

The Conditions and Special Qualities of the Imam

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Before anything else, in the discussion of this issue, we must note one necessary point and that is that: It can clearly be seen in the Holy Qur'an that the position of leadership is the highest station that a human being can possibly attain and that it is even higher than the station of Prophethood and having a Divine mission because in the story of Abraham, the idol destroyer, peace be upon him, it says, "And remember that Abraham was tried by his Lord with certain commands which he fulfilled: He said, 'I will make thee a leader to the nations.' He pleaded, 'And also (Imams) from my offspring?' He answered, 'But My promise is not within the reach of evil-doers'" (2:124)

In this way, Abraham, after moving through the station of prophethood and his Divine mission and victory in the various Divine tests made of him, is then given the valuable position of external and internal, material and spiritual leadership of the people.

The Prophet of Islam, peace and the mercy of God be upon him and his descendants, also, in addition to the position or station of prophethood and mission, has the station of leadership and imamate as well. Others among the prophets also had this station. This is one point to note.

On the other hand, we know that the conditions and qualities necessary for the receiving of any position relate to the duties and responsibilities which a person must perform in that position or station. That is, however much the station is elevated, the responsibilities are heavier and greater, in the same proportion, the conditions and qualities necessary for the position are greater.

For instance, in Islam, a person who has the responsibility to judge and even to bear witness and becomes the congregational prayer leader must be just. When the necessity for bearing witness arises or the duty to recite the surah Hamd and another verse in the congregational ritual prayer, justice is necessary, it is clear what conditions are honored in order to reach the position or station of imamate, with the extraordinary importance which it has.

.In general, the following conditions are vital for an Imam

Infallibility or Being Free From Sin and Error .1

An Imam, must, like a Prophet, have the station of purity, that is, be free of sin and error,

otherwise he cannot lead and be a model for the people and receive the trust of society. The Imam must consume the heart and soul of the people and his command be accepted without questioning. A person who has sinned can never receive such trust and from all points of view, be trusted and confirmed. How can a person who in his daily life commits errors, have his opinions be relied upon in the work of society and be followed without questioning. Doubtlessly, a prophet must be immaculate and this quality is necessary for the Imam as well, as we pointed out above. This can be proven in another way as well. That is 'the law of kindness' which the existence of the prophet and Imam relies upon requires the infallibility of the prophet or Imam and the mission which we pointed out in the last lesson, will be incomplete

Overflowing with Knowledge .2

The Imam, like a Prophet, is a place of refuge of knowledge for the people. He must know all principles and practices of the religion, the external and internal meanings of the Holy Qur'an, the Traditions of the Prophet and whatever relates to Islam, and, in a complete way, be aware because he is the preserver and guardian of the Divine Law as well as the leader and guide of the people. A person who when a complicated issue is presented either becomes conscious or asks another person for the answer, their knowledge and information will not answer the needs of an Islamic society. They can never be given the position or station of imamate and leadership of the people. In conclusion, the Imam must be the most aware and most knowledgeable person in relation to the religion of God after the death of the Holy Prophet who does not allow Islam to deviate

Courage .3

An Imam must be the bravest individual of Islamic society because without that courage of the leader, it is not possible to accept him as leader. He must have courage in face of the difficult events of life and sudden and unexpected happenings, courage before those who use coercion and who are oppressive and courage before external and internal enemies of Islam

Austerity .4

We know that those who are captives of the gold and attractions of this world, are easily deceived and it is possible that they deviate from the way of truth and justice. Sometimes this happens by way of greed and sometimes by way of threats, whereby the captive of this world is deviated from the straight path.

Imam must be above the possibilities of gifts of this world and not to be a captive to it. He must be free from any chains or bonds of the material world, from all whims and lusts, from any ambition, from wealth and position so that he cannot be deceived and influenced and he .then surrender and compromise because of these desires

Ethical or Moral Attractions .5

The Holy Qur'an says about the Holy Prophet: "It is part of the Mercy of God that you deal gently with them. Were you to be severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee." (3:159)

Not only the Holy Prophet, but the Imam and any leader of society are in need of goodness so that the people are magnetized towards him.

Without doubt, any kind of harshness and evil intentions towards the people for the Prophet and Imam is a great defect and they are free from any such defect, otherwise, many of the philosophies of existence would not be fulfilled.

These are the most important conditions which the great Ulama have mentioned for the Imam to have.

Of course, in addition to these five qualities mentioned above, there are other qualities in the Imam, as well, but we have just mentioned the most basic ones

Think and Answer

1. Why is the station of leadership of the highest station of a human being?
2. Why do the Prophet of Islam and other prophets who brought a divine law have the station of leadership or imamate?
3. If the Imam is not immaculate, what problem will arise?
4. What is all abundance of knowledge necessary for the Imam to have?
5. For what reason must the Imam be brave, austere and the most pure from the point of view of attracting the ethics of the people?

Who has to Select the Imam?

A group of Muslims (Sunnis) believe that the Prophet of Islam (S) died not having selected his successor and they believe that this responsibility belongs to Muslims themselves to select their leader.

They undertake this act through Ijma (consensus) which is one of the reasons given in the Divine Law.

They add that this program was implemented the first time for the first Imam Ali (A.S.)ph who was selected with the consensus of the Ummah.

And he selected the second Imam Ali (A.S.)ph and introduced him as such.

And the second Imam Ali (A.S.)ph selected a council of six people to select the person who should succeed him.

This Council consisted of: Imam 'Imam Ali (A.S.), peace be upon him, Uthman, Abdal Rahman ibn Awf, Talha, Zubayr and Sa'd bin Abi Waqas.

This Council, with a majority of Sa'd ibn Waqas, Abdal Rahman and Talha voted for Uthman. (The second Imam Ali (A.S.)ph had directed that if the Council should be divided three to three, the side that Abdal Rahman ibn Awf ('Uthman's son-in-law) was on would be the person selected).

Towards the end of Uthman's reign, the people arose against him for several reasons and before he had a chance to select his successor or select a Council, he was killed.

At this time, the majority of the people turned to 'Imam Ali (A.S.), peace be upon him, and selected him as their Imam Ali (A.S.)ph.

They pledged their allegiance to him as the successor of the Prophet, other than Mu'awiyah who was the governor of Damascus and who was certain that Imam 'Imam Ali (A.S.) would not support him. He then raised the flag of opposition which was the beginning of disgraceful events in the history of Islam and caused the shedding of the blood of a great many innocent people.

Here, in order to intellectually and historically clarify what happened, several questions arise, a few of which will be mentioned here below

Can the Ummah select the successor to the Prophet? .1

The answer to this question is that if we take the meaning of imamate to be external leadership of an Islamic society, the selection of a leader on behalf of society with the vote of the people is possible.

But if we take imamate to mean that which we have previously mentioned and as the Holy

Qur'an has described, doubtlessly, no one other than God can chose the Imam and the Imam Ali (A.S.)ph.

The conditions for imamate, according to the commentaries on the Holy Qur'an, is knowledge of all of the principles and practices of Islam, a knowledge whose base is in heaven and relies upon the knowledge of the Prophet so that he can guard and preserve the Divine Law of Islam. Another condition is that Imam must be immaculate and infallible, free from sin and error and is the selected of the Divine immaculateness so that the station of imamate and spiritual and material, external and internal leadership of the imamate can be assumed as well as austerity, piety, courage which is necessary to confirm this important post. The discrimination of these conditions can clearly only be done through God and the Prophet. It is He Who knows in whose spirit immaculateness has shown its rays, and it is He Who knows who has the highest knowledge needed for leadership, the sufficient courage and spiritual strength.

Those who placed the selection of the Imam and the Imam Ali (A.S.)ph of the Prophet in the hands of the people, in truth, changed the meaning of imamate in the Holy Qur'an and limited it to meaning only leadership and giving organization to the affairs of this world of the people. Otherwise the conditions of imamate in the general and complete sense can only be determined by the Creator and it is He Who knows who has these Imam Ali (A.S.)ties. The Holy Prophet, as well, could not have been selected by the vote of the people, but must rather have most definitely been selected by God Almighty, because other than God, no one .can discern the necessary Imam Ali (A.S.)ties in the Prophet

Did the Prophet not select a Person to succeed him? .2

There is no doubt that the precepts of Islam were universal and eternal and according to the direct verses of the Holy Qur'an, special to no time or place.

There is, also, no doubt that at the time of the death of the Holy Prophet, the precepts of Islam had not moved beyond the Arabian peninsula.

On the other hand, 13 years of the life of the Prophet in Mecca were spent in struggle against polytheism and idol worship and 10 years of the life of the Prophet, which began from the time of the migration to Medina which was the period of the blossoming of Islam, was spent mainly in conflicts and wars imposed upon him by the enemies.

Even though the Holy Prophet spent night and day endeavoring to have Islam be better understood and to teach the precepts of Islam, but is it clear that many of the Islamic issues needed more time and a person similar to the Holy Prophet was needed to be able to do so

and to accept this heavy responsibility.

Beyond this, the foreseeing of future events and providing the preliminaries for the school was among the most important tasks which was something that every leader thought about and would never allow himself to forget.

Beyond this, the Prophet of Islam had provided commands for all of the affairs of life from the most simple possible. Could it be, then, that he would not have provided for the important issue of the person who was to succeed him and not determine the imamate for the Muslims?

The totality of these three directions are clear reasons why the Prophet (S) most certainly took steps for the determination of his successor which we will mention in the later lessons so that this logical result will become more clear, because the Holy Prophet was never negligent in this area even though many political waves, after the Prophet, tried to fill the people's minds with the idea that he had neglected to select a successor.

Can one really believe that considering that when the Holy Prophet left the city for just a few days for a conflict (like Tabuk), he did not leave Medina empty of his successor and he took steps to assign a person to succeed him and act in his place, he not guarantee the future generations after his death by selecting his successor but rather left the Ummah in the middle of an abundant number of groups who had differences of opinion on the method of the continuity of Islam?

It is clear that the lack of assigning a successor would have been a great error for Islam which was recently formed and developing. Our intellect and logic tells us that such a situation is impossible to have come from the Prophet of Islam.

Those who say that this was the responsibility of the Ummah must at least show that the Prophet directed this issue whereas no such proof of this is offered

Consensus and Council .3

Let us assume that the Prophet of Islam ignored this vital issue and the Muslims themselves were duty-bound to choose his successor, but we know that consensus means the consensus of the Muslims and such a consensus did not exist in relation to the first Imam Ali (A.S.)ph.

Only a group of the Companions who lived in Medina made the decision to do this and the rest of the cities of Islam were not in agreement and did not participate in this decision. In Medina itself, 'Imam Ali (A.S.), peace be upon him, and a large number of the Bani Hashim, did not participate in any way. Thus, such a consensus cannot be accepted as such.

And if this method be correct, why did the first Imam Ali (A.S.)ph not use the same method in choosing the second Imam Ali (A.S.)ph?

Why did he personally select his successor? If the determination of one person is sufficient, the Holy Prophet, who was of the highest station should have his method of selection be accepted and if the later allegiance of the people would solve this problem, in relation to the Holy Prophet, they solve it better.

Beyond this, a third difficulty arises as to the third Imam Ali (A.S.) and that is why did the second Imam Ali (A.S.) not use the method which was used to select the first Imam Ali (A.S.)? Why did he ignore it as well as the tradition which had been used in his own case, that is, neither did he choose Consensus nor did he choose election of an individual but chose a council to do so.

If a council or the idea of consultation is correct, then why just six people? And how can the vote of three people out of six be sufficient?

These are questions which arise for every scholar of Islamic history and they have remained unanswered showing that the way to select the Imam was none of these

Imam Ali (A.S.) ibn Abu Talib was the most worthy of all'.4

Let us assume that the Prophet of Islam (S) did not determine who was to succeed him. Let us also assume that it was the responsibility of the people but can it be that at the time of choosing a person, from the point of view of a person who has knowledge and piety and other qualities, and is superior to all others, be put aside and that a person who is lower on this ladder be chosen?

A large group of Islamic scholars, even those who are among the Sunnis, have directly stated that 'Imam Ali (A.S.), peace be upon him, was the most aware person of Islamic affairs and the Traditions and traces which have remained from him, bear witness to this truth.

The history of Islam says that he was a place of refuge for the Ummah in all intellectual knowledge and difficulties and even if the other Imams Ali (A.S.) were asked difficult and complicated questions, they asked 'Imam Ali (A.S.) to answer them.

His courage, piety and austerity and other outstanding qualities which he possessed were superior to those of any other. Thus, if we assume that the people should select the most superior person, 'Imam Ali (A.S.), peace be upon him, was the most deserving. (Of course, this discussion has many, many documents which are beyond the range of this brief study to be presented here. Students who are interested may study further in this area

Think and Answer

1. Why can the people not select and choose the successor to the Prophet?
2. Does our intelligence and logic tell us that the Prophet did not select any one to succeed him or not?
3. What method was used to choose the first three Imam Ali (A.S.)s?
4. Was their method of selection based on Islamic precepts and logic?
5. Why was 'Imam Ali (A.S.) the most deserving of all