

AL-ISTIQA'AH vol.1 no.1

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The Qur'ân and Imâmah

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There is no gainsaying that of all differences that exist between the Ahl as-Sunnah and the Shî'ah, the issue of Imâmah is by far the most serious. It is in fact quite within the limits of reason and logic to say that the question of Imâmah is the root of all Sunnî-Shî'î differences; all other differences will upon closer scrutiny be found to result from the difference that exists on that central point. Therefore, no person or organisation who is serious about bringing Shî'îs and Sunnîs closer to one another can afford to ignore the doctrine of Imâmah. All endeavours aimed at removing the barriers that separate the Ahl as-Sunnah from the Shî'ah must start from this point. Starting from anywhere else would be similar to treating the symptoms, and not the cause, of a disease. For a while the symptoms might disappear, only to be reactivated at a later stage by the dormant cause. Likewise, attempting to solve Sunnî-Shî'î differences from any perspective other than that of its root, Imâmah, might for the immediate moment create the impression of removing obstacles to Muslim unity. In reality those very same obstacles will return as soon as the euphoria at the creation of that unity subsides.

As Muslims we are obliged to refer the differences that exist amongst us to Allâh and His Rasûl. In this series of articles we refer the doctrine of Imâmah to the Qur'ân, with the purpose of ascertaining whether this doctrine as conceived of and believed in by the Ithnâ 'Asharî (or Ja'farî) Shî'ah is justified by Divine Revelation or not.

The Doctrine of Imâmah

Before going any further it would be well-advised, for the benefit of those who may not be fully aware of what the Imâmah of the Shî'ah means, to expand somewhat upon the detail of the issue. Once the reader has a proper focus of what Imâmah means to the Shî'ah, and what its position in the belief structure of the Shî'ah is, we will continue with our discussion of that doctrine in the light of the Qur'ân.

Essentially, Imâmah is about leadership of the Ummah after the demise of Rasûlullâh sallallâhu ‘alayhi wasallam. The Shî‘ah believe that just as Allâh chose Muhammad sallallâhu ‘alayhi wasallam as His Messenger to mankind, he chose and appointed a line of twelve men to succeed him as the leaders of the Ummah in all matters, spiritual as well as temporal. The first of these leaders, or Imâms as they are called, was ‘Alî ibn Abî Tâlib radiyallâhu ‘anhu. He was succeeded by his eldest son Hasan, and he by his brother Husayn. After Husayn the Imâmah continued in his progeny until the year 260AH, when the twelfth Imâm, a child of five, disappeared upon the death of his father. He is believed to be the Awaited Mahdî who will return from occultation to establish justice upon the earth. To these twelve men from amongst the family of Rasûlullâh sallallâhu ‘alayhi wasallam alone belongs the right to assume leadership of the Ummah. There are two aspects to Imâmah that need to be looked at with attention. The first is the nature of the appointment of the Imâms, and the second is the nature of their office.

The nature of the appointment of the Twelve Imâms

As far as the nature of their appointment is concerned, it is a matter of consensus amongst the Shî‘ah that the right of their twelve Imâms to lead the Ummah was bestowed by Allâh Ta‘âlâ Himself. No distinction is made between the appointment of Muhammad sallallâhu ‘alayhi wasallam as the Messenger of Allâh and the appointment of the twelve Imâms as his successors. Underscoring this vital aspect of Imâmah, ‘Allâmah Muhammad Husayn Àl Kâshif al-Ghitâ, who was the most prominent Shî‘î ‘âlim of Najaf in Iraq during the seventies, writes in his book *Asl ash-Shî‘ah wa-Usûluhâ*:

Imâmah is a divine station, just like Nubuwwah. Just as Allâh chooses whomsoever He wants to for Nubuwwah and Risâlah ... similarly, for Imâmah too, He selects whomsoever He wishes.¹

It is interesting to note that the book from which this statement is drawn was written for the express purpose of correcting contemporary misconceptions about the Shî‘ah. Since Imâmah is then for all practical purposes on exactly the same plane as Nubuwwah and Risâlah, consistency would dictate that the rejection of Imâmah be censured with the same severity as the rejection of Nubuwwah and Risâlah. If rejection of the Nubuwwah of Muhammad sallallâhu ‘alayhi wasallam cast the likes of Abû Jahl and Abû Lahab outside the fold of

Islâm, then it is only logical to expect that rejection of the Imâmah of 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib radiyallâhu 'anhu should cast the likes of Abû Bakr, 'Umar and the rest of the Sahâbah radiyallâhu 'anhum out of the fold of Islâm. For one who views the problem from this perspective it thus comes as no surprise to find the Shî'ah narrating from their Imâmams that "all the people became murtadd after the death of Rasûlullâh, except three."² , since it is consistent with the principle that equates Imâmah with Nubuwwah in the sense that each of them is a position appointed by Allâh.

What is surprising is the opinion the Shî'ah of today express about the Ahl as-Sunnah in general. One would expect them to say about the Ahl as-Sunnah as they have said about the Sahâbah: that they are unbelievers, out of the fold of Islâm. After all, there are many non-Muslims who believe in the oneness of Allâh, but do not believe in the prophethood of Muhammad sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam, and for that reason we all regard them as unbelievers. If Imâmah is then a "divine station, like Nubuwwah", Sunnîs who do not believe in the Imâmah of the Twelve Imâmams must also be unbelievers. There have been many 'ulamâ of the Shî'ah in the past who have displayed consistency in this regard and declared all those who deny the Imâmah of the Twelve Imâmams - like the Ahl as-Sunnah - unbelievers. For example, Ibn Bâbawayh al-Qummî (died 381AH), the author of one of the four canonical hadîth collections of the Shî'ah, Man Lâ Yahduruhû al-Faqîh, states in the treatise he compiled on the creed of the Shî'ah:

It is our belief about one who rejects the Imâmah of Amîr al-Mu'minîn (Sayyidunâ 'Alî) and the Imâmams after him that he is the same as one who rejects the Nubuwwah of the Ambiyâ'.

It is our belief concerning a person who accepts (the Imâmah of) Amîr al-Mu'minîn but rejects any one of the Imâmams after him, that he is similar to one who believes in all the Ambiyâ' but rejects the Nubuwwah of Muhammad sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam. The Nabî sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam said: "The Imâmams after me are twelve. The first is Amîr al-Mu'minîn 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib and the last is the Qâ'im (the Mahdî). Obedience to them is obedience to me, and disobedience to them is disobedience to me. Thus, whoever rejects one of them has rejected me."

Whoever wrongfully claims the Imâmah is an accursed oppressor. Whoever places the Imâmah in anyone besides its rightful repositories is an accursed oppressor. The Nabî sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam said: "Whoever shall deny 'Alî his Imâmah after me has denied my Nubuwwah, and whoever denies me my

Nubuwwah has denied Allâh His divinity." Imâm Ja'far as-Sâdiq said: "Whoever doubts the kufr of our enemies is himself a kâfir."³

His student Shaykh Mufîd (died 413AH) writes:

There is consensus amongst the Imâmiyyah (the Ithnâ 'Asharî or Ja'farî Shî'ah) that whoever denies the Imâmah of anyone of the Imâms, and denies the duty of obedience to them that Allâh has decreed, that such a person is a kâfir, misguided, and that he deserves everlasting torment in Hell.⁴

The prolific Abû Ja'far at-Tûsî, called Shaykh at-Tâ'ifah, (died 460AH), who is the author of two of the four canonical hadîth collections, has the following to say:

Rejection of Imâmah is kufr, just as rejection of Nubuwwah is kufr.⁵

The mujaddid of Shî'ism in the eighth century after the Hijrah, Ibn Mutahhar al-Hillî (died 726AH) expresses similar sentiments in the following terms:

Imâmah is a universal grace (lutf 'âmm) while Nubuwwah is a special grace (lutf khâss), because it is possible that a specific period in time can be void of a living Nabî, while the same is not true for the Imâm. To reject the universal grace is worse than to reject the special grace.⁶

This is the opinion held by four of the most eminent classical scholars of the Shî'ah, and if seen from the angle of consistency, it is a commendable position indeed. Yet, if one has to ask the Shî'ah of today (especially recent converts to Shî'ism) whether they believe Sunnîs are Muslims or not, they will respond with surprise, and might even appear grieved at such a question. As far as recent converts to Shî'ism are concerned, this is to be expected, since it is in the interest of any propaganda scheme that certain facts be kept secret from neophytes. However those who are more knowledgeable about the technicalities of Shî'ism will know that in the eyes of the Shî'ah a distinction is made between a Muslim and a Mu'min. All those who profess Islâm outwardly are Muslims: Sunnîs, Zaydîs, Mu'tazilîs, and all other sects. A Mu'min, however, is only he who believes in the Twelve Imâms. By this clever ruse the fuqahâ of the Shî'ah kill several birds with one stone. By accepting all other sects as Muslims they protect themselves against the ridiculousness of casting out of the fold of Islâm over 90% of its adherents, and the same men who carried the

banner of Islâm to all corners of the world. At the same time they avoid the antagonism of Sunnîs and others, which facilitates proselytisation for them. On the other hand, by the subtle measure of distinguishing Muslim from Mu'min they effectively excommunicate their opponents. Muslims are those to whom the laws of Islâm apply in this world. It is therefore permissible to intermarry with them, to pray behind them, to eat what they slaughter, etc., while Mu'mins are those to whom salvation in the hereafter belongs exclusively, and that depends upon belief in the Twelve Imâms. This distinction between Muslim and Mu'min can be found throughout classical Shî'î literature. The seventh century faqîh, Yahyâ ibn Sa'îd al-Hillî (died 690AH), for example writes in his manual on fiqh, *al-Jâmi' lish-Sharâ'i'*:

It is correct for a Muslim to make an endowment (waqf) upon Muslims. Muslims are those who utter the two shahâdahs, and their children. But if a person makes something waqf upon the Mu'minîn, it will be exclusively for the Imâmiyyah who believe in the Imâmah of the Twelve Imâms.⁷

Eight centuries later, exactly the same view is propounded by Ayatullâh al-Khumaynî. In his own manual of fiqh, *Tahrîr al-Wasîlah*, he states:

If a person makes a waqf upon the Muslims it will be for all those who confess the two shahâdahs ... If an Imâmî makes a waqf upon the Mu'minîn it will be restricted to the Ithnâ 'Ashariyyah.⁸

Some amongst the contemporary spokesmen for Shî'ism, like Kâshif al-Ghitâ, have realised that even this ruse is not sufficiently subtle. He thus devised another terminology. He speaks of being a Mu'min in the special sense, and of being a Mu'min in the general sense. Whoever believes in Imâmah is regarded as a Mu'min in the special sense, while those who do not believe in it are regarded as being Mu'min in the general sense, as a result of which all the temporal laws of Islâm are applicable to him. The result of this difference, he says, will become apparent on the Day of Judgement, in the degrees of Divine proximity and honour that will be bestowed upon the believers in Imâmah.⁹

To us this reveals much more than what the author intended. It reveals to us that when the Shî'ah say they regard Sunnîs as Muslims, it is in strict reference to worldly matters. In eschatological matters, matters of the hereafter, Sunnîs who do not believe in the Imâmah of the Twelve Imâms are just like Jews, Christians,

Buddhists, Hindus or any other rejectors of the Nubuwwah of Rasûlullâh sallallâhu ‘alayhi wasallam. The only reason for saying that Sunnîs are Muslims is expedience and convenience. Without professing such an opinion the Shî’ah would have had to retreat into seclusion and bear ostracism from the rest of the Muslim world. This reason is given by Sayyid ‘Abdullâh Shubbar (died 1232AH) in his commentary of az-Ziyârat al-Jâmi’ah, the comprehensive du’â read at the graves of the Imâms. At the point where the ziyârah reads:

Whoever denies you is a kâfir,

he comments upon it, saying:

There are many narrations that indicate that the opponents are kâfir. To document all of them would require a separate book. Reconciling such narrations with that which is known about the Imâms, viz. that they used to live, eat and socialise with them, leads to the conclusion that they (the opponents) are kâfir, and that they will dwell in Hell forever, but that in this world the laws of Islâm are applied to them as a gesture of mercy and beneficence to the True Denomination (the Shî’ah), since it is impossible to avoid them.¹⁰

The nature of the office of the Imâms

On this point it would be sufficient to say that the Shî’ah bestow upon their Imâms all the perfections and accomplishments of the Ambiyâ’, and even more. It would be impossible to document here all the narrations that deal with the status of the Imâms, but it might be just as informative to quote the chapters under which they have been documented in a source that is described as a "veritable encyclopaedia of the knowledge of the Imâms": Bihâr al-Anwâr of ‘Allâmah Muhammad Bâqir al-Majlisî (died 1111AH), widely reputed to be the greatest and most influential Shî’î scholar of the Safawid era. During his lifetime he occupied the office of Shaykh al-Islâm in Isfahan, capital of the Safawids, and even to this day his works are indispensable to the Shî’î clergy as well as their lay public. We quote here the name of the chapter, as well as the number of narrations he documents in each chapter:

1. The Imâms possess more knowledge than the Ambiyâ’ (13 narrations)¹¹
2. The Imâms are superior to the Ambiyâ’ and the entire creation. The Covenant of the Imâms was taken from them (the Ambiyâ’), the Malâ’ikah and the entire creation. The (major prophets called) ulul-‘Azm (Nûh, Ibrâhîm, Mûsâ and ‘Isâ)

attained the status of ulul-'Azm on account of loving the Imâms. (88 narrations)¹²

3. The du'âs of the Ambiyâ' were answered because they invoked the wasîlah of the Imâms. (16 narrations)¹³

4. The Imâms can bring the dead back to life. They can cure blindness and leprosy. They possess all the miracles of the Ambiyâ' (4 narrations)¹⁴

5. Nothing of the knowledge of Heaven, Earth, Jannah and Jahannam is hidden from them. The Kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth was shown to them. They know all that happened and that will happen upto the Day of Resurrection. (22 narrations)¹⁵

6. The Imâms know the truth of a person's faith or hypocrisy. They possess a book that contains the names of the inmates of Jannah, the names of their supporters and their enemies. (40 narrations)¹⁶

The titles of these chapters create quite a vivid impression of the narrated material upon which the Shî'ah base their faith. The office of Imâmah can thus be seen to incorporate more than just the political leadership of the Ummah. The Imâms are more than just heads of state with a divine right to rule. They are the repositories of every branch of knowledge and perfection possessed by the Ambiyâ'. The existence of the world depends upon their presence. They are the intermediaries upon whose intercession acceptance of the prayers of even the Ambiyâ' depends. Their office is one that combines political, religious, scientific, cosmological and metaphysical supremacy over the entire creation. From this one can understand the reason for al-Khumaynî's statement in the book al-Hukûmat al-Islâmiyyah, upon which rests the entire philosophy of his revolution:

It is of the undeniable tenets of our faith that our Imâms possess a status with Allâh that neither Angel nor Messenger can aspire to.¹⁷

After this introduction to the concept of Imâmah, the nature of the appointment of the Imâms, and the nature of their office, we pose the question: Is belief in such a concept justified and upheld by the Qur'ân? Surely a belief of such momentousness, an article of faith with such far reaching consequences, that supercedes even belief in the Ambiyâ', must be rooted in the Qur'ân, the book which was revealed by Allâh

*as an explanation of all things, a guide, a mercy, and glad tidings to the Muslims.
(an-Nahl:89)*

It is with the purpose of answering this question that this series of articles is written.

To be continued.

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the Ambiyâ' and the entire creation. The Covenant of the Imâms was taken from them

AL-ISTIQA'AH vol.1 no.2

The Qur'ân and Imâmah

The Qur'ân and Imâmah (2)

Imâmah and Nubuwwah in the Qur'ân

In this article we investigate the Qur'ânic foundations of the Shî'ite concept of Imâmah. By analysis of the usage of the word imâm and its plural form a'immah in the Qur'ân we will investigate whether the Qur'ân provides any basis for the doctrine of Imâmah as formulated in Shî'ite theology.

In limiting our investigation to the Qur'ân, it is not our contention that the Sunnah is inconsequential in issues of doctrine. Instead, it is out of the conviction that a doctrinal issue like Imâmah, which Shî'ite theology places above Nubuwwah, must find textual support from the Qur'ân. After all, the "secondary" issue of Nubuwwah finds more than ample support in the pages of the Qur'ân. No one, after reading the clear and unambiguous Qur'ânic texts wherein Allâh makes mention of His Messengers and Prophets, their status,

وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (86 الأنعام)

And each (of them) we favoured above all the worlds. (al-An'âm : 86)

their stories,

وَهَلْ آتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى (9 طه)

And has there come to you the story of Mûsâ? (Tâhâ : 9)

وَأَنْتَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (69 الشعراء)

And recite to them the story of Ibrâhîm. (ash-Shu'arâ : 69)

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ أَحْسَنَ الْقَصَصِ... (3 يوسف)

We relate unto you the most beautiful of stories. (Yûsuf : 3)

the explicit mention of their names,

وَتِلْكَ حُجَّتُنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مَن نَشَاءُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ (83) وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ كُلًّا هَدَيْنَا وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِن قَبْلُ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (84) وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَى وَعِيسَى وَإِلْيَاسَ كُلٌّ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (85) وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَالْيَسَعَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطًا وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (86) الْأَنْعَام

Such was the argument we gave Ibrâhîm against his people. We raise in degree whomsoever We will, and your Lord is Wise, All-Knowing. We gave him Ishâq and Ya'qûb; each of them We guided. And before that, We guided Nûh, and among his (Ibrâhîm's) progeny (We guided) Dâwûd, and Sulaymân, and Ayyûb, and Yûsuf, and Mûsâ, and Hârûn; thus do We reward those who good. And (We guided) Zakariyyâ, and Yahyâ, and 'Isâ, and Ilyâs; all of them of the Righteous. And Ismâ'îl, and Alyasa', and Yûnus, and Lût; each of them We favoured above all the worlds. (al-An'âm : 83-86)

and the importance of belief in them as an integral part of faith in Islâm,

... وَمَن يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا (النساء 136)

And whoever denies Allâh, His Messengers, His Books and the Last Day has clearly gone astray. (an-Nisâ' : 136)

can reasonably doubt that the Qur'ân supports, or rather enjoins, belief in Nubuwwah. The question now is: Does the same hold true for Imâmah? If Imâmah is superior to Nubuwwah, as the theology of the Ithnâ 'Asharî Shî'ah teaches, it would be only reasonable to expect that the Qur'ân would deal in equally explicit terms with Imâmah; and if not, that at least a clear, unambiguous picture what Imâmah is and who the Imâms are, would be drawn by the Qur'ân.

A book

The word imâm recurs 7 times in the Qur'ân, while its plural form, a'immah, appears 5 times. In 3 of these cases it refers explicitly to a book:

...وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَى إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً...

And before it was the Book of Mûsâ, a guide and a mercy. (Hûd : 17)

...وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَى إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً...

And before it was the Book of Mûsâ, a guide and a mercy. (al-Ahqâf : 12)

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ (12)

Verily, we will restore the dead to life, and we write that which they sent forth, and that which they left behind; and of everything we have taken account in a Clear Book. (Yâsîn : 12)

The champions of kufr

In another 2 cases it refers to the champions of kufr:

فَقَاتِلُوا أئِمَّةَ الْكُفْرِ إِنَّهُمْ لَا أَيْمَانَ لَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْتَهُونَ (12)

Fight the leaders of kufr. (at-Tawbah : 12)

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ لَا يُنصَرُونَ (41)

And We made them leaders who call towards the Fire. (al-Qasas : 41)

A road

One reference is to a clearly discernible road:

فَانتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمَا لَبِإِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ (79)

And verily, the two (cities) lie next to a clear road. (alHijr : 79)

Leadership of the Israelites

In the remaining six places where the word is used, it is used in terms of its literal meaning, i.e. leadership. In Sûrah al-Ambiyâ' it is stated:

قُلْنَا يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (69) وَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا فَجَعَلْنَاهُمُ الْأَخْسَرِينَ (70) وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ
وَلُوطًا إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا لِلْعَالَمِينَ (71) وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ نَافِلَةً وَكُلًّا جَعَلْنَا
صَالِحِينَ (72) وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ فِعْلَ الْخَيْرَاتِ وَإِقَامَ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءَ الزَّكَاةِ
وَكَانُوا لَنَا عَابِدِينَ (73)

We said: O fire, be cool and (a means of) safety unto Ibrâhîm. And they planned against him; but We made them the greater losers. And We delivered him and Lût to the land which We blessed for the nations. And We gave him Ishâq, and Ya'qûb as an additional gift; and all of them We made righteous men. And We made them leaders who guide by Our command; and We revealed to them the doing of good, the establishment of prayer and the giving of alms. And they were men who served Us. (al-Ambiyâ' : 69-73)

In this extract, which had to be extended somewhat in order that the reader may see the full context in which the word a'imma is used, one clearly sees its association with the function of the Ambiyâ' as the leaders of men, who guide them towards Allâh. This unequivocal identification of a'imma as Ambiyâ' leads us to conclude that the reference in Sûrah as-Sajdah too, is to the Ambiyâ', and not to any other category of men:

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَلَا تَكُنْ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِنْ لِقَائِهِ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ (23) وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ
أَئِمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ (24)

Indeed, We gave Mûsâ the Book, so be not in doubt about meeting him; and We made it a (source of) guidance for the Children of Isrâ'îl. And We made from amongst them leaders who guided by Our command, when they persevered. And they had full certainty in Our signs. (as-Sajdah : 23-24)

Even if the scope of a'imma in this verse were to be extended to include people other than the Ambiyâ', there is nothing to justify its identification with the elaborate doctrine of Imâmah as conceived of by the Shî'ah.

In a third verse Allâh speaks of His plans for the oppressed Israelites in Egypt:

وَنُرِيدُ أَنْ نَمُنَّ عَلَى الَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَنَجْعَلَهُمْ أَئِمَّةً وَنَجْعَلَهُمُ الْوَارِثِينَ (5)

And We wished to be gracious to those who were oppressed in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them heirs. (al-Qasas : 5)

In order to see who the word a'imma refers to in this verse one only has to look at the persons in whom this divine wish came to fulfilment. It was primarily in Nabî Mûsâ and the other prophet-kings of Banî Isrâ'îl like Nabî Dâwûd and Nabî Sulaymân 'alayhimus salâm that the leadership referred to in this verse, came to be vested. If at times they were ruled by men other than the Ambiyâ', the status of those leaders was never seen to be superior to the rank of the Ambiyâ'. Verses like the above three, apart from dealing specifically with the Ambiyâ' of Banî Isrâ'îl, are not in the least indicative of the existence of a rank like that of Imâmah as conceived of by the Shî'ah.

Leadership of the pious

There remain three places where the word imâm is mentioned in the Qur'ân. In one of these three places Allâh speaks of the prayer of His exemplary worshippers:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا (74)

(They are) those who say: Our Lord, grant us the coolness of (our) eyes in our wives and children, and make us leaders of the pious. (al-Furqân : 74)

This verse speaks of normal people who do not belong to a special class like the Ambiyâ', asking Allâh to make them imâms, in the sense of paragons of virtue, whose example others would strive to emulate. It is very obvious that it cannot refer to a group of "divinely appointed Imâms", for the reason that the Imâms' elevation to the rank of Imâmah is not on account of their prayers. Since their appointment, like that of the Ambiyâ', is supposedly divine in origin, it not attainable by any amount of exertion or devotion.

It is interesting to note that this verse proved to be so unpalatable to certain of the early Shî'ah that they declared it to have been corrupted. The following

narration appears in the tafsîr of ‘Alî ibn Ibrâhîm al-Qummî, the teacher of Abû Ja‘far al-Kulaynî:

It was read to Abû ‘Abdillâh (i.e. Imâm Ja‘far as-Sâdiq):

And make us leaders of the pious.

He said: 'It would be an enormous thing for them to ask Allâh to make them Imâms of the pious.' [The Shî‘î concept of an Imâm is intended, of course, since the Imâms are appointed, and no one can become an Imâm by praying for it.]

Someone enquired: 'How was it then revealed, O son of Rasûlullâh?'

He replied: 'It was revealed:

...and make for us leaders from amongst the pious.1

This narration, documented in a tafsîr of great repute amongst the early tafsîrs of the Shî‘ah, (a tafsîr, in fact, that is described by its twentieth century editor as being "in reality the commentary of the Imâms al-Bâqir and as-Sâdiq",² and each one of whose narrators is regarded as reliable and credible by Shî‘î hadîth experts³, which vouches for its authenticity by Shî‘î standards) obviates the need for further discussion around the meaning of the word Imâm as it appears in this âyah.

On the Day of Judgement

In Sûrah al-Isrâ’ Allâh Ta‘âlâ says:

يَوْمَ نَدْعُو كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ ...

The day when we will call all people by their leaders. (al-Isrâ’ : 71)

The Imâm spoken of in this âyah is recognised by the mufassirûn of the Ahl as-Sunnah as either the book of deeds or the prophet to whose Ummah the person belonged. The first meaning is preferred by Ibn Kathîr,⁴ who mentions in support of his preference the âyât where the word Imâm was used in the sense of a book (see above). This meaning is further supported by the rest of the âyah:

...فَمَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَأُولَئِكَ يَقْرَءُونَ كِتَابَهُمْ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلًا (71)

So those who are given their book in their right hand will read their books.

The second meaning also finds ample support in the Qur'ân. In another âyah Allâh says:

فَكَيْفَ إِذَا جِئْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ بِشَهِيدٍ وَجِئْنَا بِكَ عَلَى هَؤُلَاءِ شَهِيدًا (41)

How will it be when We bring forth from every Ummah a witness, and bring you (O Muhammad) as a witness over these? (an-Nisâ':41)

From the way in which the position of the Nabî sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam is compared to the position of the "witnesses" of the other Ummahs we can only conclude that the reference is to the Ambiyâ. It therefore follows that those Ummahs will be called by the names of their Ambiyâ. Calling the Ummahs of the past by the names of the Ambiyâ who were sent to them is further a common thing in both the Qur'ân and the Sunnah. The 'Âd, for example, are commonly referred to as "the people of Hûd", just like Banû Isrâ'îl are called "the people of Mûsâ". Identifying the Imâm mentioned in the âyah under discussion with the Ambiyâ is therefore warranted by both the Qur'ân and the Sunnah.

As for the claim of the Shî'ah that it refers to the Twelve Imâms,⁵ this claim not only lacks Qur'ânic support, it also curtails the general scope of the âyah. The lack of Qur'ânic support is evident from the above discussion on the usage of the word Imâm in the Qur'ân. The restriction of the general scope of the âyah arises from the chronological disparity between the times when the Twelve Imâms lived, and the periods during which previous Ummahs flourished. If we say that all Ummahs will be called by the names of the Twelve Imâms, then what about the Ummahs that existed before them? By whose name will they be called? After all, the âyah says that all people will be called by their leaders.

In addition, when for argument's sake we do assume that the reference is to the Twelve Imâms, we are left with a somewhat incongruous situation. Sayyidunâ 'Alî, the first of the Twelve Imâms, died in the year 40. His son Sayyidunâ Hasan died nine years later, in 49. If Sayyidunâ 'Alî is the Imâm for the people of his time, Sayyidunâ Hasan is left with only those people who were born during his nine years. All the other people of his time who were alive during his father's time will form part of his father's group, and not his. The tenure of the 3rd Imâm lasted for 22 years; the 4th for 34 years; the 5th for 19 years; the 6th for 34 years; the 7th for 35 years; the 8th for 20 years; the 9th for 17 years; the 10th for 34 years; and the 11th for only 6 years. Suddenly, with the 12th

Imâm, the Awaited Mahdî, we have a tenure of Imâmah that has been running for over 1200 years. The group that will supposedly be called by the name of the 11th Imâm, for example, will only include people that were born during his Imâmah that ran from 254 up to 260, while the numbers of those who will be called by the name of the 12th Imâm will be practically incalculable.

Compare this incongruous scenario with the much more orderly and Qur'ânic system of having the various Ummahs called by the names of their Ambiyâ on the Day of Qiyâmah, and the absurdity of using the 71st âyah of Sûrah al-Isrâ' to substantiate the doctrine of Imâmah as conceived of by the Shî'ah will be fully exposed. There can be no question that the word Imâm in this âyah does not refer to the Twelve Imâms.

To be continued.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Tafsîr ('Alî ibn Ibrâhîm) al-Qummî vol.1 p. 10 (ed. Sayyid Tayyib al-Mûsawî, 2nd edition, Kitâbfarosh 'Allâmeah, Qum 1968)
2. *ibid.*, editor's introduction.
3. Abû Tâlib at-Tajlîl at-Tabrîzî: Mu'jam ath-Thiqât p. 224 (Mu'assasat an-Nashr al-Islâmî, Qum 1404AH). In this book the author has compiled a list of all reliable hadîth narrators of the Shî'ah. One of his sources is the tafsîr of al-Qummî. In the third chapter of this book he gives a list of the narrators upon whom al-Qummî has relied in narrating the material contained in his tafsîr, quoting al-Qummî's statement in the introduction to his book, that "we will mention and inform about that which reached us, which our mentors and reliable narrators have narrated". He then quotes the author of Wasâ'il ash-Shî'ah who states that "'Alî ibn Ibrâhîm al-Qummî has testified that his tafsîr is narrated from the Imâms by reliable narrators." (Wasâ'il vol. 3 p. 524)
4. Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr vol. 3 p. 52 (Maktabah Dâr at-Turâth, Cairo n.d.)
5. In the first volume of al-Kâfî this âyah is used thrice in relation to the Imâms.

The Imâmah of Ibrâhîm ‘alayhis salâm

وَإِذِ ابْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا ، قَالَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي ، قَالَ لَا يَنَالُ عَهْدِي الظَّالِمِينَ (البقرة : 124)

And (remember) when Ibrâhîm was tested by his Lord with certain words (commands), and he fulfilled them. (Allâh) said: “I will make you an Imâm to mankind”. (Ibrâhîm said): “And also from my offspring.” (Allâh) said: “My Covenant will not be attained by the Unjust.” (al-Baqarah:124)

This âyah is probably the most frequently cited proof for the Shî‘î doctrine of Imâmah. There are several angles to their appropriation of the âyah in support of their belief. Our foremost concern here is with the meaning and connotation of the word *imâm* as it appears here. Further on we will also examine the issue of the “offspring of Ibrâhîm”.

Isolation

As far as the connotation of the word *imâm* is concerned, we first need to recall that none of the other usages of the word *imâm* in the Qur’ân supports the existence of a divinely ordained rank distinct from and superior to the rank of Nubuwwah and Risâlah. We have seen it used to denote a book, or a record of deeds. We have seen it used in the sense of a clearly discernible road. We found it at places to refer to the champions of Kufr. At times it indicated leadership of the pious, but that leadership we found to be incompatible with the Shî‘î concept of Imâmah, since it is of an acquired nature, and not divinely ordained. We also found it to refer to the Ambiyâ of Banî Isrâ‘îl, in which case it is a reference to the Ambiyâ’s function of leadership and guidance of their people, and certainly not a rank apart from and higher than that of Nubuwwah.

Therefore, when we look at the Shî‘î claim that the Imâmah of Ibrâhîm mentioned in this âyah is the same as the Imâmah they ascribe to their Twelve Imâms, we

have to treat it as an isolated argument that is unsupported by instances where the word *imâm* is used in the Qur'ân. This isolation in which the argument finds itself is in itself a most potent argument against the Shî'î claim, since any cardinal article of faith (which is what the Shî'ah believe Imâmah to be) obviously deserves much more than a single reference in isolation. Compare this with the way in which reference is made to other cardinal articles of faith: Tawhîd, Risâlah, Malâ'ikah, life after death etc. Reference to issues like these are so frequent and abundant that they may well be looked upon as major themes of the Qur'ân, and therefore undeniable tenets of faith. Does a single isolated reference, the connotation of which is thereupon highly debatable, constitute adequate grounds for believing that the Qur'ân upholds and teaches the existence of the rank of Imâmah, distinct from and superior to that of Nubuwwah and Risâlah?

Connotation

After this preliminary discussion we now turn to the meaning of the word *imâm* as used in the context of this âyah. According to a Shî'î tradition Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm was already a Nabî when Allâh told him He would make him an Imâm for people. It thus follows that Imâmah has to be a status separate from Nubuwwah as well as superior to it. The narration goes:

Zayd ash-Shahhâm says: I heard Abû 'Abdillâh (i.e. Imâm Ja'far as-Sâdiq) saying: "Verily Allâh made Ibrâhîm an 'Abd (slave) before He made him a Nabî. And verily Allâh made him a Nabî before He made him a Rasûl. And verily Allâh made him a Rasûl before He made him a Khalîl (friend). And verily Allâh made him an Khalîl before He made him an Imâm."¹

This manner of regarding the Imâmah of Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm *'alayhis salâm* creates several questions. Firstly, if it is as the Shî'ah claim, that his appointment as Imâm superceded in excellence all his other distinctions, then why is it that nowhere else in the Qur'ân is he referred to as "Imâm"? We find that Allâh speaks of him as Nabî and Siddîq:

وَأذْكَرَ فِي الْكِتَابِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ صِدِّيقًا نَبِيًّا (مريم : 41)

And make mention in the Book of Ibrâhîm. Verily he was a Siddîq (truthful) and a Nabî. (Maryam:41)

We find mention the sterling qualities he possessed:

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ لَحَلِيمٌ أَوَّاهٌ مُنِيبٌ (هود : 75)

Verily Ibrâhîm was forbearing, compassionate and given to look to Allâh. (Hûd:75)

إِنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ كَانَ أُمَّةً قَانِتًا لِلَّهِ حَنِيفًا ، وَلَمْ يَكُ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ، شَاكِرًا لِّأَنْعَمِهِ ، اجْتَبَاهُ وَهَدَاهُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ، وَآتَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً ، وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (النحل : 120-122)

Ibrâhîm was indeed an Ummah, devoutly obedient to Allâh and true in faith. He was not of the Mushrikîn. He was grateful for (Allâh's) favours. We chose him and guided him to a straight way. And We gave him good in this world, and he will be, in the Hereafter, of the Righteous.(an-Nahl:120-122)

وَأذْكَرُ عِبَادَنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ أُولِي الْأَيْدِي وَالْأَبْصَارِ ، إِنَّا أَخْلَصْنَاهُمْ بِخَالِصَةٍ ذِكْرَى الدَّارِ ، وَإِنَّهُمْ عِنْدَنَا لَمِنَ الْمُصْطَفَيْنِ الْأَخْيَارِ (ص:45-47)

And commemorate Our servants Ibrâhîm, Ishâq and Ya'qûb, possessors of power and vision. Verily We selected them for a special pupose: (to proclaim) the message of the Hereafter. And verily, they were of the Elect and the Good. (Sâd:45-47)

Nowhere in the Qur’ân is there to be found any reference to Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm ‘*alayhis salâm* as “Imâm”. Another question which poses itself here is that if Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm ‘*alayhis salâm* became an Imâm only after he had already been a Nabî, a Rasûl and a Khalîl, who was the Imâm for the time that he was not yet given that status? Shî‘î tradition is very emphatic that the earth cannot exist without an Imâm; in *al-Kâfî* there is an independent chapter under “The earth can never be void of a Hujjah (Imâm)”.² If there lived during the time that Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm ‘*alayhis salâm* was successively an ‘Abd, Nabî, Rasûl and Khalîl, someone who was superior in rank to him, why is it that the Qur’ân is completely silent about that person? The same may be said about all the other supposed “Imâms” in history. The Qur’ân is completely silent about their existence. Whenever mentioned is made in the Qur’ân of Imâms in the sense of leadership and guidance towards Allâh it is with reference to the Ambiyâ. There is no mention at all of Imâms other than the Ambiyâ. This clearly means that in the terminology of the Qur’ân the term “Imâm” does not denote a rank “distinct from and superior to Nubuwwah”. Rather it indicates the major function of the Ambiyâ, which is to guide mankind towards Allâh. The Qur’ân itself is unequivocal about that. After mentioning by name eighteen of the Ambiyâ, Allâh says:

ذَلِكَ هُدَى اللَّهِ يَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ (الأنعام: 88)

That is the guidance with which Allâh guides whomsoever of His servants He chooses. (al-An‘âm:88)

Then Allâh goes on to say:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ فَبِهِدَاهُمُ افْتَدِهِ (الأنعام: 90)

Those are the men whom Allâh has guided, so follow you their guidance. (al-An‘âm:90)

The Qur'ân recognises no divinely appointed guides for humanity other than the Ambiyâ. Therefore, when we notice the Ambiyâ being referred to in the Qur'ân as “Imâms” we are compelled to read therein the fact that guidance of mankind was their prime duty, and not that they were “Imâms” in addition to being Ambiyâ, or that there could be “Imâms” who were not Ambiyâ. This also is the meaning of the Imâmah of Ibrâhîm *'alayhis salâm*.

There is, however, a very special reason why the Qur'ân makes particular mention of his Imâmah. Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm, amongst all the Ambiyâ, was that Nabî who is recognised as the father of the world's major religions. Islâm, shares with Judaism and Christianity the collective name of the “Abrahamic faiths”. Even Hinduism, it is claimed, reveres the personality of Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm, though distortedly as Brahma. There is probably no other Nabî of antiquity whose influence over mankind has been as huge as that of Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm *'alayhis salâm*. It comes therefore as no surprise that when the time dawned for Islâm to supplant all other religions, it was the pure religion of Ibrâhîm that Allâh ordered His final and beloved messenger Sayyidunâ Muḥammad *sallallâhu 'alayhi wa-âlihî wasallam* to emulate:

ثُمَّ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ أَنْ اتَّبِعْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا (النحل : 123)

Then We revealed to you (O Muḥammad): Follow the religion of Ibrâhîm, the True in Faith. (an-Nahl:123)

The Offspring of Ibrâhîm

Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm pleaded with Allâh to extend the Imâmah which Allâh promised him, to his progeny after him. Since the Twelve Imâms of the Shî'ah are also of the offspring of Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm, they claim the âyah as proof of their Imâmah. Since we have already demonstrated that the Imâmah of Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm is for all practical purposes synonymous with his Nubuwwah, we maintain here too, that the extension of that promise meant the gift of Nubuwwah to men from amongst his progeny, and as such it was realised in the elevation of

Ismâ‘îl, Ishâq, Ya‘qûb, Yûsuf, Mûsâ, Hârûn, Dâwûd, Sulaymân, Ilyâs, Yahyâ, ‘Isâ and finally Muḥammad ‘*alayhimus salâm* to the rank of Ambiyâ. Extension of the divine promise is warranted by the Qur’ân only upto this extent. The Qur’ân does not mention anything beyond that. This is borne out by the following verse:

وَجَعَلْنَا فِي ذُرِّيَّتِهِ النُّبُوَّةَ وَالْكِتَابَ (العنكبوت : 27)

And We ordained amongst his progeny Prophethood and Revelation. (al-Ankabût:27)

The fact that no mention is made of Imâmah as a gift extended to his progeny shows that there is no such a thing in the Qur’ân as Imâmah. The gift that Allâh extended to the offspring of Sayyidunâ Ibrâhîm ‘*alayhis salâm* was Nubuwwah and Wahy. The names of the recipients of this gift have been expressly mentioned in a number of places in the Qur’ân. In Sûrah al-An‘âm, for example, Allâh says:

وَتِلْكَ حِكْمٌ عَلِيمٌ حُجِّنَا آتَيْنَاهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلِي قَوْمِهِ نَرْفَعُ دَرَجَاتٍ مِّنْ نَّشَاءُ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ حَكِيمٌ عَلِيمٌ ،
 وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ ، كُلاًّ هَدَيْنَا ، وَنُوحًا هَدَيْنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِ دَاوُدَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَأَيُّوبَ وَ
 يُوسُفَ وَمُوسَى وَهَارُونَ وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ . وَزَكَرِيَّا وَيَحْيَى وَعِيسَى وَإِلْيَاسَ ، كُلٌّ مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ .
 وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيُونُسَ وَلُوطًا ، وَكُلًّا فَضَّلْنَا عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (الأنعام: 83-86)

Such was the argument we gave Ibrâhîm against his people. We raise in degree whomsoever We will, and your Lord is Wise, All-Knowing. We gave him Ishâq and Ya‘qûb; each of them We guided. And before that, We guided Nûh, and among his (Ibrâhîm's) progeny (We guided) Dâwûd, and Sulaymân, and Ayyûb, and Yûsuf, and Mûsâ, and Hârûn; thus do We reward those who good. And (We guided) Zakariyyâ, and Yahyâ, and ‘Isâ, and Ilyâs; all of them of the Righteous. And Ismâ‘îl, and Alyasa‘, and Yûnus, and Lût; each of them We favoured above all the worlds. (al-An‘âm : 83-86)

Finally, it must be remembered that this gift of Nubuwwah and came to an end in Sayyidunâ Muḥammad Rasûlullâh *sallallâhu ‘alayhi wa-âlihî wasallam*.

مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ النَّبِيِّينَ (الأحزاب : 40)

Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allāh and the Seal of the Prophets. (al-Aḥzāb: 40)

This unequivocal identification of the “gift” and its recipients proves once again that the word *imâm* in the âyah quoted at the start of this article refers to nothing other than Nubuwwah, and does not in the least provide grounds for belief in Imâmah as conceived of by the Shî‘ah.

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The âyah of *Wilâyah*

﴿ إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُعِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ ﴾ (المائدة : 55)

Your Walî is only Allâh, His Messenger, and the believers who establish salâh and give zakâh, and they bow down. (al-Mâ'idah:55)

Meaning and context

This verse is called the âyah of *Wilâyah* due to the appearance of the word *walî* in it. The word *wilâyah* may have one of two meanings. The one meaning is authority. The walî would then be the possessor of authority. The Shî'ah have arbitrarily latched on to this meaning, seeking thereby to prove the Imâmah of 'Alî. By coupling this meaning of the term to the narrations which we will discuss in due course—the gist of which is that Sayyidunâ 'Alî ﷺ once gave his ring to a beggar whilst in the state of rukû', and that the âyah was revealed on that occasion—they draw the conclusion that the only legitimate authority in the Muslim community is that of Allâh, His Messenger and the Imâm. Any other kind of authority, like that of Abû Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmân ﷺ for example, is then illegitimate and contradicts the Qur'ân.

The other meaning of *wilâyah*, which in this sense might also appear as *walâyah*, is a relationship of affection, attachment and solidarity in which each individual becomes the friend and protector of the other. In this sense the *walî* is then that person or entity whom you regard as your friend, your ally, the one with whom you associate, who can be counted upon to protect you and defend your rights. In this sense it stands opposed to terms such as “enemy”, “foe” and “adversary”.

In order to see which of these two meanings apply to the âyah, one needs to look at the context in which it stands. The âyah of *Wilâyah* is the 55th âyah of

Sûrah al-Mâ'idah. For us to get the complete picture of the context in which it stands, we need to go back a few âyât. In âyah no. 51 Allâh Ta'âlâ says:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الْيَهُودَ وَالنَّصَارَىٰ أَوْلِيَاءَ ، بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ، وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّهُمْ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنَّهُ مِنْهُمْ ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴾

O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as your awliyâ (plural of walî). They are the awliyâ of one another. Whoever amongst you takes them as his awliyâ is one of them. Verily Allâh does not guide the unjust people.

It can be seen from this âyah that Allâh Ta'âlâ is definitely not speaking of *wilâyah* in the sense of authority. What is being spoken of here is taking non-Muslims as allies, friends and protectors. When Allâh then says in âyah 55 that “your true *walî* is only Allâh, His Messenger and the Believers” it is clear that it is the relationship of *wilâyah*, and not *wilâyah* in the sense of authority, that is meant.

This meaning of *wilâyah* is repeated again in âyah 57:

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَكُمْ هُزُوءًا وَلَعِبًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَالْكَفَّارَ أَوْلِيَاءَ ﴾

O you who believe, do not take as your awliyâ those who take your religion for a mockery and fun from amongst those who received the Scripture before you, and from amongst the disbelievers.

In light of the fact that in the preceding as well as successive âyât *wilâyah* is used in the sense of the relationship we have described earlier, it is unacceptable to

claim that in this âyah in the middle it has been used in the sense of authority. The meaning of the âyah of *Wilâyah* is therefore that a Muslim's allegiance should be only to Allâh, His Rasûl ﷺ and the Believers. Of the exclusive and pre-emptive right to authority which the Shî'ah seek to read into it, the âyah does not speak at all.

This is further corroborated by an authentic narration documented by Ibn Jarîr at-Tabarî and others that âyah 51 was revealed in connection with 'Ubâdah ibn Sâmit ؓ and 'Abdullâh ibn Ubayy, both of whom had *wilâyah* relationships with the Jews of Madînah. 'Ubâdah ؓ came to Rasûlullâh and announced that he was severing all ties of *wilâyah* with them, while 'Abdullâh ibn Ubayy insisted on keeping ties with them, saying that he feared a turnabout of circumstances. It was then that the 55th âyah of Sûrah al-Mâ'idah was revealed.¹

Narrations

The main grounds for forcing the âyah out of its context has to be the narrations that exist, according to which it was revealed when Sayyidunâ 'Alî ؓ gave his ring to a beggar whilst in the position of rukû'. In the following we will investigate the authenticity of those narrations. It must be remembered, as a principle, that untruthfulness in narrating hadîth was a very real phenomenon in the early centuries of Islâm, the result of which has been that a lot of spurious, unauthentic material was brought into circulation. Much of this material was later included into hadîth collections by compilers who were motivated more by a desire to document a largely oral tradition, than to separate authentic from unauthentic material. Whoever thereafter wishes to utilise the material thus compiled will first have to ascertain the authenticity of the material he wishes to quote. By failing to first prove the authenticity of one's quoted material, the entire argument which is based upon that material is rendered useless.

After this very important introductory remark, we now launch into a study of the available material. We will first look at what has been narrated from some of

the Tâbi'în, and thereafter at what has been narrated with chains of narration that go right back to the Sahâbah.

1. Narrations from Sahâbah

The sources at our disposal contain narrations of the supposed incident whose *sanads* (chains of narration) go back to four different Sahâbah. They are:

1. Sayyidunâ 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs ﷺ
2. Sayyidunâ 'Ammâr ibn Yâsir ﷺ
3. Sayyidunâ 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib ﷺ himself.
4. Sayyidunâ Abû Râfi' ﷺ

1.1 'Abdullâh ibn 'Abbâs ﷺ

1.1.1 There are at least three separate *sanads* from Ibn 'Abbâs in which this story is recounted. The first is recorded by Abû Bakr ibn Mardawayh in his *Tafsîr* and al-Wâhidî in his book *Asbâb an-Nuzûl*. Ibn Mardawayh's *Tafsîr* has not survived, but al-Wâhidî's book has been published a number of times, and it is known from as-Suyûtî's *ad-Durr al-Manthûr*² that these two sources have at least the last portion of their *isnâds* in common. This last portion is as follows:

Muhammad ibn Marwân — Muhammad ibn as-Sâ'ib — Abû Sâlih — Ibn 'Abbâs³

This *isnâd* is one of the most famous chains of forgery. Each one of the three narrators before Ibn 'Abbâs was a notorious liar. Abû Sâlih, whose name was Bâdhâm or Bâdhân, was described as a liar by his own student Ismâ'îl ibn Abî Khâlid.⁴

The next narrator, Muḥammad ibn as-Sâ'ib al-Kalbî, was one of the most notorious liars of Kûfah. His biography in al-Mizzî's *Tahdhîb al-Kamâl* is filled with statements of the 'ulamâ of his time who denounced him as an extremely unreliable reporter, and even a blatant liar.⁵ Two of the statements in his biography are of particular interest here. The one is a statement by his kinsman Abû Janâb al-Kalbî who records Abû Ṣâlih as saying that he never read any tafsîr to Muḥammad ibn as-Sâ'ib. The second is a admission of guilt narrated from al-Kalbî by Imâm Sufyân ath-Thawrî wherein al-Kalbî says, "Whatever tafsîr I narrated from Abû Ṣâlih is untrue. Do not narrate it from me."

The third person in this *isnâd* is Muḥammad ibn Marwân, who is also known as as-Suddî as-Saghîr (the younger Suddî). In him we have another notorious forger whose mendacity was exposed by both his contemporaries and the 'ulamâ who came after him.⁶ This particular chain of narration (as-Suddî as-Saghîr—al-Kalbî—Abû Ṣâlih) became so infamous amongst the 'ulamâ that it was given the epithet *Silsilat al-Kadhib* (the Chain of Mendacity).⁷

1.1.2 The second *isnâd* from Ibn 'Abbâs رضي الله عنه is also documented in the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Mardawayh. It runs through ad-Dahhâk ibn Muzâhim from Ibn 'Abbâs. The weak point in this *isnâd* lies in the fact that ad-Dahhâk never met Ibn 'Abbâs, leave alone narrate from him.⁸ In the book *al-Jarḥ wat-Ta'dîl* by Ibn Abî Hâtîm ar-Râzî there is a narration which throws some light upon the link "ad-Dahhâk—Ibn 'Abbâs". Ibn Abî Hâtîm narrates with an authentic *isnâd* from 'Abd al-Malik ibn Abî Maysarah that he asked ad-Dahhâk: "Did you personally hear anything from Ibn 'Abbâs?" Ad-Dahhâk replied in the negative. 'Abd al-Malik then asked him: "So this which you narrate (from him), from whom did you take it?" Ad-Dahhâk replied: "From this one and that one."⁹

This shows that ad-Dahhâk was not very careful about the persons from whom he received the material he later transmitted from Ibn 'Abbâs. Having been a contemporary of Muḥammad ibn as-Sâ'ib al-Kalbî, it is not at all improbable that he might have heard the story of the beggar from him.

1.1.3 The third *isnâd* Ibn ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه goes through the famous mufassir Mujâhid ibn Jabr from Ibn ‘Abbâs. It is narrated by ‘Abd ar-Razzâq aṣ-Ṣan‘ânî in his *Tafsîr*. He narrates it from ‘Abd al-Wahhâb ibn Mujâhid, who narrates it from his father Mujâhid. ‘Abd al-Wahhâb ibn Mujâhid is described by the *rijâl* critics as *matrûk*, which implies that his unreliability is a matter of consensus amongst them.¹⁰ Imâm Sufyân ath-Thawrî described him as a liar.¹¹ There is even doubt about whether he ever heard ḥadîth from his father.¹¹

An alternative narration from Ibn ‘Abbâs رضي الله عنه

From the above it can be seen that not one of the various narrations from Ibn ‘Abbâs is authentic. In addition to their spuriousness they also contradict another more reliable report from Ibn ‘Abbâs on the tafsîr of this âyah. This report is documented in the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Jarîr, who narrates it with his *isnâd* from the *Tafsîr* of ‘Alî ibn Abî Ṭalhah. According to this report Ibn ‘Abbâs was of the opinion that the words “*and those who believe, who establish ṣalâh and give zakâh, and they bow down*” in the âyah refer to all Muslims in general.¹² This interpretation by Ibn ‘Abbâs is not only in harmony with the meaning of *wilâyah* as outlined above, it also agrees with the use of the plural form (“*those who believe*”) in the âyah.

1.2 ‘Ammâr ibn Yâsir رضي الله عنه

The ḥadîth featuring Sayyidunâ ‘Ammâr ibn Yâsir رضي الله عنه as its narrator is recorded in *al-Mu‘jam al-Awsat* of aṭ-Ṭabrânî. This book has been only partially published; out of a total of 10 volumes we are in possession of only 3. However, we do have an idea of the state of its *isnâd* from Abul Ḥasan al-Haythamî’s *Majma‘ az-Zawâ‘id*¹³ as well as as-Suyûtî’s *Lubâb an-Nuqûl*.¹⁴ Both of them state unequivocally that the *isnâd* of this ḥadîth consists of a string of unknown persons. With an *isnâd* such as this the possibility is always strong that the

names appearing in it never belonged to real persons; that they are fictitious names invented by some or other hadīth forger. This is then the reason why the critics are unable to trace them as hadīth narrators.

1.3 ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ

The hadīth with Sayyidunā ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ as its narrator was contained in the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Mardawayh, a source which, to the best of our knowledge, no longer exists. However, Hāfiẓ Ibn Kathīr in his *Tafsīr* has stated that this narration, like that of ‘Ammār and Abū Rāfi’, is unreliable “due to the weakness of their *isnāds* and the fact that their narrators are unknown”.¹⁵ The fact that amongst all hadīth sources it is only in the relatively late *Tafsīr* of Ibn Mardawayh (died 410 AH) that this narration appears, is a further indication of its spuriousness.

1.4 Abū Rāfi’ ﷺ

This narration too, is recorded by Ibn Mardawayh. Fortunately it is also recorded by aṭ-Ṭabrānī in his work *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*,¹⁶ so unlike the previous case, we are in a position to conduct a first-hand investigation into its *isnād*. Before going into that it must first be noted that this narration differs from all of the above versions in that it does not recount the story of the beggar. It only speaks of Rasūlullāh ﷺ waking up from his sleep and reciting this āyah. Thereafter he tells Abū Rāfi’ that there will come a people who will fight ‘Alī ﷺ, and that it will be incumbent upon people to fight them. In *ad-Durr al-Manthūr*¹⁷, where it is stated as being recorded by Ibn Mardawayh, aṭ-Ṭabrānī as well as Abū Nu’aym, there is an addition which goes that after reciting the āyah Rasūlullāh ﷺ said: “Praise be to Allāh who completed His favour for ‘Alī.” This addition must be from the book of either Ibn Mardawayh or Abū Nu’aym, since it does not appear in *al-Mu’jam al-Kabīr*. It is neither in *Hilyat al-Awliyā* of Abū Nu’aym, so it must be from another of his works which is not available to us.

The *isnâd* in *al-Mu'jam al-Kabîr* is not free from serious defects. Its second narrator, Yahyâ ibn al-Hasan ibn Furât,¹⁸ is totally unknown, while its fourth narrator, Muḥammad ibn 'Ubaydillâh, is regarded as unreliable by the vast majority of critics. For example, Abû Hâtim describes him as "*da'îf al-ḥadîth, munkar al-ḥadîth jiddan*", and Ibn Ma'în says about him "*laysa bi-shay*".¹⁹ Ibn 'Adî declares that he narrates completely uncorroborated material.²⁰

From the above it can be seen that none of the narrations from Ṣaḥâbah that may be adduced as evidence that the âyah of *Wilâyah* refers to Sayyidunâ 'Alî, is authentic. Shî'î writers often quote material of this kind from Sunnî sources, seeking to mislead their uninformed Sunnî readership by the amount of sources they are able to produce. A general principle that must be kept in mind with regard to such attempts at deception is that any narration is only as good as its chain of narration. Any material quoted must therefore first be authenticated before it can be used to substantiate any argument.

In the next issue: *Narrations from the Tâbi'în*

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2. Narrations from Tâbi'în

Besides the previously discussed narrations from Ṣahâbah, the sources provide us with reports from four of the Tâbi'în in which mention is made of the incident of the beggar. Below we discuss these four reports. Before actually looking at them we need to take cognisance of the following principle: Narrations such as these, which terminate at the Tâbi'în, but speak of incidents which allegedly happened during the time of Rasûlullâh ﷺ must be treated with care. The reason for that is that the Tâbi'î who narrates something which he claims happened during the time of Rasûlullâh ﷺ did not actually witness the incident. The only way he could have knowledge of it is by someone informing him. The crucial question is: Who is his informant? To some people the logical answer to this question is that the Tâbi'în were informed by the Ṣahâbah, for the simple reason that the Tâbi'în were the students of the Ṣahâbah. However, this is an oversimplification. It is a fact that the Tâbi'în were informed of incidents from the time of Rasûlullâh ﷺ by their teachers the Ṣahâbah. But it is equally true that the phenomenon of ḥadîth forgery made its appearance during that same early stage, when the adherents of the various unorthodox sectarian groupings, like the Khawârij and the extremist Shî'ah were seeking to legitimate their doctrines by bringing into circulation ḥadîth material which they projected back to the time of Rasûlullâh ﷺ. Traditions of this kind are then later taken up by unsuspecting orthodox narrators who transmit it, often without naming of their sources.¹ In this way spurious material finds its way into orthodox literature.

2.1 'Utbah ibn Abî Ḥakîm

The first narration is that of 'Utbah ibn Abî Ḥakîm which is documented in the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Kathîr from its original source, the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Abî Ḥatîm.² 'Utbah says: "*They (those who believe, who establish ṣalâh and give zakâh, and they bow down)* are the Believers and 'Alî ibn Abî Tâlib."

'Utbah gives a double meaning to the phrase in italics. He understands it to refer to the Believers in general, in harmony with the context. At the same time

he also understands it to refer specifically to Sayyidunâ 'Alî ﷺ. The only reason for him reading that specific meaning into the âyah must be the fact that he had heard of the incident of the beggar. Otherwise the text by itself does not support that deduction. So now the question is: From whom did he hear it? From a Sahâbî, or from someone else? He himself doesn't state the identity of his source.

'Utbah's source could not have been a Sahâbî, since he himself is not a Tâbi'î in the strict sense of the word. He lived during the time of the younger generation of Tâbi'în, like Sulaymân al-A'mash, but did not get to meet any of the Sahâbah.³ All the sources from whom he transmitted hadîth were of the Tâbi'în, and some of them were his own contemporaries.⁴ One of his contemporaries was the notorious forger Muḥammad ibn as-Sâ'ib al-Kalbî whose role in the forgery of the hadîth narrated from Ibn 'Abbâs has already been discussed. It is therefore not wholly inconceivable that 'Utbah ibn Abî Hakîm received his information about the incident of the beggar also from al-Kalbî, and if not from him then from some other equally untrustworthy source.

2.2 Salamah ibn Kuhayl

Salamah ibn Kuhayl was a Tâbi'î from Kûfah who had met none of the Sahâbah except Jundub ibn 'Abdillâh and Abû Juḥayfah.⁵ The vast majority of his teachers were of the elder and middle generation of the Tâbi'în. His saying was also recorded in the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Abî Hâtim from where it was reproduced and preserved by Ibn Kathîr.⁶ He too, recalls the incident of the beggar as the cause of revelation for this âyah.

Since this is once again a report by a person who did not actually witness the incident, a similar line of reasoning is applicable to it as to the previous case. However, aside from asking questions about who Salamah's source for this information could have been, it is of particular interest to us to note that according to the Shî'î *rijâl* critics, Salamah ibn Kuhayl was *persona non grata*. Abû 'Amr al-Kashshî, the prime *rijâl* critic of the Shî'ah, narrates from the 5th Imâm

Muḥammad al-Bâqir that Salamah ibn Kuhayl, amongst others, was responsible for misleading a lot of people, and that he is of those about whom Allâh has said in the Qur'ân: *There are some people who say: "We believe in Allâh and the Last Day," but (in reality) they do not believe.*⁷ With their Imâm himself having condemned Salamah ibn Kuhayl as a hypocrite who is guilty of leading people away from the truth, we fail to understand how the Shî'ah can venture to make an argument out of his statement.

2.3 as-Suddî

The third report which recalls the incident of the beggar comes from Ismâ'îl ibn 'Abd ar-Raḥmân as-Suddî, a contemporary of Salamah ibn Kuhayl who also lived in Kûfah. His statement is recorded in the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Jarîr at-Ṭabarî.⁸ He says: "Thereafter (i.e. after the preceding âyah) Allâh informs them who they should have *wilâyah* with, saying: *Your walî is only Allâh, His Messenger and the Believers who establish salâh and give zakâh, and they bow down.* This refers to all Believers, but a beggar passed by 'Alî ibn Abî Ṭâlib ﷺ while he was in rukû' in the masjid, so he gave him his ring."

As-Suddî is of the opinion that the âyah is not specific, that it applies in general to all Believers. However, he does mention the incident of the beggar, and states it here almost as an afterthought. He is influenced by two things. Firstly he is influenced by the context in which the âyah appears. The context definitely provides no grounds for restricting the meaning of the âyah to any particular incident or person, and that is what causes him to say that the scope of the âyah is general so as to include all Believers. On the other hand he is also influenced by a report which reached him about the incident of the beggar. Our quest is to investigate with what degree of authenticity that report was handed down to him.

We know that at the time when as-Suddî lived there were many reliable ḥadîth narrators from amongst the elder and middle generations of the Tâbi'în alive, but we also know that there were also numerous notorious forgers and

liars, who for the sake of propagating their heresies, resorted to forgery and invented history. For the critic it is thus not simply as easy as to accept whatever is narrated, but to investigate.

As-Suddî did not personally witness the incident, nor was he ever in contact with anyone who could have witnessed it. His informant therefore had to be another person. He himself does not state the name of his informant, nor of the eye witness from who the informant received the report. The failure of all of these persons—‘Utbah ibn Abî Hakîm, Salamah ibn Kuhayl and as-Suddî—to mention the names of their sources points strongly to the fact that the whole incident was nothing more than hearsay, more of a rumour than an authenticated report. It was brought into circulation by an unscrupulous person whose identity has remained a mystery. Thereafter it was circulated by word of mouth, with some commentators mentioning the incident but refraining from naming their sources, and other less scrupulous persons projecting it right back to the Sahâbah. Not a single one of the various chains of narrations fulfil the requirements of authenticity.

2.4 Mujâhid ibn Jabr

We earlier discussed the narration transmitted from Mujâhid by his son ‘Abd al-Wahhâb. That narration was on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbâs. In the *Tafsîr* of Ibn Jarîr at-Tabarî there is another narration from Mujâhid in which mention of the story of the beggar is made.⁹ The statement appears there as Mujâhid’s own, and not as his narration from Ibn ‘Abbâs. However, the person who narrates from him, namely Ghâlib ibn ‘Ubaydillâh, is regarded as extremely unreliable by the *rijâl* critics. His unreliability, like that of ‘Abd al-Wahhâb ibn Mujâhid, is a matter of consensus amongst the ‘ulamâ. Abû Hâtim describes him as “*matrûk al-hadîth, munkar al-hadîth*”(one upon whose extreme unreliability there is consensus, an unreliable narrator of uncorroborated reports); ad-Dâraqutnî says

simply “*matrûk*”(technically meaning that he is extremely unreliable by consensus); and Ibn Ma‘în says “*laysa bi-thiqah*” (he is not reliable).¹⁰

At this some point some readers might get the impression that the *rijâl* critics condemned these narrators as unreliable only because they narrate material which is unpalatable to them. To this we might reply by saying that this is the response of one who has no knowledge of the methodology of the muḥaddithîn in criticising narrators. Having here seen quotations from the *rijâl* critics on a few narrators who all happen to narrate the same ḥadīth, the mind of the non-adept could be expected to jump to the generalisation that “it is only because these narrators narrate material favourable to Shī‘ism that they have been censured.” The tendency to generalise in this way would be even stronger if considered that in this critical examination the person might be the destruction of something which he had once thought to be an incontrovertible argument. Such persons would be well-advised to read up on the methodology of *jarḥ* and *ta’dīl*.

That is the first part of our response. The second part is that this particular person, Ghâlib ibn ‘Ubaydillâh, does not only narrate this one saying of Mujâhid. He is known to have transmitted other material as well. In Ibn Hajar’s work *Lisân al-Mîzân* there is a ḥadīth which he narrates, the text of which is that Rasûlullâh ﷺ gave Mu‘âwiyah an arrow and told him: “Keep this until you meet me in Jannah.” The ḥadīth is squarely denounced as a forgery. This condemnation of his ḥadīth is definitely not result of prejudice based on the type of ḥadīth which he transmits. That much even the Shī‘ah will agree to. It was simply on account of the person’s unreliability and untrustworthiness, which is, as we have already said, a matter of consensus between the muḥaddithîn. If anyone feels that Ghâlib ibn ‘Ubaydillâh has been unfairly dealt with by the *rijâl* critics merely because he narrated something in support of Sayyidunâ ‘Alī’s pre-emptive right to the khilâfah, let him ask himself if he would feel the same about the fact that that same Ghâlib narrates this ḥadīth about Rasûlullâh ﷺ telling Mu‘âwiyah to keep the arrow until he meets him again in Jannah. An honest response to this question is sure to reveal where the real prejudice lies.

Alternative narrations from the Tâbiʿîn

The above four narrations are not the only ones that have come down to us from the Tâbiʿîn. They are contradicted by another, much better known narration that has reached us from a person no less in status than Imâm Muḥammad al-Bâqir, who is regarded by the Shîʿah as their 5th Imâm. This narration is documented in aṭ-Ṭâbarî's *Tafsîr*. It runs as follows:

Hannâd—ʿAbdah [ibn Sulaymân]—ʿAbd al-Malik [ibn Abî Sulaymân]—Abû Jaʿfar [i.e. Imâm Muḥammad al-Bâqir]: ʿAbd al-Malik says: I asked Abû Jaʿfar about this âyah, *Your walî is only Allâh, His Messenger and those who believe, who establish ṣalâh and give zakâh, and they bow down.* We asked: “Who is meant by *those who believe?*” He said: “Those who believe.” We said: “A report reached us that that this âyah was revealed in connection with ʿAlî ibn Abî Ṭâlib.” He said: “Alî is one of those who believe.”¹¹

This narration shows that the incident of the beggar had become quite popular, despite the fact that none of its narrators is able to produce a chain of narrators that is free from serious defects. It had become so popular, in fact, that ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Abî Sulaymân—who is recognised by the Shîʿah as a Tâbiʿî who narrates from Imâm Muḥammad al-Bâqir¹²—thought to refer the matter to the Imâm himself. The Imâm made it clear to him that the âyah refers to all Believers in general. When told about the claim that it refers specifically to Sayyidunâ ʿAlî ibn Abî Ṭâlib ﷺ, the Imâm makes it clear that Sayyidunâ ʿAlî ﷺ is neither the specific subject of the âyah, nor is he excluded from it, since he too, is a believer amongst the Believers. He mentions nothing at all in confirmation of the incident of the beggar.

To the Shîʿî mind, so used to thinking of the illustrious members of the Ahl al-Bayt in the despicable terms of *taqiyyah*, the Imâm might well have been

“covering up the truth”. But to any person who truly loves and respects the Family of Rasûlullâh ﷺ this is an honest and straightforward answer. Only an anxious and prejudiced mind would care to read into it meaning that is not there.

Conclusion

From this discussion we may draw the following conclusions:

- The context of the âyah is general, and gives no cause for believing it to refer to any specific person.
- The incident of the beggar is recorded in reports narrated from four different Sahâbah. Not a single one of those four reports is free from serious defects in the chains of narration. They are further contradicted by other narrations which are more reliable.
- Narrations from the Tâbi‘în suffer from a common defect, in that the names of the sources who relate the incident are not disclosed. Some of them suffer from the further defect of untrustworthy narrators. They are contradicted by a report in which Imâm Muḥammad al-Bâqir himself attests to the fact that the âyah is general and unrestricted in meaning.

With this being the state of the historicity of the incident of the beggar, there is no way in which it could ever be claimed, with confidence and in full honesty, that the 55th âyah of Sûrah al-Mâ‘ida was revealed in respect of Sayyidunâ ‘Alî ibn Abî Tâlib ﷺ.

REFERENCES

1. See Ibn Hajar, *Lisân al-Mîzân* (introduction) vol. 1 p. 21 (Dâr al-Fikr, Beirut 1408/1988)
2. *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr* vol. 2 p. 71
3. See his *tarjama* in *Taqrîb at-Tahdhîb*, no. 4427, where he is counted as belonging to the 6th *ṭabaqah*. Compare with Ibn Hajar's definition of the 6th *ṭabaqah* in the introduction, p. 75
4. *Tahdhîb al-Kamâl* vol. 19 p. 300
5. 'Alî ibn al-Madîni, *Kitâb al-'Ilal*, cited by Dr. Bashâr 'Awwâd Ma'rûf in a footnote to *Tahdhîb al-Kamâl* vol. 11 p. 317
6. *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr* vol. 2 p. 71
7. *Rijâl al-Kashshî*, cited by Muḥammad ibn 'Alî al-Ardabîlî, *Jâmi' ar-Ruwât* vol. 1 p. 373 (Dâr al-Adwâ', Beirut 1403/1983)
8. *Jâmi' al-Bayân* vol. 6 p. 186
9. *ibid.*
10. *Lisân al-Mîzân* vol. p. (Dâr al-Fikr, Beirut)
11. *Jâmi' al-Bayân* vol. 6 p. 186
12. *Jâmi' ar-Ruwât* vol. 1 p. 519 no. 4187

The fundamental point of divergence between the Shî'ah and the Ahl as-Sunnah is the concept of the Imâmah. Since Imâmah is in a very real sense the essence of Shî'ism, and is regarded by the Shî'ah as a cardinal point of faith on the same level as belief in Allâh, in Prophethood and in the Hereafter, one would expect it to be as firmly rooted in the Qur'ân as those other tenets of faith. It is therefore of vital importance to the Shî'î propagandist to prove that the Qur'ân does expound the Shî'î belief of Imâmah. To lend further credibility to their arguments they draw from Sunnî works on tafsîr and hadîth. The articles in this series debunk the myth that the Qur'ân supports the Shî'î concept of Imâmah, and critically examines the material from Sunnî works which Shî'î propagandists use in support of their arguments.

The Verse of Tablîgh

﴿ يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ ، فَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَّغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ ، وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴾ (المائدة : 67)

O Messenger! Convey that which was revealed to you from your Lord. If you will not do so, you would not have conveyed His message. And Allâh protects you from the people. Verily Allâh does not guide the people who transgress. (al-Mâ'idah:67)

This verse is called *Ayat at-Tablîgh* (the Verse of Conveyance) on account of the word *balligh* (the imperative form of the verb *ballagha* i.e. to convey) in it. The ahâdîth which have come down to us, which state the circumstances of its revelation, may be divided into four categories:

- (1) aḥādīth which state that the âyah was revealed during a military expedition, when a bedouin Arab crept up on Rasûlullâh ﷺ and tried to kill him with his own sword
- (2) aḥādīth which speak of Rasûlullâh ﷺ dispensing with the services of guards after the revelation of the âyah
- (3) a ḥadīth which states that his uncle ‘Abbâs used to be amongst those who guarded him until the revelation of the âyah
- (4) aḥādīth which state that his uncle Abû T̄alib used to send someone with him to guard him wherever he went, until the revelation of the âyah¹

The first three categories do not contradict one another. They may all be speaking of the same thing, the only difference between them being that each of the three of them deals with a specific aspect of the revelation of the âyah. The aḥādīth of the first category speak of the place and the incident of the bedouin; those of the second category inform us what steps Rasûlullâh ﷺ took after the revelation of the âyah; while the solitary narration in the third category informs us that his uncle ‘Abbâs used to be amongst those who used to guard him.

It is only with the fourth category that a problem is encountered. The aḥādīth of first three categories all concur on the fact that the âyah was revealed after the Hijrah. However, the introduction of the name of Abû T̄alib into the circumstances of revelation places it well before the Hijrah. So here we have a contradiction. Closer inspection of the isnâds of the two narrations in question reveals problems with the reliability of some of their narrators. We may thus conclude that this version is unacceptable, firstly on account of the fact that it contradicts more authentic material, and secondly because it has been handed down to us through unreliable chains of transmission.



The above is a very brief synopsis of the narrated material surrounding the 67th âyah of Sûrah al-Mâ'idah which is to be found in the well-known works on tafsîr. Our intention in presenting this synopsis is to give the reader a general overview of the narrations contained in the major sources of tafsîr, and especially narrated tafsîr (*at-tafsîr bil-ma'thûr*). This has the advantage of demonstrating to the objective observer the incongruity of narrations Shî'î propagandists have been known to latch on to in their mission to convince the Ahl as-Sunnah that the Qur'an does in fact speak of the Imâmah of Sayyidunâ 'Alî ibn ʾĪlîb, and this claim is borne out by the mufasssîrîn of the Ahl as-Sunnah themselves.

In Shî'î propagandist works we encounter another category of narrated material, other than the four we have mentioned here. In this fifth category of narrated material we find the revelation of the âyah being linked to the stopover at Ghadîr Khumm on the return journey to Madînah after the Hajjat al-Wadâ'. The narration in question is quite simple and straightforward:

This âyah was revealed on the day of Ghadîr Khumm in connection with 'Alî ibn Abî ʾĪlîb.

The Shî'î propagandist is ingenious. Being an expert in the art of misrepresentation, he presents this narration to the unsuspecting Sunnî public as if it is the only material which exists on the revelation of the âyah. He knows that most—if not all—of his listeners or readers are laymen who first of all do not know any Arabic, and secondly, if they do, they do not have access to the books on tafsîr. Being thus assured that they will never discover his dishonesty in concealing the existence of alternative material on the issue, he goes ahead to convince his listener or reader that the quotation which he has supplied him with is the unadulterated truth. He emphasises the fact that he has taken this quotation not from a Shî'î source, but from a Sunnî one. The Sunnî

reader/listener is thus left with the impression that what he is getting is the truth, since it comes, in a manner of speaking, from the horse's mouth.

The brief narration given above is documented in the book *Asbâb an-Nuzûl* by Abu'l-Hasan al-Wâhidî.² Al-Wâhidî narrates most of the material in his book with their complete isnâds. Therefore, quoting material from al-Wâhidî without stating the nature of the isnâd on the authority of which he has quoted is basically an act of deception. It is relatively easy to deceive the public with such quotations, since they lack a proper understanding of the nature of quotation by isnâd. The lay person looks only to the author of the book, and not to the chain of narrators on whose authority the author narrates. To deceive him is therefore quite simple.

To understand exactly how illogical this approach is we need to compare it with a parallel case. Let us assume we have a book on science. This book quotes the theory of an earlier scientist about the invalidity of whose theories there exists consensus amongst the experts in the field. Note that the author of the book merely *quotes* that theory; he does not lend his own weight to it by defending or supporting it. The question now is: can we take this particular theory and ascribe it to the author of the book, and omit any reference to the fact that he is merely *quoting*, and not supporting it? We very obviously cannot do so, and if we do so we will be dishonest.

Similarly, quoting from al-Wâhidî without mentioning that he narrates it on the authority of a chain of narrators, and without proving the authenticity of the chain of narrators is also dishonest. When we encounter a quotation from al-Wâhidî the first question we need to ask ourselves is: is it narrated with an authentic chain of narration? This question can only be answered by referring back to the original book. In the book *Asbâb Nuzûl al-Qur'ân* this is what we find:

أخبرنا أبو سعيد محمد بن علي الصفار، قال: أخبرنا الحسن بن أحمد المخلدي، قال: أخبرنا محمد بن حمدون بن خالد، قال: حدثنا محمد بن إبراهيم الحلواني، قال: حدثنا الحسن بن حماد سجادة، قال: أخبرنا علي بن عباس، عن الأعمش وأبي الجحاف، عن عطية، عن أبي سعيد الخدري رضي الله عنه قال: نزلت هذه الآية ﴿ يا أيها الرسول بلغ ما أنزل إليك من ربك ﴾ يوم غدير خم في علي بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه.

We can see that this statement which is ascribed here to Sayyidunâ Abû Sa'îd al-Khudrî رضي الله عنه, is narrated via a chain of narration which runs as follows:

al-Wâhidî—Muhammad ibn 'Alî as-Saffâr—Hasan ibn Ahmad al-Makhladî—Muhammad ibn Hamdûn ibn Khâlid—Muhammad ibn Ibrâhîm al-Hulwânî—Hasan ibn Hammâd, Sajjâdah—'Alî ibn 'Abîs—al-A'mash and Abu'l-Jahhâf—'Atiyah (ibn Sa'd al'Awfî)—Abû Sa'îd al-Khudrî...

Thus, the statement “al-Wâhidî narrates from Abû Sa'îd al-Khudrî” is extremely elliptical, since it completely omits any reference to the fact that what al-Wâhidî narrates is narrated on the authority of the nine persons who stand between himself and Abû Sa'îd. Only when the reliability of these nine persons is proven may we with confidence say that “al-Wâhidî narrates from Abû Sa'îd al-Khudrî”.

Critical scrutiny of the isnâd reveals the following flaws:

1. **'Alî ibn 'Abîs:** This narrator lived in Kûfah during the latter half of the second century AH. There is consensus amongst the *rijâl* critics that he was an unreliable transmitter.³ His unreliability stems from the fact that the material transmitted by him was for the greater part uncorroborated or

contradictory to more reliable versions. In the case of this particular narration he has transmitted a ḥadīth of which no trace can be found anywhere else. Since his own reliability is already seriously questionable, we cannot by any objective standards place confidence in the lone narration of one such as he. Ibn Hibbân sums up the reason for dismissing him as a ḥadīth transmitter in the following words: “Mistakes of his in transmitting ḥadīth were so serious that he deserved to be abandoned (as a narrator).” Abû Zur‘ah ar-Râzî states: “He is *munkar al-ḥadīth* (meaning that he transmits uncorroborated material, or material which contradicts more reliable versions); he transmits uncorroborated aḥādīth on the authority of reliable narrators.”³

2. **‘Aṭīyyah al-‘Awfī:** ‘Aṭīyyah al-‘Awfī appears in the isnād as the person who narrates from Abû Sa‘īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه. He lived and was active as a ḥadīth transmitter in Kûfah, where he died in 111AH or 127 AH. He transmitted ḥadīth from figures amongst the Ṣaḥābah such as Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه, Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه, Zayd ibn Arqam رضي الله عنه and Abû Sa‘īd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه. The muḥaddithîn have called his reliability as a narrator into question, especially when he narrates from Abû Sa‘īd. This is on account of the habit termed *tadlīs ash-shuyûkh* by the muḥaddithîn. His practise of this habit is explained by Ibn Hibbân in his *Kitâb al-Majrûḥîn* in the following words:

He heard some aḥādīth from Abû Sa‘īd al-Khudrī. When Abû Sa‘īd died he sat with (the Shî‘î mufassir) al-Kalbî and listened to his stories. Thus when al-Kalbî used to say “Rasûlullâh ﷺ said...” he used to memorise it. He now gave al-Kalbî the *kunyah* “Abû Sa‘īd” and started narrating from him. When it was asked “Who narrated this to you?” he used to say, “Abû Sa‘īd”. The people would think that he meant Abû Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, when in reality it was al-Kalbî. It is therefore not allowed to use him as an authority or to write his aḥādīth, except if it is in the sense of amazement.⁴

This is then the state of the narration which Shî'î propagandists so brazenly thrust in the faces of their Sunnî readers or listeners.

There is another narration which holds connection with this one. It was originally documented in the tafsîr of Abû Bakr Ibn Mardawayh (died 410 AH), but his tafsîr is no longer extant. It has been preserved, albeit without isnâd, by as-Suyûtî in his book *ad-Durr al-Manthûr*.⁵ The text of this narration runs as follows:

أخرج ابن مردويه عن ابن مسعود قال: كنا نقرأ على عهد رسول الله ﷺ: يا أيها الرسول بلغ ما أنزل إليك من ربك أن عليا مولى المؤمنين وإن لم تفعل فما بلغت رسالته والله يعصمك من الناس.

Ibn Mardawayh recorded from Ibn Mas'ûd that he said: In the time of Rasûlullâh ﷺ we used to read: "O messenger, convey what has been revealed to you from your Lord that 'Alî is the Master of the Believers; If you do not do so, you would not have conveyed His message. And Allâh protects you from the people...

This narration, as can be clearly seen, has come down to us stripped of its chain of narration. The chain of narration is usually regarded as the chief indicator of authenticity. However, it is not the only indicator. In the absence of the isnâd, which would have pinpointed the exact person responsible for this blatant forgery, we still have the significant fact that this narration assails the sanctity of the Qur'ân. This addition to the wording of the âyah is not to be found amongst any of the *qirâ'ât* (variant readings) of the Qur'ân, neither the *mutawâtir* readings nor the *shâdhah* ones. In fact, it can be found nowhere except in a single, lone narration preserved without isnâd in a work of the fifth century. The work of Ibn Mardawayh is in no way free from narrations by the extremists of the Shî'ah. We have earlier seen, in the case of 'Aṭīyah al-'Awfî, how Shî'î narrations crept into Sunnî compilations as early as in the days of the Tâbi'în. Classical Shî'î works like the tafsîrs of 'Alî ibn Ibrâhîm al-Qummî and Furât ibn

Ibrâhîm al-Kûfî, the *Kitâb al-Qirâ'ât* of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad as-Sayyârî, *al-Ihtijâj* by Aḥmad ibn 'Alî at-Ṭabarsî, the book *al-Manâqib* by Ibn Shahrâshûb and the book *Kashf al-Yaqîn* by Ibn Ṭâwûs all contain narrations which state that the name of 'Alî ؑ was mentioned in this âyah, but "they" (meaning the Ṣahâbah ؑ) removed it from there.⁶ It is therefore not at all inconceivable that this narration found its way into the tafsîr of Ibn Mardawayh through an isnâd going back to its Shî'î originator.

Shî'ism and Sîrah

But let us now look at the issue from a different angle. Let us for a moment assume that the name of Sayyidunâ 'Alî ؑ was in fact mentioned in this âyah, and the matter which Allâh ordered Rasûlullâh ؑ to convey to the Ummah was Sayyidunâ 'Alî's imâmah, an issue so important that failure to convey it would be tantamount to complete failure. This scenario fits snugly into the Shî'î picture of the *Sîrah* of Rasûlullâh ؑ. There is a stark difference between the Shî'ah and the Ahl as-Sunnah in the way either of them conceives of the *Sîrah*, or life history, of Rasûlullâh ؑ. It is the contrast between failure and success.

To the Ahl as-Sunnah, the mission of Muḥammad ؑ was a successful one, the most successful mission of any messenger of Allâh. And nowhere is his success reflected more clearly than in his followers. He succeeded in establishing Islâm upon earth, and Imân in the hearts of his followers. His followers were of such a caliber that they earned praise from Allâh Himself, in the Qur'ân, the Tawrât as well as the Injîl. Therefore, when Allâh says to His Messenger, "Convey, and I will protect you against the people," it is impossible that those "people" could be the same people who stand so highly praised in the Holy Scriptures. The people against whom Allâh promised to protect him could therefore have been none but the unbelievers.

To the Shî'ah, on the other hand, the *Sîrah* of Rasûlullâh ؑ is incessantly clouded by fear, doubt and suspicion. Rasûlullâh ؑ is constantly having to cajole and blandish his followers in fear that they might openly turn against him. With

the exception of a minute group of persons consisting of his daughter, her husband, their two infant sons and three or four others, he cannot trust anyone. His wives, their fathers, the husbands of his other daughters, his closest friends, his scribes, his military commanders—all of them are tainted with hypocrisy, and eagerly await the moment of his death to usurp power. In short, two decades of tireless effort has brought him nothing but a handful of sincere followers; the rest are all hypocrites. He is under continuous pressure from this sea of hypocrisy which surrounds him, and he is forced to take recourse to *taqiyyah* (meaning to act or speak falsely for the sake of convenience).

In the case of this âyah he is hesitant to announce that Allâh has decreed ‘Alî to be his successor; so hesitant that he has to be sounded a severe warning about it and given the assurance that he will be protected from harm. A contemporary Shî‘î scholar, Muḥammad Ridâ al-Mâmaqânî, writes:

He (may my soul be his ransom) practiced the greatest *taqiyyah*. This is clear to anyone who studies his life. Sufficient proof thereof is the Verse of Tablîgh and the Verse of Wilâyah. On the whole, regarding the status of *taqiyyah* there is no difference whatsoever between the Rasûl ﷺ, the Infallible Imâm and the common people.⁷

To the Shî‘ah, therefore, the “people” against whom Allâh would protect him were none other than his own companions. The people with whom he lived and who stood by his side, who shared his happiness and grief, who assisted him in times of hardship, who were ever ready to sacrifice their lives and their possessions for him and for his cause —these same people were in reality his enemies whom he was afraid to offend. In the Shî‘î view of Sîrah, and in their opinion about the circumstances under which the âyah was revealed, these were the people against whom Allâh had to protect His Messenger.

But ultimately, even though his person was protected against them, his mission was thwarted by those very same “enemies”, and a struggle of twenty

three years ended in disgraceful failure (*na'ûdhu billâh*) when this entire community which he had given twenty three years of his life to build, reverts back into kufr, with the exception of a mere handful.

It is for this reason that we will conclude here by saying that acceptance of this kind of narrations is tantamount to subscribing to a view of Sîrah wherein Muḥammad ﷺ is reduced to one of the most unsuccessful leaders who ever lived. That view of Sîrah, as much as it might be camouflaged and paraphrased, lies at the very heart of Shî'ism.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *Tafsîr Ibn Kathîr* vol. 2 pp. 77-79 (Maktabah Dâr at-Turâth, Cairo, n.d.)
2. al-Wâhidî, *Asbâb Nuzûl al-Qur'ân*, p. 204 (ed. Kamâl Basyûnî Zaghlûl, Dâr al-Kutub al'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1411/1991)
3. see *Tahdhîb al-Kamâl* vol. 20 p. 502-504 (ed. Dr. B.A. Ma'rûf, Mu'ssasat ar-Risâlah, Beirut, 1413/1992)
4. *Kitâb al-Majrûhîn* vol. 2 p. 176 (ed. Maḥmûd Ibrâhîm Zâyid, Dâr al-Wa'y, Halab (Aleppo), 2nd edition, 1402)
5. *ad-Durr al-Manthûr* vol. 2 p. 298 (repr. Maktabah Ayatullâh al-Mar'ashî, Qum, 1404 AH)
6. These sources, together with a number of others, are quoted by Mirzâ Husayn Nûrî in his book *Faṣl al-Khiṭâb fî Ithbât Tahrîf Kitâb Rabb al-Arbâb*. See *ash-Shî'ah wal-Qur'ân* by Ḥsân Ilâhî Zâhîr, pp. 215-217 (Idârah Tarjumân as-Sunnah, Lahore, n.d.)
7. Muḥammad Ridâ al-Mâmaqânî, footnotes to 'Abdullâh al-Mâmaqânî, *Miqbâs al-Hidâyah fî 'Ilm ad-Dirâyah* vol. 1 p. 78 footnote no. 5 continuing from previous page.