The Origin of Shiaism

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QUESTION:

Have historical factors influenced the development of Shiaism, or is this sect a set of beliefs derived from the Qur'an and the clear traditions of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family)?

ANSWER:

We need to explain several points in order to shed light on the topic and show that: (a) historical factors and events had no role in the development of Shiaism and the belief in the existence of an Imam who will save humanity (b) all beliefs of the Shi'a are entirely Islamic and are derived from the same sources that the remainder of Muslim beliefs, from the Unity of Allah to the Day of Judgement, are derived from.

A. The Origin of Shiaism in the Prophet's Time

In accordance with firm historical evidence and abundant traditions, the origin and formation of Shiaism was during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). It began in the very first years of the prophetic mission and was completed by conveying Hadith al-Thaqalain and officially and publicly proclaiming it during the event of Ghadir Khumm. Of course, during his final illness, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) wished to put that hadith in written form, and strong historical evidence and narrations indicate that 'Umar's obstruction and the disrespect shown to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) prevented him from having it written.

The principles of Shi'a belief have been referred to in various places in the Holy Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) words of guidance. By way of example, the issue of the leadership of the Muslim community ('ummah), brought up many times at suitable occasions, can be found among the sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). The importance of the issue of Imamah (leadership of the 'ummah) has been emphasized in his sayings to an extent that in one of his well-known and in fact mutawatir (consecutively-narrated) traditions he says:

"One who dies without recognizing the Imam of his time dies the death of the Days of Ignorance (before the advent of Islam)."[1] Death while ignorant of the Imam has been

regarded as equal to dying during the Age of Ignorance – or rather they have been considered the same thing. According to consecutively narrated traditions, the conditions of the Imam, which tribe he is from, and the fact that the number of Imams (peace be upon them) is twelve all have been explained by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family).

Similarly, the qualities of the Imam's knowledge, his spiritual characteristics, and that he must be the most knowledgeable and perfect of all human beings have been explained in the Qur'an and traditions, as has the fact that the successorship of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and Imamate of the ummah after him is a Divine post that, just like prophethood itself, is appointed by Allah.

Shi'a thought was established in the very first years of the advent of Islam on the basis of the original sources of Islam. However, at that time the opposing school of thought – which some time later came to be known as Sunni thought – did not exist and the Muslims were not divided into two branches.

This is because those who, after the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) death, propagated the opposing view – which caused a division in the Muslim ranks – were unable to openly position themselves against the pure Islam, which later came to be known as Shi'a Islam. This division officially became apparent after the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) when a group gathered in Saqifah and chose a successor for the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family).

We must add that according to the guidance provided in the Holy Qur'an, in Islam, a reliable source and authority for explaining, organizing, and legislating beliefs has been foreseen and in numerous verses has been clearly stated, such as in Surah Nisa:

"Although, were they to refer that to the Messenger (peace be upon him and his family) and those in authority among them, those among them who understand the roots of the issues would know it."[2]

From this verse, it is understood that leadership is exclusive to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and the ulu 'l-amr, who are the infallible Imams.

According to mutawatir traditions, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) has clearly introduced this virtuous authority, which is none other than the progeny and Imams from the Ahl al-Bait of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). He has said, "They are with the Qur'an and the Qur'an is with them, and they and the Qur'an shall never separate from each other." In fact, in one hadith, he has added:

"Among us, the Ahl al-Bait, in every generation there are found people firm in religion who protect the religion from the tampering of extremists and the mischief of the astray."[3]

B. The Origin of the Issue of Khilafah

From the first days of the prophetic mission (bi`thah) the issue of leadership of the Islamic Nation after the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) was more or less in people's minds. The story of the man who made his acceptance of Islam conditional upon becoming the leader after the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), which the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) did not accept, is well known.

The Shi'a viewpoint about successorship of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) is a point that was announced by divine command before the people during the time of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) by the Prophet himself. At that time, none opposed it; rather, all the people – even those who later were involved in the events at Saqifah – celebrated it, and while pledging allegiance congratulated the Imam (peace be upon him). But from that very instant they began covertly planning and plotting and reached a point where they wished to assassinate the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family)!

After the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), the issue became a crisis and the opponents, with unusual severity and hard-heartedness, acted in the name of expediency and by threats and plotting created such an atmosphere that in the end they opposed the arrangements the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) had announced, to the extent that they insulted and transgressed the personality of Fatimah az-Zahra (peace be upon him and his family) and distanced the course of Muslim history from the path the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) had specified.

With the limitless cruelty they showed, they even trampled the dignity of the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) only offspring. Of course, because of the policy 'Ali (peace be upon him) pursued, two schools – Shi'a and Sunni – did not come into open and violent confrontation. The issue only remained in the minds of those who thought about the legitimacy of the government; others, either indifferent to the matter or associated with the ruling party, did not discuss it. They may very well have considered it settled.

However, people like 'Umar ibn al-Khattab were aware that in the face of the arrangements announced by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) the legitimacy of their actions would always be under question. Thus, they prevented the return of the people to that authentic Islamic thinking by using political devices, and this is the reason that for about a century and a half they forbade traditions from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). And since 'Umar knew that if he did not find a way to sideline 'Ali (peace be upon him) after him 'Ali (peace be upon him) would definitely assume leadership, he plotted a new strategy.

He knew that if the testament – about which it is not known whether it is authentic or whether

'Uthman added it to the document – was not attributed to Abu Bakr, Shi'a thinking would again rise after 'Umar's death and their plotting would be fruitless.

He thus devised a six-member council and specified its mandate in such a way as to eliminate Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him).

In spite of this, the program specified by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) was revived in memories and finally, in the end of 'Uthman's period, his oppression aroused general anger and disgust towards him and stirred the Muslims to rise against him. In this way the issue of successorship of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) was again raised and many companions returned to the Prophet's original dictate and declared 'Ali (peace be upon him) the rightful successor of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and regarded jihad under him (peace be upon him) the highest form of worship.

Thus, the Shi'a belief about the succession to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) was never forgotten and people's hearts were never without attachment to the Ahl al-Bait and awareness that they had been oppressed and their right usurped. People's statements and the odes of poets such as al-Farazdaq show that the Shi'a point of view existed and even an individual like Musa ibn Nasir – the ruler of Africa whose slave, Tariq, conquered Spain – in spite of being one of the officials of Banu Umayya's government, was a proponent of Shi'a thought. For this very reason, in spite of all of his services, in the end his property was confiscated and he was removed from office.

In fact, events came to such a pass that this point of view even penetrated the family of Mu'awiya and Yazid, and Yazid's son officially condemned his grandfather and father and acknowledged the right of 'Ali and the Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them). The situation was the same in the time of Banu 'Abbas as well.

From the government's point of view the rightfulness and genuineness of Shi'a thought should not have been put forth and followers of this school should not have had official responsibilities. But the situation was such that the oppressive and usurping rulers of Banu 'Abbas such as Mansur, Harun, and Ma'mun, were aware of the truth of this Shi'a thought, even though in practice they crushed it.

As a result of the spread of Shi'a thought, Muntasir and some other rulers from Banu 'Abbas became favorably disposed to this view in the issue of succession to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). It has been said that Nasir, in whose time the cellar of occultation in Samarra was inspected, declared himself Shi'a, and it has been narrated that he regarded himself the deputy of the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him).

From the sum of the above facts it becomes clear that the true Islam, which is the same Shi'a

thought and Islam that existed in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), has been there over the last fourteen centuries and history played no role in its existence. Rather, the existence of this point of view played a part in the coming about of major movements, risings, and events. Contrary to what some simple and misinformed people think, it must be said that Shi'a governments in Egypt, Africa, and the Dayalima in Iran and Iraq, and finally the rise of the Safawiyya were all events brought about by Shi'a thought; they played no role in bringing it about.

C. Sunnism and its Sectarian Meaning (in opposition to Shiaism) After the Prophet's Time

The analysis that Shiaism, like Sunnism, had from the beginning a political form and gradually developed a religious basis is incorrect. Opposition to the successor announced by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) had a political aspect and that same political behavior caused division and conflict and brought into existence a new opinion in opposition to belief in Imamah. It resulted in the followers of pure Islam, in the form of a faction and with the name Shi'a, developing a political orientation.

But the policy the Shi'a as a political group pursued after this affair was based on the true teachings of Islam. Before it acquired a political tint, it was a principle pertaining to belief and religion, and it was a creed that included politics. Thus, politicians would oppose this creed and strove to introduce a new sect and school of thought in opposition to it. In this way, at great expense and by bribing, threatening, and terrorizing, they in later periods gave a religious form to the policies that made the khilafah (succession) deviate from its specified course. Of course, this movement wanted only to acquire the government, and if they hadn't seen this aspect in Shiaism, they would not have opposed it and would not have introduced a sect by the name of Sunnism in opposition to it.

Thus, politics was the motive for opposition to Shiaism and the command announced by the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). In the beginning, when the leaders of this party started their activities in those confused times, they hadn't yet put forward a clear way of thinking. Many factors, primary among which was the threat of the destruction of Islam through internal armed strife, prevented the religio-political leaders from reaching for their swords, and this aided the leaders of the anti-Shi'a school in taking hold of affairs. Since they had no firm thinking for them to follow in practice and in no case respected the principle of bay`ah (allegiance) and election by the people, the basis of their government was coercion and tyranny. After the event of Saqifah which was the reason for Abu Bakr's assumption of power, 'Umar, with the peculiar coarseness and roughness that he possessed,

drew his sword and roamed the streets, forcing the people to pledge allegiance to Abu Bakr. This coercion came to such a pass that they even demanded allegiance of 'Ali (peace be upon him) and forcibly took him to the masjid to obtain his allegiance, after unspeakable insolence to Lady Fatima (peace be upon her) and desecrating the sanctity of her house.

The government of 'Umar himself, which he claimed was formed in accordance to Abu Bakr's testament, was such that they said that when Abu Bakr was on his deathbed and was in an out of consciousness, he endeavored to write a testament. In that situation, without him specifying the ruler after him, 'Uthman wrote 'Umar's name in the testament. When Abu Bakr returned to consciousness, he affirmed it!

Whatever it was, was there even a testament in place? In any case, 'Umar came to power and no one so much as said to Abu Bakr, "Pain has overcome him"[4]; no regard is given to what this ailing man, who has lost his reason, says. Yet with this very excuse they prevented the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) from writing a testament!

Be that as it may, with Abu Bakr's appointment 'Umar took control of power and himself appointed a six-member council for after his death. Thus, we come to know that there was no harmonious idea based on the people's right to election involved in the affair. However, when 'Uthman was killed, the Muslims rushed to 'Ali's (peace be upon him) door – and though, according to the Shi'a, he alone was the rightful ruler – all pledged allegiance to him. Afterwards, though the opponents of the Shi'a strove to find a religious basis for government and put forward the idea of general allegiance or that of the upper class and other contradictory ideas – even force and overpowering – as such a basis, in reality the standard was nothing but coercion. They acted in such a way that the people had no choice but pledging allegiance to the successor appointed by the ruler.

Thus, the Shi'a's opponents had no overall program of government, and even in current times one of their biggest researchers, who has realized this fact, says: "In fact, Islam has not foreseen a particular method in the politics of selecting a ruler; any form the people themselves specify becomes the law and is implemented."

D. Cause of the Division of Muslims into two factions, Sunni and Shi'a

The fact is that the real reason for this split was the love of status and power. A few saw that with the situation that had taken shape, they would have no part in the future leadership; thus from the very time of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) they began grouping and conspiring. One of their major plans was to introduce and then propagate a new school of thought in opposition to the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) stance.

They raised the slogan "حَسْـبُنَا كِتَـابُ اللّٰهِ" (The Book of Allah suffices us) to reduce the value of the existing traditions about Imamah, and in the end they introduced these traditions as worthless. For this very reason when the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) wished to write his testament, since they knew this written testament would reinforce his oral testaments, they put up firm resistance. In words also related by Ahl al-Sunnah, 'Umar said, "Illness has overcome him; the book of Allah suffices us."[5] According to the narration of others, he said, "The man (The Prophet) speaks nonsense!"[6] (God forbid In either case, he stood in the way and said, "The book of Allah suffices us," meaning that we have no need of the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) testament and his explicit statements.

The title Shi'a was given to the followers of 'Ali (peace be upon him) in that period by the Prophet himself (peace be upon him and his family). The Prophet called his sincere followers the Shi'a. But this did not result in the division of the Muslims into two groups. Though people like Salman, Abu Dharr, and Miqdad had a firm belief in 'Ali (peace be upon him) from that time, the opponents were not yet an independent group, and these admonitions of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) about Imamah meant that all should follow Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him).

But after the death of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), opposition to this command came out in the open and the love of power and ruling over others – which some had set their sights on – caused some, in spite of the Prophet's explicit statements about 'Ali's successorship, to oppose that and cause division in the ranks of the Muslims.

If we wish to hide the facts and present a different explanation, even if untrue, we have to say that this division started when because of their weak faith a group of Muslims did not give the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) words and counsel the same status as revelation and assumed the book of Allah is sufficient for people's guidance and there is no need for the Prophet's words. It is as if they regarded themselves as the Prophet's equals in grasping the Qur'an's principles and purposes.

Thus, they did not follow the path he (peace be upon him and his family) had specified and favored their personal opinion and the benefit and harm they themselves perceived for themselves over the Prophet's commands. Or else they considered some of the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) commands as being related to government and administration of society, but considered them modifiable as conditions required. They presumed the successorship was just such an issue and believed that even if the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) had appointed his own successor, since his words and actions –in their view – did not have the status of revelation, opposition to them is permissible.

Thus after the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) death these people ignored the Prophet's command and set it aside and with these false excuses removed the successorship from its specified course.

Even though they had no proper system of thought for the administration of society in those conditions on which they could base the khilafah, still they insisted that the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) appointee shouldn't take charge of the administration of society, or it isn't expedient. In spite of the fact that in some issues they insisted on implementing the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) command, here their conduct was the opposite, just as, when the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) appointed 'Usamah as the leader of the army, they did not leave him in his post. In any case, they thought it was their right to adjust the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) commands, carry out any changes or alterations they thought necessary and make use of pretexts that are worse than the crime itself.

In opposition to this group it was Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) and a small group of his followers who believed in the truth of the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) teachings and commands and would say that the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) words have the ruling of revelation, or rather that they are in fact revelation, as the Qur'an says in this regard:

"He speaks not of his own desire; it is naught but revelation that is revealed."[7] And the verse: "What the Messenger has brought you, take, and what he forbids you from, avoid."[8] refers to the commands of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), which must be implemented without alteration, and we are in no way free of need of the Prophet's counsels and teachings. The religion of Islam is perfect and comprehensive from all aspects and no defect can be imagined in it.

This group was called Ahl al-Nass (followers of the religious texts). They would say that the path of re-interpreting and contextualizing these traditions is closed and the succession of Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) was conveyed at Allah's command to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) by revelation.

"O' Messenger! Convey that which has been revealed to thee by thy Lord…"[9] In any case, the Muslims were in this way split into two camps. In truth, using the term "Ahl al-Sunnat" (followers of the sunnat) to refer to those who rejected, altered, and falsely interpreted the sunnat is incorrect. Instead, those deserving this title are the ones who remained attached to the Qur'an and Prophetic sunnat (conduct).

Incidentally, intent of those who by clinging to "The book of Allah suffices us" split the Muslims

into two camps is that the basic matter of the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) messengership is the book of Allah and there is no need of the Prophetic sunnat. Even though this group, with there way of thinking, opposed the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) explicit command regarding Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him), after they had sidelined 'Ali (peace be upon him) they returned to the Prophet's sunnat in many instances, since they saw that their fallacious way of thinking could not go forward. By raising the slogan "The book of Allah suffices us" it is not possible to obtain needed rulings and solve society's difficulties. Of course, the opponents of the Shi'a thought benefited substantially from such slogans and deceived a large group, most of whom were commoners and unaware, and they prevented the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) from writing his testament. With this excuse they marginalized those who said the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) command regarding the successorship of 'Ali (peace be upon him) must be respected and made it their principle that only the Qur'an is central. Their aim was that the traditions of Ghadir, yawn al-dar, and other ahadith not be mentioned.

Later, when they saw that without the traditions it is not possible to manage the affairs they became involved in ijtihad (juristic reasoning) in opposition to ahadith (the exercise of personal opinion) and altered the commandments of Allah and turned to false interpretations, explanations, and analogy, and they subjected many traditions to doubt.

The origin of the Shi'a school, like the origin of Islam itself, is not related to historical events. Of course, events had and have an effect on people's political positions and the occurrence of certain happenings, but is not the primary factor on all matters. For example, one of the causes and wisdoms in the concealment of the twelfth Imam (peace be upon him) – as indicated by some traditions – was that he (peace be upon him) not be caught up in allegiance to oppressive rulers.

However, his existence (peace be upon him) and concealment, according to consecutively narrated (mutawatir) traditions, was a destined affair determined in advance and which occurred according to that plan. It is not that the issue of Imamah came about gradually through time and the course of history has made it necessary.

Through historical research it becomes clear that it is the Sunni school of thought about the succession that came about as a result of a chain of historical causes; otherwise Shi'a thought about the principle of Imamah, as explained several times, was founded at the beginning of the Prophetic mission (bi`thah) as a result of Allah's command and the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) clear instructions. Thus, it was Shi'a thought that influenced history, not history that created it.

Opponents of the Shi'a school of thought say that there was no guidance from the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) in this regard. Thus, after the Prophet's (peace be upon him and his family) demise, the concern and confusion that had taken hold of the Muslims caused them to specify someone as khalifah. This was accomplished in Saqifah after much discussion and searching that resulted in Abu Bakr being chosen as the Prophet's successor. Subsequently, in order to avoid unpleasant events and chaos in society, Abu Bakr appointed his successor and 'Umar in turn specified a six-member council for after his death to make a decision in this regard.

All of these occurrences had particular reasons at the head of which was political goals. Though the supporters of this point of view try to portray this important historical happening as natural, facts are at odds with its being natural. On the other hand, in numerous ways they support the Shi'a point of view about Imamah.

E. The Religious Basis for Support of the Leadership of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them)

Support for the leadership of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) from the beginning was based on Islamic teachings. Those who opposed Saqifah and the succession of Abu Bakr had no motive except their religious duty and guarding the teachings and guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family).

Referring to books like The Origin of the Shi'a and their Principles, History of the Shi'a, The Shi'a in History, and tens of other Shi'a and Sunni books will at least demonstrate that inclination to Shiaism from the beginning has had only a religious motive. The sermons of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him) in Nahj al-Balagha affirm that the true position of the Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) has truly been material, spiritual, and religious leadership, of which governing is a branch.

The Shi'a and Armed Uprising
QUESTION:

Is armed uprising one of the conditions of the Imamah of the Imam? Is armed uprising unconditionally and in all situations part of the agenda of the Shi'a? In other words, must the Shi'a always be in a state of armed conflict with oppressive systems of government, or are the same conditions relevant here as are mentioned about enjoining good and forbidding evil? Also, what was the role of the Shi'a in the armed uprisings against the government of Banu Umayyah?

ANSWER:

The Shi'a have no agenda regarding jihad against the infidels except the agenda of Islam, which has been explained in depth on books of jurisprudence, and which many jurisprudents consider obligatory only in case of the presence and call of the Imam. However, defending the heart of Islam and honor of the Muslims and repelling the enemies' attacks from the Islamic borders – whether physical, cultural, or economical – is a general obligation. In fact, according to the verse of the Qur'an preparation to defend and guard the physical and cultural borders is a Divine obligation.

"And prepare what strength you are able and trained horses with which you frighten the enemy of Allah and your enemy."[10] In the physical battlefield, this is by acquiring military weaponry and in the cultural or economic battlefield by acquiring the provisions peculiar to that arena. In this aspect, the time of the Imam's presence is no different from the time of his absence. Just as a Muslim's house, dependents, property, and self must be safe from danger and attack by outsiders, "One who is killed defending his possessions is a martyr"[11] the Islamic homeland as well – which is the home of all – must be free from danger.

This is the gist of the method of dealing with external enemies. As for dealing with internal anti-Islamic events and factors that hypocritically inflict damage on Islam and Muslims on account of seeking power, the positions taken to repel these dangers must be such as are able to remove that anti-Islamic movement.

Of course, in instances where this movement jeopardizes the existence of Islam or threatens the laws of Islam and society's security and repelling this danger depends on an armed movement, armed uprising becomes obligatory. In short, in the Shi'a way of thinking, complacency with respect to opposing and oppressive events is condemned. A Muslim must give importance to everything that is related to the honor and grandeur of Islam and Muslims and to elevating the word of Allah and must always act according to his duty.

Still, armed uprising is not among the conditions of the Imamah of the Imam as has been attributed to the Zaydi sect. It is not the case that every leader of an armed group, if from the descendants and family of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), is regarded as Imam. And one who apparently had no armed uprising and struggle cannot, for this reason, be declared not to be the Imam, as was the case with Imam Zain al-'Abidin, Imam Muhamad al-Baqir, and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him). This is because:

First, their non-armed policies were more effective than armed uprising in elevating the name of Islam, guarding the truth, and protecting the shari`at in their time.

Second, as has been related in the tradition of Mahmud ibn Labid from Fatimah az-Zahra

(peace be upon her): It is the people's duty to gather round the candle of the Imam's existence and present themselves to assist him, elevate the name of Islam, and guard the objectives of the religion. In such a situation, the Imam chooses whatever position is appropriate. Thus, Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), after the death of 'Uthman, did not leave the people without an answer when they rushed to him from all directions to pledge allegiance with that commotion and longing. He said:

"Lo, I swear by the One who split the seed and created man, were it not for the crowd that had come to me and the establishment of the argument by the presence of supporters, and were it not for the covenant Allah has taken from the `ulama' (scholars) not to remain silent in face of the waste of the oppressors and hunger of the oppressed, I would have abandoned the ropes of the khilafah and filled its latter part with the cup of its former part. You would then have well understood that your world [with all its attractions] is worth less to me than the water that comes out of a sheep's nose!"[12][13]

As for the armed revolts against Banu Umayyah, apart from the rebellions of the Khawarij – none of which reached fruition – the cause and motive of all other uprisings was to avenge the blood of Sayyid al-Shuhada' (the Prince of Martyrs) Husayn (peace be upon him) and object to the oppression of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them). Among those uprisings were those of `Ayn al-Wardah and Mukhtar, in both of which a large number of Shi'a participated. Subsequently, there was the revolt of Zaid and other uprisings, all of which sprang from love of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) and declaring aversion and hatred towards Banu Umayyah. Therefore, we see that a man like Kumail participates in the uprising of `Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Ash`ath or in the last revolt which resulted in the termination of Banu Umayyah's rule and the end of their dominion over most of the lands of Islam.

The true motive for the tragic events of Karbala' and the heart-rending martyrdom of Zaid, in a word, was the oppression of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them).

Thus, what was important in these uprisings against Banu Umayyah was the role of the Shi'a and making use of the oppressed position of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them), though after the martyrdom of the Prince of Martyrs (peace be upon him) the remaining Imams did not revolt since they did not see conditions as appropriate for the establishment of a just and Islamic government through armed uprising. So they became involved performing their Divine duty in other trenches, especially in spreading jurisprudence and repelling many innovations. Even in the events after the success of the last revolt against Banu Umayyah the only personality more fitting than all others for leadership was Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him), but though they recommended this task to the Imam (peace be upon him), he refused to

accept. His adopting such a policy was, in the belief of the Shi'a, in accordance with a command of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) that was disclosed to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) by revelation.

In addition, every Imam recognizes better than all else his duty in light of the existing conditions and always gives precedence to the most important matters over all other matters. In this issue, too, if the Imam (peace be upon him) were to accept rulership, the important interests of Islam would be lost, since it was apparent to every authority that in those conditions there was no possibility of implementing the luminous laws of Islam and establishing a just Islamic system of government.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq and the Shi'a School of Thought
QUESTION:

Was Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) the founder of the Shi'a school or its promulgator and explainer?

ANSWER:

Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) acquainted the public with the original Shi'a school of thought, which perhaps even some friends and devotees of Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) had not recognized properly. By establishing that vast school of knowledge, he familiarized the people with the realities of true Islam, which are fulfilled by following 'Ali and the Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them). This was while in the periods before Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) the opportunity for disseminating knowledge was not to the extent that it reached in his time.

This does not mean that Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) is the founder of Shi'a thought, since as explained earlier Shi'a thought existed in the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) in an organized and systematic manner. Mutawatir traditions and the illuminating guidance of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) had specified its limits, and passage of time and occurrences had no share in its development. Of course, these affairs had an influence in its propagation, promulgation, and organization in later periods, especially in the time of Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) and Imam al-Baqir (peace be upon him), and in fact these very incidents made more clear the truth of this school of thought as opposed to the opposing school of thought.

One of the reasons for the success of Shi'a thought in the issue of Imamah was that during the rule of Banu Umayyah the people witnessed conduct and actions of the claimants to

succession of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) which were incompatible with any of the Islamic laws and principles. This conduct even became a cause for the people's rebellion against them in different instances, though most of these rebellions were quelled by force and in appearance the government of Banu 'Umayyah continued, but overall these events caused the Shi'a school to spread and become entrenched in people's hearts.

Before Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him)

QUESTION:

Has the Shi'a school been discussed in the speech of the religious leaders before Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him)?

ANSWER:

As we mentioned before, Shiaism is an genuine Islamic school introduced by the person of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), and all can understand this point from the matter found in Nahj al-Balaghah and the sayings of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him). Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (peace be upon him) and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) explained the various dimensions of this school for the people and perfected the people's information about it and eliminated the over- and under-exaggeration existing regarding this issue.

They demonstrated that the principle of Imamah was an genuine and entirely Islamic concept and the reference point of explaining its reality and limits are the Imams (peace be upon them), just as they are the reference for explaining all Islamic concepts and terminology and Qur'anic verses. When their unparalleled and great-learned position became apparent, all understood that those eminent men possessed all abilities and at the same time were the sole reliable source in recognizing the principle of Imamah and its entire and original concept. Of course, this does not mean that we should presume that the principle of Imamah was their innovation or, as some who do not believe in the unseen world say, a product of history.

Among the reliable traditions according to Ahl al-Sunnat are the traditions of 'Ali ibn Husayn (peace be upon him), Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (peace be upon him), and Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (peace be upon him); as Ahmad Shakir has written in his commentary of al-Ba`ith al-Hathith, the spiritual position and Imamah of the Imams before these two Imams was very firm in the hearts of the people.

The belief that the Imams are al-Qur'an al-Natiq (the Qur'an that speaks), i.e. they know the specific Qur'anic meanings and expressions, was raised on numerous occasions previous to

Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (peace be upon him) in the words of his noble father Imam 'Ali Zain al-'Abidin (peace be upon him) and before him in the traditions of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), Imam al-Hasan (peace be upon him), and Imam al-Husayn (peace be upon him). The Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) has pointed to this issue in traditions that have passed the limit of tawatur (consecutive narration) and he (peace be upon him and his family) introduced the Imams as equals of the Qur'an. In the books of Ahl al-Sunnat, a sermon has been narrated from Imam 'Ali Zain al-'Abidin (peace be upon him) in which the placing of Imamah in Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) and their being the sole referral authority and Divine authority for mankind has been discussed explicitly and in depth.

Shi'a Ideology's Practicality
QUESTION:

Keeping in view the fact that aside from the short five-year period of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), the administration of society was not in the hands of the Imams (peace be upon them), to what extent is the system of religious government according to the Shi'a view practicable and able to be implemented in society?

ANSWER:

Shi'a thought is a logical school that has and has always had the possibility of being implemented in the core of its teachings. The Shi'a view about the issue of Imamah is that after the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) the religious and political leader of society must be someone who knows better than all else all the laws and principles the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) brought for the people from Allah. Without doubt during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) none but 'Ali (peace be upon him) possessed this distinction, and therefore the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) selected 'Ali (peace be upon him) to succeed him and then introduced the rest of the Shi'a Imams, who are twelve people in all, to the people and appointed them his successors. Certainly, this was not because of their physical relationship with the Prophet; rather their spiritual attributes, intellectual abilities and so forth became the reason that Allah chose them alone from among the people to succeed the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), just as the Qur'an says about the successors of the prophets as well: "Verily Allah chose Adam, Nuh, the family of Ibrahim, and the family of `Imran over all the people of the world."[14]

If the people want to tread the true path in all matters, they must follow them and regard them

as wali al-amr (guardians of the believers' affairs), must consider it obligatory to obey them, and must respect their commands just like the commands of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). At the same time, the laws and policies broached in the Shi'a school are not imaginary and unreal affairs that could be said to be unable to be implemented. Rather, they are the most genuine Islamic teachings that, if conditions are available, can be implemented in every society.

If we see that during a portion of history some people prevented their political aspect from being realized, it does not mean that they cannot be implemented. Rather, since these laws were formulated in view of the realities of the existence of man, all human societies are in search of them, and according to the belief of Shi'as, will in the end reach them. This undertaking will be accomplished at the end of time through the last Divine authority (hujjat), and human society will be administered by a single system and law.

In addition, what is fundamental in the call of the prophets is to explain the realities and the path of salvation and the way that leads to ultimate success, which must be announced to the people even in case of certainty that it will not be accepted: "Surely We have guided him to the Path, whether he be grateful or ungrateful."[15]

This is because the responsibility of the prophet is to propagate the Divine laws, among which is Imamah; it is the people who must accept the prophets' invitation and cooperate with the prophets and Imams (peace be upon them) to make available the opportunity to put it in practice. The conduct of the Imams (peace be upon them) and their policies were all practical, bearing results, and at the same time realistic.

For example, the conduct of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon them) was in light of the conditions of existing realities and the conduct of Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (peace be upon him) and Imam Husayn Sayyid al-Shuhada' (peace be upon him) was the same way. They performed all their actions while keeping in view existing conditions. For example, if Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (peace be upon him) made peace with Mu`awiyah, he took into consideration all the aspects of the issue and in those conditions saw no better course of action. And Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) consciously refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid, went to Karbala' and accepted those sorrowful difficulties, and in the end reached his purpose.

Yes, if Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) had been in a different situation and had seen that the path and provisions for taking charge of the government are ready, he would still have moved to acquire his right and repel the undeserving from the khilafah of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). But conditions in his time were such that he knew that the

situation is not suitable for reaching this aim. Thus, with the great and unparalleled mission which he implemented he created a reawakening in the Muslim world, and as long as the world remains the reawakening of Islam's reviver will remain alive.

He, although apparently he did not prevent Yazid and all the usurpers of the khilafah who came after him from usurping the khilafah, internally turned people's hearts away from them and put to the wind Mu`awiyah's plots to defeat Islam. He performed such a deed that afterwards it was said, "Islam is Muhammadi in origin and Husayni in continuance." The remaining Imams (peace be upon him), too, performed well the responsibility with which they were entrusted in protecting Islam, keeping in mind existing conditions.

Belief in the appearance of the savior and twelfth Imam gave comfort to the Shi'as and created a spirit of resistance, patience, and perseverance in the people and prevented power-seeking, despair, and carelessness towards religion. It is a belief that has been explicitly mentioned in the core of Shi'a teachings and reliable traditions, and this principle received more attention during the time of Imam al-Baqir (peace be upon him) and as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) and people's inclination to it increased in light of the transgressions the usurping rulers committed. The people understood that if some indifferent individuals during the time of the companions – that is, after the Prophet's demise (peace be upon him and his family) – conjectured that introducing change in the principle of Imamah would not bring much change in the Islamic agenda, in reality it caused a major tragedy and caused Islam to veer from its true course and the usurped khilafah became a means of hedonism and easy living for a few and of fettering the people and a return to the customs of Caesar, Kisra, and other Satanic powers. This matter strengthened their faith in the principle of Imamah and they understood that it is only this school of thought that can bring Islam's agenda to fruition and end that deplorable situation.

Thus, the becoming conduct of the Imams (peace be upon them) on the on hand and the oppressive behavior of the usurpers of the khilafah on the other caused the Shi'a school of thought to become ever more influential in people's hearts, and as a result their inclination to the Imams (peace be upon the) began to increase. It is because of this that in spite of the efforts of the rulers, Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) was so popular among the masses that the Shi'a themselves are recognized through him.

Shi'a Positions with Respect to the Usurping Rulers
QUESTION:

How were the stands of the Shi'a with respect to the rulers and on what basis were they taken?

The positions of the Shi'a have always been on the basis of protecting Islam's interests, preserving the religion, and denying the legitimacy of oppressive and usurping governments, and they have always endeavored, in the form of an opposing front, to establish a powerful Islamic government on the foundation of religious rule.

In explaining the religious concepts, the Shi'a follow only the Qur'an and sunnah and conduct themselves in accordance with the Qur'anic injunction: "And debate with them in the best manner."[16]

by honorable discussion and debate, and also, in instances, on the basis of taqiyyah (dissimulation) which becomes necessary in certain conditions in all times and places. They do this so that they can guide others to true Islam and the true concepts of the religion and remove society from under the yolk of oppressive and usurping rulers and merciless officials. It is thus that we see that the Shi'a have throughout history always had uprisings against the armed powers. The Shi'a believe in the Imamah of those whose names and infallibility were explicitly mentioned by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and in taking positions they always act on the basis of Islamic teachings and the conduct of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family). In situations when the right conditions do not exist, such as a portion of the life of Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him), they give preference to silence and apparently sitting aside over rebellion, or conduct themselves like Imam Hasan al-Mujtaba (peace be upon him) to save Islam from the threat of splintering. However, the event of Karbala' and refusal of Sayyid al-Shuhada' (peace be upon him) to pledge allegiance to Yazid was an uprising the like of which neither had precedence nor will be seen after it.

That movement was a model and path-opening agenda of struggle for Muslims.

That uprising, though apparently it was crushed and defeated, in reality was a successful uprising, since it revived the true Islam and brushed aside the factors of hopelessness and despair from the faces of the Shi'a and became a cause of their constancy of thought and strength of spirit. After that, no uprising or movement took place among the Shi'a that was crushed and changed hopes to despair, and the infallible leaders of the Shi'a knew, as per the traditions and through the (special) knowledge of the Imamah which they possessed, that belief and faith in the Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them) must be propagated in the hearts of the people so that, through an increase in their awareness and by training capable powers in academic, political, and cultural arenas, they can prevent the usurping rulers from opposing them and in this way prepare the way for the rule of the true Islamic views. The Accusation of

QUESTION:

Some writers classify certain sects of the ghulat as Shi'a and may very well accuse the Shi'a of exaggerating the status of the Ahl al-Bait (peace be upon them). We know this is a false accusation that even in our times the Wahhabis resort to by publishing and disseminating pamphlets among those unfamiliar with Shi'a beliefs. If possible, shed some light on this topic.

ANSWER:

The issue of exaggerated beliefs has precedence among previous religious communities. About the Jews and Christians the Qur'an says, "And the Jews said, 'Uzair is the Son of God,' and the Christians said, 'The Messiah is the Son of God.' "[17] This disease is also found among the Muslims in various forms, as the hadith denotes:

Verily you will follow the paths of those who have gone before you in an exact manner, to the extent that if one of them were to enter a lizard's hole, you would enter it (too).[18]

One form of the above is the situation that came about regarding Amir al-Mu'minin (peace be upon him). One group began believing in his divinity and praised him in their poetry as their deity. For example, they said You created the universe, the one who uprooted Khaybar's firm foundations, We are happy with him as a leader and master, and prostrate to him as our God and Lord A few said such words and poems out of hyperbole and exaggeration, not that they truly considered him their God. In addition, it has been narrated from Imam 'Ali (peace be upon him) himself that he said,

"Two groups of people will be destroyed on my account: the friend who exaggerates in his friendship and the enemy who dislikes me."[19] In any case, throughout histor there have been and there are individuals who have had exaggerated beliefs, though not all of them to the extent that they raise someone to the status of Allah. In any case, these ideas are a form of deviation from Islam and the proper Shi'a creeds. Such beliefs have more often been found among the Sufis, most of who are considered among the Ahl al-Sunnat; ideas such as transmigration (hulul), unity (ittihad), and so forth tend to be found in their writings. Fortunately, thanks to the guidance of the Imams (peace be upon them), not only did the issue of sufism not spread as much among the Shi'a as among the Ahl al-Sunnat, rather it was also repudiated and condemned by the Imams (peace be upon them), their followers, and the major scholars. Thus, associating these issues to the Shi'a is slander; the Shi'a beliefs in regard to each of the issues of Divine unity, prophecy, Imamah, and resurrection are free of such

exaggerated and devious matters, since the Imams (peace be upon them) as protectors of the Divine religion acted in such a way over two and half centuries as to close the path for idolatrous beliefs to penetrate, and the limits and boundaries of the fundamentals of Shi'a thought and doctrine became known. Afterwards, the scholars clearly explained all of these beliefs by compiling and writing books of doctrine, such as the I`tiqadat of Majlisi.

A small group of Sufis was indeed found among the Shi'a who put forth exaggerated beliefs in the name of wilayah and love of 'Ali (peace be upon him), and in every case with the efforts of the mindful 'Ulama appropriate answers were given them. As a result, they were not able to offer much resistance.

The Shi'a consider none a partner to Allah in the His qualities of Majesty and Beauty. They believe the Prophet and Imams (peace be upon them) to be creatures and worshippers of Allah who are in need of Allah from all aspects and regard only Allah as free of need by His essence. Of course, the qualities, distinctions, elevated status, and ranks of perfection that the Shi'a mention for these personalities in accordance with reliable verses and traditions – for example they consider them the authority (hujjat), Imams, rulers (wali al-amr), and possessed of miracles – in no way have even the scent of exaggeration or polytheism. All of them represent the their perfection, apex of servitude, and degree of submission to the commandments of Allah.

In short, the principle of Imamah is one of the original principles of Islam that is understood from the verses of Qur'an and abundant traditions narrated from the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) himself; passage of time, conquests, and defeats played no role in its spread and development.

In addition, belief in this principle does not necessitate any form of exaggerated beliefs. All of the qualities that the Imam, in accordance with the traditions, possesses are not incompatible with the Imam being a servant of Allah and, like the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), being in need of Allah.

"And he controls neither his own benefit nor his loss."[20] In fact, the Imam is not even a prophet, meaning that a code of law and rules is not revealed to him, though he is muhaddath (addressed), meaning that angels speak with him. However, his relation to the angels is not like the relation of the prophet to the angel of revelation, who communicates the Divine commands to the prophet, since the principles of all the commands have previously been explained, and messengership and prophecy have been sealed with the demise of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family).

In recognizing the Imam, it is important that one recognize the Imams who were introduced

and appointed to the Imamah by Allah through the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) and regard them, like the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family), as having general rule and absolute authority (wilayat) over all religious and worldly affairs, and as possessing, with the exception of the prophecy, all of the Prophet's qualities, like knowledge and infallibility. In short one must recognize the Imams (peace be upon them) as the true successors of the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) in both religious and mundane matters.

From the point of view of materialists and those who don't believe in the unseen world, belief in the unseen world, Divine religions, and the qualities which the faithful attribute to the prophets and friends of Allah are all mingled with exaggeration. Since the faithful believe in qualities, actions, and traits with respect to them that the materialist is unable to comprehend, he considers them to be the exaggerations of the believers with respect to the prophets and friends of Allah.

For example, from the materialists' point of view, the miracles of Ibrahim, Musa, and `Isa (peace be upon them), in which the faithful believe, are all a form of exaggeration, though no exaggeration exists in these beliefs. All of these form a chain of realities that show the elevated status of their possessors. Exaggeration is to associate the Prophet or Imam with Allah, or regard Allah as unified with them, and so forth.

The Relation of the Shi'a with the Mu'tazilah

QUESTION:

For what reason have the principles of religion been divided into five principles? Has the link of the Shi'a with the Mu'tazilah played any role in that?

ANSWER:

The Shi'a have conducted discussions and debates about Islamic issues with all sects, as mentioned in books of kalam (theology) and polemics. However, they have not influenced it with regard to any issues of creed. As we have mentioned numerous times, the Shi'a school of thought is an original Islamic school of thought, though the remaining sects appeared afterwards.

The beliefs of the Shi'a are not limited to these five principles, but rather comprise many other issues as well. Of course, in one exposition, the Islamic beliefs can be summarized into tawhid (Divine unity), nubuwwah (prophecy), and ma`ad (resurrection), or in tawhid and nubuwwah, since the remaining beliefs, such as Imamah (vicegerency) and resurrection are a part of the issues which the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) preached and informed

about. And according to the narrations, faith in the prophecy consists of faith in all that the Prophet conveyed. Faith in the prophecy consists of faith in all that the Prophet conveyed. On this basis, these five principles – Divine unity, Divine justice, prophecy, Imamah, and the resurrection – are among the principles in which all Muslims must believe. Reason and revelation also affirm them. Summarizing the beliefs in these five principles is because the Shi'a regard the issue of Divine justice and the Imamah as important as the remaining principles of belief, but Ahl al-Sunnat – the Ash`ari sect – do not believe in them. The Shi'a have taken the Islamic beliefs directly from the Holy Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and Imams (peace be upon them) and have not been influenced by the Mu'tazilah with respect to any of their beliefs, since the Mu'tazilah sect came into being afterwards.

If we see that the Mu'tazilah share the Shi'a view in some issues, what is proper is that we say that they have taken these views from the Shi'a Imams either directly or indirectly. The well-known proverb, "Belief in coercion and anthropomorphism is Umayyad and belief in Justice and unity is an Alawi doctrine," confirms this claim. In spite of this, some writers who are ignorant of the Shi'a school of thought and have researched the Mu'tazili and Ash'ari sects have assumed the Shi'a scholars, among them Sayyid Murta¤a, were Mu'tazili since they found them opposed to some Ash'ari beliefs. Notes:

Notes

[1]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 8, p. 368, in the course of Allamah Majlisi's commentary

[2] Surah an-Nisa' (4), Verse 83

[3]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 92, footnote 21

[4]Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Abi 'l-Hadid, vol. 2, p. 55

[5]Commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Abi 'l-Hadid, vol. 2, p. 55

[6]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 30 p. 535

[7] Surah Najm (53), Verses 3-4

[8] Surah Hashr (59), Verse 7

[9] Surah Ma'idah (5), Verse 67

[10] Surah Anfal (8), Verse 6

[11]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 226

[12]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 36, p. 352

[13]Nahj al-Balaghah, edited by Subhi al-Salih, sermon 3, section 1

[14] Surah Ali-Imran (3), Verse 33

[15] Surah Insan (76), Verse 3

[16] Surah Naml (16), Verse 125

[17] Surah Tawbah (9), Verse 30

[18]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 21, p. 257

[19]Nahj al-Balaghah, edited by Subhi al-Salih, Short Sayings, no. 117

[20]Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 76, p. 167, footnote 7