeable is muzzled, and the ignorant is honored.”¹⁴

“He sent him when the people were astray in confusion, gathering in affliction. Desires had misled them, pride had tripped them, and the most ignorant had belittled them; lost in the shudder of the matter, and the calamity of ignorance. So, he ﷺ went to great lengths in advising, followed the way, and called to wisdom and admonition.”¹⁵

“And I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger. He sent him when the people were lost in delusion, surging in confusion. The crises of the time led them, and the locks of blindness closed upon their hearts.”¹⁶

Opposition to the Divine Mission

Imam Ali ﷺ mentions on many occasions that the

Arabs, since the beginning of the prophetic mission, had unanimously resolved to kill the Holy Prophetﷺ and erase his memory and extinguish his light. “And I testify that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger. He called to His obedience and fiercely fought his enemies in jihad for his religion, undeterred by their collective denial and attempts to extinguish his light.”¹⁷

Their entire atmosphere and conditions were in opposition to the divine mission, far from accepting its teachings and call. The people of that land were not inclined to receive a divine message, as they had never known anything like prophecy and revelation in their lives. There was no one among them who looked back at the lives of previous prophets, discussing their biographies and history.

Despair of Change and Its Rejection

The Arabs were children of an ignorant era, unfamiliar with knowledge or enlightenment, and they did not honor scholars or educators! So much so that a death in that era (the Age of Ignorance or Jahiliyyah) became a proverb for a death in disbelief and misguidance.¹⁸ “Indeed, Allah, Glorified be He, sent Muhammadﷺ, and there was no one among the Arabs who could read a book, nor claim prophecy. He led the people until he placed them in their rightful position and delivered them to their salvation. Thus, their channels were set right, and their qualities were stabilized.”¹⁹

Despite the dire state of their social, economic, and living conditions, they were not looking towards change in any sense. There was no talk among them of aspiring to the future or to any alternative social model.



Their minds were dominated by a mentality of strict conservatism towards traditions, strongly clinging to customs and heritages, even if each one was a cause for their degradation and misery.

For this reason, they created idols to cement those customs and relationships, and to impart a sense of sanctity to their miserable ignorant system, making the idols a means to maintain the status quo.

Thus, the Arabs surrounded themselves with an impregnable wall of ignorance and adherence to reality, where mere talk of any change was considered madness and an offense deserving stoning and expulsion.

If even seeking the reasons for all this misery was not contemplated, even in wishes and dreams, then how much more challenging is the endeavor to change it!

Thus, despair dominated the souls of the Arabs, both young and old, to the point where they no longer saw any glimmer of hope or path of escape and salvation.

In that era, the world for those living in that environment was a limited realm, devoid of ideas about opportunities, improvement, and development. They were confined within a harsh desert environment where one could see no horizon beyond the hot sands; this meant for them that what one achieves is the utmost one can reach, even if it is very little.

If you lived in that environment and someone told you about a better, more beautiful, and easier life than yours, you wouldn't believe it and might even think they were insane. How much more so if they told you about eternal bliss, an imperishable kingdom, and endless bounty!

Today, as a young person, you might think that if you travel or start a project, you will gain additional opportunities; perhaps you might gain some profits or

acquire wealth that would change your living and social conditions. Despite the current economic difficulties, most young people hope for a better tomorrow and aspire to improve their conditions through effort and work. But if you had lived in that time, during the Age of Ignorance when the Messenger of Allahﷺ was sent to people, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of such hopeful and change-filled ideas!

Thus, Satan subjected them to his despair, convincing them that there was nothing better than this life, despite its misery, wretchedness, and aridity. Strong tribal affiliation became their only source of survival and living. Since they were tribal communities, a person's tribe was the only place that could accept or acknowledge him. As soon as an Arab left his tribe (as you do today when you travel to another country, for example), it meant losing that only opportunity!

This bitter reality appeared in the lives of tribal members wherever they went. As soon as one of them left their tribe, they became outcasts, called a vagabond, and were subject to kidnapping and enslavement. Being expelled from the tribe was enough for one's honor, dignity, and freedom to be violated.

If you were in that era and your tribe was wandering in the desert, and you saw a lone person, you would know they were an outcast from their tribe. If no one claimed them, it was natural for your tribe to kidnap and enslave them, making them a slave at your mercy. If this person thought to reject this new situation, they would have to face death from hunger and thirst. It was either absolute allegiance to the tribe or slavery and a miserable life under another tribe! The Quran refers to this tragic situation, as in the verse: ﴿Have they not seen that We have



appointed a safe sanctuary, while the people are despoiled all around them? Would they then believe in falsehood and be ungrateful toward the blessing of Allah?». ²⁰

Thus, a person's tribe became akin to the supreme god that one must obey in everything, follow its path and method, and it became their only refuge and the thing that gave them identity before others.

As for the man-made stone and copper idols, they were only revered and venerated if they were made by the tribe itself; thus, any other idol, regardless of its status or the quality of its stone in another tribe, held no value.

Therefore, the idols of the Age of Ignorance multiplied as much as the tribes, and the sacred idol became the emblem, culture, identity, and pride of the tribe.

If there had to be a god to be worshiped, it should be what the tribe dictates, and it is not permissible to worship any other god, no matter how famous. Thus, worship and sanctity moved away from thought, logic, and instinct, becoming captive to customs, as they said: «We found our fathers following a creed, and we are indeed guided in their footsteps». ²¹

The nature of the Arabian Peninsula was a barren environment with scarce resources. More regretfully, most people living in that environment did not envision changing, improving it, or migrating from it. The only hope for Quraysh, who resided in Mecca, a valley with no crops, was in the winter and summer journeys, meaning the trade that could bring some benefits, not in nature, climate, or pleasant weather. At the same time, the strict control and monopoly exercised by the leaders of Quraysh in this trade made changing the situation impossible. Most of the profits from this trade did not benefit the deprived classes in any way that could improve their

conditions. Therefore, we find the Quran in its early revelations addressing and admonishing the polytheists of Mecca, warning them because they withheld simple assistance and did not give from their wealth what was rightfully due to the needy and deprived. The harshest criticism fell on the tyrannical leaders of Quraysh, and what angered them the most were these verses calling them to abandon their monopoly. It is said that these affluent people were willing to forsake some of their gods in exchange for not addressing their conditions and financial practices.

It was trade, and it was supposed to flourish social life; however, due to their stinginess, it became a means for influence, domination, and control over people, just like what major capitalists do today in centers of power and decision-making around the world.

Thus, the direness of the Arabian social conditions worsened with the increasing class gap between the poor and the rich.

Naturally, under such conditions, which favor a particular class, any attempt at change would be met with utmost cruelty and violence. This explains the brutality of Quraysh in their dealings with the Prophetؐ in the early days of his calling, despite the fact that he was not waging war against them and wished only good for them.

Neglecting Knowledge and Disdaining Its People

It was natural to combat any form of free thinking or calls for acquiring knowledge and understanding because it all meant striving to change the status quo. As you know, when knowledge spreads among people, they



become more desirous of change and transformation. Therefore, ignorance imposed by the social system of Jahiliyyah (Age of Ignorance) became a means to preserve interests, and knowledge and education were condemned to the extent that their bearers were labeled as insane. If there were a slightly educated person, they would fear for themselves and be cautious about revealing their knowledge to anyone.

When anyone came up with a new idea, whether in the field of medicine, language, nature, the universe, life, or marriage, something unfamiliar to his tribe, and presented it to them, they were struck with intense panic; even though the idea might not have significant impact or importance. All because they imagined some sort of change occurring!

Based on this, a young person was not supposed to think, innovate, or come up with new ideas. All forms of learning and thinking were suppressed; thus, a state of mental dullness dominated the people of that environment to a great extent. Allah Almighty referred to the Prophet's suffering with these people, saying: "There are some among them who prick up their ears at you. But when they leave your presence, they say to those who have been given knowledge, "What did he say just now?" They are the ones on whose hearts Allah has set a seal, and they follow their own desires",²² and He said: "The Bedouins are more obdurate in unfaith and hypocrisy, and more apt to be ignorant of the precepts that Allah has sent down to His Apostle, and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise."²³

Thus, that era rightly earned the title of Jahiliyyah (ignorance); where knowledge was scorned and rejected, and ignorance was praised and considered. Hence, among

the Arabs of that time, there was no book to be read, no school to teach, or a thinker to think.

No one from that era dared to engage in any scientific analysis or thinking in that vast environment inhabited by dozens of tribes and thousands of people, without being subjected to abuse and isolation. We have heard that those who knew writing among the Arabs at that time did not boast about it.

When the Prophetؐ passed away or was killed and people reverted to their old ways and despised values, the first loser was the knowledge for which the Prophet was sent, as he said: "I was sent as a mercy. O Lord, guide my people, for they do not know,"²⁴ complying with Allah's saying: ﴿It is He who sent to the unlettered [people] an apostle from among themselves, to recite to them His signs, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and wisdom, and earlier they had indeed been in manifest error.﴾²⁵

Therefore, the disdain for writing continued among the Arabs for several centuries after Islam; then, this scorn intensified in the Ottoman era, which imposed policies of ignorance and punished for education, paving the way for the return of the new Crusaders and their domination over Muslim lands through the weapon of knowledge.

The Arabs later became famous for employing scribes and avoiding this demeaning craft! Writing was not suitable for an Arab and should be delegated to clients and slaves! This is one of the reasons why most Muslim scholars in the Abbasid era were non-Arabs.

When Islam emerged, and the prophetic calling began, the prevailing state in that environment was division, tribalism, fragmentation, and disunity. Due to strong tribal loyalty and clannishness, Arab souls leaned towards



conflict and strife. A simple skirmish between two men was enough to ignite a fierce war between their tribes. Who hasn't heard of the Dahis and Ghabra war that lasted for decades over a horse race between the 'Aws and Khazraj tribes?

Thus, the Arabs lived in a state of crisis, fear, and anticipation of raids and attacks, not only from outside the naturally fortified Arabian Peninsula but also from within and among the tribal environment they inhabited. If a tribe was not engaged in raiding, it was anticipating being raided at any moment; hence, security disappeared, along with it, the opportunities for change, innovation, and development.

Under such turmoil and unrest, one cannot expect the flourishing of economic, intellectual, social, and political conditions. Wars, conflicts, and raids consumed the Arabs, weakening them, making them the most insignificant nations, not accounted for in the global system or in political equations.

The neighboring empires - whether Persian, Roman, or even Ethiopian - did not consider the Arabs significant in their struggles, treaties, or equations, as they were a divided and fragmented people, unable to provide any real military force or hold any decision-making or influential power. Later on, what shocked the leaders of these empires most was that not long after the emergence of Islam, they saw the Arabs on their doorsteps with a significant military force that stormed their fortresses and invited them to their religion.

Can you imagine the magnitude of the shock that befell the leaders of these empires when they saw these previously enslaved, divided, fragmented, and feuding people, who had managed to organize a strong, united

army, and this new power was inviting them to Islam! What greatness can be imagined for the leadership of the Prophet, who turned these warring tribes into a force that began to topple the thrones of the great empires?

Disdain for Humanity

On the level of humanity and dignity, the value of a person in that ignorant environment did not exceed the value of camels and livestock; in fact, for many, camels held higher value, perhaps due to their greater material benefits and advantages.

When materialistic tendencies dominate any society, the moral value of a person diminishes, and assessments are based on what one produces or provides in material benefit. If not productive, one becomes a burden to be discarded. Thus, among the Arabs, it was common to bury daughters alive and kill sons for fear of poverty, which Allah Almighty forbade, as He stated in His Book: “Do not kill your children for the fear of penury”²⁶ – meaning they used to bury their children alive in childhood because they were considered a burden in terms of livelihood.

While having many children in agricultural societies might be beneficial, it was not the case in nomadic societies. As you know, tribes living in deserts or following water sources are in a constant state of movement, and they find an excess of children to be a disruption. This led the disbelieving and ill-thinking individual to bury his children, especially daughters, alive.

Thus, a culture of belittling and humiliating humans prevailed among the Arabs, more so towards women and females. When a female is disdained, humanity is dishonored and despised because the female is the mother



who gives birth to men and the wife who raises males. A person whose mother is disdained finds it difficult not to grow up dishonoring himself; and a person who disdains his wife will despise his children.

Therefore, a society that degrades females, oppresses women, and treats them with contempt to the extent of burying alive their children cannot live with dignity and honor or grant supreme value to humanity. When humans are scorned, it becomes easy to kill, annihilate, or break them, akin to stepping on an insignificant insect. When bloodshed becomes widespread and normal, people find no value or lofty meaning in their lives and do not seek the philosophy of their existence and life's purpose. This was one of the biggest obstacles to the spread of religion because divine religion is based on moral values and the principle of human dignity, aiming to elevate humans to the pinnacles of glory, greatness, and perfection.

Spread of Filth and Diseases

Due to living in desert areas where water is scarce, and because of a strong desire to maintain the status quo, it's also expected that filth, dirt, and diseases would proliferate. Cleanliness and a pleasant appearance instill optimism, hope, and joy, which lead to the feeling that change is possible; something that conservatives could not tolerate. If you want a pessimistic, depressed person to change, advise them to take care of their cleanliness and appearance, from dressing elegantly to smelling nice and looking good, and you'll see a rapid positive transformation. All this was completely contrary to the mentality of the Arab, who saw frowning and sternness as expressions of manliness and dignity, whereas smiling

was seen as frivolous. Hence, Ali Ibn Abi Talib's enemies spread among people that he was a humorous man (meaning he was cheerful, friendly, and liked to joke in today's language), "Strange is the son of Nabigha (i.e. 'Amr ibn al-'AS)! He claims to the people of Sham that I am humorous, and that I am a man of jest: frivolous and playful! He has spoken falsely and uttered a sin."²⁷ They wanted to degrade him in the eyes of the Arabs, whose exterior only Islam changed, while this Imam was a person optimistic about life and happy with the great bounty of Allah. How could a believer not be happy with Allah's bounty, which is more extensive and beautiful than anything? Allah Almighty said: ﴿Say, "In Allah's grace and His mercy let them rejoice in that! It is better than what they amass">﴾.²⁸

How can there be sadness in a believer's heart with all this bounty and mercy?

Indeed, Ali was the epitome of a person who truly understood life as a great divine gift. It is natural for someone who realizes Allah's immense favor to be joyful and spread happiness in the hearts of those around him. This kind of mockery did not occur in the early days of the Islamic call but forty years after the emergence of Islam, indicating that many mental and psychological attitudes had not changed, and the mentality of the ignorant tribe still condemned the cheerful, smiling, and joyful person; how could it not when it feared him? And how could it not fear him when he threatened its customs and undermined its traditions?

Thus, the Arab environment of that time was characterized by all kinds of barriers against change. How then, if this change was comprehensive, profound, and far-reaching? And how, if this environment was naturally

opposed and resistant to change in its entirety? “And know that after the migration, you became Bedouins again, and after forming alliances, you became factions. You cling to Islam only by its name and recognize from faith only its form. You say: “Disgrace rather than fire!” As if you wish to turn Islam on its face, violating its sanctity, and breaking the covenant that Allah has set for you as a sanctuary in His land, and safety among His creation.”²⁹





WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE HOLY PROPHET ﷺ?

This was a brief overview of the environment and society to which the Holy Prophet ﷺ was sent, a society he was supposed to transform into the best community brought forth for humanity, assuming the responsibility of this religion, spreading it across the world, establishing God's rule on Earth, promoting virtue, and eradicating vice.

- How was Prophet Muhammad ﷺ able to undertake this task, a task too daunting for anyone else until the Day of Judgment?

- What did this great Prophet achieve in his time that would lay the groundwork for the ultimate goal on the promised day?

- Also, what was the role of Imam Ali عليه السلام in this great revival?

Reflecting on the Arab situation more than ten years after the start of the prophetic mission shows us a series of major civilizational achievements unparalleled in human history.



The greatest achievement of the Holy Prophet'sؐ struggle was in establishing the pillars of the religion within Arab society, guiding it towards becoming a unified nation. This meant that every seeker of truth, guidance, and light could easily find their way to it, something that was impossible in the era of ignorance.

This great guidance was embodied in the Holy Quran and in the pure Imamsؑ whom this great Prophet prepared to take responsibility for guiding and leading society when demanded.

No one living in that environment and its surroundings remained untouched by the radiance of Islamic guidance, as the Quran became the revered and respected book for all, regardless of how much they benefited from it. The ground was prepared for people to listen to Allah's word without the disruptions practiced by the tyrants of Quraysh in the early stages of the call. Listening to the Quran was no longer considered a cause for affliction and madness, as those opponents claimed. Such an opportunity is the greatest achievement in any society, given the Quran's contents and knowledge that can elevate any nation to the highest peaks of glory and greatness.

At the same time, any free and honorable person who wanted to act according to the Quran's fundamental teachings could identify and recognize the real Imam, especially after those noble values were established in plain sight throughout the great and continuous jihad of Imam Aliؑ. If you asked any Muslim or companion who followed the message's movement from its beginning

about the person who was the focus of the Holy Prophet's care and attention, none would surpass Ali Ibn Abi Talibؓ; meaning that the Muslim community no longer lacked the leadership figures who could lead them to horizons of prosperity, peace, security, development, dignity, and strength. Thus, Allah's argument was completed, He perfected His religion for people, bestowed His favor upon them, and was pleased with Islam as a religion for them until the Day of Judgment. Anyone seeking Allah's path will find His light shining before them, for it is the path of those upon whom Allah has bestowed favor, the people of the Prophet's household, purified by Allah and purged of all impurity, the source of wisdom, the beacon of prophecy, where angels converge and the custodians of revelation, the learned, forbearing, righteous, pious scholars whose virtues are known to all.

We now await the society that will embrace the Book of Allah under the leadership of the purified, infallible Imamؓ. What history of Islam reveals to us is that this society has been forming since the very first moments of the Holy Prophet'sﷺ message, but such evolution required a long period and continues to this day. In other words, there has never been a time on earth when the mission of the final prophecy and the Muhammadan message wasn't spreading, expanding, and deepening, even though it transitioned from one society to another, from one people to another, as Allah Almighty promised: ﴿O you who have faith! Should any of you desert his religion, Allah will soon bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, [who will be] humble towards the faithful, stern towards the faithless, waging jihad in the way of Allah, not fearing the blame of any blamer.﴾³⁰

If you can grasp this evolutionary scene in the world, you will have understood history accurately, for it is its most truthful aspect.



This understanding requires several conditions:

- Most importantly, avoid prejudice;
- Know that Allah's promise is true and that He will make Muhammadؐ and his light prevail over all religions;
- Understand that the Prophetؐ was not reactionary to circumstances but had a deep, far-reaching plan that considered all conditions and challenges. In other words, the Prophet had a primary plan (Plan A) if the Arabs responded well, supported and obeyed him, and followed his testament. If that didn't happen, he had a secondary plan (Plan B), which could take hundreds of years.

Since the foundation of the Quran has been established in society and it can no longer be eradicated, as happened with other heavenly books, the phase of integral history began irreversibly. The major role of the leaders of the divine project is now to establish this Book and apply it in all aspects of human life, especially in political life.

The pure Imamsؑ faced intense resistance on this path, but this did not deter them, regardless of the sacrifices. Their struggle continues to this day in various forms and ways but on a singular path.

The Role of Imam Aliؑ in the Struggle with the Prophetﷺ

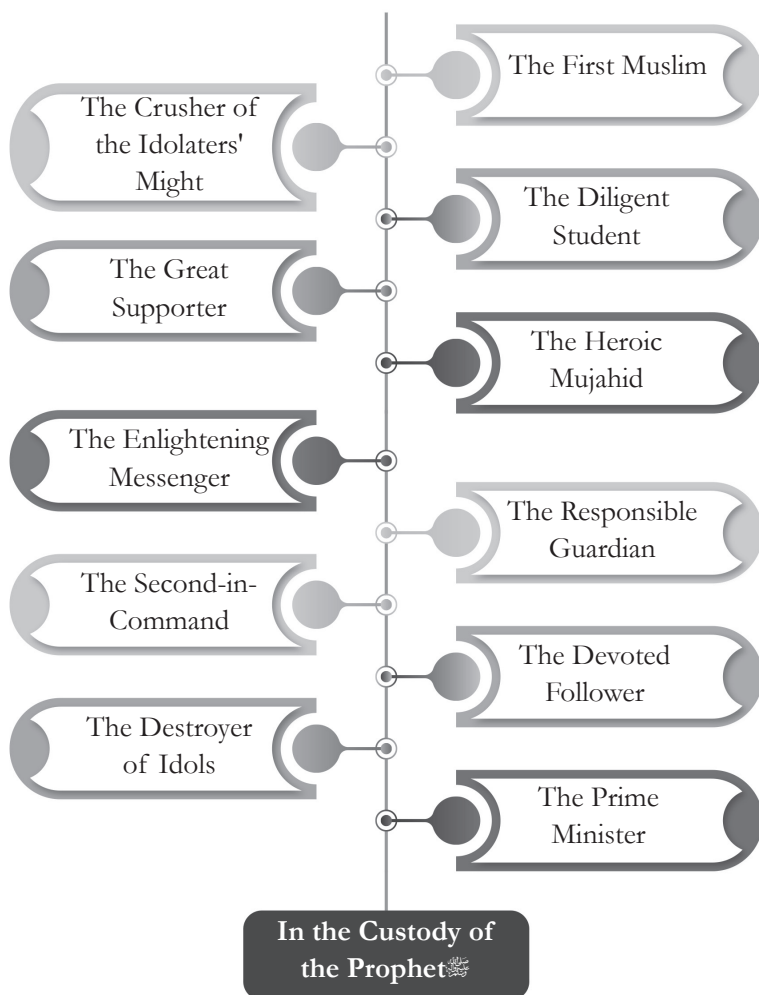
Imam Ali's role during the initial phase, i.e., the period of struggle alongside Prophet Muhammadﷺ, revolved around supporting the Holy Prophetﷺ and following him in the process of defeating the idolaters. This was a role that Imam Aliؑ performed perfectly. He said in this regard: "I was placed among the coils of the Arabs in my youth, and I broke the incisors of the tribes of Rabi'ah and Mudar; and you know well my close kinship and special status with the Messenger of Allahﷺ."³¹

The Prophet led this great Jihadist movement with all his might and strength, enduring all kinds of injustice and harm, to the extent that he said: "No prophet was harmed as much as I was."³² However, he deliberately made the real heroes stand out in every battlefield; he himself did not take the lead in combat and fighting, although he was in the heart of the battle and at the forefront of the army. This was evident in the Battle of Badr, where Ali and Hamza came forward, and in the battles of Uhud, Al-Ahzab, and others.

The Holy Prophetﷺ aimed to acquaint Muslims and future generations with the man who supported Islam and honored it through his efforts, so they would not deviate from him when the situation stabilized, and the building phase began.

Imam Aliؑ supported the Messenger of Allah not only with his sword but also with his tongue. He was the best envoy for preaching, guidance, and calling to Islam. Many Arabs and others embraced Islam through his efforts, as happened in Yemen, where the faith of its

people was solidified thanks to the days Imam Ali spent among them as a governor and judge.

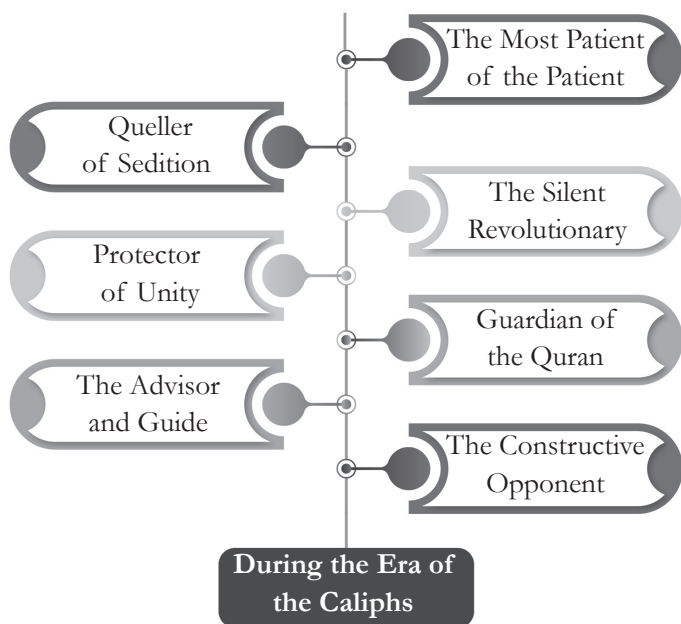


Role of Imam Ali ؑ After the Passing of the Prophetﷺ

In the second phase, after the passing away of Prophet Muhammadﷺ, the major role of Imam Ali ؑ became to consolidate the achievements of the message and prevent their dissolution. The Prophetﷺ had established an Islamic state, as previously mentioned, and had entrenched the pillars of guidance within the Arab society so that its light could spread to all horizons. Without this central state, such an accomplishment would not have been realized. Thus, in the subsequent phase, we will see Imam Ali ؑ as a fundamental agent in preserving the nascent state and its key cultural and social components.

It is related that during the days of 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, the question of the excess of the ornaments of the Ka'bah he saidؓ:

Indeed, when the Quran was revealed to the Prophetﷺ, there were four types of wealth: the wealth of Muslims, which he distributed among the heirs in accordance with the prescribed shares; the gains of war, which he distributed to those entitled to it; the one-fifth tax (khums), which Allah has placed where He placed it; and the charities, which Allah has set where He set them. The ornaments of the Kaaba were there at that time, so Allah left them as they were, not out of forgetfulness, nor was their location unknown to Him. Therefore, they were kept where Allah and His Messenger had established them.



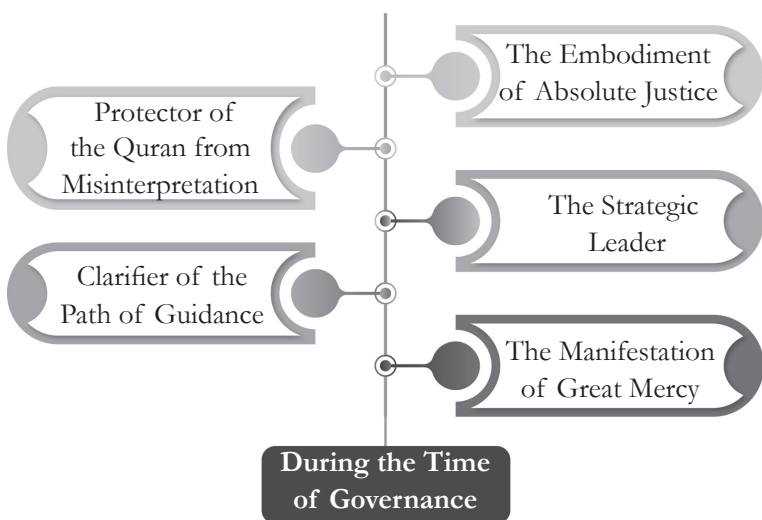
Demonstrating the Islamic Model of Divine and Just Governance

The third phase of Imam Ali'sؑ struggle and role was manifested in the effort to present the Islamic model of divine and just governance. This phase also involved confronting the currents of distortion and misinterpretation of the Quran, which, unfortunately, came from individuals who were expected to be among the righteous companions.

Prophet Muhammadﷺ prepared Imam Aliؑ for this sensitive phase and indicated that he would face these internal currents. The Prophet said, "Among you is one

who will fight for the interpretation (of the Quran) after me, just as I fought for its revelation.” When asked who it would be, the Prophet ﷺ replied, referring to Imam Aliؑ, “He is the mender of the shoe.”³³

Understanding this type of struggle and jihad undertaken by Imam Aliؑ in the second phase, what he achieved, and the challenges he faced is crucial. This period has left its mark to this day and remains a bright point of reference for all those aspiring to establish the Quran in social life.



The Imam Establishes a Complaint Box

Muhammad ibn Sirin narrates: “Ali created a house where people could deposit their complaints and stories. Even when some of them wrote insults about him and threw them into it, he left them there.”³⁴ This narration highlights the deep concern of the Commander of the Faithful for the grievances and issues of the people. Despite some papers sent to him containing insults directed at him, he was neither embarrassed nor disturbed. Instead, he maintained this box or house to remain attentive to the needs and affairs of the people.

Justice First

The Commander of the Faithfulؓ was faced with a choice between establishing his rule as any ruler who remains in power for a few years, or to present an ideal model of just governance. Imam Aliؓ chose the second option without any hesitation, for he knew that the realization of the goals of Islam could not be achieved without presenting this high-value model, even if it took hundreds of years.

Abu Mikhnaf al-Azdi narrates: A group of Shi'a approached Imam Aliؓ and said, “O Commander of the Faithful, if you

distribute these funds among these leaders and nobles, prioritizing them over us, then when things are stable, you can return to the fairest method Allah has accustomed you to, of equal distribution and justice among the subjects.” Imam Aliؑ replied, “Woe to you! Do you command me to seek victory through oppression and injustice over those I have been appointed to govern among the people of Islam? No, by Allah, this shall not be as long as the evening gives way to the night and as long as stars are seen in the sky. By Allah, even if these were my personal riches, I would have distributed them equally among them; how much more so when they are their own wealth!”³⁵

In a sermon when he was reproached for equality in distributing the spoils, he said, “As for these spoils, no one has any preference over another. Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, has already decreed their division. It is the wealth of Allah, and you are the servants of Allah, the Muslims. This is the Book of Allah; we have agreed upon it, we have testified to it, and we have submitted to it, and the covenant of our Prophet is among us. So, submit, may Allah have mercy on you. Whoever is not pleased with this can turn away as they wish.”³⁶

In his letter to Musqala ibn Hubayra al-Shaybani, his governor in Ardeshir Khurra,

he wrote, “Know that the right of those under your and our authority, regarding the division of these spoils, is equal. They come to me for it and leave from it.”³⁷

“One of the most contemptible situations for leaders among upright people is to be suspected of loving ostentation and to be considered arrogant. I have disliked the thought among you that I love flattery and enjoy praise. By the grace of Allah, I am not like that. If I had desired such acclaim, I would have left it as a fall from the sublimity of Allah, who is most deserving of greatness and pride. Sometimes, people find praise sweet after hardship, so do not praise me excessively, for it diverts me from Allah and from you, when there are still obligations I haven't fulfilled and duties that must be performed. Do not address me as the tyrants are addressed, do not be cautious with me as with the people of haste, and do not interact with me with flattery. Do not think of me as disdainful when told the truth, nor as seeking to magnify myself inappropriately. Indeed, he who finds it burdensome to be told the truth or to be presented with justice will find it even harder to act upon them. So, do not refrain from speaking the truth to me or from advising justice. I am not above making mistakes, and I am not safe from erring in my actions, except that Allah may protect me from my own self, which He has more control

over than I do. We are but servants owned by a Lord other than whom there is no lord, who owns what we do not control in ourselves and brought us out from our previous states to our current state of guidance, replacing our misguidance with guidance and giving us insight after blindness.”³⁸

By What Right Does the State Retain Wealth?

If the wealth of the state belongs to the Muslims, then by what right does it keep it in its treasuries while there are those in need and poor, who may go to sleep hungry with their families that night? From Imam Aliؑ, we learn that the Islamic state should consider all its resources for the welfare and interest of its citizens first and foremost. This ensures the development and progress of the country. A nation that sees its state acting in this manner will not abandon it or shirk its responsibilities in developing its land and country. Thus, projects are initiated based on the general public participation, rather than relying on a central administration that may overlook many aspects.

From Hilal Ibn Muslim al-Jahdari, he said: “I heard my grandfather Jarrah - or Jowah

- say: I witnessed Ali ibn Abi Talib ؑ being presented with wealth in the evening. He said, 'Divide this wealth.' They said, "It is evening now, O Commander of the Faithful, so delay it until tomorrow." He said to them, "Do you guarantee that I will live until tomorrow?" They said, "That is not in our hands!" He said, "Then do not delay it until you have divided it." They brought candles, and they divided that wealth throughout the night."³⁹

Al-Dahhak Ibn Muzahim narrates about Aliؑ saying: "My friend, the Messenger of Allahﷺ, did not keep anything for the next day, and Abu Bakr used to do that, while Umar Ibn al-Khattab had a different opinion about it. Umar wrote the registers and delayed the money from year to year, but as for me, I do as my friend, the Messenger of Allahﷺ, did."⁴⁰

It is narrated from al-Sha'bi, he said: "I entered Al-Rahba as a young boy among a group of boys, and I saw the Commander of the Faithful, Ali Ibn Abi Talibؑ standing on two piles of gold and silver, with a whip in his hand. He kept driving people away with his whip and then returned to the money and divided it among the people until nothing was left, and he carried nothing of it to his house. I returned to my father and said, 'Today I saw either the best of people or the most foolish!'

He asked, 'Who is it, my son?' I said, 'I saw the Commander of the Faithful, Ali,' and I told him what I had seen him do. He wept and said, 'My son, indeed you saw the best of people.'⁴¹

Behold The Islamic Ruler

One of the Muslims narrates that he witnessed Imam Ali عليه السلام during his governance. A date seller and a crying servant girl came to him. The Imam asked the girl, "What is the matter with you?" She replied, "This man sold me dates for a dirham, but my masters rejected them, and he refuses to take them back." Imam Ali عليه السلام then said to the seller, "Take your dates and give her her dirham back, for she is a servant and has no authority." The seller pushed the Imam with his hand. The people said to the seller, "Do you know who this is?" He replied, "No." They said, "This is Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Commander of the Faithful." The seller poured out the dates, gave her the dirham, and said, "I wish for you to be pleased with me, O Commander of the Faithful." Ali replied, "I am not pleased with you until you fulfill their rights."⁴²

Can you imagine a ruler personally overseeing the markets of the Muslims and attending to their issues and complaints? Even more astonishing, can you imagine a president

of a great state, stretching from the farthest reaches of Iran in the east to the borders of Morocco in the west, encompassing vast areas and hundreds of thousands of people, being pushed by a rude seller and yet not reacting for his own sake?

Imam Aliؑ says, "I discipline my soul with piety so that it may find safety on the day of the greatest fear and remain steadfast on the slippery slopes. If I wished, I could find the way to the purest honey, the core of this wheat, and the finest silk. But far be it from me to let my desires overpower me and my greed lead me to choose the finest foods, while perhaps in Hijaz or Yamama there is someone who has no hope for even a morsel of bread, nor is familiar with satiety. Or should I sleep satiated while around me are stomachs suffering from hunger and livers burning with thirst? Or should I be as the one who said: "It's a disease for you to sleep satiated while around you are livers yearning for sustenance." Can I be content with being called 'Commander of the Faithful' and not share in the hardships of time with them, or be an example to them in the ruggedness of life? I was not created to be preoccupied with eating delicacies like a tied beast whose only concern is its feed, or a free animal whose only activity is grooming itself, oblivious to what is intended for it. Nor was I meant to be left aimlessly, or to be neglected carelessly, or to be drawn into the

rope of misguidance, or to wander aimlessly in the path of confusion!”⁴³

In a sermon, he mentioned his interaction with Aqeel when he asked for money from the public treasury:

“By Allah, I would rather spend the night on the prickly Sa’dan (a type of rough grass) as a bed and be dragged in chains than to meet Allah and His Messenger on the Day of Judgment as an oppressor to some of the servants and usurper of any part of the spoils. And how can I oppress anyone for a self that hastens towards decay, its final abode being in the soil? By Allah, I saw Aqil impoverished to the extent that he asked me for a Saa’ (a standard used for measure) of your barley. I saw his children disheveled and dirt-stained from poverty, as if their faces were blackened with darkness. He implored me insistently and repeated his request. I listened to him, thinking he expected me to sell my faith and follow his lead, abandoning my path. So, I heated a metal piece and brought it close to his body for him to take heed from it. He screamed in pain as if he was being burnt by its touch; I said to him: ‘May you be bereft of kin, O Aqil! Do you feel pain from a heated piece of metal prepared by a man for amusement, and yet you push me towards a fire ignited by an Almighty for His wrath? Do you wince from harm, yet I do not flinch from the blaze?’”⁴⁴

The Ruler of the Islamic Nation

It is narrated that Imam Aliؑ passed by a poor woman one night. She had young children who were crying from hunger, and she was trying to distract them until they fell asleep. She had lit a fire under a pot containing only water, pretending that it had food she was cooking for them. The Commander of the Faithfulؑ understood her situation and went with Qambar to his house. He brought out a sack of dates, a bag of flour, some fat, rice, and bread, carrying it on his noble shoulder. Qambar offered to carry it, but he refused. When they reached the woman's door, he asked for permission to enter, which she granted. He threw some rice into the pot along with some fat. After cooking it, he served the children, and when they were full, he started to crawl around the house and playfully scare them, making them laugh. When heؑ left, Qambar said, "My master, tonight I saw something astonishing. I understand the reason for some of it, like you carrying the provisions seeking reward. But why did you crawl on your hands and feet around the house and playfully scare them? I don't understand the reason for that." Imam Aliؑ replied, "O Qambar, I entered upon these children while they were crying intensely from hunger, so I wanted to leave them laughing in addition to being full. I found no other way to

do so except what I did.”⁴⁵

Narrated by Ali ibn Abi Rafi': I was the treasurer and scribe for the treasury of Ali ibn Abi Talibؑ. In his treasury was a pearl necklace that he had acquired on the day of the Battle of Basra. Ali's daughter sent me a message saying she had heard about the pearl necklace in the treasury of the Commander of the Faithfulؑ and that she would like to borrow it to adorn herself for the Eid al-Adha. She assured me it would be a temporary loan, to be returned after three days. I lent it to her under those conditions.

When the Commander of the Faithfulؑ saw the necklace on her, he recognized it and asked her where it came from. She explained that she had borrowed it from Ali ibn Abi Rafi', the treasurer of the Muslim's treasury, to wear for Eid and would return it afterwards. The Imam then summoned me and questioned if I had betrayed the Muslims. I denied it, explaining that since she was his daughter and wanted to borrow it, I lent it to her with the condition of its safe return and that I would personally guarantee it.

The Imamؑ instructed me to return it immediately and warned me not to repeat such actions. He then said, "It would have been better for my daughter if she had taken the necklace without it being a temporary loan, as she would then have been the first Hashimi

woman to have her hand cut off for theft.” His daughter, hearing this, argued that she was his daughter and had more right to wear it than others. The Imam replied, “Do not deviate from the truth. Do all the women of the Muhajirin adorn themselves with such on this Eid?” I then took the necklace from her and returned it to its place.⁴⁶

Sa’eed ibn Al-Qays Al-Hamadani once saw Imam Aliؑ on a hot day in a garden courtyard and asked, “O Commander of the Faithful, at this hour?” The Imam replied, “I came out to aid an oppressed person or help someone in distress.” While he was there, a woman, distraught and lost, approached him and said, “O Commander of the Faithful, my husband has wronged me, threatened to beat me. Please come with me to him.” The Imam bowed his head, then raised it, saying, “By Allah, I will not leave until the oppressed gets their right.” He asked where she lived, and upon reaching her house, she indicated it.

A young man with a colored waist-wrap came out when the Imam called. The Imamؑ warned him to fear Allah, as he had frightened his wife. The young man retorted, “What do you have to do with this? By Allah, I will burn her because of your words.” The Imamؑ, who always carried a whip and a hanging sword, would use the whip for those who deserved it and the sword for others. The young man didn’t

realize until the Imam had drawn his sword, saying, "I order you to do good and forbid you from evil, yet you reject the good! Repent or I will kill you." People gathered around, and the young man, overwhelmed, pleaded for mercy. The Imam then instructed the woman to go home and left, reciting, "There is no good in much of their secret talks, excepting him who enjoins charity or what is right or reconciliation between people". Praise be to Allah who used me to reconcile a woman and her husband," and he quoted the Quran, "There is no good in much of their secret talks, excepting him who enjoins charity or what is right or reconciliation between people, and whoever does that, seeking Allah's pleasure, soon We shall give him a great reward."⁴⁷

Asiyyd ibn Safwan, a companion of Prophet Muhammadﷺ, said: "On the day when the Commander of the Faithful passed away, the place was filled with crying, and the people were stunned, just like the day when the Prophetﷺ passed away. A man came, crying and hurrying, lamenting, 'Today, the succession of prophethood has ceased.' He stopped at the door of the house where the Commander of the Faithful was and said: 'May Allah have mercy on you, O Abu al-Hasan. You were the first among the people in embracing Islam and the most sincere in faith... The weak and the

oppressed were strong and dignified in your presence until you claimed their rights for them. The strong and the powerful were weak and humbled in your presence until you took the rightful dues from them. To you, the near and the far were equal in this regard.”⁴⁸

Imam Aliؑ in his instructions to Malik al-Ashtar said, “Let your heart feel mercy for the people, love for them, and kindness towards them. Do not be a ferocious beast towards them, snatching away their sustenance. For they are of two kinds: either your brother in religion or your equal in creation. Errors are committed by them, illnesses afflict them, and they may intentionally or mistakenly transgress. Grant them your forgiveness and pardon, as you would wish Allah to grant you His forgiveness and pardon. For you are above them, and the one who has authority over you is above you, and Allah is above the one who appointed you. He has given you the authority over them and tested you through them. Do not be an adversary to Allah's will, for He is capable of exacting retribution from you and does not depend on you for His forgiveness and mercy.

Know that nothing is more conducive to a ruler's favorable impression of his subjects than his kindness to them, reducing their burdens, and refraining from forcing them into what they cannot endure. Let your actions towards

them create a favorable impression, for good opinion eliminates much of the burden. The one most deserving of your good opinion is the one who shows the good consequences of your actions, and the one most deserving of your bad opinion is the one who shows the adverse consequences of your actions.”⁴⁹

“When the subjects fulfill their obligations to the ruler, and the ruler fulfills his obligations to them, truth will prevail among them. The paths of religion will stand firm, the landmarks of justice will be aligned, and traditions will flow smoothly. This will lead to the rectification of the times, the continuity of the state will be hoped for, and the ambitions of the enemies will be dashed.”⁵⁰

How Commander of the Faithful Deals with His Enemies

Narrated by Abdullah ibn Sharik: Hujr ibn ‘Adi and ‘Amr ibn Al-Hamiq openly expressed their disapproval and curses towards the people of Sham. Imam Aliؑ then sent them a message to refrain from such behavior. They approached him asking, “O Commander of the Faithful, aren't we on the side of truth?” He affirmed, “Yes.” They asked, “Aren't they on the side of falsehood?” Again, he affirmed. They questioned why he stopped them from cursing

the others. The Imam replied, "I disliked for you to become people known for cursing and insulting. Rather, if you described the flaws in their actions, saying such and such about their conduct and deeds, it would have been more accurate in speech and justifiable. Instead of cursing and disassociating from them, you should pray, 'O Allah, protect our blood and theirs, reconcile our relations with them, and guide them from their misguidance so that those among them who are ignorant of the truth may recognize it, and those who are indulged in transgression and hostility may retreat.' This approach would be more pleasing to me and better for you." They responded, "O Commander of the Faithful, we accept your advice and will adopt your discipline."⁵¹

The Judgment of Imam Aliؓ

"The Messenger of Allahؐ sent me to Yemen. I said: 'O Messenger of Allah, you are sending me while I am young to judge among them, and I do not know how to judge?' He then struck me on my chest with his hand and said: 'O Allah, guide his heart and steady his tongue.' By the One in whose hand my soul is, I have never doubted in making a judgment between two parties."⁵²

"By Allah, if the cushion of authority were

placed before me, I would judge among the people of the Torah according to their Torah, and among the people of the Gospel according to their Gospel, and among the people of the Psalms according to their Psalms, and among the people of the Quran according to their Quran.”⁵³

Narrated by Asim ibn Hamza Al-Saluli: I heard a boy in Medina saying, “O wisest of judges, judge between me and my mother.” Umar ibn Al-Khattab asked him, “O boy, why do you curse your mother?” The boy replied, “O Commander of the Faithful, she carried me in her womb for nine months and breastfed me for two years. When I grew up, understanding right from wrong, and distinguishing my right from my left, she disowned me, claiming not to recognize me.” Umar asked, “Where is your mother?” The boy replied that she was in the shade of so and so’s house. Umar said, “Bring the boy’s mother to me.” When she arrived with four of her brothers and forty witnesses, they testified that she did not recognize the boy and that he was falsely accusing her to disgrace her among her tribe. They claimed she was an unmarried woman from Quraysh, still a virgin.

Umar asked the boy, “What do you say?” The boy reiterated his claim that she was indeed his mother. Umar then asked the woman about the boy’s claims. She swore by Allah, who is

veiled in light, unseen by eyes, and by the truth of Muhammad and his progeny, that she did not know the boy and was not aware of who he was. She reiterated that she was an unmarried Qurayshi woman, still a virgin.

Umar asked if she had witnesses, and the forty witnesses repeated their earlier testimony. Umar then ordered the boy to be taken to prison until the truth of the witnesses could be ascertained. If their testimony proved true, the boy would be punished for making false accusations.

As the boy was being taken to prison, he encountered the Commander of the Faithful, Aliؑ on the way. The boy called out, "O cousin of the Prophetﷺ, I am an oppressed boy!" He recounted his story, and Aliؑ instructed them to return the boy to Umar. When they did, Umar, surprised, asked why they returned the boy despite his order to imprison him. They explained that Aliؑ had instructed them to do so, and Umar had always said not to disobey Ali's commands.

Imam Aliؑ then arrived and asked for the boy's mother. He asked the boy to repeat his story and then asked Umar's permission to judge between them. Umar, acknowledging Ali's wisdom as the most knowledgeable, allowed him to proceed. Aliؑ asked if the woman had a guardian, and her brothers confirmed they were. He then declared before

Allah and the present Muslims that he married the boy to the woman for 400 dirhams from his own wealth. He ordered Qambar to bring the money, which he handed to the boy to give to his wife, instructing them to return only after consummating their marriage.

When the boy placed the dirhams in the woman's lap and started to leave with her, she cried out, "Fire! Fire! O cousin of Muhammad, you're marrying me to my son!" She confessed that her brothers had married her to a man, and this boy was their son. She had been instructed to disown him. Holding her son's hand, she left. Umar exclaimed, "Woe to Umar! Had it not been for Ali, Umar would have perished."⁵⁴

Narrated by Imam Sadiqؑ: "A man came to Aliؑ from the mountains as a pilgrim, accompanied by his servant. The servant sinned, and his master struck him. The servant retorted, "You are not my master; I am yours." They continued threatening each other, with the master insisting on taking the matter to the Commander of the Faithfulؑ in Kufa. Upon arrival in Kufa, they presented themselves to the Commander of the Faithfulؑ. The master complained that his servant had sinned, and when he disciplined him, the servant rebelled. The servant argued that he was not a slave, but a student sent by his father to learn, accusing the master of attacking him and trying to seize

his wealth.

Both men swore and contradicted each other. Aliؑ told them to reconcile that night and return only with the truth. The next morning, Aliؑ instructed Qambar to make two holes in the wall. As the men returned and the crowd gathered, wondering how Aliؑ would resolve this unique case, Aliؑ asked them again. Each man swore the other was his slave.

Imam Aliؑ then told them to insert their heads into the holes in the wall. He called for the Prophet's ﷺ sword and ordered Qambar to behead the slave among them. The servant quickly withdrew his head, while the other man remained in the hole. Aliؑ questioned the servant, who admitted to falsely claiming he was not a slave but accused his master of mistreatment. Aliؑ secured an oath from the master and handed the servant over to him.”⁵⁵

It is narrated from Imam Sadiqؑ, he said: “The Euphrates River swelled during the time of Aliؑ. The people came to him and said: “O Commander of the Faithful, we fear drowning because the water in the Euphrates has risen to an unprecedented level, and its banks are full. Please take care.” The Commander of the Faithfulؑ rode with the people around him, right and left. As he passed by the mosque of Thaqif, some of their young men nudged him. He turned to them angrily and said: “Young



and foolish, contemptible by lineage, remnants of Thamud, who will buy these slaves from me?' The elders of Thaqif stood up and said to him: "O Commander of the Faithful, these are young men who do not understand what they are doing. Please do not hold us accountable for them. By Allah, we disapprove of this and none of us accepts such talk against you. Please forgive us, may Allah forgive you." It seemed as if heﷺ felt shy and said: "I will not forgive you unless you demolish your council hall and every niche, spout, and sewer onto the road of the Muslims, as this is a nuisance to Muslims." They said: "We will do that." So he continued on his way and left them. They broke down their council hall and everything he ordered until he reached the Euphrates, which was surging with its waves. He stood there, and the people watched as he spoke in Hebrew and then struck the river with a stick he had, admonishing it. The Euphrates then lowered by an arm's length."⁵⁶



IMAM ALIؓ GUARDS AND PRESERVES THE NATION OF THE PROPHETﷺ

Imam Aliؓ faithfully embraced the responsibility entrusted to him by Prophet Muhammadﷺ, aware that this significant duty required immense patience and endurance. The opposition he faced from the community after the Prophet's passing away was due to his embodiment of Islam's revolutionary and reformatory values.

Despite many of the Prophet's companions knowing his plans regarding the leadership of the Muslim community, having heard him express this on numerous occasions, some chose not to implement the Prophet's directives and recommendations. These companions believed it was in the Muslims' best interest not to immediately appoint Ali ibn Abi Talib as the Caliph after the Prophet, arguing that the Arabs would not accept a young man who had slain their chiefs, leading to potential disunity and fragmentation.

There were those who incited against Imam Ali due to past grievances from the battles of Badr and Uhud. Despite the fact that the Prophet'sﷺ act of forgiveness when he entered Mecca as a conqueror had nullified these

grudges, making the Prophet'sﷺ hand the upper one, especially when he said to them, "Go, you are free." In other words, the Prophet'sﷺ stance during the conquest of Mecca put those who could have sought revenge in a position of embarrassment, as they received a general pardon for their major crimes against the Prophet and his companions, like Abu Sufyan and his wife Hind, known for her heinous acts.

Those who instigated against Imam Aliؑ after the Prophet'sﷺ death aimed to stir up pre-Islamic tribal animosities, despite the fact that it would have been an honor for the Arabs to have their beloved ones slain by a brave hero like Aliؑ. The incitement against Ali was intended to assert that there was no benefit in having him assume leadership.

It is narrated from Al-Zuhri, from Salih ibn Kaysan who said: "Uthman ibn Affan passed by Sa'id ibn al-As and said: "Let's go to the Commander of the Faithful, Umar ibn al-Khattab, and have a conversation with him."

So they went; Uthman took his preferred place, and I moved to the side of the people. Umar looked at me and said: "Why do I see you as if you have something against me? Do you think I killed your father? By Allah, I wish I had been his killer, and if I had killed him, I wouldn't apologize for killing a disbeliever. But when I passed by him on the day of Badr, I saw him searching for battle like a bull with its horn, and his jaws foaming like a lizard. When I saw that, I feared him and turned away from him." He said: "Where to, O son of al-Khattab?" And Ali engaged with him and fought him, and by Allah, I had not moved from my spot until he killed him. Aliؑ was present in the assembly and said: "O Allah, forgiveness! The shirk (polytheism) is gone with what it

contained, and Islam has erased what preceded, so why do you incite people against me!" Umar then refrained, and Sa'id said: 'Indeed, it wouldn't have pleased me if the killer of my father were anyone other than his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib.'"⁵⁷

Imam Aliؑ said, "Every resentment Quraysh harbored against Prophet Muhammadﷺ was unleashed upon me and will continue to be inflicted upon my descendants after me. What do I have to do with Quraysh! I have only opposed them by the command of Allah and His Messenger. Is this the reward for those who obey Allah and His Messenger, if they claim to be Muslims?"⁵⁸ He also prayed, "O Allah, I seek Your aid against Quraysh, for they harbored various forms of evil and treachery against Your Messenger, which they couldn't execute. When prevented from harming him, they directed their malice towards me."⁵⁹

On the other hand, the desire for worldly gains and wealth heavily influenced the minds of many Muslims who lacked deep faith in the unseen and the value of spirituality. This attitude is reflected in the sorrowful verses of Surah Al-Jumu'ah, where Allah says, ﴿When they sight a deal or a diversion, they scatter off towards it and leave you standing! Say, 'What is with Allah is better than diversion and dealing, and Allah is the best of providers'﴾.⁶⁰ Naturally, when such individuals saw an opportunity to attain spoils and gains, they pursued it, disregarding the Prophet's advice and guidance. Thus, Imam Ali summarized the reasons for the post-Prophetic events and the neglect of his testament by reciting this verse, ﴿This is the abode of the Hereafter, which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will

be in favour of the Godway». ⁶¹ He commented, “It’s as if they haven’t heard Allah say: ‘This is the abode of the Hereafter, which We shall grant to those who do not desire to domineer in the earth nor to cause corruption, and the outcome will be in favour of the Godway.’ Indeed, they have heard and understood it, but the allure of this world has blinded them, and its glitter has appealed to them.” ⁶²

He wasn’t referring to the disbelievers or idolaters who openly opposed the Prophet and his message, but rather to those among the Muslims and companions who coveted power and prestige, exploiting the Islamic community’s challenges and struggles to pursue worldly goals and ascendancy.

In his reflection on the situation after the Prophet’s death, Imam Aliؑ said, “When Allah took back His Messengerﷺ, some people reverted to old ways, lost on divergent paths. They relied on illegitimate bonds, severed proper kinship, abandoned the relation commanded to be respected, and shifted the foundation from its rightful place. They became sources of sin and gateways to confusion, wandering in perplexity, lost in intoxication, following the pattern of Pharaoh’s people: either clinging to this world, departing from religion, or opposing it entirely.”

Since Imam Aliؑ demonstrated throughout his companionship with the Prophet and his absolute obedience to him all the characteristics of pure spirituality, justice, and devotion to truth, those who coveted worldly gains knew that if this Imam were to lead the Islamic community, he would rule with justice, thwarting their materialistic ambitions and desires.

- There were those who, under the guise of concern

for the community, believed it was in the community's best interest not to have the Imam assume leadership, even though the Prophetﷺ had appointed Ali as his successor and leader.

- Others harbored grudges and a desire for revenge against Ali, unwilling to accept him as a ruler, seeking opportunities to vent their hatred.

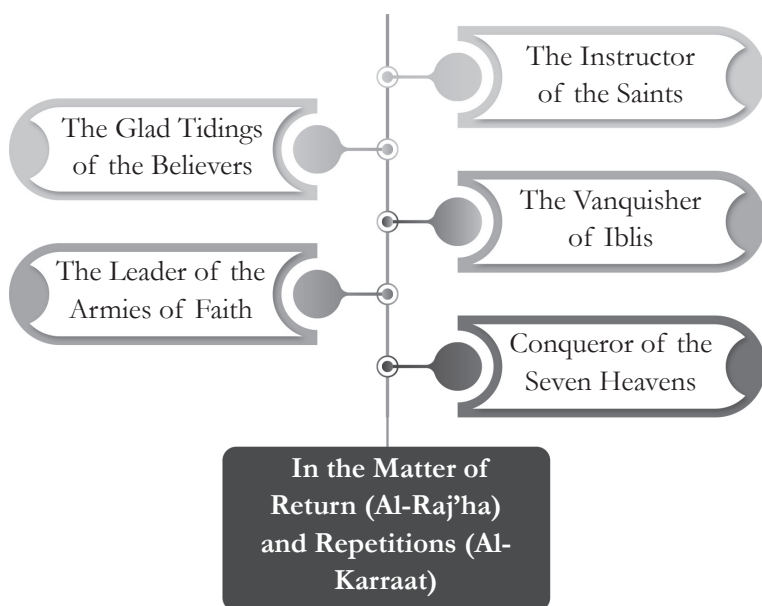
- Still, others were motivated by seizing opportunities for material gains and privileges, knowing that Imam Aliؓ, once in power, would not allow them to achieve their objectives.

Thus, these groups united to sideline the Imam from the significant role he was supposed to play, a role rightfully his due to his competence, eligibility, knowledge, and ability. Some ignored the numerous occasions when the Prophetﷺ recommended Ali, highlighting his virtues and qualities.

Imam Aliؓ lamented, "This position was usurped from us, despite our closest lineage to the Prophet and strongest support for him. It was out of greed that some people clung to it, while others turned away from it. The final judgment belongs to Allah, and to Him is the return on the Day of Resurrection... They tried to extinguish Allah's light from His lantern, to block its spring from its source. They created a divide between us and them in sustenance and habitation. If tribulations lift from us and them, I will uphold the truth in its entirety; otherwise, 'So do not fret yourself to death regretting for them. Indeed, Allah knows best what they do.'"⁶³

"They recognized justice, saw it, heard it, understood it, and knew that people were equal in justice with us. Yet, they fled to favoritism, so woe and ruin to them!"⁶⁴

Thus, the Muslims and Arabs distanced themselves from Ali ibn Abi Talib, isolating him despite his capability to lead them to the pinnacles of glory and leadership, making them masters and leaders of the world. “Know that if you follow the caller among you, he will guide you on the path of the Messenger, spare you the burden of error, and relieve you of the heavy weight upon your necks.”⁶⁵



The Contradiction of Wills

The primary reason for the people's distance from Imam Aliؓ was the fundamental difference in visions and the principal contradiction between the motivations and goals of the people. The majority who revolted against Uthman, especially some of the movement's leaders like Talha and Zubair, were not driven by a desire to return society to the Prophet's ways and his Sunnah or to resume the original Islamic values. Instead, their motivation was frustration with the tribal and partisan favoritism practiced by the Umayyads, led by Uthman. Their goal in killing Uthman and pledging allegiance to Imam Aliؓ did not extend beyond resolving this issue, as they waited for the Imam to address this problem.

As for Imam Aliؓ, he had a different purpose and motivation for accepting leadership. His response aimed to bring society back to the Prophet'sﷺ ways and Sunnah, initiate a revival of Islamic values, and launch a deep and comprehensive reform movement in society and the state, affecting administrative, cultural, economic, social, and judicial aspects.

In summary, the aspirations of the public were personal, while what the Imam wanted was divine. While the people were concerned with their personal benefits, the Imam sought to resume and implement Islamic values. This

is reflected in his sayingؑ: “My purpose and yours are not the same; I want you for Allah, and you want me for yourselves.”

In such an atmosphere, when people realized that the Imam's goals did not align with theirs, they began to withdraw their support. Over time, as the Imam's motives in his actions became clearer, public support dwindled, and the gap between them and the Imam widened.

It is narrated from Imam Baqirؑ, he said: “Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talibؑ, delivered a sermon in Kufa after returning from the Battle of Nahrawan. He heard that Muawiyah was cursing him, insulting him, and killing his companions. So, he stood to give a speech. He praised and glorified Allah and sent blessings upon the Prophetﷺ. He mentioned the blessings Allah bestowed upon His Prophet and upon himself. Then he said: If it were not for a verse in the Book of Allah, I would not have mentioned what I am about to say in this stance. Allah Almighty says: ‘and as for your Lord’s blessing, proclaim it!’. O Allah, all praise is to You for Your immeasurable blessings and Your grace that cannot be forgotten. O people! I have received the news I have, and it appears that my time is near. I fear that after me, you will be ignorant of my affairs. I leave among you

what the Messenger of Allahؐ left: the Book of Allah and my progeny, the progeny of the guide to salvation, the seal of the prophets, the leader of the noble, and the chosen prophet.”⁶⁶

What are the Consequences of Abandoning Imam Ali's Leadership?

The rebellion against Prophet Muhammad'sؐ directive regarding Ali ibn Abi Talibؓ and the disregard for it led to a regression and retreat from several goals and achievements realized under the Holy Prophet's guidance.

Prophet Muhammadؐ wanted the Arabs to be a unified nation, spreading goodness, righteousness, and guidance. For this unity to materialize, tribal and clannish values had to be relegated to the past, replaced by the bond of Islamic brotherhood. The Prophet's designation of the 'Aws and Khazraj tribes as the Ansar (helpers) was one of his strategies to unify Muslims and dissolve the prevalent tribalism.

The foremost element ensuring the nation's unity under the banner of Islam was the leadership unified in representing the religion's paramount values like knowledge, wisdom,

piety, asceticism, and justice. Herein lies the importance of the directive making Ali ibn Abi Talib the Caliph.

When the vast majority of Muslims turned away from this directive, they essentially turned away from the value-driven transformation that Prophet Muhammadﷺ intended. This amounted to a return to pre-Islamic (Jahiliyyah) values. Soon, tribal affiliations resumed their central role in the Islamic society's politics and administration. Many reduced the Prophet's accomplishments and struggles to a tribal victory, perceiving it as a triumph for Hashim or Quraysh, rather than a broader Islamic success.

This shift towards familial and tribal politics inevitably led to conflicts, rivalries, and the resurgence of ethnic nationalism that devastated the Islamic nation. It made the nation vulnerable, subject to the predations of external enemies. These family-based political systems have largely influenced the course of Islamic life to the present day.

It is narrated from Imam Aliؑ, he said: “The decline of nations can be identified by four signs: neglecting foundational principles, clinging to delusions, favoring the unworthy, and sidelining the virtuous.”⁶⁷ He also said, “The bane of civilization is the tyranny of rulers.”⁶⁸

Imam Aliؑ was aware of all this due to his experience with these people during the period of struggle and jihad, and the knowledge he received from the Messenger of Allahﷺ, “When Allah Almighty revealed His words, ‘Alif, Lam, Meem. Do the people suppose that they will be let off because they say, ‘We have faith,’ and they will not be tested?’”, I knew that the trial would not come upon us while the Messenger of Allahﷺ was among us. So I said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, what is this trial that Allah Almighty has informed you about?’ He said: ‘O Ali, my nation will be tried after me.’ I said: “O Messenger of Allah, did you not tell me on the day of Uhud, when those who were martyred from the Muslims were martyred and martyrdom eluded me, which upset me, you told me: Rejoice, for martyrdom is ahead of you!” He said to me: “Indeed, it is so, how will you then be patient?” I said: “O Messenger of Allah, this is not a situation of patience but one of good tidings and gratitude!” He said: ‘O Ali! The people will be tempted by their wealth, they will oblige their religion to their Lord, hope for His mercy, feel secure from His wrath, and they will legalize His prohibitions with false ambiguities and negligent desires. They will permit alcohol with non-alcoholic drinks, bribery with gifts, and usury with trade.” I said: “O Messenger of Allah, at which station should I place them at that time, a station of apostasy or a station of trial?” He said: “A station of trial”.”⁶⁹

Thus, Imam Aliؑ had detailed knowledge of these matters. The Prophetﷺ had informed him after the Battle of Uhud (early in the Islamic mission) that he would be killed by the most wretched of the nation.

Imam Aliؑ was not a passive figure who merely declared his victimhood. He actively worked according to the Prophet's teachings and the knowledge imparted to him, focusing on preserving the major priorities that would pave the way for achieving the ultimate goal in the future. These priorities of the mission included:

1. Preserving the Quran and protecting it from distortion and misinterpretation.
2. Maintaining the unity and centrality of the Islamic community.
3. Highlighting the path of divine Imamate and guardianship (Wilayah).

The Efforts of Imam Aliؑ Against the Distortion of the Quran

The distortion of the Quran can manifest in two ways:

1. Literal Distortion: This involves altering the words or verses of the Quran, as occurred with previous divine scriptures. Such tampering undermines the sanctity and reliability of the Quran, leading to doubts about the authenticity of every verse.

2. Interpretative Distortion:

This pertains to the misinterpretation of



verses, applying them to unrelated matters. Correct interpretation of the Quran requires deep knowledge, which only the well-versed in Islamic studies possess. There were groups attempting to interpret the Quran for their own interests, causing confusion and diverting people from the true teachings of Islam, as indicated in the Quranic verse: ‘As for those in whose hearts is deviance, they pursue what is metaphorical in it, courting temptation, and seeking its interpretation.’⁷⁰

Because the Quran held a special place among Muslims at that time, anyone who appeared to have an understanding of its interpretation and exegesis had a distinguished status among them and could attract large groups. Thus, all of the defectors (Nakithun), dissenters (Qasitun), and renegades (Mariqun) used the Quran and interpreted its verses according to their desires and objectives. The renegades – who rebelled against the authority of Ali (and hence were called Kharijites) – engaged in this process to reject arbitration in Siffin, even though they were the ones who called for it and accepted it initially. They began to raise the slogan “The judgment belongs only to Allah,” meaning they accept only the judgment of Allah Almighty. In essence, they were saying that there is no ruler but Allah, and they rejected the government of Ali and Muawiya. The Commander of the

Faithful responded to them with that famous sentence: “A word of truth by which falsehood is intended! Yes, there is no judgment except for Allah, but these people are saying: no leadership. Indeed, people must have a leader, righteous or wicked. Under his leadership, the believer works, the disbeliever enjoys, Allah accomplishes the terms, the spoils are gathered, the enemy is fought, the roads are safe, and the weak are taken from the strong until a righteous person rests, and a wicked person is relieved.” The process of interpretation and moral distortion continued over time, but the Commander of the Faithfulؑ, was able to significantly limit this destructive process in his time, by suppressing its proponents, breaking their power, and establishing some pillars of correct interaction with the Holy Book of Allah.

Imam Aliؑ actively worked to enlighten Muslims about the upcoming challenges and the necessity of adhering to Prophet Muhammad’sؐ guidance. However, he encountered significant resistance, with many driven by worldly desires and deaf to his message. Additionally, he saw enemies waiting for any split within the Islamic community to undermine the Prophet’s achievements. Realizing that further elaboration on the truth could provoke these adversaries to fuel conflicts, Imam Aliؑ

refrained from persisting in this matter to avoid escalating peaceful opposition into blind strife that would harm both the young and the old.

Many people are unable to bear the truth, interpreting any criticism as a personal attack, and quickly escalating any opposition into conflict, potentially leading to war. Instead of engaging in dialogue and consulting the Quran and Sunnah, they perceive such actions as divisive and incendiary. Understanding this, Imam Aliؑ chose silence on this sensitive issue, as his ultimate concern was for the unity and integrity of the Ummah. If there was no cohesive Islamic community, his leadership would be meaningless. Moreover, without a strong, unified community, how could the Quran be preserved?

One of the most important principles and conditions for preserving the heavenly books and keeping them safe from distortion throughout the ages is: there must be a strong community that embraces, sanctifies, honors, and defends them, even if it does not apply or act upon them.

Thus, the priority of preserving unity emerged for the sake of preserving other priorities like the Quran and Divine leadership (Imamate and Wilayah). The Imam became highly sensitive towards anything that could lead to harming or affecting this unity. This intense concern for the unity of the Ummah was evident throughout the period of the three Caliphs' rule after Prophet Muhammadﷺ which lasted nearly twenty-five years. The price the Imam had to pay for his silence during this period was to become an unknown figure, not recognized for his worth by the generations that would grow up during that time.

“The situation that culminated in burying the virtues of the Commander of the Faithfulؑ and preventing

scholars from spreading them is beyond doubt to any rational person. It reached a point where a man, if he wanted to narrate a hadith from the Commander of the Faithfulؑ, could not attribute it to him by mentioning his name and lineage. He was compelled by necessity to say: 'A man from the companions of the Messenger of Allahﷺ told me,' or to say: 'A man from Quraysh told me.' Some would say: 'Abu Zainab told me.'"⁷¹

Al-Allama al-Amini said: "Muawiyah and his governors were constantly engaged in cursing Imam Aliؑ until it became a habit for the young and old alike. Initially, there might have been those who refrained from engaging in such disgraceful cursing, and some noble souls might have chosen to abstain from it. However, the severity of Muawiyah - the tolerant in executing his innovations - and the tyranny of his governors - the bitter enemies of the family of revelation - in their eagerness to bolster that oppressive rule and implement that accursed innovation, prevailed in the trial until the calamity became widespread. People's necks succumbed to it, and the hands of injustice shackled them under the yoke of humiliation and degradation. This practice continued from the martyrdom of the Commander of the Faithfulؑ until its prohibition by Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, spanning forty years, on the pulpits and in all Islamic cities, from Sham to Ray, to Kufa, to Basra, to the Islamic capital

Medina al-Munawwara, to the sanctuary of Allah's security, Mecca al-Mukarrama, to the east and west of the Islamic world, and among all Muslim communities... They adopted it as a firm belief, a constant duty, or a followed Sunnah, desiring it with eagerness and longing. So much so that when Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz forbade it, whether for practical wisdom or temporary policy, they considered him as if he had committed a great calamity or a tremendous sin.”⁷²

Silence meant retreating from the educational role, as teaching by a great scholar implies prominence and fame. The knowledge that Imam Ali ؑ possessed was sufficient to attract the hearts of scholars, not just from the Arab world, but from all regions globally. Had the Imam been allowed to teach and display his knowledge, he would have become known in all horizons and regions as the greatest figure known to humanity. Undoubtedly, such scholarly fame would have led many to demand him as a ruler and caliph.

Silence also meant stepping back from the primary military role, because jihad under Ali would quickly bring him to the forefront. How could he not advance when he was the hero of heroes, possessing a strategic military intellect capable of conquering the entire world? Had it been destined for the Imam to use his military skills in the later stage, he would have emerged as the greatest

leadership figure in existence; and this too would have made the soldiers and heroes demand him as a ruler and caliph.

Silence also meant withdrawing from the political role, because political participation would soon reveal his wisdom in matters, which would make people demand him and call for his allegiance.

Thus, the Imamؑ was forced to remain silent during that period, distancing himself from fundamental activities and settling for ordinary proximity that demonstrated the minimum presence, so as not to be accused of opposition and to prevent this from being used against the unity of the community. He used to say, "By Allah, I will submit as long as the affairs of the Muslims are secure."⁷³

- A quarter of a century of the Imam's life during which he could have demonstrated Islam's superiority over all other religions, ensuring that not a single polytheist remained on Earth, no idol was worshiped, and no land failed to acknowledge the declaration of faith in "There is no god but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." How could it not be so, when he was the one who shattered the idols of the Kaaba!

- A quarter of a century during which the Imam had the potential to transform the Earth into a land illuminated by the light of God.

- A quarter of a century, and the years passed without the Muslim community benefiting from the Imam's knowledge, which could have elevated it to the highest levels of power, technology, and prosperity; a stage where our era's technology would seem like child's play.

Indeed, Imam Aliؑ spent those years witnessing the



Muslim community turn away from him, indifferent to his knowledge, despite his only desire being their well-being, glory, greatness, and perfection.

Imagine having even a modicum of knowledge that could save your community from a calamity or alleviate some of its problems and pains and being unable to share this knowledge. I doubt you could endure living on this Earth for even a year; you would likely perish in your grief and heartache. How much more so for Imam Aliؑ, who possessed knowledge that could lead us through the paths of the heavens, extract all the Earth's riches and resources, bring life to all souls, open up all countries, and save all of humanity! He who said, "O people, ask me before you lose me, for I know the paths of the heavens better than the paths of the Earth,"⁷⁴ and "Here, indeed, is ample knowledge - pointing to his chest - if only I had bearers for it!"⁷⁵ Yet, in those days, not a single person asked him about even one aspect of his knowledge!

The nascent Islamic society carried within it seeds of decay to such an extent that it could not have survived without a wise person like Ali ibn Abi Talibؑ. These seeds threatened a massive apostasy that would revert people back to the era of ignorance. For this reason, the Imam stood as a defender, supporting the political system against the widespread apostasy movement following the Prophet's death, realizing it would destroy all the achievements made by the Prophet.

He also stood by the second Caliph, protecting him from assassination when he consulted Imam Aliؑ about leading the Muslim army against the Persians and the Romans, knowing that his death would spell the end of the Muslim community.

When Umar ibn al-Khattab consulted him about

going to war against the Byzantines, Imam Aliؑ said, "If you go to this enemy yourself and face them, and if you are defeated, there will be no stronghold left for the Muslims at the farthest reaches of their lands, and after you, there will be no one for them to turn to. Send a warrior to them and motivate the people of valor and sincerity with him. If Allah grants victory, that is what you desire. But if it turns out otherwise, you will be a support for the people and a refuge for the Muslims."⁷⁶

And when he was also consulted about going to war against the Persians, Imam Aliؑ said, "Be the pivot, and turn the mill with the Arabs, keeping them away from the fire of war, for if you leave this land, the Arabs will revolt against you from all sides, and what you leave behind will be of more concern to you than what is before you. The Persians, if they see you tomorrow, will say: This is the root of the Arabs; if we cut it off, we will be at ease. So, their ferocity and greed for you will increase. As for what you mentioned about the people marching to fight the Muslims, indeed, Allah, the Exalted, dislikes their march more than you, and He is more capable of changing what He dislikes. As for what you mentioned about their number, we have never fought in the past with numbers, but with divine support and assistance."⁷⁷

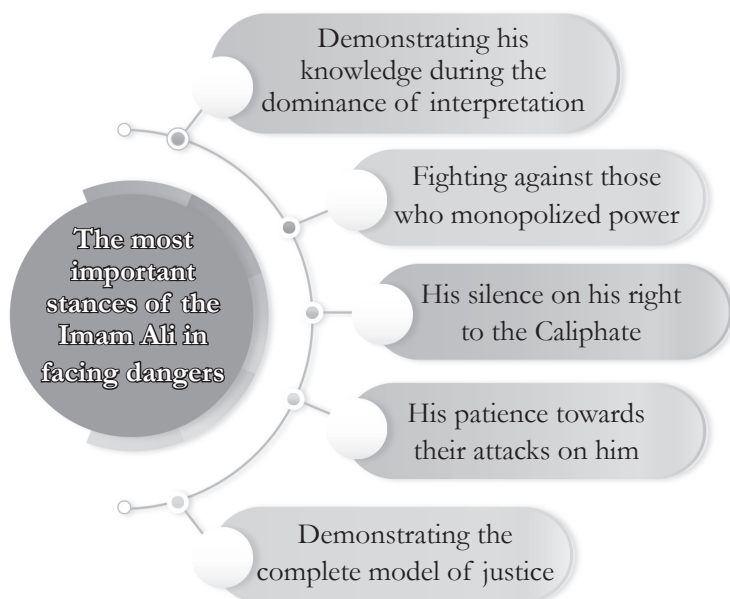
Then he stood to protect the third caliph, fending off the rebels who demanded financial and administrative reforms from him, knowing that his murder would bring a long-lasting tribulation upon the nation, opening the door to endless strife.

"People are following me, and they have asked me to speak on their behalf to you. By Allah, I do not know what to say to you! I do not know of anything you are ignorant of, nor can I guide you to something you do not know.

Indeed, the paths are clear, and the markers of religion are established. Know that the best of God's servants in His sight is a just Imam, guided and guiding others. He establishes a known Sunnah and abolishes an unknown innovation. Indeed, the Sunnahs are bright, each with its markers, and the innovations are apparent, each with its markers. And the worst of people in the sight of God is an oppressive Imam who has gone astray and leads others astray, reviving an abandoned innovation and killing an established Sunnah. I heard the Messenger of Godﷺ say, 'On the Day of Judgment, the unjust Imam will be brought forth with neither a defender nor an excuser, and will be thrown into the fire of Hell, spinning like a millstone, and then bound in its depths.' And I beseech you by Allah not to be the slain Imam of this nation, for it was said that in this nation, an Imam will be killed, opening the doors to killing and warfare until the Day of Judgment, confusing its affairs, spreading discord (fitna), making it difficult for people to discern truth from falsehood. They will surge and swirl in it, so do not be a guide for Marwan, leading you where he wishes in your old age and after the completion of your lifetime."⁷⁸

"As for Uthman, I inform you of his matter as if you were witnessing it yourself. People criticized him, and I was one of the Muhajirin who frequently advised him and rarely reproached him."⁹⁷

We cannot understand these stances of Imam Aliؑ unless we are aware of the conditions of the Muslim society, the nature of the culture, and the prevailing relationships within it. From here, we deduce that if it were not for Ali ibn Abi Talibؑ, there would have been no community or entity left for Muslims to preserve their religion and their Quran.



The dangers did not arise from within alone; there were also the conspiring Jews and external forces that began to fear the rising Islamic power and realized its true threat to their tyrannical thrones. They were also lying in wait, ready to attack the center of the Muslim society and destroy it.

Imam Ali's predictions and warnings about the sedition after the assassination of the third caliph proved true. The Islamic society was divided into four warring factions, a conflict that has persisted to our times, although the forms of struggle and dispute have varied.

What prevented the Imam from stopping this sedition was the instigation of those close to and around the third

caliph against Ali, preventing him from benefiting from his advice, as the second caliph had done in critical situations. If you study the chapters of this historical period, you will realize that everything that happened, happened because the caliph of the Muslims did not listen to the Imam's advice, which could have prevented his assassination and spared the Muslim society from sedition.

Imam Aliؓ did not desire the caliphate for himself, and his issue was not to attain power at any cost. His primary condition was that he be accepted by the Muhajirun and the Ansar and those who followed them, and that they be ready to support and obey him in order to achieve Islamic goals. If this condition was not met, the Imam considered advisory and counsel more beneficial than being a ruler. As he said on some occasions: "Leave me and seek someone else; for we are facing a matter which has many faces and colors, which the hearts cannot withstand, and the minds cannot endure. The horizons have darkened, and the clear path has become unrecognizable. Know that if I respond to you, I will ride you on what I know, and I will not listen to the speaker's speech or the critic's reproach. And if you leave me, I am like one of you; perhaps I will be the most obedient and attentive to whoever you appoint over your affairs, and I am better for you as a minister than as a commander!"⁸⁰

And he said: "You pledged allegiance to me while I was not pleased with that, nor overjoyed. Allah, the Exalted, knows that I was reluctant to govern among the nation of Muhammadﷺ; I have heard himﷺ say: Any ruler who takes charge of any affairs of my Ummah will be brought on the Day of Resurrection with his hands tied to his neck, in front of all creatures, then his book will be spread, and if he was just, he will be saved, and

if he was unjust, he will fall.”⁸¹

Abdullah ibn Abbas said: “I entered upon the Commander of the Faithfulؑ in Dhi Qar while he was repairing his sandal. He said to me: What is the value of this sandal? I said: It has no value! He said: By Allah, it is more beloved to me than your rule, unless I establish a right or repel a falsehood.”⁸²

However, due to the instigation and slandering of his entourage and tribe against Imam Aliؑ, the third caliph reached a state where he could not even tolerate the mere presence of Imam Ali around him, ordering him to leave Medina and stay away from the center of power. When he felt the danger of a revolt against him, he would seek help from the Imam, sending for him not to act upon his advice, but to ward off the danger of the rebels. Then, under the pressure of his hostile tribe members, fearful of Ali ibn Abi Talib, he would quickly order him to leave the city again.

“O Ibn Abbas, Uthman only wants to make me a camel that grazes in the west, coming and going! He sent for me to leave, then he sent for me to come, and now he is sending for me to leave again! By Allah, I have defended him to the extent that I feared I might be committing a sin.”⁸³

Imam Aliؑ spoke in detail about this suffering and held the third caliph responsible for the killings and divisions that occurred afterward.

Indeed, Imam Aliؑ was sincerely ready to defend Uthman vigorously, not for his person or kinship with him, but for what he represented as a center of gravity in the Islamic nation. For when this center is assassinated in such a revolutionary manner, which did not stem from a sound understanding of Islam's reformatory and moral

values, it means that the door to killing and sedition would be wide open.

Imam Aliؓ knew that among those who rebelled against Uthman were many opportunists who did not want reform, but rather wanted to turn the situation to their personal advantage, without any consideration for the community's interest.

Although the majority of the rebels were the aggrieved and those demanding reform, this revolutionary movement was not immune to any kind of distortion that could completely reverse its outcome from what it originally intended.

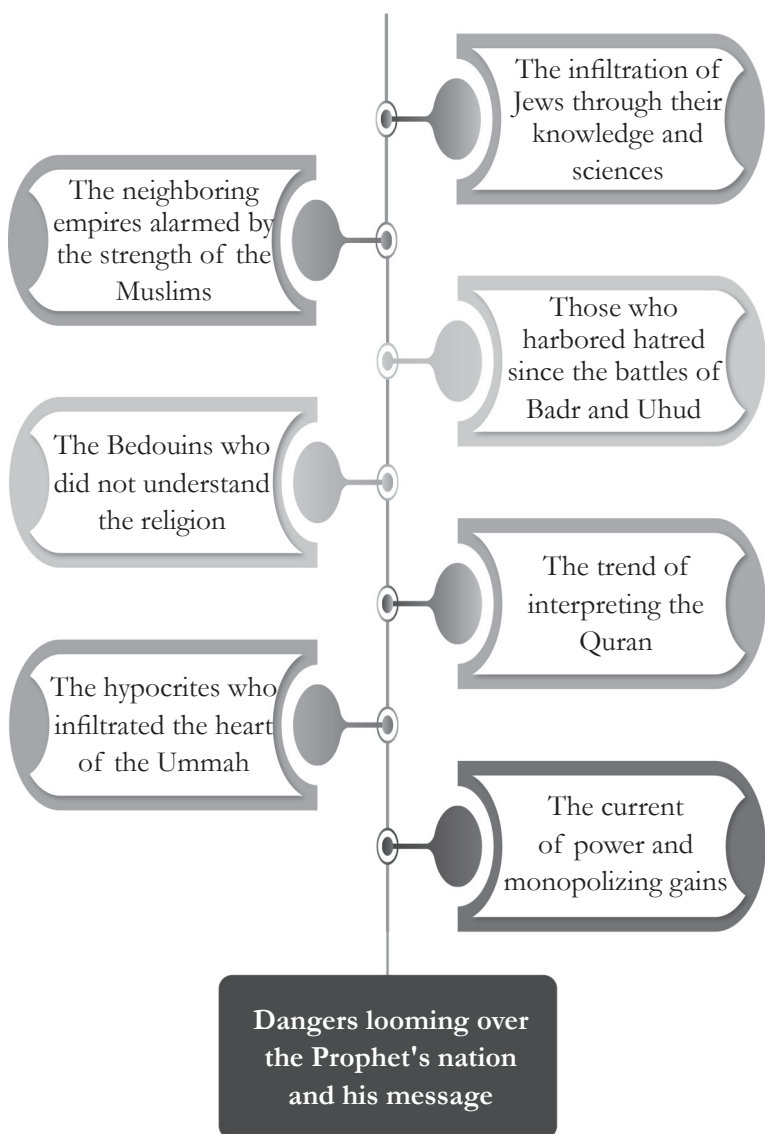
Had Imam Aliؓ not taken over the leadership after the assassination of the third caliph, the community would have disintegrated into factions fighting each other for worldly goals unrelated to Islam; all achievements would have been lost, and the most apparent positives would have vanished.

Imam Aliؓ led the rebels after their calming down to educate them and acquaint them with the real values of Islam that they should have risen to demand. He clarified to them that the financial and administrative corruption that had occurred was because the Muslim society had not borne its divine responsibility and had not adhered to the fundamental principles of the religion since the passing away of the Holy Prophetﷺ. In other words, an important part of the rebels discovered that they were victims of a long process of ignorance that deprived them of the ability to diagnose the real problem and its causes. They could have been drawn into a sedition that would have been more severe for them than the situations they had revolted against.

Thus, Imam Aliؓ saved the nation from a loss it

would never have found its way from and redirected the society to the correct path it should follow. This clarified the reality of the currents that exploited the rebels and infiltrated among them. The division and separation were quickly made, and the breakers of the covenant, the unjust, and the dissenters were distinguished from the free followers of Ali. Any honorable Muslim could then take the appropriate position if he desired the hereafter and the greater pleasure of Allah.

For nothing could be worse than the loss of truth, its obscured features, and its mixing with falsehood. This is what Imam Ali did not allow to happen.





ALI عليه السلام AND THE OPPOSITION

It is only logical for a wise person to know that the unity of the community is the fundamental basis for political reform; there is no meaning to reform if it does not aim to unify and strengthen the community. If disputes arise in this society, leading to division and fragmentation, and a return to the conditions of the days of ignorance, then there will be no point in reforming the leadership. The most that can happen is that a righteous person will become a leader of a small group of Muslims, which is a regression. And let's suppose that's the end of it, one might ask, "What's the problem with that? Let Ali ibn Abi Talib start from where the Holy Prophet ﷺ started with a small group of sacrificing Muslims!" But this notion is completely wrong because going backwards will not be under the same circumstances, as the enemies here will be more dangerous and capable, and this small group will not be able to overcome them.

The initial plan of the Holy Prophet ﷺ was to gather the Arabs and unify them within a social system that honors and respects Islam. In this system, the leadership

and the aware first cadre would undertake the process of educating and purifying people within this single society and its institutions, changing their culture and ideas. This would lead to the embedding and rooting of Islamic values in the society for a long time.

If this single social entity is not preserved, the aware companions will not be able to play their educational, missionary, and reformatory role, as these new Muslims will return to their tribes. This was nearly what happened after the Messenger of Allah, when the apostasy movement started in a large number of tribes for political and economic reasons. Ali ibn Abi Talib found himself in front of this significant challenge, and the companions were confused about the required stance and did not know what to do; and Imam Ali was their refuge and sanctuary, advising them, and they accepted his counsel.

It is wise here, when faced with two choices: the first is to destroy all achievements to become the leader, and the second is to preserve the society, its unity, and the Prophet's fundamental achievements, hoping that society will support his leadership. It is wise to choose to maintain the social entity by sacrificing his central role in the project; meaning to play a role in preserving Islam and propagating its fundamental principles in a single society, as long as he would not be able to propagate all Islamic knowledge and implement the divine plan and establish the religion at that time.

For the sake of preserving the Islamic message over the ages, Imam Aliؑ protected the new political institution, which lacked many of the competencies needed to lead the grand divine project.

This situation is much better than the disappearance of the Muslim society that the Messenger of Allah

worked hard to achieve. Thus, Imam Ali's role in the post-Prophetic era focused on protecting the new political system, despite all his criticisms of it, which he mentioned in the well-known Sermon of Shaqshaqiya. The existence of this political system is far better than the disintegration of Muslims and the return to ignorance.





THE SERMON OF SHAQSHAQIYA

“By Allah, indeed so-and-so has donned it (the caliphate), while he knows that my position in relation to it is like the axis in the millstone. The flood descends from me, and the bird cannot rise to me. I watched the plunder of my inheritance until the first one went his way, passing it to another after him.

Then Imam Ali[ؑ] recited the poetry verse of Al-A'sha:

“How different are the days I command its millstone, and the days of Hayyan, brother of Jabir.”

Oh, wonder! While he (Uthman) was trying to get rid of it in his lifetime, he tied it to another after his death – how they milked the two udders! And he turned it over to a rough custodian whose words are harsh, whose touch is hard, and in whom stumbles and apologies abound. Its holder is like a rider of an unruly camel: if he pulls its reins, it snorts, and if he slackens, it plunges. By Allah's life, the people were subjected to beating and oscillation, changing colors and objections.

I endured with patience despite having a thorn in the eye and suffocation in the throat, seeing my heritage plundered. I continued to bear the hardship until the first

one went his way and handed it over to a group, claiming I am one of them. So, by Allah, for the consultation! When did doubt about me arise with the first of them, until I was paired with these peers! But I moved when they moved, and I flew when they flew. One of them inclined to his grudge, and another leaned towards his son-in-law, amidst weakness and feebleness.

Until the third of the group stood up, puffing his chest between his dung and fodder, and with him stood the sons of his father, chewing up Allah's wealth like camels chew the spring vegetation, until his rope twisted back on him, his deeds finished him, and his gluttony flipped him over.

I was suddenly surrounded by people like the mane of a hyena, crowding around from every side, until Hasan and Husayn were trampled underfoot, and my shoulders were torn, gathered around me like a flock of sheep.

When I took up the matter, a faction broke the covenant, another group defected, and others became sinful and unjust, as if they had not heard Allah, the Exalted, saying, "That Home of the Hereafter We shall assign to those who do not desire exaltation upon the earth or corruption. And the end is (best) for the righteous.' Yes! By Allah, they heard it and understood it, but the world was adorned in their eyes, and they were pleased with its glitter!

By the One who splits the seed and creates the soul, had it not been for the presence of the supporter, the establishment of the proof through his existence, and the covenant taken by Allah from the scholars not to acquiesce in the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have thrown its rope on its own neck and would have turned the last of it with the

cup of the first of it, and you would have found your world contemptible to me as a sneeze of a goat!

They said: And a man from the people of Al-Sawad stood up to him when he reached this point in his sermon and handed him a letter. He started reading it. When he finished, Ibn Abbas said to him, "O Commander of the Faithful, if only you had continued your speech from where you had left!" Ali^{عليه السلام} said: "Far it is, O Ibn Abbas! That was like the foam of a Camel which gushed out then subsided!"

Ibn Abbas said: By Allah, I have never regretted any speech as I regretted that Imam Ali^{عليه السلام} did not complete what he intended to say in that sermon."

Where did things end up away from Imam Ali's leadership?

After more than twenty years since the beginning of the Islamic call, the dominant understanding remained that Islam was a means for invasion, expansion, and conquest of lands, with the priority being on military jihad, whatever the form. The lofty spiritual teachings of Islam began to recede in society in the wake of this new priority.

Imam Aliؑ saw the imminent danger to Islam due to the focus on the military aspect at the expense of fundamental aspects such as spirituality, education, and morality. Indeed, what he feared came to pass, as we see that most of those who rebelled against Uthman and killed him were objecting more to his economic policies than anything else; they were protesting against the unfair distribution of the spoils of war and conquests. Perhaps they demanded Ali ibn Abi Talib as a ruler and caliph of the Muslims not for his knowledge or understanding, but for his financial integrity and his distance from the ruling apparatus that had made the public treasury a prerogative for itself and its clan.

Due to the recession of Islamic spirituality and its great knowledge from the public life stage, we can understand how many have come to reduce the religion of Islam to a set



of rituals and duties, expressing them as the pillars of the religion. When browsing most books introducing Islam, you find that they start from the basic acts of worship, neglecting the plan, goals, spirituality, and values of Islam.

Thus, we find ourselves in front of two currents interpreting Islam:

The first current, led by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and entrusted to Ali ibn Abi Talib (عليه السلام), believes that Islam is a divine message not confined to changing some social or individual conditions but preaching to change the world and calling its followers to be active and distinguished soldiers, spreading Islam globally, and before that, establishing the model of the Islamic experience in their social, political, economic, and educational lives.

The second current confines Islam to a set of rituals and sees it as a means for worldly development, personal benefits, and transient pleasures. Unfortunately, the supporters of this current were overwhelmingly the majority. And Allah, the Almighty, to complete His argument against the worlds, gave them the opportunity to rule and enabled them in the earth to show people where such limited Islam leads. Hence begins a strange story, full of lessons, rich in events, and long in duration.

Imam Ali's Foreknowledge of Events

“I was with him (Prophet Muhammadﷺ) when the nobles of Quraysh came to him and said: 'O Muhammad, you have claimed something great which neither your fathers nor anyone from your family ever claimed. We ask you for a matter, if you answer us and show it to us, we will know that you are a prophet and messenger. If not, we will know that you are a lying sorcerer.' Heﷺ said: 'And what do you ask?' They said: 'Call this tree so that it uproots itself and stands before you.' Heﷺ said: 'Allah is capable of everything. If Allah does this for you, will you believe and testify to the truth?' They said: 'Yes.' He said: 'Then I will show you what you ask for, but I know that you will not incline towards any good and that among you is one who will be thrown in the well and one who will mobilize the parties.' Then heﷺ said: 'O tree, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day and know that I am the Messenger of Allah, then uproot yourself by Allah's permission and stand before me.' By the One who sent him with the truth, it uprooted and came with a loud noise and crackling like the flapping of bird wings, until it stood before the Messenger of Allahﷺ, rustling, and its highest branch touched the Messenger of Allahﷺ, and some of its branches touched my shoulder, as I was



on his right. When the people saw this, they said in arrogance and pride: 'Then command half of it to come to you and the other half to remain.' So he commanded it, and half of it came towards him with the most astonishing approach and loudest noise, almost wrapping around the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. They said in disbelief and defiance, 'Command this half to return to its other half as it was.' So, he ﷺ commanded it, and it returned. I said: 'There is no god but Allah. I am the first believer in you, O Messenger of Allah, and the first to acknowledge that the tree did what it did by Allah's command, in affirmation of your prophethood and in reverence for your word.' The entire group said: 'Rather, he is a lying sorcerer, a master of deception. And who would believe you in your matter except someone like this?' referring to me, and I am from a people who are not blamed in the way of Allah."

Muawiya had dispatched people from his companions to Kufa to spread the news of his death. The news reached Ali, and he said in his assembly: "You have exaggerated the news of Muawiya's death. By Allah, he has not died and will not die until he rules what is under my feet. Ibn Akilat Al-Akbad (son of the liver-eater) wanted to know this from me, so he sent someone to spread this among you to know and be certain of what I hold regarding him and what will happen in

the future. There was much talk mentioning the days of Muawiya, Yazid, Marwan, and their sons, and mentioning Al-Hajjaj and the torment he would inflict on them. The noise rose, and there was much crying and sobbing. A man from the people stood up and said: 'O Commander of the Faithful, you have described great matters, is that really going to happen?' Ali said: 'By Allah, that is going to happen. I have not lied, nor have I been lied to.' Others asked: 'When will that be, O Commander of the Faithful?' He said: 'When this is dyed with this,' placing one hand on his beard and the other on his head, and the people cried more. He said: 'Do not cry in your time now, for you will cry long after me.' Most people of Kufa secretly corresponded with Muawiya about their affairs and took his side. By Allah, it was not long before all that happened."⁸⁴

Imam Ali's Interest in History

Imam Aliؑ, in a will he wrote to his son Imam Hasanؑ, with two witnesses present when he was departing from Siffin, said: "O my son, even though I have not lived the age of those who were before me, I have looked into their actions, thought about their news, and walked in their traces until I became as one of them. Indeed, by what has reached me



of their affairs, it is as if I have lived from the first of them to the last of them. I recognized the clear from their turbidity, the benefit from their harm. I have singled out for you from every matter its essence, chosen for you its beauty, and turned away from you its obscurity. I have seen from your affair what concerns a compassionate father, and I have gathered for your education that this should be while you are at the beginning of your age and the threshold of your time, with a sound intention and a pure soul.”⁸⁵

Benefits of Loving Him

It is narrated from Prophet Muhammad ﷺ: “O Aba al-Hasan, your example in my Ummah is like “Say, He is Allah, One”. Whoever recites it once has recited a third of the Qur'an, and whoever recites it twice has recited two-thirds of the Qur'an, and whoever recites it three times has completed the Qur'an. So, whoever loves you with his tongue has completed a third of faith, and whoever loves you with his tongue and his heart has completed two-thirds of the faith, and whoever loves you with his tongue, his heart, and supports you with his hand has perfected the faith. By the One who sent me with the truth, O Ali, if the people of the earth loved you as the people of the heavens do, no

one would be punished with fire.”⁸⁶

It is also narrated from the Prophetﷺ: “O group of my companions, do not blame me for my love for Ali ibn Abi Talib, for my love for Ali is by the command of Allah. Allah commanded me to love Ali and bring him close. O Ali, whoever loves you has indeed loved me, and whoever loves me has indeed loved Allah, and whoever loves Allah, Allah loves him and is bound to settle his lovers in Paradise. O Ali, whoever hates you has indeed hated me, and whoever hates me has indeed hated Allah, and whoever hates Allah, Allah hates and curses him, and it is bound upon Allah to place him on the Day of Judgment in the position of the haters, and no compensation or substitute or protection will be accepted from him.”⁸⁷

Harms of Hating Him

Narrated from the Prophetﷺ:

“O Ali, if my Ummah hates you, Allah will topple them on their noses into the fire.”⁸⁸

“O Ali, if my Ummah fasts until they become like jawbones and prays until they become like strings, then they hate you, Allah will topple them on their faces into the fire.”⁸⁹

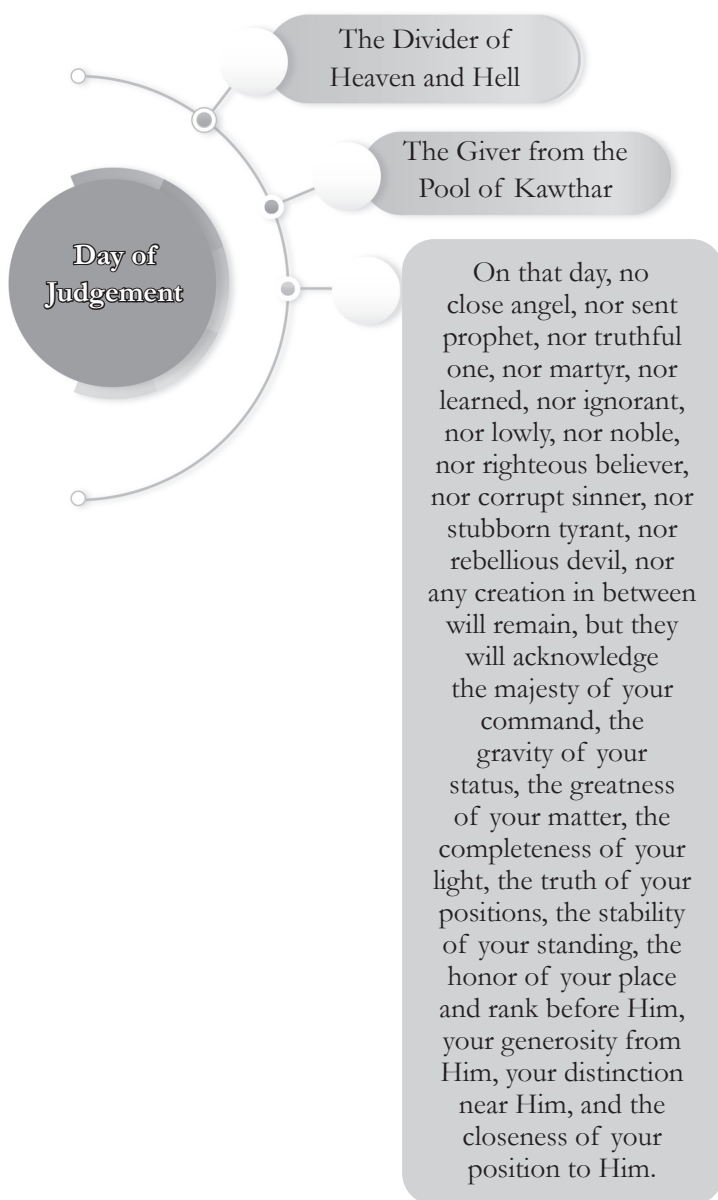
“If a servant worships Allah for a thousand years after a thousand years between the Rukn and Maqam, then meets Allah hating Ali, Allah



will topple him on his nostrils into the fire of Hell.”⁹⁰

“O Ali, if a servant worships Allah as Noah stood among his people, and he has gold like the mountain of Uhud, which he spends in the way of Allah, and his life is extended so that he performs Hajj for a thousand years on foot, then he is killed between Safa and Marwah oppressed, but does not have your loyalty, O Ali, he will neither smell the fragrance of Paradise nor enter it.”⁹¹

Narrated from Al-Asbagh Ibn Nubatah: “I was with the Commander of the Faithful (عليه السلام), and a man came to him and greeted him, then said: ‘O Commander of the Faithful, by Allah, I love you for the sake of Allah, and I love you in secret as I love you openly, and I profess allegiance to you in secret as I do openly.’ The Commander of the Faithful had a stick in his hand, he bowed his head, then poked the stick in the ground for a while, then raised his head to him and said: ‘Indeed, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) told me a thousand hadiths, each hadith with a thousand doors, and the souls of the believers meet in the air and recognize and know each other. What recognized among them agreed, and what denied among them differed, and by the right of Allah, you have lied; I do not recognize your face among the faces, nor your name among the names.’”⁹²





WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE REIGN OF THE THIRD CALIPH?

More than ten years after the death of the holy Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, signs of deviation from the Islamic plan began to appear to everyone. The appointment of governors and officials started to be influenced by considerations of kinship and clan, away from Islamic competence, good precedent, and piety. Corruption spread and infiltrated the state's apparatus openly and blatantly. Imam Ali tried his best to reform matters by advising the ruling system as he had done previously, but the entourage and clan of the ruling caliph incited him against the Imam, portraying his advice as a kind of greed for power and reaching for governance.

The nature of governance in the third caliphate can be summarized as follows:

- For the first time in the Islamic world, a system based on classism was established, contrary to Islamic principles.
- The door was opened for the plundering and looting of public funds (the treasury of the Muslims). It began first with the promotion of what is called the feudal

system, meaning that a large portion of the treasury funds was distributed among his relatives, companions, especially his family and entourage, and then he generously gave it to whoever he wished without accounting.

- He appointed and employed his people and clan, the aristocrats who lived during the pre-Islamic era, in government positions.

As a result, within 10 or 12 years, the Islamic world saw the rise of the rich like never before seen by the Muslims. Politically too, positions and ministries revolved around the same privileged minority.

Objections gradually began from all sides, and people started to express their disapproval and migrate from different cities towards Medina to show their dissatisfaction. Since verbal objections did not yield results, the opposing people, especially from Kufa and Egypt, along with the people of Medina themselves, were forced to take up arms against the third Caliph of the Muslims. Uthman resisted until the last moment when he was killed.

The only person during Uthman's life who was accepted by the rebels and sometimes by Uthman, and other times rejected by him, was Imam Aliؑ, who acted as a mediator between the rebels and Uthman.

Imam Ali always advised Uthman to abandon his actions and behavior, to satisfy people's needs satisfactorily, to give up his corrupt entourage, led by Marwan ibn al-Hakam. Prophet Muhammadﷺ had expelled Marwan and his father from Medina, knowing their danger, and ordered that they never return to Medina, due to the discord they caused among the Muslims. In the era of the first Caliph, Uthman asked to bring them back to Medina, but this was not accepted, and similarly, during

the second Caliph's era. When it came to Uthman, he not only brought them back to Medina but also appointed Marwan ibn al-Hakam as the second man in the Islamic government, a person who caused many disagreements.

Looking at this case, we see from the ruler and his entourage all this injustice, oppression, favoritism to relatives and clan members, and his negligence and lack of concern for the people.

On the other hand, we see the angry and rebellious factions from the Hejaz, Medina, Basra, Kufa, and Egypt. They came from everywhere, protesting and criticizing, and the government refused to meet their demands. Interestingly, Imam Ali عليه السلام was the mediator between the rebels and the caliph, opposing his approach, but at the same time, he did not want to give the rebels a chance to kill the caliph, thus opening the door of sedition among Muslims.

Imam Ali عليه السلام strongly criticized this tribal approach and tried to divert it from the path it was on, hoping that the fire of the rebels would calm down, thus extinguishing the sedition. However, the government was not prepared to deviate from its course, nor were the rebels ready to cease their demands and lift the siege they had imposed around the Caliph's house. The result was that the rebels carried out their threat.

After Uthman's assassination, people from all walks of life, men and women, old and young, Arabs and non-Arabs, gathered immediately behind Imam Ali's house, shouting together: Imam Ali is the only person fit for the Islamic caliphate, and he must accept the caliphate. Their allegiance and insistence were because they found no one else from the first rank known for clean hands and abstention from the ruling system they had revolted

against.

From Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya: "I was with my father when Uthman was killed. He stood up and entered his house, then the companions of the Messenger of Allahﷺ came to him and said: "This man has been killed, and the people need an Imam, and today we find no one more deserving of this matter than you; neither earlier in precedence nor closer to the Messenger of Allahﷺ!!"93

ENDNOTES

1. Holy Quran 17:71
2. Nahj al-Balagha, p. 416
3. Bihar al-Anwar, v. 10, p. 432
4. Holy Quran 9:42
5. Holy Quran 2:124
6. Nahj al-Balagha, p. 300
7. Nahj al-Balagha, p. 300
8. Al-Tawhid, p. 305
9. Nahj al-Balagha, p. 186
10. Nahj al-Balagha, p. 300
11. Nahj al-Haqq, p. 240
12. Al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 64
13. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 68.
14. Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 46,47
15. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 140.
16. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 283.
17. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 281.
18. Narrated by Ibn Abi Ya'foor: I asked Abu Abd Allah عليه السلام about the saying of the Prophet ﷺ: "Whoever dies without an Imam dies a death of ignorance." He said: I asked, "A death of disbelief?" He said, "A death of misguidance." I asked, "So, whoever dies today without an Imam, dies a death of ignorance?" He replied, "Yes."
19. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 77.
20. Holy Quran 29:67.
21. Holy Quran 43:23.
22. Holy Quran 47:16.
23. Holy Quran 9:97.
24. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 17, p. 276.
25. Holy Quran 62:2.
26. Holy Quran 17:31.
27. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 115.
28. Holy Quran 10:58.
29. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 298.
30. Holy Quran 5:54.
31. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 300.
32. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 39, p. 55.
33. Al-Kafi, vol. 5, p. 10.
34. Abu Al-Hilali. Al-Awail, p. 142.
35. Al-Kafi, vol. 4, p. 31.
36. Tuhaf al-Uqul, pp. 184,185.
37. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 415.
38. Al-Kafi, vol. 8, pp. 355357-.
39. Al-Amali, p. 404.
40. Al-Gharat, vol. 1, p. 32.
41. Al-Gharat, vol. 1, p. 36.
42. Kashf al-Ghumamah fi Ma'rifat al-Aimmah, vol. 1, p. 164.
43. Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 417-418.
44. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 347.
45. Kashf al-Yaqin, pp. 115,116.
46. Tahdhib al-Ahkam (edited by Khorsan), vol. 10, p. 151.
47. Al-Ikhtisas, p. 157.
48. Al-Kafi, vol. 1, pp. 454,455.
49. Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 427-

- 431/428.
50. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 333.
51. Waq'at Siffin, p. 103.
52. l'lam al-Wara bi A'lam al-Huda, p. 130.
53. Al-Tusi. Al-Amali, p. 523.
54. Al-Kafi, vol. 7, pp. 423,424.
55. Al-Kafi, vol. 7, p. 425.
56. Al-Yaqin bi Ikhtisas Maulana Ali a.s. bil Imarat al-Mu'minin, pp. 416,417.
57. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 19, p. 280.
58. Ibn Abi al-Hadid. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 20, p. 328.
59. Ibn Abi al-Hadid. Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, vol. 20, p. 298.
60. Holy Quran 62:11.
61. Holy Quran 28:83.
62. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 49.
63. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 231.
64. Makatib al-A'imma (as), vol. 2, p. 121.
65. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 241.
66. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 35, p. 45.
67. Tasnif Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim, p. 342.
68. Tasnif Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim, p. 346.
69. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 220.
70. Holy Quran 3:7.
71. Al-Irshad fi Ma'rifat Hujaj Allah 'ala al-'Ibad, vol. 1, p. 310.
72. Majma' al-Ghadir, vol. 10, pp. 265,266.
73. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 102.
74. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 180.
75. Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 496-497.
76. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 192.
77. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 203.
78. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 234.
79. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 363.
80. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 136.
81. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 32, p. 5.
82. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 76.
83. Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 358.
84. Muruj adh-Dhahab, vol. 20, p. 429.
85. Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 393-394.
86. Al-Saduq. Al-Amali, text, p. 34.
87. Tafsir Furat al-Kufi, p. 598.
88. Ibn Shahrashub. Manaqib Aal Abi Talib (as), vol. 3, p. 205.
89. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 27, p. 226.
90. Kashf al-Yaqin fi Fada'il Amir al-Mu'minin a.s., p. 224.
91. Kashf al-Ghummah fi Ma'rifat al-Aimmah, vol. 1, p. 102.
92. Al-Ikhtisas, p. 311.
93. Tarikh al-Tabari.

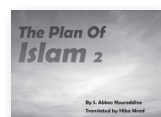
The Master Plan of Islam 1

How come in spite of all our acts of worship, we still feel distant from our Creator? What did we neglect that makes us feel so void on the inside? Here in the Master Plan of Islam. Once you understand the plan, you will see the light.



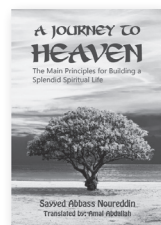
The Master Plan of Islam 2

This book shows the basic stages that the mission of Islam has gone through, and exposes the anticipated future and hence determines the basic responsibilities for any person seeking to be truly committed to the Divine plan.



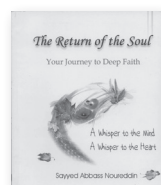
A Journey to Heaven

Are you looking for happiness and for the path that leads to it? Are you interested in reforming your soul and disciplining it? Such questions constitute the main common points that tightly connect you with this book.



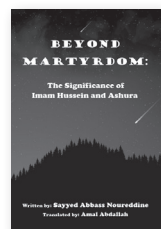
The return of the Soul

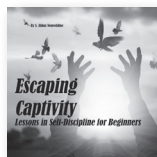
How does Islamic faith differ from other faiths? how can we discover the faith in ourselves? and how can we increase it? you find in this book the answer to these questions and much more.



Beyond Martyrdom

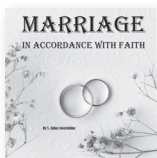
Imam Hussein founded a great school that never stops rearing generations, enlightening their hearts and minds and spurring their potentials. And this is what this book aims to achieve.





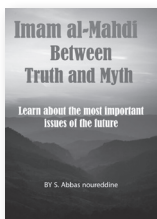
Escaping Captivity

If you are new to the world of spirituality and don't know where to start from, then this book is for you. It explains in an easy and simple way the reality of the human being, the purpose of creation, and the path to it.



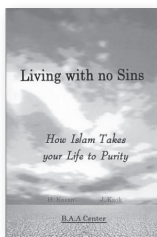
Marriage in accordance with Faith

This book provides the reader with principles and wisdoms, that once followed and applied they pave the way to a happy marriage. It also explains the true meaning of love, and the secret that makes it last forever.



Imam Mahdi between Thruth and Myth

How does the Mahdism creed contribute to the dissemination of great values? And what is the ultimate condition for the appearance of the Imam? In this book you find the answer to these questions and much more.



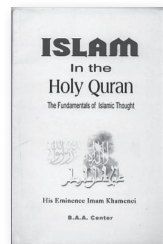
Living with No Sins

In this book, we will be informed of the first step on the road to giving up sins, which is repentance. If a sinner doesn't repent for what they have done, they won't be granted infallibility and waviness of sin. God, be he exalted, said: {Those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong.}

The book can thus be very rewarding as it presents a guide to the most important issue in the life of a believer; the relation with God the Great and Almighty.

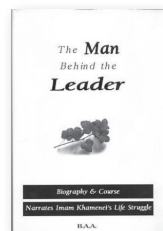
Islam in the Qoly Quran

Ayatullah sayyed Ali Khamenei, the Revered Leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, delivered several lectures in 1974, 1353 A.H., which were later summarized and published. The original title selected by the learned author for the book was “Tarh Kulli Andisha Islami Dar Qur'an” (The General concepts of Islam in the Qur'an). What the author intended was to introduce the principles of Islam according to the Qur'an. The author accordingly provides a general survey of Islamic concepts by supporting his beliefs with different verses of the Qur'an.



The Man behind the Leader

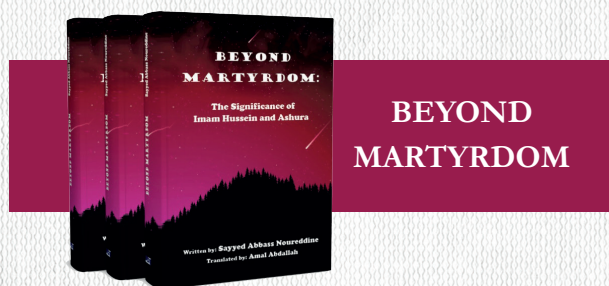
Due to the crucial role that the marji'iyat plays in the lives of Shiite, we thought of introducing this book “the Man behind the Leader” which aims at clarifying a number of issues related to this matter and that goes on to introduce the current marji' for the Islamic nation, Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Khameni from whose life course many precious lessons can be withdrawn.



Recognizing the personality of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib ؑ is part of our endeavor to identify the ideal role model and example we wish to adopt and follow in life.

The character of Imam Ali ؑ is like a vast and turbulent sea, with many dimensions and profound depths.

To navigate this immense ocean, there are numerous ships of varying sizes, strengths, and speeds. However, if we ponder a little, we realize that the strongest, fastest, and most expansive ship is that of leadership, through which we can get we can get a comprehensive view of Imam Ali's entire personality.



Beit-Al-Kateb

