



Ali Ibne Abi Taleb
The Wali of God & Wasi ^(as)
of the Prophet
^(saww)

Chapter 1

Introduction

From the day the Prophet Muhammad began his mission in 610 C.E., inviting his family members to respond to the call of Islam, cAli, the son of Abu Talib, has figured prominently as a pious believer and an ardent supporter and warrior of Islam in the religious history of Islam. There is no doubt in the historicity of cAli as the champion of Islam. The pages of early history of Islam record countless events in which cAli was assigned by the Prophet to undertake one or another important mission connected with the development of the Umma. There is hardly any other figure in the entire history of Islam who compares with cAli in his loyalty to the Prophet and the teachings of Islam. At the same time, cAli has been at the center of sectarian controversies and political factionalisms in the Muslim community. If one can trust Muslim authors of sectarian development (*al-milal wa al-nihal*) in Islam, almost every other faction in the community that separated itself from the majority Sunni community (*ahl al-sunna wa al-djama'ah*) upheld the belief that cAli b. Abi Talib was endowed with some special qualities and supernatural endowments that set him apart from and above all other companions of the Prophet, and hence, most worthy of the leadership, the Imamate, after the Prophet.

This chapter is concerned with an examination of the status of cAli in Twelver Shi'ite religious thought in two areas, as expressed by their religious scholars in their writings. The first area is the *wilayah* ('**authority**')¹ of cAli alongside God and the Prophet as a pivot round which religious belief about the love and devotion to cAli developed. The second area, organically

1 The word appears in two forms: *walayah* and *wilayah*. Most of the lexicographers of the opinion that *walayah* (as an infinitive) signifies *nusrah* (help, aid, assistance), whereas, *wilayah* (as a verbal noun) signifies *imiirah*, *sultan* (authority, power). However, a number of them take both forms in one sense, that is, in the meaning of 'devotion' and 'love.' See: Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'A.rab* (Beirut, 1987), Vol. 15, pp. 406-7.

connected to the *wilayah* is the ***wisayah*** ('**executorship**') of ^cAli as the successor of the Prophet chosen either explicitly or implicitly by God and by Muhammad. Shi'ism, which maintains the Imamate of ^cAli from the day the Prophet died in 632 C.E., splits into various sects which differ in their conception of ^cAli's position with regard to God and to Muhammad. These sects range, in this respect, from extremist groups like the *ghulat*, who attribute to ^cAli qualities which Islamic doctrine confines either to God or the Prophet, thereby placing themselves outside the Islamic faith, to moderate groups, who confirm the belief in *tawhid* (Oneness of God) and in Muhammad as the Prophet of Islam, but regard ^cAli as the rightful successor of the Prophet through the latter's explicit **designation** (***nass***). Most of the *ghulat* sects that arose in the early centuries of Islam have now disappeared. The ^cAli-Ilahis today to be found in western Iran and the Nusayris in Syria may be considered sub-sects of the *ghulat*; while of the moderate Shi'ite sects, the most numerous group is the Imamiya Ithna 'Ashariya (the Twelver Shi'ah) to which the Iranians, the great majority of Iraq, Lebanon, important minorities in India, Pakistan, Syria, Bahrayn and Kuwait belong. In fact, the term Shi'ah is used to refer to only the Twelver Shi'ah. This chapter will be concerned with the religious beliefs of the Twelver Shi'ites as recorded in the Shi'ite sources. I have depended mostly on Twelver Shi'ite works of *kalam* and *fiqh* to estimate the religious status of ^cAli as the *wali* and *wasi*. I have excluded from this study popular devotions and legends connected with the personality of ^cAli. However, I have employed devotional materials, which are contained in the juridical works or have been included in the prayer manuals compiled by

renowned Shi'ite jurists for further elaboration of the theological and juridical status of ^cAli.²

2 In my earlier study on the concept of al-sultan al-adil in the Shi'ite jurisprudence and theology I have dealt with the evolution of the wilayah of the Shi'ite Imams and its culmination in the juridical doctrine of the wiliyat al-faqih (the governance of the jurist) as expounded by the Shi'ite jurists in the last century and a half. See: Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam: The Comprehensive Authority of the jurist in Imamite jurisprudence* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

Chapter 2

The Wayah of 'Ali b. Abi Talib

The most fundamental doctrine in the Twelver Shi'ism is the belief regarding the wilayah of 'Ali To understand the meaning of wilayah we will explore its meanings in the context of the most important event that marks the genesis of the concept in the history of Islam. The account that we will cite below is taken from al-Amini al-Nadjafi's monumental work on alGhadir fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Adab. The work copiously and carefully cites all the primary sources compiled by the Sunni and Shi'ite scholars. The account will provide the context in which the famous hadith of the Prophet regarding the wilayah of 'Ali was publicly announced. The account runs as follows:

When the Prophet had completed his pilgrimage ceremonies, he left for Medina accompanied by the multitudes of people who had participated in this farewell pilgrimage with him. The Prophet arrived at the Pool of Khumm (ghadir khumm) in al-Djuhfa, where the roads of the people of Medina, the people of Egypt and the People of Iraq cross. That was on Thursday, 18 Dhu'al-hidjdja, 10 A.H. Gabriel, the trustworthy, brought down God's revelation saying: 'O Messenger! Deliver that which has been sent down to thee from thy Lord' (Q. 5:71). And he commanded him to point out ^cAli to the people and proclaim to them the revelation concerning him about the wilayah and the obligation of obedience upon everyone. Those of the people who were in front, were near al-Djuhfa. The Prophet of God commanded that those who advanced should be halted at that place. He forbade them to sit down under five gum acacia trees, which were close to each other. VWhen the summons to prayer was given for the noon prayers, he went towards the trees and prayed at the head of the people under them. When

he had completed his prayers, he stood delivering a speech in the middle of the people, on the saddles of the camels. He made them all hear, raising his voice, saying:

O people, the Merciful, the All-Knower, informed me that a prophet has not lived but half the age of his predecessor and that I am about to be recalled and I responded. I am to be interrogated and you are to be interrogated, what will you say? 'We bear witness that you have proclaimed the message and that you have given the advice and that you have made the endeavor, may God reward you!' He said: "Would you not bear witness that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger; that His Garden is true; that His Fire is true; that Death is true; that the Hour comes of which there is no doubt; and that God will resurrect those in the graves?" They said: 'Yes. We bear witness to that.' Then he said: 'O God bear witness (to that),' [and he continued] 'O people! Do you hear?' They said: 'Yes.' He said: 'I am preceding you to the Pond (al-hawd) and you will rejoin me at the Pond. See to it, how you will look after the two Treasures (*al-thaqalayn*) after me.' A caller called out: 'What are the two Treasures, O Messenger of God?' He said: 'The bigger Treasure (*al-thaqlu'l-akbar*) is the Book of God, one end of it is in the Hand of God and one end is in your hands. If you adhere to it you will not go astray. The smaller Treasure (*al-thaqlu'l-asghar*) is my Family (' *itrati, ahlu bayti*) and, the Knower informed me that they would not separate until they rejoin me at the Pond - I wished that from God for them. Do not precede them, so that you may not perish. Do not fail to reach them so that you may not succumb.' Then, he held the hand of 'Ali, raised it until the whites of their armpits could be seen and all the people recognized him. He said: 'O people who is more worthy (*awla*) [in the eyes of] the believers than their own selves?' They said: 'God and His Messenger know better.' He said: 'God is my Master and I am the Master of the Believers and I am worthier in their eyes than their own selves. Whoever has me for his master has 'Ali for his master.' He said it thrice, and according to Ahmad [b. Hanbal], the Imam of the Hanbalis, four times.

The above proclamation at the Ghadir Khumm regarding the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali occurred in the last year of the Prophet's

life (10 A.H./632 A.D.). Fourteen centuries have passed since then, and looking at the number of books and studies written on the subject of the wilayah, both by the proponents as well as opponents, the proclamation at Ghadir Khumm proved to be one of the most pivotal event for the determination of the direction of the politico-religious history of Islam. All questions about the historicity of that event, whether raised by the Sunni scholars or by their Western counterparts, who, more than often, followed the Sunni sources in their conclusions about the early history of Islam, have overlooked the political-religious implications of the Ghadir Khumm on the subsequent conceptualization of Islamic leadership (*imamah*) among Muslims in general. The event at al-Djuhfa, moreover, unfolded the Qoranic presupposition in the matter of the direction that human society must follow in order to attain the final goal for which it has been created. On studying the Qoran in its entirety the following general view emerges about the human society which directly affects the question of **leadership** (*al-imamah*) of that society.

To begin with, the Qoran states more than once that Islam is not a new religion but the culmination of God's spiritual and temporal commands made known throughout human history through the leadership of divinely appointed prophets like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the other prophets, the last in that line being Muhammad. Thus, the Prophet is the bearer of divine revelation that puts forth the divine commands for the guidance of humanity. This guidance lays the foundation of human social organization by providing a set of laws and rules by which the believers manage their affairs and through which their public order is governed or should govern itself. Accordingly, the divine guidance forms the basis for relations between human and God, on the one hand, and, between all persons, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, as well as between human and all aspects of the creation, on the other. Furthermore, the divine guidance also contains rational principles which should help human intellect to infer detailed rules to organize the Muslim society and proffer the means to resolve conflicts between individuals and between individual and the public order which has taken upon itself to implement the essential elements of the divine directives.

It is relevant to point out that unlike any other legal-political-social system, Islamic revelation clearly points toward an integrated concept of life based on the intricate relationship between this world and the hereafter. It regulates the conduct of the public order and of individual in all aspects of human concern, linking the mundane and transcendental concerns in an inseparable whole. In this linkage, the will of God is decisive in guiding the inter-relationship of humans, and of human and his Creator.³ The Qoran regards the knowledge of the All-knowing and All-powerful Creator a priori through the precise creation of the **innate disposition** (*fitrah*) in humanity, which, if it heeds to the call of the divine guidance, would attain 'prosperity' (*al-falah*)⁴.

These preliminary considerations about the Qoranic view of divine guidance explain the inter relationship of the Islamic norms provided in the Shari'ah, that divine scale of justice and equity, and the leader (the imam) who exercises the divinely invested authority in him to lead the Muslim

3 'Abd al-Husayn Ahmad al-Amini al-Nadjafi, *al-Ghadir fi al-Kitab wa al-Sunnah wa al-Adab* (Beirut, 1967), VoL 1, pp. 9-11 and all the Sunni and Shi'i sources cited therein.

4 · This is the meaning of the word the Qoran applies so often to indicate the divine purpose in endowing humanity with guidance, namely, *al-falah*. Usually translated as "**prosperity**," *falah* signifies the good of both this and the next world for those who have responded to the divine guidance.

community to the prescribed goal of creating an ethical order on earth. The Shar'i norms and the divinely appointed leadership fulfill humanity's need for the authoritative guidance based upon spiritual values giving human being existential meaning of his position in the universal context of Islamic revelation. The interdependency between the divine norms and the divinely appointed authority to attain the Qoranic prosperity rejects the notion of separation between temporal and spiritual spheres of human activity. Moreover, the connection between the divine guidance and the creation of the Islamic world order, as a consequence, marked the inevitable interdependency between the religious and the political in Islam.

The entire question of the *wilayah* and its ramifications for the qualified leadership (*al-imamah*) to further the divine plan and to enable God's religion to succeed must be seen from the perspective of the Islamic promise of the creation of an ethically just order on earth. More importantly, the belief in, the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali gave rise to the group of dedicated individuals among the associates of the Prophet who formed the nucleus of the early Shi' ah. These early followers of Imam c Ali represented the growth of discontent among the Muslims who refused to acknowledge and regard as legitimate the rule of those whom they considered usurpers of a position of leadership that rightfully belonged to cAli b. Abi Talib and his descendants. The period also caused the predicament of the Muslim community precipitated by the Muslim political power under the caliphate, which led to revolutions and rebellions as well as to discussions and deliberations. This is depicted in the early Islamic ***fiqh* (theology-cum-jurisprudence)**⁵ literature that emerged toward the end of the second/ eighth century. Early jurisprudence wove together the various threads of Islamic legal practice with the doctrinal underpinnings of early Muslim groupings. Consequently, the juridical opinions in the early juridical works were formulated by taking into consideration whether certain legal or political injunctions affected the legitimacy of one or the other leader among the associates of the Prophet favored by each faction. In other words, the legitimacy of a leader allowed

5 Fiqh in its early usage was not limited to legal jurisprudence. It dealt with doctrinal and creedal matters connected with basic Islamic beliefs, including the subject of Muslim authority after the Prophet's death. This early trend in fiqh writing continued much later as is evidenced in many works of fiqh that were written in sixth/ twelfth thirteenth century which began with a prologue on the main tenets of Islam. See article, "fiqh" in EP; also, Introduction to my work: . The just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam, pp.3-4.

him to be used as a valid legal religious precedent required for establishing the authoritativeness of Islamic practices.

Thus, even when a particular ruling went against explicit textual evidence provided by the Qoran, the overriding consideration for the early Muslim scholars was the preservation and legitimation of the authority in power, a consideration that came to be justified under the rubric of *al masalih al 'ammah* (the general welfare of the Muslim community).

The most important issue throughout the Shi'ite history has been access to the right guidance as an important consequence of the acknowledgement of the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali. For the Shi'ites, the right guidance had continuously been available to the community even though the Imams, except for the short period of Imams 'Ali and Hasan's caliphate, were not invested with political authority and were living under the political power exercised by the de facto governments. The possession of the *wilayah* (notwithstanding the Imam's lack of political power, he still had the right to demand obedience from his followers) was clearly seen in the Imam's ability to provide religious leadership by interpreting divine revelation authoritatively. What was decided by him through interpretation and elaboration was binding on believers.

The interpretation of the divine revelation by the Imam, only because of his position as the wali of God, was regarded as the right guidance needed by the people at all times. It was, moreover, the divine guidance that theologically justified the superstructure erected on the two doctrines of Imami Shi'ism: the justice of God and the designation of the Imam, free from error and sinful deviations, in order to make God's will known to humanity. The belief in divine justice demanded that God do what was best for humanity; and the belief in divine truthfulness generated the confidence that God's promise would be fulfilled. The proof that God was doing what had been promised was provided by the divinely created institutions of the Prophethood (*nubuwwah*) and the Imamate (through the *wilayah*) to guide humanity toward the creation of an ideal public order. In response to the dilemma created by the end of the manifest leadership of the Imams through the occultation of the twelfth Imam, and the continued need of the community to their guidance, the Shi'ite leaders expounded the theological and legal content of the Islamic revelation through meticulous study of the Qoran and elaborated upon the teachings of the

Imams, in which a prominent place was given to the faculty of reasoning (*al 'aql*). The importance of reason in the exposition of the fundamental tenets of Islam was in accord with the Imami Shi'ite rational theology, in which reason was prior to both sources of revelation, the Qoran and the Sunnah. This does not mean that the revelation was not regarded as all-comprehensive. However, it was reason that acknowledged the comprehensiveness of the revelation by engaging in its interpretation and discovering all the principles that the believers needed to know. In addition, there was recognition of a fundamental need of interpretation of the revelation by reason, all the more so when the authority invested with divine knowledge was in occultation. At any rate, the decisive responsibility to guide the community by interpreting revelation rationally needed authorization from a divine source, a sort of designation to assume the wilayah similar to that which was initiated at the Ghadir Khumm that could guarantee to Muslims the availability of right guidance based on Islamic revelation. Ostensibly, only such an authorized person could assume the authority that accrued to the Imam as the rightful successor of the Prophet. Moreover, only the investiture of the wilayah (which reserved the right to demand obedience, depending on legal-rational circumstances) and the assuming of political power (*qudrah or saltanah*, which could exact or enforce obedience) could establish the rule of justice and equity on earth, as promised by the Islamic revelation.

In the light of the above, the central position of the event at Ghadir Khumm for Islam becomes evident. The proclamation by the Prophet on that occasion gave rise to the tension between the ideal leadership promoted through the wilayah of 'Ali b. Abi Talib and the real one precipitated by human forces to suppress the purposes of God on earth. The acknowledgment of the validity of the declaration about the wilayah at Ghadir Khumm, in some sense, became the yardstick for measuring the true faith in the divine promise for humanity. Consequently, the entire theological question of qualified leadership to further divine plan and to enable God's religion to succeed Islam must be seen from the perspective of the Islamic promise of the creation of an ethically just order on earth by the rightful possessor of the wilayah. The relationship between

the leadership (*imamah*) and the possession of *wilayah* make it impossible to conceive an ideal public order in Islam without this leadership being invested in the person in whom the *wilayah* functions as a divine designation. It was for this reason that in Imami Shi'ism the concept of *wilayah* assumed a pivotal status as a precondition to the establishment of the ideal public order based on the divine scale of justice. However, it was important for the Imamite theologians to secure the Qoranic origins of the doctrine of *wilayah* and connect it with the notion of human obligations (*al-taklif al-shar'i*), the fulfillment of which was regarded as necessary to attain prosperity in this and the next world. The link between theology and law in Islam was reflected in the way the relationship between *wilayah* (the authority that can exact obedience in the name of sacred power) and the Shari'ah (the moral vision of an ideal public order) was treated as inseparable in Islam. The Shari'ah needed the *wilayah* of the one designated by the Prophet to guarantee the outcome of the divinely ordained norms for human perfection. In this sense *wilayah* had to be *imarah* or *saltanah* through the process of *wisayah*, designation of the *wasi* to execute God's will for humanity. The designation of 'Ali as the Prophet's *wasi* was regarded as the fulfillment of God's will for humanity.

Chapter 3

The Implications of the Wisayah

'Ali b. Abi Talib is the bearer of innumerable attributes in the Shi'ite pious literature. Some of these attributes are purely descriptions, indicating his religious position in the Shi'ite theology and tradition. Other attributes are esoteric, indicating his being the repository of the secrets of God in his position as the waşi of Muhammad. The Shi'ite formula of the confession of the faith, shahadah, includes three tenets. In the first two tenets they share the proclamation of faith with the Sunni Muslims, that is, belief in the Unity of God and the prophethood of Muhammad; the Shi'ites add the third tenet which declares the designation of 'Ali as the wali of God and the wâsi of the Prophet. Thus, the shahadah in Twelver Shi'ism includes the following:

I bear testimony that there is no deity but God; and I bear testimony that Muhammad is the servant and the messenger of God; and I bear testimony that 'Ali is the wali of God and the wâsi of the messenger of God.

The third tenet implies that 'Ali is an heir to Muhammad's mission of guiding the believers in spiritual as well as temporal matters, and that it is incumbent upon God to nominate this heir to ascertain that he is without defect, infallible (*ma sûm*) and equal to Muhammad, except in the latter's position as the Prophet-Messenger (*nabi-rasu*). This tenet about the wilayah and wişayah and its association with the affirmation of tawhid and nubuwwah are endorsed by the interpretation offered by the Shi'ite jurists of the following verse of the Qoran:

Your friend is only God, and His Messenger, and those who believe, who perform the prayer and pay the alms while bowing down. (5:60)

These scholars maintain that "those who believe" in the above verse refers to cAll and therefore the subject "Your friend" has three predicates: God, Muhammad and 'Ali.

While the present Shi'ite scholarship regards the three-tenet shahadah as the authoritative creed, which muezzins proclaim all over the Shi'ite world, there is no reference to the three-tenet shahadah in the four highly respected classical works of Twelver Shi'ite traditions that are the source of legal rulings in Shi'ite jurisprudence.⁷ This source of difference with the Sunni world is strongly condemned by a leading Imamite muhaddith, Ibn Babawayh (d. 381/991) in one of the four compilations, namely, *Man la yahduruh al-faqih*.⁸ In addition, all these four classical works on juridical traditions, without exception, give the wording of the shahadah similar to that of the Sunnis in both the adhan (the call to prayer) and in the main portions of the daily prayers where the shahadah is recited. And yet, in the earliest compilations of the Imamite traditions, namely, *al-Kafi* of al-Kulayni (d. 329/941) establishes that belief in the wilayah/wisayah of 'Ali as not only one of the pillars of the faith, but ranks immediately after the two-fold shahadah of tawhid and nubuwwah. According to one of the traditions quoted on the authority of the fifth Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (d. 113/73132), the Imam says: "Islam was built on five pillars: prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimage and wilayah. Nothing was more emphasized than wilayah. But the people adopted the four and left out this, i.e. wilayah.

In another tradition in *al-Kafi*, the sixth Imam Dja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148/765) summarizes the essentials teachings of Islam as follows:

6. Allam a al-Hilli, l:fasan b. YUsuf, *Minhadj al-Kariimah fi Ma 'rifat al-Imamah*, (Litho. Tehran, 1296/1878). pp. 52-53.

7 These are (1) *al-Kafi fi' ilm al-din*, by al-Kulayni; (2) *Man la yahduruh al-faqih*, by Ibn Babawayh; (3) *Tahdhib al-Ahkam*; and (4) *al-Istibsar fi ma Ukhtulifa min al-Akhbar* by Tusi. For details on these books, see: *The just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam*, Chapter 2.

8 Ibn Babawayh, Muhammad b. 'Ali, *Man la yahduruh al-faqih* (Najaf, 1378/1958), Vol. 1, pp.59

9 Kulayni, Muhammad b. Ya'qub, *al-Usul min al-Kafi* (Tehran, 1392/1972), Vol. 2, p. 18.

Dja'far al-Sadiq was asked about those pillars of Islam, about which one cannot afford not to know something and which failure to know something about would result in one's religion being corrupted and in God not accepting from a person his deeds. He said: "The *shahadah* that there is no deity but God, the belief that Muhammad is the messenger of God, the acknowledgement of the truth of what Muhammad brought from God, payment of the due on property which is the zakat, and the *wilayah* which God, the Exalted and Glorified, commanded, namely, the *wilayah* of the House of Muhammad." ¹⁰

The evolution of the *shahadah* that included the *wilayah* of 'Ali among the Shi'ites reveals the dilemma of the Shi'ite jurists. The Shi'ites had formally accepted the Qoranic doctrine that Muhammad is the seal of the prophets and hence the message he delivered is complete and perfect in every sense. The doctrine of *wilayah/wisayah*, on the other hand, demanded belief in the continuation of the availability of the divine guidance after the Prophet through the leadership of the infallible Imams to protect that message from corruption. The doctrine of the Imamate, as the necessary link to the continuation of the prophet's position as the teacher and the guide of the community, was a solution to this dilemma of perfected and yet in need of protection teachings of the Qoran. *Wilayah* provided the theological basis for the continuation of the divine guidance through the acknowledgment of 'Ali and his descendants, the eleven Imams, as true heirs to the prophetic knowledge and his impeccable spiritual-moral authority assumed under the *wisayah* (proper designation of legal executor of the Prophet's will).

10 Ibid.

Chapter 4

"The Trust" (al-amanah) in the Qoran and the Wilayah

Let us now consider the arguments based on the interpretation of the verses from the Qoran that were produced by the Shi'ite theologians in support of the wilayah. It is important to bear in mind that the Shi'ite hermeneutics were based on the ideological considerations that emerged since the event of Ghadir Khumm. The Prophet's statement appointing 'Ali as his successor: "Whoever has me for his master has 'Ali for his master," in spite of the circumstantial evidence pointing to its constitutional significance became entangled in the post-prophet struggle for community leadership.

The key word *mawla*, derived from the Arabic root WL Y, meaning "to exercise authority or power" and its verbal noun form *wilayah* were taken up by the traditionists representing various political and theological trends in the community at large. In this section I will deal with the Shi'ite hermeneutics regarding their central doctrine of the wilayah as it relates to 'Ali b. Abi Talib and other Imams.

Wilayah in the Qoran is intrinsically related to the moral vision of Islamic revelation. *Wilayah* in this regard is the faculty of the legal and moral authority, which enables a person in whom this authority is invested to exact obedience to fulfill this moral vision. Accordingly, the concept of *wilayah* is directly connected with the fundamental question of saltana- exercise of that legal and moral authority by demanding obedience. Islamic revelation regards creation of an ethical order as an inevitable projection of personal response to the moral challenge of accepting Islam. Personal devotion to God implies the responsibility of furthering the realization of a just society, embodying

all the manifestations of religious faith in the material as well as spiritual life of humankind.

This responsibility of striving for one's own welfare and that of the society in which one lives derives from the fact that, according to the Qoran, humankind has boldly assumed "the trust" that God had offered "unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! he has proved a tyrant and a fool" (33:72).

Shaykh Tusi, in his *al-Masa'il al-Ha'iriyat*,¹¹ explains amanah as taklif (religious-moral obligation imposed by God on humanity) and cites the Shi'i opinion as the one in which amanah is equated with wilayah. However, he argues that such equation of amanah with wilayah is unnecessary, because the general sense derived from taklif also includes acknowledgement of the person in whom wilayah is invested. In his Qoranic exegesis, Tusi explains amanah as the contract (*al-'aqd*) that humankind must fulfill because it has been entrusted to humankind by God.¹² He cites several early authorities to show the complication in interpreting the amanah verse which has theological implications in the realm of human volition and responsibility as

11 Muhammad b. al Hasan al-Tusi, *al-Masail-Ha'iriyat* (Najaf. 1969). pp. 312-13.

12 Tusi. *Tafsir al-Tibyan* (Najaf, 1957), 8/368).

the recipient of this "trust."¹³ However, as Tusi explains in his *al-Masa'il al-Ha'iriyat*, it is in the early traditions dealing with the wilayah that the amanah verse has been interpreted as pointing to the wilayah of Imam 'Ali b. Abi Talib. 'Allama Tabataba'i's detailed exegesis on this verse should be regarded as the recapitulation of all these early materials, including those written by the Sunni scholars, and his interpretation is derived in the light of the early traditions regarding the wilayah. According to him, the "trust" is *al-wilayat al-ilahiyya*, meaning the divine sovereignty, which God offered to all creatures.¹⁴ Only human beings, having assumed the trust, have the potential to attain perfection and perfect their environment. The crux of the problem in the exegesis of the verse is

that if human being was the only creature of God who accepted the "trust," why should he be described as "tyrant" and "fool"? At this point, Tabataba'i's interpretation draws upon main tenets of Imamite theology, which regard the "trust" in the sense of *wilayah* as a special favor to humanity entailing enormous responsibility to stand by the obligation of guarding it. Accordingly, only human beings are not afraid to bear the burden of this trust, and to accept the consequences of being a "tyrant" and "ignorant," because they only can acquire the opposite attributes — namely, those of being "just" (*'adil*) and "knowledgeable" (*'alim*). In fact, both "tyranny" and "ignorance" are the primary counterpoise of human responsibility in accepting *al-wilayat al-ilahiyya*, especially as it concerns God's providential purpose in allowing imperfect humanity to accept this responsibility. The acceptance of this *wilayah*, furthermore, makes human beings acquire both the responsibility for their actions as well as superiority over all other creatures in the world. It is *al-wilayat al-ilahiyya* that enables them to put society into order in accordance with their unique comprehension of religion.

However, the *wilayah* is given to humankind with a clear warning that it will have to rise above "tyranny" and "ignorance" by heeding the call of divine guidance. Human beings, according to the Qoran, have been endowed with the cognition needed to further their comprehension of the purpose for which they are created, and volition to realize it by using their knowledge. It is through divine guidance that human beings are expected to

13 See also: al-Faql b. al-Husyan al-Tabarsi, *Madjma' al-Bayin fi Tafslr al-Quran* (Beirut, 1379), 8/373-74; Zamakhshari, *al-Kashshaf*, 3/276-77.

14 Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, *al-Mizan fi. Tafsir al-Quran* (Beirut, 1960). 6/10ff

develop the ability to judge their actions and choose what will lead them to prosperity. But this is not an easy task . It involves spiritual and moral development, something that is most challenging in the face of basic human weaknesses indicated by the Qoran in the following passage:

Surely man was created fretful, When evil visits him, impatient, When good visits him, grudging [70:19-20]. This weakness reveals a basic tension that must be resolved if human beings are to attain the purpose for which they are created. It is at this point that divine guidance is sent through the prophets and revealed messages to provide either the sources and principles or basic norms of the social organization under which a divinely sanctioned public order is to be established. The Prophet thus becomes a representative of the divine authority on earth and exercises that authority in conformity with the divine plan for human conduct.¹⁵

In this Qoran context of the divine guidance for humanity the Prophet's role should be understood as the head of a state and the founder of a religious order. The sense in which the Qoran speaks about the wilayah of the Prophet is necessarily in conformity with the Qoranic view of divine guidance governing the whole of human life, not just a limited segment of it. As a consequence, the wilayah of the Prophet meant not merely that the Muslim community be organized in the context of religious devotion to God as explained by the Prophet, but also that it acknowledge his political leadership as well. Thus, the wilayah of the Prophet establishes an authoritative precedent regarding the relationship between religion and political leadership in Islam.

It is on the basis of this concept of *wilayah* in the Qoran that one can say that in Islam religious and political authority are one and the same. This wilayah is concerned with the whole life of the Muslim community, with the result that it never relinquished its belief in the identity of religion and government as it saw them in the founder of Islam. The Prophet's

15 John Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford, 1978), has discussed the development of the practical application of the Qoran during the process of community formation. In his section dealing with authority he describes the Islamic concept of authority as "apostolic." The charismatic figure of the Prophet is depicted therein in an essentially public posture in the emergence of Islamic polity. See especially pp. 70.71.

emergence, the Muslims believed, had a fundamental purpose behind it: to transform the tribal structure of the Arab society at that time into a Muslim umma - a religio-socio-political community under the divinely planned *al-wilayat al-ilahiya*.

The social transformation envisioned and initiated by the Prophet was the necessary consequence of this wilayah, which had to be acknowledged by society as a whole, not merely by individuals as a logical outcome of their faith in God. Acknowledgement of the *wilayah* of the Prophet, necessary to live a new life based on divine norms, led to the emphasis on a crucial requirement for the fulfillment of social responsibility of Muslim community -namely, that the community always needs to acknowledge a leader, divinely designated, who would exercise wilayah in order to unite its members in their purpose of creating a just social order under the guidance of Islamic revelation.¹⁶

Thus, the question of leadership (imamah) is of utmost significance in attaining the purpose of Islam, because it is only through divinely guided leadership that the creation of an ideal society could be realized. The need for the divinely guided leadership in the fulfillment of divine planning, under the aegis of *al-wilayat al-ilahiyah*, consequently, assumes a central position in the Islamic belief system or worldview, in which the Prophet, as the active representative of the transcendental God on earth, is visualized as possessing the divine wilayah. If the ultimate objective of Islam was conceived as the creation of an ideal community living under a fitting moral, legal, and social system of Islam on earth, then such an ideal, as enhanced by the Qoran and shown by the example of the Prophet himself, was dependent on leadership that could assure its realization.

This fact was so important that, both during the Prophet's lifetime and immediately following his death in A.D. 632, the question of Islamic leadership became inextricably interwoven with the purpose of Islamic revelation, namely, the creation of an Islamic order. Islamic revelation

16 However, in the composition of Islamic salvation history, it was in Shi'ism that the wilayah of the Prophet, as I have

elaborated in this paper, was repeatedly and consistently expressed by Shi'i scholars; whereas in Sunnism the *wilayah* (authority in the form of exemplum [imam]) of the Prophet, in the absence of the charismatic authority following the death of the Prophet, came to be located in the Sunna, which became the imam of the community. See: Wansborough, *Sectarian Milieu*, pp. 70ff.

unquestionably presumed divine guidance through the divinely appointed mediatorship of the Prophet for the realization of Islamic public order. This mediatorship of the Prophet in human affairs was the logical consequence of the strict monotheistic nature of Islam, which precluded the possibility that God assume human form, ruling directly over humanity and governing its affairs. Thus, a ruler to represent God on earth and to exercise *al-wilayah al-ilahiyah* was deemed necessary in order to achieve the ultimate goal of Islam.

Moreover, in the light of the basic human weaknesses indicated in the Qoran, there had always existed an underlying tension between the purpose of creation and the obstacles to its achievement. This tension was to be resolved, according to the Qoran, by further acts of divine guidance through the Prophet, who became the "pattern of model behavior (*uswah/hasanah*)" for human beings, showing them how to reform their character and bring it into conformity with the divine plan.

Studying the Qoran in its entirety, it becomes evident that the question of divine sovereignty - *al-wilayah al-ilahiyah* - is the integral element in the creation of ideal society. It is through such a *wilayah* that the divinely appointed leader is able to provide a set of religious and moral laws and rules by which believers manage their affairs, and through which their public order is governed and should govern itself.

In the Shi'ite worldview based on the Qoranic injunction in which the concept of *wilayah* occurs, the perspective sketched above on the leadership of the Muslim community assumes a central position. The pertinence of the *wilayah* to the question of lawful and legitimate authority can be deduced in those sections of Qoranic exegesis that deal with the passages on *wilayah*. The following verse of the Qoran is regarded by Shi'ite exegetes as the most important reference to the *wilayah*:

Only God is your wali [guardian] and His Apostle and those who believe, who perform prayer and pay alms while they bow [5:55] ¹⁷

This passage establishes the "guardianship" of God, the Prophet, and "those who believe." The last phrase ("those who believe"), according to

17 See Tusi, *Tibyan*, 3/559.

Shi'i commentators, refers to the Imams whose *wilayah* is established through their designation by the Prophet. ¹⁸

The term *al-wali*, as it occurs in the above context, has been interpreted diversely by Sunni exegetes. Although there is a consensus among them that the verse was revealed in praise of Imam 'Ali's piety and devotion, the term *al-wali* has been interpreted as denoting *muwalat* ("befriending") of Imam 'Ali and not necessarily the acceptance of his *wilayah* (authority, in the form of *imamah*). ¹⁹ But Imamite exegetes have taken the term in another of its primary significations, *al-awla* and *al-ahaqq* ("more entitled" [to exercise authority]), because *al-awla* in ordinary usage is often applied to a person who can exercise authority (*al-sultan*) or who has discretionary power in the management of affairs (*al-malik li al-'amr*). ²⁰ Furthermore, *al-wali*, as it occurs in the above passage of the Qoran, is unlikely to mean a person invested with *wilayat al-nusrah* (the authority of "backing"), because there are numerous explicit references to that effect in other verses of the Qoran where believers are exhorted to back the religion of God by promulgating God's laws, a task in which the Prophet and the community of the believers assist each other. ²¹ Rather, *al-wali*, as applied to the Prophet, signifies a person who is invested with *wilayat al-tasarruf*, which means possession of the authority that entitles the wali to act in whatever way he judges best, according to his own discretion, as a free agent in the management of the affairs of the community. The *wilayat al-tasarruf* can be exercised only by one so designated by *al-wali al-mutlaq* (the absolute authority) or by one who is explicitly appointed by someone in the position of *al-wali bi al-niyaba* (authority invested through deputization). Consequently, the Imam who is

designated as wali by the Prophet possesses the *wilayat al-tasarruf* and is recognized as the ruler over the people.

This was the meaning of the term in the early usage of the Shi 'i Imams. In a speech to the Umayyad troops who had come to intercept him on his

18 Tusi. Tibyan, 3/561; al-Kulayni, al-Usul min al-Kafl (Tehran, 1964), 2/402, Hadith no. 77; Tabataba'i, Mizan, 6/lff.. 'Abd al-Husayn Sharaf al-Din Musawi, al-Muraji'at (Beirut, 1963), p. 180.

19 See, for example, Tabari, Tafsir. 6/l86ff.; Zamakhshari, al-Kashshaf. 1/623-24; Baydawi, Anwar, p. 154.

20 Tusi, Tibyan, 3/559.

21 See, for example, the Qoran, 47:7, 7:157, 59:8. See also Tabataba'i Mizan, 6/13; Tusi, Tibyan. 3/565, alludes to this.

way to Iraq, Imam Husayn b. 'Ali (d. 680) explained to his adversaries the reason why he had refused to pay allegiance to the caliph Yazid, son of Mu'awiya:

We the family of the Prophet (ahl al-bayt) are more entitled (awla) to [exercise] the authority (wilayah) over you than those [who have taken it for themselves (i.e. the Umayyads)].²²

Accordingly, *tasarruf* (discretionary authority) has been regarded as the primary and essential import of wilayah, especially as it is applied to God, the Prophet, and the Imams in the above passage. However, there exists a substantial differentiation in the way wilayah is apprehended in relation to God, the Absolute Authority (al-wali al-mutlaq), on the one hand, and the Prophet and the Imams, the authority through deputization, on the other. When the Qoran speaks about God being the wali, it primarily signifies *wilayat al-takwini*- the unconditional *wilayah* "originating" in God, with absolute and all-encompassing authority and discretion over all that God has created. To this wilayah is sometimes appended *wilayat al-nusrah*, by means of which God helps believers. Thus the Qoran reads: "God is the guardian (wali) of those who believe ... unbelievers have no guardian" (47:11). Moreover, the Qoran frequently speaks about God's wilayah in relation to believers, by means of which God manages the affairs of the believers — their

guidance to the right path and assistance to them in obeying God's commandments:

God is the guardian (wall) of those who believe. He brings them out of darkness into the light [2:257].

But when *wali* is used in relation to the Prophet, it is designated as *al-wilayat al-i 'tibariyyah*- that is, "relative" authority dependent upon God's appointing him in that position; or *al-wilayat al-tashri 'iyyah*, the religious-moral-legal authority invested in the Prophet to undertake the legislation and execution of the divine plan on earth. Thus, the Qoran declares: "The Prophet has a greater claim (*awla*) on the faithful than they have on themselves" (33:6).²³

22 *Tabari, Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk* (Cairo, 1962), 5/402. See also 5/357, where instead of *awla*, *ahaqq* is used to signify the same conclusion of being "more entitled to *tasarruf*."

23 *Awla* in this verse has been translated by A. J. Arberry and others as "nearer" and "closer." But, taking into consideration the Prophet's speech on the occasion of the Farewell

The *wilayah* of the Prophet over believers is due to his being the Prophet of God. As such, the point of reference for his *wilayah* is, in actuality, the *wilayah* of God. It is for this reason that his *wilayah* is signified as "relative" - that is, accorded through designation as a mark of trust. In this sense, the Qoran speaks of only one kind of *wilayah* - God's *wilayah* which is the only fundamental *wilayah*. The *wilayah* of the Prophet and "those who believe" (i.e., in this context, the Imams) is dependent upon God's will and permission.²⁴ It is because this *wilayah* was vested in them that the Prophet and the Imams had more right than other believers to exercise full authority, handing down binding decisions on all matters pertaining to the welfare of the Muslim community, and requiring complete obedience to themselves.

The corollary of this *wilayat al-tasarruf* was the Shi'ite belief that not only was the Imamate the continuation of the Prophethood, because of the authority vested in the Imams after the Prophet; it also meant that the Imams were the sole rightful authority to lead the community in establishing just public order. The Imams became the just (*'adil*) authority. In a case where the Imam's right to exercise his authority was usurped,

the usurping authority was rendered illegal, and the ruler unjust (*al-dja 'ir*) and unrighteous (*al-zalim*). The above elucidation of the concept of *wilayah* in the context of the Qoranic verse about the "trust" makes the following hadith-report related by Shaykh Kulayni comprehensible:

Imam Dja'far Sadiq was asked by someone about the passage of the Qoran the mentions the Trust (*amanah*) which God offered to humankind. The Imam said: "This Trust is the *wilayah* of the Amir of the Faithful" ['Ali b. Abi Talib].²⁵

Pilgrimage, where the same verse of the Qoran occurs in the form of a question by the Prophet to the Muslims, the implication is in the sense of being "more entitled." The Prophet asked the assembled pilgrims: "Who is more worthy [in the eyes of] the believers than their ownelves?" See: fn. 1.

24 Among the early works, besides Qoranic exegesis where *wilayah* occurs in the meaning of *wilayat al-tasarruf*, one can cite the *Ikhtiyar Ma 'rifat al-Ridjal* of Abu 'Amr 'Umar b. 'Abd al-' Aziz al-Kashshi, especially where he mentions the *wilayah* of Abu al-Khanab, which was denounced by the Imam Dja'far al-Sadiq. See *Ridjal* (Mashhad, 1348/1964), 296/523. Also: *Tabataba'i*, *Mizan*, 6/12-14

25' Kulayni, *al-Kafi*, 2/368, Hadith no. 2.

The Imam's statement makes it clear that it was the act of accepting or rejecting the *wilayah* of Imam 'Ali that determined whether one had been faithful to the divine trust or not. The same act, moreover, determined the righteousness or unrighteousness of the ruling authority claiming to be legitimate. In Shi'ism, from its inception, the Imams not only possessed the *wilayah* to establish political authority on earth; they were also regarded as the sole legitimate authority who could and would establish Islamic public order. Imamite works treating of the theory of political authority unanimously maintained that equitable government could not be established except by the one who is *ma 'sum* that is, the infallible leader invested with the *wilayat al-tasarruf* to exercise discretionary control over the affairs of the community. Furthermore, it was held that the process through which this authority becomes known to the public is explicit designation (*nass*) by the one possessing *al-wilayat al-i'tibariyah* -the "relative" authority derived through one's

being appointed to that office (e.g., Prophethood or Imamate) by God.

Chapter 5

Wilayah as the Moral Vision of Islamic Revelation

The cornerstone of the Imamite theory of political authority is the existence of an Imam from among the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad, clearly designated by the latter to assume the leadership of the Muslim community. Acknowledgement of the authority of the Imam falls within the category of the religious obligations (*al-takalif al-shar'iyah*) imposed on the adherents of the Imam. In Imami Shi'ism, government belonged to the Imam alone, for he was equally entitled to political leadership and religious authority. However, even though the Imam was entitled to both the political and religious leadership, his Imamate was not contingent upon his being invested as the ruler of the community. The religious leadership empowered the Imam to interpret Islamic revelation and elaborate on it without committing an error. In this respect, the Imam was like the Prophet, who was endowed with special knowledge and had inherited the knowledge of divine revelation through his designation in the wilayah. The Imam is, thus, the link with the way of guidance, and without acknowledging his wilayah no person seeking guidance can attain it. This *wilayah* (the spiritual authority with the right to demand obedience), according to the Imamite teaching, was not contingent upon the Imam's being invested as the ruling authority (*sultan*, who could and did exact or enforce obedience) of the community.

As such, the spiritual authority resided in Imam 'Ali from the clay the Prophet died, for he became the *wal al-'amr* (the executor of the Prophet's spiritual function) through the Prophet's designation on the occasion of Ghadir Khumm. This

leadership would continue to be available in the line of the Imams, explicitly designated by the preceding Imams. It was in this latter sense that the Imamate of the community came to be conceptualized. Therefore, religiously speaking, to ignore the *wilayah* and disobey these Imams was tantamount to disbelief in God's promise that He would provide the necessary guidance to lead humanity toward the creation of ideal world order. This confidence in the proclamation of the Ghadir Khumm regarding the future leadership was directly responsible for generating threefold religious experience of the Shi'ite community which became the decisive sources of the subsequent Imamite political attitude. These were the martyrdom (*shahadah*), the occultation (*ghaybah*) and precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyyah*). What made the Shi'ites responsive to their religious leaders has in large measure to do with this threefold religious experience which conditions their political attitudes and inspires their willingness to strive to preserve their religious identity in the context of the larger Muslim community.²⁶

26 The just Ruler in Shi'ite Islam, Chapter 3, pp. 90-92.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

The theological and legal implications of the position Imam 'Ali as the possessor of the *wilayah* are far and wide. It is not an exaggeration to hold that since the death of the Prophet Muhammad there has been no other issue than the leadership of the Umma in Islamic history that has given rise to intense polemics and misunderstanding in the Muslim community. Whereas no one questions the highly esteemed position held by 'Ali as the most prominent disciple of Muhammad among all Muslims, his *wilayah* and i are the source of much debate and disagreement among the Sunni and the Shi'ah. The Shi'ite Imam, by virtue of his being the wali of God and the wasi of the Prophet, is regarded as the most authoritative interpreter of Islamic revelation in the post-prophetic era. This divinely ordained position, according to Shi'ite theologian jurists, also entitles the *wali al-'amr* in whom the *wilayah* is invested through the *wisayah* to exercise the comprehensive authority of the Prophet, as the sole legitimate leader who could establish the ethical public order on earth.

However, as historical circumstances unfolded, the experience of Ghadir Khumm and subsequent political history of the Muslim community gave rise to the belief among some prominent Muslims, who formed the early nucleus of the Shi'ite movement, that the *wilayah* belonged solely to 'Ali and his descendants, who too were deprived of the Imamate in its political realm. The Imamate thus became divided into temporal and spiritual spheres. The temporal authority of the Imam was regarded as having been usurped by the ruling dynasty, but the spiritual-moral authority remained intact in the Imam, who as the *hudjdjat Allah* (God's proof), was empowered to guide the

spiritual lives of his adherents as the wali Allah This spiritual authority was not contingent upon the Imam's investiture as the ruling authority (*sultan*) of the community. Accordingly, the Imamate in the form of religious leadership that began with the Prophet's proclamation about the *wilayah* of 'Ali at Ghadir Khumm in 632 A.D., continued through all political circumstances until the last Imam, the twelfth Imam al-Mahdi, went into occultation (A.D. 874). During this period of the occultation questions regarding Shi'ite political authority in the absence of the Imam began to be treated in juridical works, especially when, for the first time, following the last manifest Imamate of Imam 'Ali (C. E. 656-660), the temporal authority of the Shi'ite Buyid dynasty was established de facto.

In view of the prolonged occultation of the Imam and the absence of special designation during this period, the Shi'ite scholars .in their works on jurisprudence reemphasized the separation between power (which could exact or enforce obedience) and *wilayah* (authority, which reserved the right to demand obedience, depending on legal-rational circumstances) that had existed from the time 'Ali was designated as the master of whoever the Prophet was master and continued during the lifetime of the subsequent Imams of the Shi'ah. The experience of Ghadir Khumm and the belief in the *wilayah* of 'An led to the doctrine that the investiture of authority (*wisayah*) and the assuming of political power were necessary conditions for the establishment of the rule of justice and equity the function that was reserved for the future Imam, the Mahdi in Islam.

However, delegation of the *wilayah* to other than an infallible Imam who could assume both the authority and power when the actual heir to the *wilayah* of 'Ali was in occultation was regarded as dangerous by majority of the Shi'ite jurists. Hence some jurists ruled out the possibility of absolute claim to political power and authority (*wilayah*) resembling that of the Imam himself. Nevertheless, the rational need to exercise however limited authority in order to manage the affairs of the community was recognized and authoritatively legalized in the juridical works. The theological conclusions about the *wilayah* that was invested in 'Ali as the perfect leader of the community remained immutable during the occultation. The Shi 'ite jurists were not infallible leaders of the community to claim the same

kind of *wilayah* whose direction was set on the occasion of Ghadir Khumm by the Prophet. Hence, the *wilayat al-faqih* (the government of the jurist) in the modern nation-state of Iran might claim the organic connection to the *-wilayah* of 'Ali b. Abi Talib, but it lacks the necessary theological foundation that was expounded in connection with the heir to the Prophet's infallible knowledge and authority. It is this lack of theological certainty about the extent of the authority that can be wielded by a Shi'ite jurist in the Shi'ite nation-state that obstructs the development of contemporary relevance of the belief in the *wilayah* as a paradigm for a just and democratic system in Iran.²⁷

Some leading Shi'ite jurists believe that the office of governing jurist, in the absence of the Imam, should be invested in a collective leadership of qualified jurists under the governance of jurisprudence (*wilayat al-fuqaha*). However, the issue of *wilayah* still remains connected with the doctrine of the continuation of the guidance after the Prophet and the Imams, which can be resolved only when theological doctrine is reinterpreted to meet the challenges of the modern political and ideological forces. It is instructive to keep in mind how a historical event of Ghadir Khumm continues to inspire the idealistic resolutions of the modern political challenges faced by the Umma as a whole.

27 See my article. "The Rule of Religious Jurist in Iran," in *Iran at the Crossroads* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 123-47.

ISLAMICMOBILITY.COM

IN THE AGE OF INFORMATION
IGNORANCE IS A CHOICE

*"Wisdom is the lost property of the Believer,
let him claim it wherever he finds it"*

Imam Ali (as)