

TARIKH (History)

Lesson 1

Legacy of the Early Calíphs

In Book 10 (Tārikh) we completed our study of the life (sirah) of Rasulullāh (s) and all the major events of Islām during his lifetime. We also completed our review of the lives of the Imāms from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).

Starting with this book, we wish to now study Islāmic History with a broader perspective and understand Islāmic events after Rasulullāh (s) and how they influenced the history of Muslims to our present day.

In this Book we will specifically review the history and legacy of the first three Caliphs as well as the Caliphate (khilāfah) of Imām Ali ('a). The Sunni Muslims regard the first four Caliphs as 'The Rightly-Guided Caliphs' (khulāfa ar-rāshidun). And in Book 12 inshā Allāh we will study the history of the Caliphs and the Muslim dynasties *after* Imām Ali ('a) until our present times.

After Rasulullāh (s)

Rasulullāh (s) passed away on 28th Safar 11 AH. As soon as the news of Rasulullāh (s)'s passing away spread throughout Madina, the Ansār (who were the original residents of Madina) got together at a place called Saqifa of Banu Sā'ida and began discussing their future and who should lead them. They ignored the various occasions on which Rasulullāh (s) declared Imām Ali ('a) as his successor, including the event of Ghadir just two months before, when Rasulullāh (s) was returning from Makkah and declared Imām Ali ('a) as his successor.

In the meantime, Imām Ali ('a) was busy attending to the burial of Rasulullāh (s). Prominent muhājirun (immigrants of Makkah) like Abu Bakr and Umar found out that a discussion on the future of Islāmic leadership was taking place at Saqifa and they immediately left the place where the body of Rasulullāh (s) lay and went to join the discussions at Saqifa. As a result, they never paid their last respects to Rasulullāh (s) nor did they assist in his funeral rites or witness his burial.

Saqifa

At Saqifa, the discussion soon became very heated. The Ansār were made up of two tribes: the Aws and the Khazraj. Each tribe wanted a leader from themselves. Abu Bakr and Umar argued with them that the successorship should belong to the Muhājirun because they were closer to Rasulullāh (s) by virtue of being from his tribe (of Quraysh) and that they were also the first to accept Islām. When the Ansār heard this, they argued back that they had given shelter to Rasulullāh (s) and the Muhājirun during the Hijrah. Abu Bakr argued with them that the rest of the Arabs in Makkah

and elsewhere will never accept any leader who is not from the Quraysh. To which the Ansār replied that the only muhājir they would accept as a leader would be Imām Ali (‘a) (even though he was not present at Saqifa).

Before Abu Bakr and Umar had arrived at Saqifa, the Ansār were leaning towards electing Sa’d b. Ubādah, the leader of the Khazraj tribe, who had played an important role in the years of Rasulullāh (s)’s life in Madina. So the heated debate at Saqifa soon became a showdown between Sa’d b. Ubādah and Umar. At one point Umar hit Sa’d physically and threatened to kill him. As each group began shouting at each other and there was total chaos, Umar jumped forward and said to Abu Bakr, ‘extend your hand!’ and he pledged allegiance to him as the 1st Caliph and successor to Rasulullāh (s). The leader of the Aws tribe of the Ansār, in rivalry to the Khazraj, did the same and soon the Khazraj had to do the same so as not to be isolated from the rest. Sa’d b. Ubādah was deeply angered by this and left Madina for good and retired in Syria expressing his disgust. Four years later, in 15 AH, he was murdered in Syria (during the rule of Umar).

What we learn from the event of Saqifa is as follows:

1. Imām Ali (‘a) and the Banu Hāshim were not present nor were they consulted because they were busy attending to the funeral of Rasulullāh (s).
2. The gathering at Saqifa was chaotic and violent. Much later when Umar became the Caliph, he called the election of Abu Bakr a “*falta*” (mistake) saying if anyone attempts to pull off anything like that again, he should be killed.
3. Abu Bakr argued that the muhājirun had greater right to being successors to Rasulullāh (s) by virtue of relationship to Rasulullāh (s) and being the first people to accept Islām. Based on this logic as well, Imām Ali (‘a) was the closest person to Rasulullāh (s) and the first to accept Islām.
4. In Arab custom, once the tribal leader had pledged allegiance to someone, his whole tribe did the same and never opposed the leader. Arabs also never broke a pledge of allegiance. That is why the muhājirun and Ansār were both keen to ensure the allegiance at Saqifa was in their favour.
5. Until Rasulullāh (s) was alive, all decisions and planning relating to the Muslim community were done in Masjid an-Nabawi. Saqifa was 3 kms outside Madina. The venue suggests this was a plot to usurp the leadership role in Islām.

The day after Saqifa, Abu Bakr came to the mosque of Rasulullāh (s) and everyone in Madina was forced to come and pay allegiance to him and accept him as the Caliph. Imām Ali (‘a) refused and some people took shelter in his home. Umar marched with a group of people to Imām Ali (‘a)’s home, set the door on fire, pushed it on Sayyida Fātima (‘a), who then had a miscarriage and lost her baby. Thereafter Imām Ali (‘a) was tied in ropes and taken to Masjid an-Nabawi. When Imām Ali (‘a) still refused to

pay allegiance to Abu Bakr, he was finally left alone by Abu Bakr but the others were forced to pay allegiance.

Abu Sufyān, the father of Mu'āwiya and the archenemy of Rasulullāh (s) saw this as an opportunity to divide the Muslims and weaken them forever. He came to Imām Ali ('a) and offered to "fill the alleys and streets of Madina" with horsemen to fight for Imām Ali ('a)'s right. Imām Ali ('a) could see through Abu Sufyān's intentions and told him to go away. It was to preserve Islām and the Muslim community that Imām Ali ('a) kept silent and did not use force to fight for his right. He did however always say his right was usurped, even 25 years later when he became the Caliph and would deliver sermons from the pulpit in Kufa.

Abu Bakr – The First Caliph

Abu Bakr's birth name was Abd al-Ka'ba or Atiq. When he converted to Islām at the age of 38, his name was changed to Abd Allāh. And when Rasulullāh (s) married Abu Bakr's daughter Aisha, he came to be known as Abu Bakr (Father of the Virgin) because Aisha was the only wife of Rasulullāh (s) in Madina who was not a widow or divorcee.

Abu Bakr's father was called Abu Quhāfa and they belonged to the branch of Taym in the tribe of Quraysh. At the time of his election as Caliph, Abu Bakr was 60 years old.

In his very first address to the Muslims, Abu Bakr ascended the pulpit of Rasulullāh (s) and said:

"I have been placed in this position of authority, though I am averse to it. By Allāh, I would have been pleased if any of you had taken it in my place. If you expect me to act like the Messenger of God, then I cannot do it. He was honoured and preserved from error by the Lord, while I am an ordinary man, no better than any of you. When you see me following the right path then obey me, and when you see me turning away from it then set me aright. I have a devil that seizes me sometimes, and when you see me enraged then avoid me because at that time you will not be able to reason with me."

This was a surprising speech. He admitted he was not the best person to lead yet he would not give it to one who was better than him i.e. Imām Ali ('a). Abu Bakr also expected the Muslims to determine if he was right or not and not to expect him to listen to them when his 'devil' seizes him. This was certainly not a speech that would inspire confidence in the Muslims.

By profession Abu Bakr used to trade in cloth and was also a genealogist i.e. he knew the family trees of the Arabs, especially the Quraysh. After his election, Umar saw him going to the market to open his shop and said, "Are you going to trade although you have been given the rule over the Muslims?"

“How else shall I feed my family?” asked Abu Bakr and so Umar then took him to Abu Ubaida, the treasurer of the Bayt al-Māl (Public Treasury), who assigned him a yearly allowance of 2000 dirhams. “Increase the sum for me, for I have a family and you have employed me on other work than my own traded,” said Abu Bakr. So they increased it by 500 dirhams, but it was not sufficient for the maintenance of himself and his family so an annual allowance of 6000 or 8000 dirhams was set for him.³⁰

³⁰ Sayyid S Husain, *The Early History of Islām*, p. 226; Also Jarrett’s trans. Of *Suyuti’s History*, p. 79.

Lesson 2

Legacy of the Early Calíphs (cont'd)

Events in the Caliphate of Abu Bakr

The Usurping of Fadak

One of the first things Abu Bakr did as a Caliph was to contest Sayyida Fatima's ('a) ownership to the land of Fadak, an action that she never forgave him for. According to her will, Abu Bakr and Umar were not allowed to attend her funeral and she would not even reply their salām.

The Land of Fadak has a lengthy history but in brief, it was given to Rasulullāh (s) after the Battle of Khaybar and because it did not involve any battle, it belonged to Rasulullāh (s) personally. On Allāh's command, Rasulullāh (s) gave Fadak to his daughter Sayyida Fātima ('a) during his own lifetime.

When Abu Bakr challenged this, Sayyida Fātima ('a) argued that even if Abu Bakr did not believe her words that Rasulullāh (s) had given it to her in his own lifetime, she was still entitled to it as his only heir. But Abu Bakr then said that he had heard Rasulullāh (s) say, "we, the community of prophets, neither inherit nor are we inherited". This was of course a 'hadith' that no one except Abu Bakr had ever heard of.

In later generations, the good calíphs amongst the Umayyads and Abbāsids, always returned Fadak to the descendants of Sayyida Fātima ('a) and then a later Calíph would usurp it again. This return of Fadak time and again shows that history always regarded it as having been usurped from Sayyida Fātima ('a).

Malik b. Nuwaira

When Abu Bakr was declared as the Calíph and successor to Rasulullāh (s), many tribes in Arabia outside Makkah and Madina refused to accept him and decided to stop paying their legal taxes (zakāh) to the Islāmic government.

Abu Bakr decided he would use force to ensure the zakāh was always paid. And in fact, the revenue from Fadak was crucial to fund the army that would be used to reclaim the distant provinces. And so, various commanders were sent out to ensure that the remote tribes were all complying with the payment of zakāh. Abu Bakr instructed his commanders to give the adhān to test the faith of the local people wherever they went. If they responded, they were to be asked to repent and submit to the Calíph, but if they resisted they were to be attacked and their women and children made prisoners. With these instructions, the various commanders left Madina. These military exercises are known in Islamic history as the *Ridda Wars*.

The man who commanded the largest division was a general named Khālid b. Walid. He was the same man who had caused the defeat of the Muslims at Uhud by attacking them from behind the mountain pass when the Muslim archers left their positions in greed for war booty. Despite his later conversion to Islām, Khālid was a cruel soldier with dubious faith. Abu Bakr sent Khālid b. Walid against Tulaiha, a man claiming to be a new prophet, in the north east. After Tulaiha ran away and the tribes of Bani Hawāzin surrendered, his task was over and his men advised him to return to Madina.

Khalid however wanted to continue fighting and he led his men southwards to the tribe of Bani Yarb. The chief of this tribe was Malik b. Nuwaira, a noble man who was famous for his generosity, horsemanship and poetry. He also had an extremely beautiful wife named Laila. When Malik heard that Khālid was approaching with an army of 4500 men, he did not resist him and responded to him when the call to adhān was given.

Khālid however had heard of Malik's beautiful wife. He therefore refused to accept that Malik was a Muslim and had him killed brutally and then forced his widow to marry him the same night, despite the fact that Islām requires a widow to observe a period of waiting (iddah).

Khālid's own men were shocked by this and complained to Abu Bakr. But Khālid was a Qurayshi and Abu Bakr favoured the Quraysh and believed he needed them to establish power so he only chided Khālid for marrying a widow under the circumstances without punishing him for murder of an innocent Muslim or taking the widow of Malik unlawfully.

Fujat Salmi

Fujat Salmi was a chief of the Banu Sulaym and a companion of Rasulullāh (s) who had taken part in Badr. Appearing before Abu Bakr, he offered his services to subdue his neighbouring disloyal tribes, and asked to be furnished with the necessary arms for his followers. Abu Bakr equipped him but Fujat Salmi is said to have abused the trust, by attacking tribes and plundering their villages indiscriminately.

Fujat Salmi was finally confronted and asked to appear before the Caliph to explain his actions. So he lay down his arms and proceeded to Madina. As soon as he appeared, Abu Bakr ordered him to be seized and burnt alive. He was immediately dragged away to Baqi where a large fire was kindled and he was thrown into the flames.

Rebellion in Hadramoot

In another example, Abu Bakr faced a rebellion in Hadramoot (Yemen) from Ash'ath b. Qays, chief of the Banu Kinda. When he finally got hold of Ash'ath, Abu Bakr not

only forgave the rebel (because of the pleading of friends) but he also allowed him to marry his sister Umm Farwa. Ash'ath and Umm Farwa had a daughter – Ja'dah – who married Imām Hasan ('a) and then poisoned him. And two of Ash'ath's sons – Muhammad and Ishāq – fought in the army of Yazid against Imām Husayn ('a) in Karbala.

Ash'ath himself was a man filled with doubt. He fought on Imām Ali ('a) side in the Battle of Siffin but was also the cause of stopping the battle in favour of Mu'āwiya, that later caused the rise of the Kharijites. (We shall study more of this in Lessons 5 and 6).

Like the case of Khālid b. Walid, this was therefore another instance where Abu Bakr should not have been lenient but he was and it had unfortunate consequences.

Foreign Conquests

Abu Bakr sent the Muslim army to conquer foreign territories and in 12-13 AH, a considerable part of Syria was taken by the Muslims as well as much of the land towards the Persian border. Abu Bakr sent Yazid, the son of Abu Sufyān and brother of Mu'āwiya, as a commander to Syria with a great amount of financial support. Along with him went many Umayyads and famous chiefs of Quraysh including Abu Sufyān himself and later Mu'āwiya b. Abu Sufyān. This was the start of the Umayyads entrenching themselves in Syria, building palaces for themselves, and claiming Syria to be their 'right'. When Umar became the Caliph, he appointed Mu'āwiya to be the governor of Syria. 25 years later, when Imām Ali ('a) became the Caliph, Mu'āwiya refused to step down as governor of Syria.

In a sense, Abu Bakr and Umar disregarded the fact that the Umayyads were always jealous of the Banu Hāshim and had caused a lot of suffering to Rasulullāh (s) and his ancestors. By the time Rasulullāh (s) had freed Makkah from polytheism; the Umayyads had been weakened and defeated. Abu Bakr and Umar turned all this around and returned the Umayyads to power. The Umayyads had represented the polytheist Quraysh of Makkah and fought Rasulullāh (s) all his life. Now they were able to fight the family of Rasulullāh (s) (the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)) but from within Islām as "God's Caliphs". This reached a climax with the brutal murder of Imām Husayn ('a) and his family and companions in Karbala and the imprisonment of the womenfolk of Rasulullāh (s) by the Umayyad Caliph Yazid b. Mu'āwiya b. Abu Sufyān.

Abu Bakr's Death

Abu Bakr died on Tuesday 22nd Jamādi al-Akhar, 13 AH (August 634 CE) at the age of 63. He had ruled as Caliph for 2 years and 3 months. Before dying he appointed Umar b. al-Khattāb as his successor. The prayers over his body was led by Umar and he was buried by the side of Rasulullāh (s)'s grave.

On his deathbed, Abu Bakr lamented three of his decisions during his caliphate saying, 'I wish I had never done them'. These were: (1) the attack of the house of Sayyida Fātima ('a), (2) the burning alive of Fūjat Salmi. He said he should have released him or killed him by sword but not burnt him alive; and (3) sparing the life of Ash'ath b. Qays and giving him his sister in marriage. The man, he said, was always forward in wickedness.

Conclusion

At the time of Rasullāh (s)'s passing away, Madina was the stronghold and base of Islām. Through Rasullāh (s), the Madinans had become the representatives of Islām and the old aristocracy of the Quraysh in Makkah (as the most powerful tribe in Arabia) was shattered. Rasullāh (s) had worked hard to promote the teaching that in Islām, Godwariness (taqwa) and not lineage mattered.

When Abu Bakr became the Caliph, he was faced with a lot of opposition from the tribes outside Madina. He felt the only way to gain stability and secure power was to take help from the old Makkan aristocracy i.e. the Quraysh. Instead of relying on the pious Madina Muhājirun and Ansār, he turned to the Quraysh and in particular to the Umayyads led by Abu Sufyān, who had become Muslims barely 1-2 years ago during the Conquest of Makkah and that, too, only to save their lives.

Abu Bakr appointed the Makkan Quraysh as army commanders to fight the *Ridda Wars* against the outlying Arabian tribes. These included men like Khālid b. Walid, Yazid b. Abi Sufyān, and Ikrima b. Abi Jahl. The Quraysh were obviously delighted to regain power after they thought their 'nobility' no longer mattered in Islām. They fully supported Abu Bakr and committed many atrocities wherever they led armies. These were men who had hardly spent time with Rasullāh (s) and knew little about *taqwa* and the values of Islām.

With the Muslim armies mostly under the command of members of the old Makkan aristocracy, Madina was virtually at the mercy of Rasullāh (s)'s recent enemies. Suddenly the Ansār felt isolated and unappreciated at once. After all their sacrifices and giving refuge to Rasullāh (s) and the Muhājirun, they did not matter anymore. The Banu Hāshim felt they were reliving the days of the Quraysh boycott when they were forced to living the Valley of Abu Tālib (Shi'b Abu Tālib) in hardship.

If Abu Bakr had placed his trust in Allāh and fought the rebellions against him using the Ansār of Madina and with the same pious army that Rasullāh (s) had used in all the battles of Islām, history would have unfolded very differently. But then again, if successorship to Rasullāh (s) had been seen by Abu Bakr and Umar as primarily a religious authority rather than a political one, then Imām Ali ('a) would not have been denied his right in the first place.

The *Ridda Wars* that Abu Bakr fought were primary against those who refused to pay zakāh. Yet the Qur'ān did not sanction the shedding of blood of those who refused to

pay zakāh. But Abu Bakr felt this was necessary to run the affairs of the State (as in government taxes today). This radical change in policy (to kill anyone who did not pay their taxes) was to be upheld later by all the tyrannical caliphs especially the Umayyads and Abbāsids. Authentic Sunni narrations also say that at first Umar tried to reason with Abu Bakr not to fight those who did not pay zakāh but he refused.

Whilst restoring the power of the Makkan Quraysh, Abu Bakr discontinued the pay of *fay'* or *khums* to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and refused to acknowledge that the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) had any special privilege or status over the ordinary Muslims. Yet he recognized the widows of Rasulullāh (s) as having a special status and continued to provide for them generously including giving his daughter Aisha (the youngest widow of Rasulullāh (s)) some lands in Madina and in Bahrain.³¹ This, while, he took away the land of Fadak from Sayyida Fātima ('a).

Even though Abu Bakr was supposed to have been elected by the 'elders of Madina', he did not think it necessary to consult them regarding his successor. Instead, he simply appointed Umar as his successor. Historians have suggested that Abu Bakr's primary goal in appointing a successor was, above all, to prevent any discussion of the rights of the family of Rasulullāh (s) - knowing that Imām Ali ('a) was a candidate who could easily have been the best choice if people were consulted. He chose Umar knowing that under Umar's rule the Banu Hāshim will continue to be kept at bay. Some historians have suggested that the only other person Abu Bakr would have chosen besides Umar would have been Khālid b. Walid, but he was not in Madina at the time.³²

³¹ Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad*, p. 51.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Lesson 3

Legacy of the Early Calíphs (cont'd)

Umar b. al-Khattāb – the Second Caliph

When Umar b. al-Khattāb took over the Caliphate, he was 52. In his first address to the people, he said, “O God! I am rough in temper, therefore soften me; and I am weak, therefore strengthen me; and I am miserly, therefore make me generous.”

With these poorly chosen words, Umar began his rule which was to last for 10 years and six months. Only one year after he came to power Umar introduced new religious laws that are regarded as innovations (bid’ah) in Islām:

1. He introduced a special prayer called Tarāwih, during the month of Ramadān. This prayer, which requires recitations of large portions of the Qur’ān, is still recited in congregation (jamā’ah) by Sunni Muslims today.
2. He made harām (forbidden) the minor Hajj (umra at-tamattu) and the fixed-term marriage (zawāj mut’a) that Rasulullāh (s) had permitted.
3. He reduced the number of takbirs in salāt al-mayyit from five to four.
4. He removed “*hayya ‘ala khayril ‘amal*” in the adhān and in the adhān for fajr salāh, he introduced the phrase, “*as-salātu khayrun min an-nawm*”.

During the reign of Umar, the boundaries of the Muslim territories were expanded greatly and many foreign lands were conquered. These included the rest of Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem, Egypt and Persia.

Umar placed ill-chosen governors in many of these new lands. In particular, he was responsible for the growth of power of Mu’āwiya b. Abu Sufyān in Syria. In a sense, this appointment was ultimately the cause of the massacre in Karbala and the rise to power of evil men like Yazid b. Mu’āwiya.

Umar was known to be quick tempered and impulsive in his rulings. Numerous incidents of wrong judgements are reported in his life and often he was about to punish someone wrongfully before Imām Ali (‘a) intervened to save the victim. Umar was known to say often, ‘If it was not for Ali, Umar would have perished!’

Abu Bakr used to call himself, ‘the Caliph of the Messenger (s)’ (Khalifat ar-Rasul) and at first Umar called himself, ‘the Caliph of the Caliph of the Messenger (s)’ but this title being too long and cumbersome, he adopted the title ‘Commander of the Faithful’ (Amir al-Mu’minin), which was a title given to Imām Ali (‘a) by Rasulullāh (s). Later Calíphs called themselves simply ‘the Caliph of God’ (khalifatullāh) or Amir al-Mu’minin.

The Conversion of Umar

How Umar converted to Islām in Makkah (before the Hijrah) at the age of 33 is often retold in books of history as a reminder of his temperamental nature. Before he became a Muslim, Umar was very hostile to Rasulullāh (s). His maternal uncle Abu Jahl had set a reward of 100 camels to anyone who kills Rasulullāh (s). Umar therefore set out one day to kill Rasulullāh (s).

On his way, Umar met Sa'd b. Abi Waqqās who advised him to first look after his own sister and her husband, who, he said, were already the followers of Rasulullāh (s). Enraged, Umar turned towards his sister's house and happened to overhear the Qur'ān being recited.

Barging into the house, Umar wrestled with his brother-in-law and threw him down, sitting on his chest ready to kill him. His sister tried to stop him but he slapped her hard until she was bleeding from her face. At this point, his sister cried in a fit of anger, "O son of Khattāb! Do what you want to do, but I have changed my faith" and then she professed that both she and her husband were Muslims.

Umar, feeling ashamed of have driven her to such anger and tears, stood aside and asked her to recite what she knew of Qur'ān. She recited the opening verses of Surah Tā Hā (20) that affected his heart. He therefore asked them both to take him to Rasulullāh (s) and when he came before his presence, he was awed.

Rasulullāh (s) said to him, "Will you not cease O' Umar! Until God sends upon you calamity and chastisement such as He sent upon Walid b. Mughira?" and he asked him to embrace Islām which he accepted. This occurred in the 6th year of Rasulullāh (s)'s mission (*bi'that*) in Makkah.

Umar's Death

Umar had a rule that non-Arabs were not allowed to enter Madina. However, he relaxed the rule for one man only at the request of his friend Mughira bin Shu'ba, the governor of Kufa.³³ The man in question was called Abu Lulu. He was not an Arab, but he was a good carpenter, blacksmith and engraver.

Abu Lulu was heavily taxed for the privilege of residing in Madina and asked Umar to increase his allowance. Umar refused and instead commissioned him to build a windmill for grinding grain. Abu Lulu promised that he would build him such a windmill that people would always talk about it. The way he said it made Umar wonder whether he was being threatened and his fears proved correct.

A few days later, On Wednesday the 26th of Dhul Hijjah 23 AH, Abu Lulu ambushed Umar in the early hours of the morning and stabbed him in the stomach three times

³³ Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*, p. 74-5.

with a double-bladed dagger. One of these wounds was fatal and Umar died three days later at the age of 63. He was buried the next day on Sunday, 1st Muharram 24 AH, besides Abu Bakr.

The Shura

Abu Bakr's policy was to give preference to the Makkan aristocracy. During Umar's time, the Muslim Empire had spread widely and many non-Arabs were becoming Muslims. So Umar's policy was to give merit to the Arabs over the non-Arabs (*'ajam*). This was a policy that Imām Ali ('a) was severely opposed to and many knew that. This is why Imām Ali ('a) was not favoured by the Quraysh Arabs and was very popular amongst the non-Arabs, the slaves and the downtrodden.

When Umar realized he would not survive the wounds from Abu Lulu, he decided to appoint a council (*shura*) of six people that included: Imām Ali ('a), Uthmān b. Affān, Zubayr b. al-Awwām, Abd ar-Rahmān b. Awf, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqās and Talha b. Ubaydillah.

Umar then asked these six people to be kept in a place for 3 days and not to leave it until they had elected one amongst them as Caliph. He also said that if three of them vote for one person and the remaining two oppose them then these two should be killed. And if the group was equally divided into three each and there were two candidates then the candidate belonging to the group with Abd ar-Rahmān b. Awf should win the vote.

Later on, Imām Ali ('a) complained to Abd Allāh b. Abbās that this was a clever plot by Umar to ensure that he would not be given his right whilst making it look like a fair vote. The reason was because Abd ar-Rahmān b. Awf was married to Uthmān's sister. He was not popular enough to be accepted as Caliph himself but he would only vote for his brother-in-law Uthmān. Secondly, Sa'd b. Abi Waqqās hated Imām Ali ('a) and would never vote for him. Talha was not in Madina at the time but he also belonged to the tribe of Taym (same as Abu Bakr) – a tribe opposed to the Banu Hāshim in general. The only person who could vote for Imām Ali ('a) was Zubayr who was a maternal cousin of Imām Ali ('a). (Zubayr's mother and Imām Ali ('a)'s father were siblings).

Another ill-effect of this *shura* was that individuals like Zubayr and Talha who never expected to ever gain authority now felt they were possible candidates for the caliphate because Umar had included them in the *shura*. So when Imām Ali ('a) became the Caliph, Talha and Zubayr asked for positions of authority and when they were denied that, they fought Imām Ali ('a) in the Battle of Jamal. Zubayr, who was once very close to Imām Ali ('a), became an enemy in due course.

As the *shura* met to discuss, everyone present realized they were not knowledgeable enough or in possession of any merit even close to Imām Ali ('a). They were therefore willing to give the caliphate to Imām Ali ('a) on the condition that he

agrees to following the “Sirah of the Shaykhain” meaning the practices of the two previous “Shaykhs” i.e. Abu Bakr and Umar. This would mean given preference to the Umayyads and Quraysh as well as the Arabs over the non-Arabs. Imām Ali (‘a)’s policy was to give preference on piety and Godwariness (*taqwa*) only, based on the verse of the Qur’ān:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ﴾

*O humankind! We have created you of a male and a female, and then We made you (into different) races and tribes so that you may get to know each other. **Surely the most honourable of you with Allāh is the one who is most pious among you; surely Allāh is All-Knowing and Aware.***

- Surah al-Hujurāt, 49:13

Imām Ali (‘a) therefore refused and said he would rule according to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of Rasulullāh (s) only. If the sirah of the shaykhain was according to the Qur’ān and the Sunnah of Rasulullāh (s) then it was covered and there was no need to mention it as a special condition; and if it was against the Qur’ān and Sunnah then he could not follow it. On the other hand, Uthmān b. Affān (an Umayyad himself), readily agreed to the condition and was thus appointed as the 3rd Caliph.

Conclusion

The idea that the successorship to Rasulullāh (s) and the caliphate was the right of the Quraysh only, with disregard to individual merit or whom Rasulullāh (s) had himself declared as his successor, was first conceived by Abu Bakr. He may have done so to allow himself to control the other Arab tribes but this was not legitimate from a Qur’ānic perspective. And yet it became an essential institution of Islām upheld by the Sunni creed.

Umar tried to ‘islamicize’ this institution by not favouring the Makkan aristocracy directly but rather by using the principles of consultation (*shura*). He also believed that those who became Muslims first, had greater rights in Islām. But these two principles of consultation (*shura*) and precedence (*sābiqa*) failed to islamicize the institution of the Caliphate and vanished almost immediately after his death, for two reasons: firstly because even though Umar preferred merit in Islām over Makkan aristocracy, he on the other hand still upheld that the Arabs must be given preference over non-Arabs. And secondly, Umar allowed the Umayyads to gain control and power, especially by appointing Mu’āwiya as his governor in Syria and arranging for Uthmān (who was an Umayyad) to succeed him.

It was now only a matter of time before succession to Rasulullāh (s) became a dynasty or monarchy with one family ruling until it was overthrown by another, regardless of the rulers’ personal qualities or relationship to Rasulullāh (s). The

institution of Imāmah that Allāh (s.w.t.) and Rasulullāh (s) had envisioned for the Muslim Ummah was ignored, neglected and forgotten except by those who remained attached to the Household (Ahl al-Bayt) of Rasulullāh (s) and called themselves their 'Shi'ah' (followers and supporters).

Lesson 4

Legacy of the Early Caliphs (cont'd)

Uthmān b. Affān – the Third Caliph

Of all the people in Umar's *shura*, perhaps no one was more surprised when Uthmān was declared the 3rd Caliph of the Muslims than Uthmān himself.

Uthmān had no leadership qualities whatsoever. He had a glaring lack of military prowess and was known to flee in battles, at times not returning home until 3 days later.³⁴ In the words of Wilfred Madelung, Uthmān was 'by nature averse to bloodshed'.³⁵ It is true that he was highly successful as a merchant; but at no time before his election at the *shura* had he displayed any qualities of public leadership.

Among the six members of the *shura* council, Uthmān was the only one who had never been entrusted with leading even a minor expedition or a small group of the Muslim army: neither by Rasullāh (s) himself nor by the first two caliphs. And before the election he had no political ambitions and can hardly even have thought of himself as a potential candidate for the supreme reign one day.

Despite his weaknesses as a leader (which was much manipulated by his family) he was put forward as a candidate only to counter and stop Imām Ali ('a) from getting the *khilāfah*.³⁶ What made him a good counter-candidate to Imām Ali ('a) was that he was an Umayyad and would therefore have a strong backing of the Makkan aristocracy. The Umayyads were descendants of Abd Manāf from Abd ash-Shams. And Imām Ali ('a) was also a descendant of Abd Manāf but from Hāshim (like Rasullāh (s)). Since none of the other candidates in the council were descendents of Abd Manāf, without Uthmān the Umayyads may have felt obliged to support Imām Ali ('a) since he was from the Abd Manāf even if not from the Abd ash-Shams line of descent.

When Uthmān became Caliph, he realized his unpreparedness but he also knew he was heavily backed by the Quraysh. He therefore took a passive approach and let his family run the show. In no Caliph's life is nepotism so widely acknowledged by historians as in the Caliphate of Uthmān.

In his first public speech, Uthmān made a poor effort and then lamely finished by apologizing, "O people! We have never been orators (*khutabā*). If we live, then inshā Allāh, the oration will come to you in proper shape!"³⁷

³⁴ As he did in the Battle of Uhud.

³⁵ Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*, p. 78.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Uthmān was also the first Caliph to refer to himself as ‘the Caliph of Allāh’ (khalifatullāh). From the first day of his rule, he began systematically replacing the governors of the major provinces with his own relatives from the Bani Umayya.

In Kufa he appointed his drunkard step-brother Walid b. Uqba to replace Sa'd b. Abi Waqqās. Walid was known to once vomit on the pulpit of Kufa because of being drunk. And on another occasion, because he was too drunk, he led the fajr salāh with four sujud instead of two. When the angry Muslims confronted him after the salāh, he said, ‘What a beautiful morning! I would like to extend it even further, if you allow me!’ The people of Kufa complained to Uthmān but he wouldn’t do anything about it. Finally Uthmān was forced to summon Walid to Madina and Imām Ali (‘a) saw to it that he was whipped 40 times for drinking. Uthmān then replaced the governor of Kufa with his cousin Sa’id b. al-Aas.

In Egypt Uthmān replaced Amr b. al-Aas with his foster brother Abd Allāh bin Abi Sarh, who has been cursed in the Qur’ān (Surah al-An’ām, 6:93) for inventing lies and saying that he had revelations from Allāh.

Uthmān also invited his uncle Hakam bin al-Aas back to Madina, after he had been exiled from Madina for life by Rasulullāh (s). Then he made his uncle Hakam's evil son Marwān his secretary and gave him huge gifts from the property of the Muslims. He also gave Marwān the property of Fadak and made him his son-in-law. Marwān played a role in the murder of Uthmān. He later incited Talha and Zubayr to fight Imām Ali (‘a) in Jamal but then had Talha killed so that he would not threaten his rise to power. He was responsible for the arrows shot at Imām Hasan (‘a)’s body before burial and he played a role in the murder of Imām Husayn (‘a). Shortly after Yazid, Marwān became the Umayyad Caliph and his sons ruled after him until the end of the Umayyad dynasty. (We shall study more about this in Book 12.)

During the Caliphate of Uthmān, conquests were extended in Africa from beyond Egypt in the east to as far as Morocco in the West, covering almost the whole territory along the sea-coast i.e. Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. All the new territory brought in untold wealth to the Caliph.

Despite his open nepotism, the greatest grievances that the Muslims had against Uthmān were his ill-treatment of the *sahāba* and the squandering of the Muslim wealth. While they suffered in poverty, Uthmān’s relatives built palaces for themselves and treated the Muslim treasury as their personal property. Hundreds of thousands of dirhams were given by Uthmān to his family members.

On one occasion the great companion of Rasulullāh (s) – Ammār Yāsir – spoke out against Uthmān. Instead of heeding his words, Uthmān ordered for Ammār to be beaten up and a group of Umayyads attacked Ammār and kicking him down, beat him until he fainted. Some of his relatives were informed of this and rushed to save Ammār and carry him off to safety.

Another great companion of Rasulullāh (s) to oppose Uthmān was Abu Dhar. At first Abu Dhar was in Damascus where he preached against Mu'āwiya and his squandering of Muslim wealth. Mu'āwiya did not dare touch Abu Dhar because of his status. Instead he wrote to Uthmān and asked for Abu Dhar to be banished from Syria. Uthmān had Abu Dhar brought to Madina on an unsaddled camel. In Madina Abu Dhar continued preaching in public against Uthmān until the latter had him banished to a wilderness in the desert called Rabadha where Abu Dhar was forced to live alone and die in isolation.

Numerous other incidents took place where Uthmān was asked to act justly but he always allowed Marwān and other relatives to influence him and he would apologize to the Muslims and then revert back and defend his family.

Uthmān's Death

When the matter got completely out of hand, a group of almost 10,000 Muslims travelled from Egypt, Kufa and Basra and surrounded Uthmān's palace in Madina. This siege lasted for 40 days. Imām Ali ('a) tried his best to help diffuse the situation and even when the Muslims besieged the palace and denied Uthmān access to food and water, Imām Ali ('a) managed to convince the Muslims to allow Imām Hasan ('a) and Imām Husayn ('a) to take water to Uthmān.

In the end however, the Muslims broke into the palace. All of Uthmān's family fled. He was only left with his wife. As Uthmān sat in a corner clutching a rosary (tasbeeh) and staring at the Qur'ān, the people attacked him and cut him with their swords until he died. Thereafter they refused to have him buried next to Rasulullāh (s) and the previous two caliphs. Instead his body was taken to the other end of Baqi where the Jews buried their dead and he was buried there.

Uthmān was murdered at the age of 82 on the 18th of Dhul Hijjah 35 AH having reigned eleven years and eleven months.

Later that same year Salmān al-Fārisi, whom Rasulullāh (s) had counted as a member of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and called "Salmān al-Muhammadi", passed away in Madāin. He was Imām Ali ('a)'s governor there and according to some historians he was 250 or 350 years old.

Conclusion

After the murder of Uthmān, the people unanimously pressured Imām Ali ('a) to take the leadership of the Muslim Ummah. What is most startling however is that the very same men who were behind the murder of Uthmān now began calling for revenge for Uthmān's blood and they found the perfect person to blame: Imām Ali ('a). Perfect because it would serve as a good excuse to remove Imām Ali ('a) from the khilāfah.

For example, one of the most active and outspoken opponents of Uthmān was Talha b. Ubaydillah. Uthmān tried to win Talha over by sending him lavish gifts and money, which Talha gladly took but did not stop criticizing the Caliph. In fact, he wrote letters to provinces outside Madina inciting revolt and encouraged the Egyptians during their siege of Uthmān's palace. And it was Talha who stopped water from getting to Uthmān during the siege.³⁸

Yet after Uthmān was murdered, Talha and Zubayr along with Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the widow of Rasulullāh (s), went to Basra and used the people there to raise an army to fight Imām Ali ('a) in the Battle of Jamal, as a revenge for Uthmān's murder.

Another example is Marwān, the son-in-law of Uthmān. He was foul-mouthed and every time the Muslim 'rebels' asked to speak to Uthmān, Marwān would abuse them and tell them off. His inciting them led to the palace doors being set on fire and the break into the palace to murder Uthmān. Yet Marwān himself fled and left Uthmān to face the protesters alone.

A third case is that of Aisha bint Abi Bakr. She had a grudge against Uthmān from the start of his Caliphate. Some historians say this was because Uthmān reduced her pension to that of the other widows of Rasulullāh (s) from the extra she was receiving during the caliphate of her father and then Umar. She was the first one to speak out against Uthmān in Masjid an-Nabawi. Every time she wanted to turn the people against Uthmān, she would bring to the Mosque a hair or garment or sandal of Rasulullāh (s) and cry out, 'how quickly you have forsaken the sunnah of the Messenger of God, the owner of this sandal!'³⁹ And seeing Rasulullāh (s)'s possession in her hand, the crowds of people would cry in rage and abuse Uthmān, forcing him to descend from the pulpit and rush back into his palace.

Aisha also wrote letters to other provinces to stir up rebellion against Uthmān. But later on, when she found out that Uthmān had been murdered and Imām Ali ('a) was the Caliph, she turned around completely in favour of the 'madhlum' (oppressed) Caliph who was murdered. This was because there was no one that Aisha hated more than Imām Ali ('a). The blood-stained shirt of the 'khalifat al-madhlum' became the standard of Aisha in the Battle of Jamal.

When Uthmān was besieged in his palace, he managed to send a note asking for help from his relative and governor in Syria – Mu'āwiya b. Abi Sufyān. Mu'āwiya of course had other plans and ambitions and was slow to respond. He held back to see what would happen next. Even after he found out that Uthmān had been murdered and Imām Ali ('a) was the Caliph, he did not react because in Arab custom, Uthmān had other closer male relatives such as Uthmān's son Abān and his step-brother Walid b. Uqba who would claim for any revenge. But after the attempt by Aisha, Talha and Zubayr failed to overthrow Imām Ali ('a) in the Battle of Jamal and Imām Ali ('a) now demanded that Mu'āwiya step down as governor of Syria, suddenly Mu'āwiya saw

³⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 100-101

the need to claim he was the heir of Uthmān and could not step down until he had avenged the death of the 'khalifat al-madhlum'. The real aim was of course not to avenge Uthmān but to remove Imām Ali ('a) from power by framing him as the culprit.

And yet, no one had tried to help Uthmān (and even arranged for him to have food and water during the siege) more than Imām Ali ('a).

Lesson 5

The Khilāfah of Imām ‘Alī (‘a)

The Allegiance to Imām Ali (‘a)

After the murder of Uthmān, there was great unrest in the city of Madina due to the absence of any government. The main citizens of the city called for the immediate election of a Caliph to end the danger of a civil war. Two men had ambitions to become Caliph. They were Talha and Zubayr, both brothers-in-law of Aisha, the widow of Rasulullāh (s). However, to the great disadvantage of these two candidates, she was in Makkah for pilgrimage at the time.

The people of Madina, however, wanted Imām Ali (‘a) to be their Caliph. He was a man admired by his friends and enemies alike for his courage, piety, eloquence, wisdom and kinship to Rasulullāh (s). After having been ruled by weak men the people now turned to the man who had been nominated to lead them in the first place. However, Imām Ali (‘a) refused their offer at first.

Imām Ali (‘a) was in a very difficult position. On one hand, he knew he was the most rightful to lead. On the other hand he also knew there were many in positions of governorship or eager for power and will not be able to withstand his justice. Those in power (as governors) were corrupt and used to the support of the previous Caliphs. They would not tolerate a rule like that of Rasulullāh (s) again.

The people of Madina insisted that they would follow none but him and at last Imām Ali (‘a) agreed. He declared he would only rule on the basis of the Qur’ān and Sunnah of Rasulullāh (s) and the people agreed. This was a unanimous vote and not in a small gathering like in Saqifa or an appointment by the previous Caliph or a *shura* (council) of electors. It took place at the end of Dhul Hijjah, 35 AH.

The next day in Masjid an-Nabawi, the Muslims gathered in large numbers to pay allegiance to Imām Ali (‘a), amongst the first ones being Talha and Zubayr.

A few days later, Talha, Zubayr and a few others came to Imām Ali (‘a) asking that the murder of Uthmān be avenged. Imām Ali (‘a) knew full well that some of these same people had been responsible for the riots that led to Uthmān's death, and now they just wanted to stir up trouble. However, he called for Uthmān's wife Naila and his secretary Marwān to ask them if they could identify the culprits. Marwān did not come and in any case he had left Uthmān before the murder. Naila came and said that Uthmān was killed by two men who she did not recognize. Under the circumstances Imām Ali (‘a) could do nothing more unless further evidence came to light.

Meanwhile, the members of the Banu Umayya slowly began to leave Madina. Imām Ali (‘a) knew that they were up to no good and anticipated future trouble.

Nonetheless, following the policies of the Qur'ān and Rasulullāh (s), the first matter that Imām Ali ('a) attended to was replacing the worthless governors of Uthmān. Most of the governors took over their new posts but the governor to Kufa was stopped from entering that city while the governor to Syria was stopped by Mu'āwiya's men and both had to return to Madina.

When his governors returned from Kufa and Syria, Imām Ali ('a) wrote letters to Abu Musa Ash'ari in Kufa and Mu'āwiya in Syria demanding that they give way to the new governors.

Abu Musa conceded and wrote back from Kufa, stating that the Kufans were at the service of the new Caliph, but Mu'āwiya did not respond.

Meanwhile, Talha and Zubayr came to Imām Ali ('a) asking to be appointed as governors. Imām Ali ('a) refused to appoint them and in anger, they planned an excuse of going to Makkah for Umra and slipped out of Madina. There, in violation of their recent allegiance to Imām Ali ('a), they met with Aisha and together a plot was hatched to proceed to Basra and arouse the people there against Imām Ali ('a).

Thus, Imām Ali ('a) was faced with a double threat to the security of his government - from Aisha, Talha and Zubayr in Basra and from Mu'āwiya in Damascus (Syria).

The Battle of Jamal

The People of Basra were easy to sway when they saw the 'wife of Rasulullāh (s)' and 'Mother of the Faithful' (*umm al-mu'mineen*) had come to their city and was asking them to rise in arms against Imām Ali ('a).

Historians confirm that Aisha also asked Umm Salama to join her but she refused saying Rasulullāh (s) had asked his wives never to leave Madina and also that Imām Ali ('a) was the rightful successor to Rasulullāh (s). Umm Salama tried dissuading Aisha but Zubayr's son Abd Allāh who was Aisha's nephew (sister's son) managed to convince his aunt to continue with the war plans. Abd Allāh b. Zubayr was known for his hatred for Imām Ali ('a).

As the preparations of war were underway in Basra, Imām Ali ('a) came to know of this and he set out of Madina and asked Imām Hasan ('a) and some of his closest companions like Malik al-Ashtar to proceed to Kufa and ask the people there to join him.

The army of Aisha, Talha and Zubayr now set out of Basra, 30,000 men strong. On the way towards the battle, they stopped at a place called Hawab. There Aisha heard dogs barking all night. She asked what the place was called and when she was told 'Hwab' she began screaming and crying. When asked why, she said she had heard Rasulullāh (s) curse one of his wives once and say, 'woe to the one to whom the dogs of Hawab bark!'

When Talha and Zubayr came to know that Aisha would not move any further and they could not convince her otherwise, Abd Allāh b. Zubayr raised a false alarm that the army of Imām Ali (‘a) was approaching and everyone got up to leave in a hurry. Soon all was forgotten and the Basran army was on the move again.

When the two armies finally met, Imām Ali (‘a) had 20,000 men mostly from Kufa and Aisha had 30,000 men mostly from Basra. This was the first time that Muslims would fight one another. It was therefore the first civil war in Islām.

Before the battle began Imām Ali (‘a) tried very hard to reason with Aisha, Talha and Zubayr so as to prevent bloodshed but to no avail. Imām Ali (‘a) reminded Zubayr that Rasullāh (s) had prophesized to him that one day he would fight against Imām Ali (‘a) but he Zubayr would be wrong. This shook Zubayr to the core.

Soon after the battle began, Zubayr left the battlefield and fled to another town where someone recognized him and killed him. Talha was shot with an arrow in the back and it is believed that Marwān shot him because he did not want Talha to have ambitions of power in case they won the battle. Marwān’s main aim was to start the battle with help from Talha and Zubayr and that had been accomplished.

Aisha was mounted on a red camel called al-Askar and from above she kept encouraging the men to fight. The Basra army rallied around her camel and hence the battle came to be known as the Battle of al-Jamal (the Camel). With Talha and Zubayr no more, the entire battle centred around Aisha’s camel. Thousands upon thousands of men died senselessly as she screaming unceasingly with her shrill voice, ‘slay the murderers of Uthmān’, urging the men to fight.

Finally Imām Ali (‘a) ordered his commander Malik al-Ashtar to ‘kill the red camel’. As soon as the camel fell, the battle came to an end. Aisha fell from the camel and Imām Ali (‘a) ensured she was carried away to safety and later returned to Madina. The Umayyads would have loved to see Aisha killed. That would have given them the added excuse that Imām Ali (‘a) had killed ‘the Mother of the Faithful’.

In total, 10,000 men on the side of Aisha and 5,000 men on the side of Imām Ali (‘a) were martyred in the Battle of Jamal due to Aisha’s hatred and jealousy for Imām Ali (‘a) and Talha and Zubayr’s greed for power. According to others almost 17,000 men died on Aisha’s side. The Battle of Jamal was fought on the morning of Friday, the 16th of Jamādi al-Akhar, 36 A.H. (November 656 CE).

The Change of Capital from Madina to Kufa

After the Battle of Jamal, Imām Ali (‘a) proceeded to Basra where he scolded the men for allowing themselves to be swayed by Aisha and for breaking their allegiance to him. Thereafter Imām Ali (‘a) decided to transfer the headquarters of the Islāmic government from Madina to Kufa. This was because the expansion of the Muslim empire made it difficult to manage it from Madina. This was Rajab 36 AH.

The people of Kufa welcomed Imām Ali (‘a) and offered him to stay at the governor’s palace but he refused and instead chose a humble house for his residence.

Imām Ali (‘a) also felt the need to be in Kufa because he knew his next challenge would be Mu’āwiya in Syria; and Kufa (being in Iraq) was closer to Damascus (Syria). Just as Rasulullāh (s) had to migrate from Makkah to Madina because of the animosity of Abu Sufyān, Imām Ali (‘a) (raised like a son by Rasulullāh (s)) now had to migrate from Madina to Kufa because of the animosity of Abu Sufyān’s son Mu’āwiya.

The Battle of Siffin

Before Imām Ali (‘a) engaged Mu’āwiya in battle, he tried to settle matters peacefully through letters that were sent back and forth by messengers. Many of these letters are found in Nahj al-Balāgha.

When several months had passed and it became obvious that Mu’āwiya was simply buying time to build an army, Imām Ali (‘a) managed to raise another army from Iraq and marched towards Syria in the month of Dhul Hijjah 36 AH. At a place called Siffin, they found Mu’āwiya’s army camped with 120,000 men. Imām Ali (‘a) had 90,000 men with him.

At first, Mu’āwiya’s men tried to stop Imām Ali (‘a)’s men from gaining access to water from the river. Mu’āwiya used the argument that Uthmān was denied water in his palace and therefore his murderers should also be kept thirsty! This was very ironic because it was Imām Ali (‘a) who had arranged for Uthmān to have access to water. Imām Ali (‘a)’s men fought the Syrians and took over the river. Thereafter Imām Ali (‘a) ordered that the Syrians too be given free access to water.

Imām Ali (‘a) tried to keep the battle limited to single combat initially or small divisions fighting each other. This was to minimize the loss of Muslim lives. The two armies stopped fighting in the month of Muharram, which was considered sacred and the fighting resumed again in Safar 37 AH.

Often Imām Ali (‘a) challenged Mu’āwiya in single combat so that innocent Muslims would not die but Mu’āwiya was too scared to come forward. And so week after week, thousands died in battle. Amongst the most eminent who were martyred on Imām Ali (‘a)’s side was Rasulullāh (s)’s companion Ammār Yāsir. Ammār was now 93 yrs old. Rasulullāh (s) had predicted that Ammār would be killed by a rebellious group. When Ammār fell, the Syrians were shaken in faith because they knew they were the rebels that Rasulullāh (s) had prophesized. To overcome their fears, Mu’āwiya’s crafty adviser Amr b. al-Aas told the men that Imām Ali (‘a) had brought Ammār to battle and therefore he had killed him! When Imām Ali (‘a) heard this, he remarked, ‘Subhānallāh! Then it means Rasulullāh (s) killed Hamza when he brought him to Uhud!’

At one point the battle was so fierce that the men fought each other even during the nights when there was a full moon (13-15 Safar 36 AH). Slowly but steadily, Imām Ali ('a)'s men were winning the battle. At one point Amr b. al-Aas ventured into the battlefield to show off. Imām Ali ('a) came forward too but with his face covered. As Amr got closer, Imām Ali ('a) uncovered his face. Amr was terrified. He tried fleeing but fell off his horse. As Imām Ali ('a) was about to strike him, the cunning but shameless man removed all his clothes and lifted his legs up, stark naked. Imām Ali ('a) turned away and Amr fled. Mu'āwiya forever teased Amr as 'the man who used his private parts to save his life' while Amr mocked Mu'āwiya as a coward who dared not accept the challenge of Imām Ali ('a) to single combat.

As well, Malik al-Ashtar, the brave commander of Imām Ali ('a), was making great strides at the battle forefront. He was feared by all and fought ferociously until he got very close to the tent of Mu'āwiya, determined to slay the evil man. As Mu'āwiya prepared to flee, just then, Amr b. al-Aas had another devilish plan. He ordered 500 men to raise pages of the Qur'ān on spears and start shouting, 'let the Qur'ān decide between us!' The plot worked. Suddenly the weak-minded cowards on Imām Ali ('a)'s side were confused. They too began shouting the same and came to Imām Ali ('a) asking him to stop the battle. Imām Ali ('a) warned them this was a trick and told them, "I am the speaking Qur'ān" (Qur'ān an-Nātiq) meaning he was more worth of being defended than the pages of the silent Qur'ān (Qur'ān as-Sāmit). But the hypocrites led by Ash'ath b. al-Qays would have nothing of it. They threatened Imām Ali ('a) and insisted he call Malik back from the battlefield and declare a truce. This was perhaps the saddest moment in Malik al-Ashtar's life. He was metres away from getting to Mu'āwiya and Amr b. al-Aas.

Then came the issue of appointing representatives to discuss the truce. Mu'āwiya naturally chose Amr b. al-Aas to represent him. Imām Ali ('a) wanted Malik al-Ashtar or Abd Allāh b. al-Abbās to represent his side but the hypocrites insisted they wanted Abu Musa al-Ash'ari. Abu Musa al-Ash'ari was a coward and a confused man who pretended to be very pious and had refused to take any side in the battle. He was once the governor of Kufa and now spent all his time at home in worship. Abu Musa was obviously delighted to know that the people of Kufa wanted him to represent them again.

In the months to come, meetings took place and finally in the month of Ramadān 37 AH (February 658 CE), Amr b. al-Aas managed to trick Abu Musa into confessing that Uthmān was killed wrongfully and that Mu'āwiya was his rightful heir. The damage was done. The Syrians now rejoiced and pledged allegiance to Mu'āwiya as their Caliph and the people of Hijāz (Madina and Makkah) as well as Irāq (Kufa and Basra) turned away in anger and remained with Imām Ali ('a).

With no conclusion to the Battle of Siffin, Mu'āwiya had lost 45,000 men and 25,000 men were martyred on the side of Imām Ali ('a).

Lesson 6

The Khilāfah of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) (cont’d)

Revolt of the Kharijites

After the truce at Siffin, as Imām Ali (‘a) led his men back to Kufa, a group of 12,000 men separated themselves from the main body and began murmuring and complaining about the truce and why they had accepted the compromise. They acknowledged that they were wrong to have forced Imām Ali (‘a) to stop the battle but now wanted Imām Ali (‘a) to also acknowledge he was wrong to have accepted their threats and they wanted him to ‘repent’ for his ‘sin’!! In the months to come, they were even more infuriated with how Amr b. al-Aas had tricked Abu Musa al-Ash’ari and now wanted Imām Ali (‘a) to ‘repent’ for allowing these two men to decide the fate of the Muslims.

Imām Ali (‘a) obviously did not accept their ridiculous requests and reminded them that it was not only they who stopped the battle when they were about to win but it was also they who insisted on having Abu Musa al-Ash’ari as their arbitrator. The group therefore broke away claiming that their ruler was neither Mu’āwiya nor Imām Ali (‘a) and that ‘no one has authority except Allāh’ (*lā hukma illa lillāh*). This became their motto and their battle-cry forever.

Imām Ali (‘a) used to say about this statement – *lā hukma illa lillāh* – that it is a true statement but they intend wrong with it. Meaning, even though it is true that ultimate authority belongs to Allāh, yet Allāh does not appear in physical form to govern and rule over people. He is represented by a human being that He chooses to rule over others.

This fanatic breakaway group came to be known as the Kharijites (Arabic, *Khawārij*), which means, ‘the outcasts’.

The Battle of Nahrawān

Ignoring the Kharijites, Imām Ali (‘a) put together another army to fight Mu’āwiya. In the meantime however the Kharijites began attacking innocent civilians. They would kidnap them and murder them in cold blood. They were truly representative of the kind of fanatics, extremists and terrorists today who kidnap people and behead them or engage in suicide bombing in the name of religion.

The people of Imām Ali (‘a) were very worried about their families and now refused to go towards Syria to fight Mu’āwiya while the Kharijites were running wild in their

own territories. Imām Ali (‘a) therefore had to divert the army towards a place called Nahrawān, where most of the Kharijites had camped.

At first Imām Ali (‘a) sent a messenger to them but they simply murdered him. A battle was therefore inevitable. The Kharijites were known to be ‘pious’ men who stood all night in prayer and memorized the Qur’ān. They had ‘lumps’ on their foreheads due to excessive prostrations in worship. Some of the people on Imām Ali (‘a)’s side were confused again. This shows the importance of obedience to an Imām vs. being fooled by the outer appearance and practices of hypocrites and weak-minded ‘pious ascetics’.

The Battle of Nahrawān took place in the month of Dhul Hijjah 37 AH (or according to some Safar 38 AH) and most of the Kharijites were killed. They numbered 1800 and only nine of them escaped. Imām Ali (‘a) on the other hand had 14,000 men of whom only a handful were martyred. One of the Kharijites who escaped from Nahrawān was Abd ar-Rahmān b. al-Muljam, the murderer of Imām Ali (‘a).

The Loss of Support

Having disposed off the Kharijites at Nahrawān, Imām Ali (‘a) resumed his march towards Syria. However the chiefs of his followers urged him to stop at Kufa to let the men rest before the long journey and to enable the army to repair their weapons and armours and to replenish their arrows. Imām Ali (‘a) agreed to this request and camped at Nukhayla outside Kufa. The soldiers were allowed to leave the camp for a day.

The next day, hardly any men returned and at length, Imām Ali (‘a) entered Kufa and gave a stern sermon to the people. However, nobody came forward and finally, Imām Ali (A) turned away from them in disappointment. The Syrian expedition was abandoned, never to be resumed. There onwards Imām Ali (‘a) complained of his people and the lame excuses they put forward to avoid jihād.

There are numerous sermons of Imām Ali (‘a) where he complained to the people of how strong Mu’āwiya’s men were in their wrongdoing and how weak they were in their following the right. He finally cursed them and prayed to Allāh to replace him and give the people the kind of leaders they deserved. Never again did the Muslims know a just and truly pious leader like Imām Ali (‘a). They were tyrannized by the Umayyads and Abbāsids, always regretting their forsaking the side of Imām Ali (‘a) who warned them of ‘kings’ after him who would oppress them. It is important to remember that after the martyrdom of Imām Ali (‘a), Imām Hasan (‘a) inherited these very same Kufan men of weak faith as followers and that is why it was easy for Mu’āwiya to bribe them and Imām Hasan (‘a) saw no point in fighting Mu’āwiya with such men and opted for the peace treaty.

Mu'āwiya's Activities

Mu'āwiya at first was apprehensive that Imām Ali ('a) would fight him with another army. He was delighted to know from his spies that there were now too many divisions in Imām Ali ('a)'s camp and it was highly unlikely that he would have to fight another battle.

To keep Imām Ali ('a) occupied with trouble and to destabilize his government further, Mu'āwiya now began stirring trouble in other parts of Arabia. He had people attack innocent civilians in Egypt and Hijāz, disguised as Imām Ali ('a)'s men.

In 38 AH, Imām Ali ('a) sent his most loyal command Malik al-Ashtar to be his governor in Egypt but Mu'āwiya arranged to have him poisoned through someone who pretended to be a Shi'ah and well-wisher of Malik. The martyrdom of Malik was a blow to Imām Ali ('a). Mu'āwiya himself rejoiced saying, 'Ali had two arms. I cut one off in Siffin (meaning Ammār Yāsir) and now I've cut the other.'

Imām Ali ('a) then sent his adopted son Muhammad b. Abi Bakr to Egypt. By then Mu'āwiya had sent Amr b. al-Aas with an army to Egypt. Muhammad b. Abi Bakr was left alone at one point and had to hide himself. He was found amidst some ruins, weak with thirst and hunger. Amr had him killed and then put his body in the carcass of a donkey and burnt it.

In the beginning of 40 AH, Mu'āwiya sent Busr b. Artah, a cruel commander, with 3000 horsemen to attack Madina and Makkah. Imām Ali ('a)'s governors in these cities fled to Kufa and Busr entered unopposed. He killed some of the people there cruelly and forced the rest to acknowledge Mu'āwiya as their Caliph. Having done this in Madina and Makkah, he went to Yemen and killed thousands of Imām Ali ('a)'s followers.

Imām Ali ('a) immediately sent an army of 4000 men towards Yemen but it was too late. By then Busr was already heading back to Syria. Imām Ali ('a)'s commander nonetheless went to Madina and Makkah and renewed the people's oath of allegiance to Imām Ali ('a) again.

The cowardly attacks by Mu'āwiya on innocent civilians continued while Imām Ali ('a) kept trying to encourage his men to respond to Mu'āwiya's evil ploys. He urged them to rise and fight, if not for Islām, then for the sake of the innocent civilians. But before anything materialized, Imām Ali ('a) was martyred.

Shahādah of Imām Ali ('a)

The Kharijites who escaped from Nahrawān regrouped and continued to think of ways to promote their cause. At one point they decided the only solution was to kill the three people whom they considered to be the cause of all their problems: Imām Ali ('a), Mu'āwiya and Amr b. al-Aas.

Three Kharijites volunteered to carry out one assassination each. They decided they would all carry out their deed on the 3rd Friday of the month of Ramadān at the time of fajr salāh. Having poisoned their swords, each one set out for his destination.

The Kharijite who attacked Mu'āwiya, managed to injure him but failed to kill him. He was put to death by Mu'āwiya. The Kharijite who wanted to kill Amr killed the wrong man because it so happened that Amr b. al-Aas did not lead the prayers that day and appointed someone else in his place. That Kharijite too was arrested and killed.

As for Ibn Muljam, his blow to Ali ('a)'s head while he was in sajdah proved fatal. Ibn Muljam was further encouraged to assassinate Imām Ali ('a) because when he arrived in Kufa, he met a beautiful woman who promised to marry him provided he killed Imām Ali ('a) as her dowry (*mahr*). Ibn Muljam too was caught and after Imām Ali ('a)'s martyrdom, Imām Hasan ('a) had him struck once with the sword and he died.

Imām Ali ('a) was wounded with the poisoned sword on Friday, the 19th of Ramadān 40 AH in Masjid Kufa. He left the world three days later on 21st Ramadān 40 AH at the age of 63. Because of his numerous enemies, the Banu Hāshim had to bury him in secret about 5 miles outside Kufa in a place today known as Najaf, where a beautiful shrine stands over his grave. The grave site of Imām Ali ('a) became public during the time of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) and Najaf went on to become the highest centre of Shi'ah learning for 1000 years. Even to this day when most Shi'ah hawzas are in Qum (Iran), Najaf is still regarded as a place of religious learning and where great marā'j'i live.



The Haram of Amir al-Mu'minin, Imām Ali b. Abi Tālib ('a) in Najaf (Iraq), 2009.

Rise of the Umayyad Dynasty

After Imām Ali (‘a), Imām Hasan (‘a) was regarded as the Caliph for 6 months only. We studied about the life of Imām Hasan (‘a) and the peace treaty with Mu’āwiya in Book 9. Mu’āwiya’s Caliphate marks the start of the Umayyad Dynasty. From him onwards, the Sunni Muslims stopped referring to the Caliphs as ‘rightly-guided’ (rāshidun) and the Muslims were ruled by oppressive monarchs and kings. We will study about the Muslim dynasties (including the Umayyad Dynasty) in Book 12 inshā Allāh.

Lesson 7

Imām al-Mahdī (‘a)

In Book 10 we studied the history of the Aimmah (‘a) until the eleventh Imām Hasan al-Askari (‘a) and we mentioned briefly the history of the final and twelfth Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs).

In this lesson we will study the life of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) in greater detail including the signs foretold by Rasullāh (s) and the other Imāms (‘a) that prophesize the coming of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs).

Introduction & Titles

Our twelfth Imām is not usually referred to by his own name (Muhammad) but rather by titles such as Imām al-Hujjah (Proof of God), Imām Sahib al-‘Asr waz-Zamān (The Master of the present age and time), Imām al-Muntadhar (the Awaited Imām), and Imām al-Mahdi (the One Guided by God). After his return, he will most popularly be known as Baqiyatullah (the Remnant of Allāh).

Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) was born on 15th Sha‘bān 255 AH and when he was only 5 years old, his father Imām Hasan al-Askari (‘a) was poisoned and martyred. From 260 AH, the Imām was not accessible to the public but had an ambassador (safir) through whom the Shi‘ah could write letters and communicate with the Imām. This continued for 69 years (until 329 AH/939 CE) and is known as the period of Ghaybat as-Sughra (the minor occultation).

Thereafter, when the 4th Safir of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) passed away, the Imām did not appoint a 5th Safir but instead asked the 4th Safir to tell people that after him the Ghaybat al-Kubra (major occultation) would begin and no one could claim direct access to the Imām until the end of times when Allāh would command Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) to reveal his identity and fill the earth with peace and justice.

The main reason for the ghayba was to protect the Imām. Every previous Imām was either poisoned or unjustly killed by the sword. Human beings must learn the value of an Imām even it is after they have been ruled over by tyrants and corrupt leaders and they realize that no one can truly establish a just society except one who is appointed by Allāh.

The Shi‘ah believe that Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) lives amongst people but they do not recognize him when they see him and he often helps them without their knowing. The ‘return’ of the Imām from ghayba is therefore the revealing of his true identity to people. He is able to hide his identity with help from Allāh for his safety and protection.

Many ahādith are reported from other Imāms that from the time of the creation of Nabi Adam (‘a) there has always been someone on the earth to represent Allāh’s affairs. And it is impossible for the earth to exist without a representative of Allāh.

When Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) was born, Imām Hasan al-Askari (‘a) showed the baby to several very close Shi’ah and asked them to inform others that the final Imām had been born. Since then, many Shi’ah ulama have had experiences of meeting with the Imām except that during the ghaybat al-kubra, no one can claim to know the whereabouts of the Imām. Often the ulama only realize they met the Imām after he has left them.

His Longevity

The Sunni Muslims also believe in Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) and that he is a descendant of Imām Ali (‘a) and Sayyida Fātima (‘a). They quote ahādith from Rasulullāh (s) that the world will never come to an end until the Mahdi comes forth and establishes peace and justice in the whole world. However the Sunni Muslims believe the Mahdi (‘atfs) is to be born in the future in time for his rising to power.

Naturally, many people ask: how is it possible for an Imām to live for so long and not age. In some ahādith we are told that when Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) returns, some people will deny him because of how ‘young’ he looks and he will have the appearance of a 40 year old man.

What is most strange is that no Muslim doubts that Shaytān, who lived for thousands of years even before Nabi Adam (‘a), is still alive to this day. If Allāh can keep an enemy alive to this day, can He not keep His Proof on the earth alive?

The Qur’ān mentions that Nabi Nuh (‘a) was 950 years old.⁴⁰ Many historians believe this was before the Flood but he lived thereafter until he was 2500 years old. Historians have also reported a long life for other prophets and people of Allāh:

Nabi Ādam (930 yrs), Luqmān (3800 yrs), Nabi Sheeth (900 yrs), Sayyida Hawwa (930 yrs), Nabi Sulaymān (‘a) (700 yrs), Nabi Hud (464 yrs).

Prophets still alive to this day: Nabi Idris (‘a) (over 900 yrs), Nabi Isa (‘a) (over 2000 yrs), Nabi Khidr (‘a) (over 4000 yrs) and Nabi Ilyās (‘a) (over 4000-5000 yrs).

In more recent history, Salmān al-Fārisi, the great companion of Rasulullāh (s) is said to have lived for 250 or 350 yrs.

From the above, we can easily conclude that Allāh is not bound by our understand of the laws of nature and science. To Allāh, keeping someone alive endlessly is as easy as creating the entire universe. He merely says, ‘Be!’ and it is! We also realize

⁴⁰ Surah al-Ankabut, 29:14.

through all this that we know very little of the mysteries of the universe and ultimately it runs on Allāh's Will and not how we predict or believe it should run.

Benefits of an Imām in Ghayba

A common question asked is: what is the use of having an Imām that is in ghayba? Why would Allāh keep an Imām alive for so long if people have no access to him?

The reason we ask this question is because we believe the purpose of an Imām is only to lead people by answering their questions and governing over them. An Imām in fact is a means through which Allāh sends blessings to His creation. In some ahādith we are told, 'if there was no Imām, the earth would collapse'. In other words, as long as the Imām is present, even if the entire world were to cease believing in God, Allāh would continue to keep the world alive.

Often we hear of great disasters and we wonder if the world might end suddenly because of a nuclear war or even being hit by a meteorite, and so on. Then we recall the hadith of Rasulullāh (s) that 'even if only one day was left for the world to end, Allāh would extend it until a man comes forth from my descendants who will fill it with justice and peace as it will be filled with injustice and oppression.' This gives us hope that Allāh wants human beings to succeed in the end and to live with peace and justice. But it also promises us that as long as the Imām has not returned, the world cannot end.

One of the greatest benefits of the ghayba is how independent and advanced in their religious understanding the Muslims, and in particular the Shi'ah, have become. In the age when the Imām was present, any doubt or question was put before him and the answer was readily available. There was no need to ponder on the verses of the Qur'ān deeply or to try and even understand the basic principles on which the laws of Islām are based. With the ghayba, the Ulama have had to take a lead in guiding people and this has resulted in the development of many Islāmic sciences such as Tafsir (Qur'ān exegesis), Usul al-Fiqh (Principles of Jurisprudence), 'Ilm al-Kalām (Theology), and so on.

We must always believe that Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) is aware of our efforts and is guiding us from behind the scenes. Ultimately he is the protector of the Qur'ān and Islām. In one hadith we are told that during ghayba, people benefit from an Imām just like they benefit from the sun when it is hidden by clouds. This is a beautiful example. Imagine a person who is born in a place that is always cloudy and never sees the sun. He might deny the existence of the sun because he doesn't realize that the light and heat he enjoys during the day comes from something that is hidden behind the clouds. He may even ask, 'what is the use of a sun that we never see?' But he wouldn't be able to survive if the sun was not there.

When Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a) was asked why the ghayba of the 12th Imām ('atfs) will take place, he said the reason will only become truly apparent after the return of

the Imām and that the wisdom behind the ghayba was like that of the story of Nabi Musa (‘a) and Nabi Khidr (‘a). You can read this story in the Qur’ān in Surah al-Kahf, 18:65-82. When you read these verses you will realize that the actions of Nabi Khidr (‘a) made no sense whatsoever to Nabi Musa (‘a) and the latter kept objecting to them until Nabi Khidr (‘a) finally told him the wisdom behind his actions and concluded, *‘this is the interpretation of that over which you could not maintain patience’* (18:82). In other words Imām Ja’far as-Sādiq (‘a) wanted to teach us that we must not be arrogant enough to believe that we can understand every secret of Allāh and the wisdom behind all His actions. Nor must we doubt what is given to us in authentic ahādith. Instead we must bear patience until the reasons reveal themselves to us.

In another hadith, the Imāms compared the ghayba to the time when the brothers of Nabi Yusuf (‘a) went to Egypt and did not realize that the king who was helping them with grain was their brother Nabi Yusuf (‘a). In other words, the Imām is in our midst and we benefit from him. Just because we do not recognize him does not mean we are not benefiting from him.

Belief in the unseen is the hallmark of the faithful (mu’mineen). Rasulullāh (s) once told his companions that the Muslims at the end of the times would be superior to them because they would believe in Allāh even though they never saw him; they would believe in him (Rasulullāh) without ever seeing him; and they would believe in an Imām without seeing him. They would only see writings on paper (i.e. the Qur’ān) and it would be enough to give them faith (imān) and conviction (yaqin).

We therefore have the opportunity to truly say we believed not by physically witnessing miracles or seeing the Prophet (s) but because of our intellect and the purity of our hearts. In this way, we would qualify to be of those whom Allāh describes by saying:

﴿ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ ...﴾

*This is the Book (i.e. Qur’ān), there is no doubt in it, a guidance to the Godwary, **who believe in the Unseen...***

- Surah al-Baqarah, 2:2-3

The ghayba therefore is a test for some and it distinguishes the truly faithful from the hypocrite; but it is also an opportunity for us to become truly greater than what we would remain if the Imām was always in front of us.

The Signs of the Return of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs)

Numerous signs foretelling the reappearance of Imām al-Mahdi (‘atfs) have been narrated in the books of hadith. Many of these signs are general in nature and talk of a world filled with injustices such as: open disbelief in Allāh, widespread adultery and homosexuality, widespread drinking of alcohol, disobedience and disrespect of

parents, the taking and giving of interest (usury) freely, the use of music and intoxicants, obsession with the world and excessive materialism, the lack of any sense of shame or modesty, the inability to distinguish good from bad and right from wrong, the rule of oppressors and the righteous being weak in power, and so on.

Then there are signs that are more specific and talk of increased natural disasters such as earthquakes and landslides due to the excessive sinning of people. There will also be a lot of turmoil amongst nations with people rising against their rulers or killing them. Some nations will invade others and each ruler will rule for only a brief period before he is replaced with another. At one point, one-third of the world will die of man-made disasters (i.e. war) and another one-third will die of resulting natural disasters (plague, starvation, and so on). In other words, the world will really get bad and people will become desperate for a saviour before Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) returns.

There are some signs of the coming of the Imām ('atfs) however that are regarded as 'definite signs' and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) told us not to expect Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) until these signs have appeared. They will occur very close to the time of the Imām ('atfs)'s return. These signs are:

1. A Voice from the Sky. A loud shout will be heard in the heavens announcing the return of Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs). Everyone will hear it and understand it in their own language. The faithful will realize this to be the sign of the Imām's return. Others will begin to doubt and say they were imagining what they heard. In some reports it is said a face will be seen in the skies that will be brighter than the Sun.
2. Solar and Lunar Eclipse in Ramadān. A lunar eclipse only occurs in the middle of the lunar (Islāmic) month (when there is a full moon) and a solar eclipse only occurs in the start or end of a lunar (Islāmic) month. Astronomically, it is impossible for the opposite to occur. But before the Mahdi ('atfs) returns, there will be a month of Ramadān when there will be a lunar eclipse at the start or end of the month; and in the same month a solar eclipse will occur in the middle of the month.
3. The Rising of the Sun from the West. We know the Sun rises in the East. Before the coming of Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) the Sun will rise from the West. This change may be caused by a disaster that causes a polar shift in the axis of the earth (such that the North and South Poles are reversed and then the Sun would appear to rise from the other side); or it may even happen miraculously by the Will of Allāh in any other way He decrees (e.g. the earth rotating the other way). This may also cause the 2nd sign mentioned above (on eclipses).
4. Sayyid al-Khurāsāni. A man will rise from Khurāsān (Iran) and invite people to join his army for "*amr bil ma'ruf and nahi 'anil munkar*". This was also the motto of Imām Husayn ('a)'s rising so perhaps he will be inspired by Karbala. The army of al-Khurāsāni will ultimately join Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs). The

Imāms have said that anyone who hears of al-Khurāsāni should rush to join him.

5. Sufyāni. An evil man from the descendants of Abu Sufyān will rise to power in Syria, Palestine and Egypt. He will fight Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) but finally be killed. The army of Sufyāni will be 'swallowed' in a landslide at a place between Makkah and Madina.
6. Return of Nabi Isa ('a). He will return to help Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs).
7. Dajjāl. He is also known amongst Christians as 'the Antichrist'. He will come at a time when people are starving all over the world and will dominate over people by demanding that they worship him in exchange for food. Nabi Isa ('a) will ultimately kill Dajjāl.
8. The Murder of Nafs az-Zakiyya (The Pure Soul). A very saintly man will be murdered in Makkah in front of the Ka'bah between the Black Stone Corner of the Ka'bah (Rukn al-Hajar) and the Maqām Ibrāhim.

Many other signs can be found in the books of hadith and tārikh such as Kitāb al-Irshād by Shaykh al-Mufid (English translation by I K Howard).

Research Homework

During every Imām's time, there were companions who were very learned. These included, for example, Abu Basir and Zurārah during the time of Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir ('a) and Hishām b. al-Hakam during the time of Imām Ja'far as-Sādiq ('a). Even during the times of the later Imāms (9th to 12th) there were scholars who compiled the ahādith of the Imāms and wrote books, such as Husayn b. Sa'id al-Ahwāzi and others.

For this homework, we wish to briefly review the Shi'ah ulama who lived after the ghayba of Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) and who made significant contributions to Islām and towards preserving the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) during the ghayba.

You will find the answers to most of these questions in the book **Fiqh and Fuqaha** (<http://www.al-Islām.org/fiqh/>), especially in chapter 2 of the book. For some questions, you will need to research over the internet.

Fill in the Blanks

1. During Ghaybat as-Sughra (260-329 AH), Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) had four ambassadors (sufara). The first safir was _____ and he was succeeded by his son _____ as the second safir.
2. The third safir of Imām al-Mahdi ('atfs) was _____ and the last safir was _____. He died on _____ 329 AH, which marked the start of the Ghaybat al-Kubra.

3. After the ghayba, the Shi'ah relied mostly on four books of hadith for their guidance from the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). These four books are _____ by _____, _____ by Shaykh as-Saduq and _____ & _____ by Shaykh Tusi. The largest Shi'ah collection of hadith however is the _____ by Allama Majlisi.
4. One of the most famous Shi'ah ulama to also pass away in 329 AH was _____. He was the father of the famous _____ and together they are known as the Saduqayn.
5. Another brilliant Shi'ah scholar was _____. His real name was Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Nu'man. He was born in 334 AH and died in 413 AH.
6. The two most famous students of Shaykh Mufid were _____ and Sayyid ar-Radi. The latter is famous as the compiler of _____.
7. Another great Shi'ah scholar was _____. He was the successor of Sayyid Murtada Alam al-Huda and he lived in Baghdad at first. When his home and library were burnt down in a Shi'ah-Sunni conflict, he moved to _____ where he established the Hawza 'Ilmiyya that continued to produce scholars for a thousand years, until late last century. He was the sole marj'a of his time and his works are studied to this day. In fact when the Shi'ah scholars write or say "Shaykh" without giving a name, they are referring to him. He compiled two of the Kutub al-Arba'a.
8. A scholar who rose to prominence from his childhood was _____. His real name was Hasan b. Yusuf b. Ali b. Mutahhar. He was born in 648 AH and died 726 AH. His works are still studied in the hawza today at the highest levels.
9. Muhammad b. Makki was another great Shi'ah scholar from Jabal Amil (South Lebanon) and because he was imprisoned and killed for his faith, he is known amongst the Shi'ah Ulama as _____. His most famous work is the Lum'ah that is studied to this day.
10. Two centuries later, in 966 AH, another great scholar, Shaykh Zainuddin, who wrote a commentary on the Lum'ah (known as the Sharh Lum'ah), was executed by the Sunni rulers as well and he is known as _____.
11. Shaykh Ahmad b. Muhammad Ardabili was so pious that he was popularly known as _____. He also contributed greatly to Islāmic sciences and fiqh. He died in 993 AH.
12. Shaykh Waheed Bihbahāni was a great scholar who saved the institution of ijtihād by defeating the _____ movement amongst the Shi'ah especially in Karbala, which was their stronghold. He was born in 1116 AH and died in 1205 AH.
13. Another great scholar was _____. He was born 1155 AH and died in 1212 AH. So great was his status that Shaykh Ja'far Kāshif al-

Ghita, himself a scholar of the highest rank, was his student and it is said he used to wipe this great scholar's slippers with the end of his turban.

14. The great Shi'ah scholar _____ was a descendant of Rasulullāh (s)'s great companion Jābir b. Abd Allāh al-Ansāri. He was born on _____ (Eid al-Ghadir) 1214 AH and he died in Najaf in 1281 AH. He was a genius of extra ordinary calibre. He establish new ways of studying Fiqh and Usul al-Fiqh and his two great works ar-Rasāil and al-Makāsib are still a requirement for anyone who wishes to become a mujtahid.
15. _____ is a more contemporary scholar. He was the sole marj'a of the Shi'ah before Ayatullah Muhsin al-Hakim and he died in Qum in 1381 AH at the age of 90.
16. _____ was the sole marj'a of the Shi'ah after Ayatullah Burujerdi. He was the teacher of Ayatullah al-Khui and the hawza in Najaf grew immensely under him, with almost 8000 students. He died in 1390 AH (1971) in _____ and was buried there in the great modern library he established.
17. _____ was the student of Ayatullah Muhsin al-Hakim and succeeded him as the sole marj'a until the revolution of Iran in 1979. He made great contributions to Islāmic sciences and died in Najaf under the rule of Saddam, on 8th Safar 1413 AH (8th August 1992). It is said he trained more than 1000 students over the five decades that he taught constantly. One of his most famous students is Ayatullah Sayyid Ali Sistāni.
18. _____ was a brilliant scholar and thinker. He is remembered for his brave stand against the tyrant Saddam in Iraq and was tortured and killed by Saddam in Baghdad on April 9, 1980 at the age of _____. He was a child prodigy and would have undoubtedly been the sole marj'a of the Shi'ah had he lived. His sister _____ was also tortured and killed by Saddam. His works on Usul al-Fiqh, Islāmic Economics and Islāmic Philosophy are still studied in hawzas today.
19. _____ is well known as the father of the revolution of Iran. He was also a great scholar and a mystic who wrote extensively on akhlāq and 'irfān. After the revolution of Iran in 1979, the Shi'ah in Iran began following him and he died on 3rd June 1989.
20. _____ was not an 'ayatullah' in the traditional sense but he was a prominent thinker and scholar. He compiled a commentary (tafsir) of Qur'ān known as _____ in 20 volumes. It is regarded to be one of the finest tafsir works in Islām to this day. He died on November 15, 1981 at the age of 89.

In the more recent years the Shi'ah have not followed one sole marj'a, partly perhaps because the marāj'i have had to play the role of a political leader in addition to a spiritual and religious leader; and different regions of the world have looked up to different marāj'i for guidance.

