

Chapter II

Muhammad's Succession

The death of Muhammad opened the door to real competition for political power between supporters of different alternatives. A fifty-year period of civil war began for the control of the Muslim territories. Each camp tried in its own way and with its own methods to impose its views:

- The leaders of nomadic tribes claimed the return to the traditional autonomy of each tribe and refused to recognize the authority of a Successor to Muhammad because they wanted to escape the domination of city dwellers.
- The people of Madīna claimed the succession to Muhammad because of their role in the consolidation and expansion of Islam.
- The Makkans claimed their right to the succession because Muhammad and his first followers were from the Quraysh.
- Finally, the family of Muhammad was isolated against an alliance of other clans, whose main spokesmen were 'Umar, Abū Bakr and Abū 'Ubayd ibn al-Jarrāh.

The family of Muhammad claimed hereditary legitimacy; this was hitherto unknown in the tribal system of Arabs and is probably one reason why their case was not heard.

Religious arguments played a very minor role in the final winning of political power. In order to add a justification to the election of Abū Bakr as Caliph, the Sunnīs later argued that Muhammad had entrusted him with the direction of prayer when he was sick. However, this was not the decisive factor. Proponents of 'Alī had even stronger arguments. The decisive factors were associated with the traditional mode of appointment of tribal leaders: Abū Bakr was older than 'Alī and was among the first companions and the stepfather of the Prophet (his daughter 'Ā'isha was the youngest of the wives of Muhammad). In addition, before the advent of Islam, Abū Bakr had been a representative of his clan on the board of Makka, and had the support of rich Makkan merchants. One decisive factor can be found on the side of the nomads' revolt, which forced residents —of Makka and Madīna— to agree quickly to deal with a situation that might call into question their hegemony. The Zaydites (who believed that 'Alī and his descendants deserved the Caliphate) explained the opposition to 'Alī by the role he had played in

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various battles across Arabia during the lifetime of the Prophet; the defeated tribes continued to feel toward him some resentment and hostility. The choice of Abū Bakr, who had the support of most Makkan notables, was also linked to the historic role of Makka and the traditional rule of the Quraysh.

The consultation (*shūrā*) of the few electors who presided at the choice of the Muhammad's Successor (*Khalīfa*, Caliph) was, therefore, far from being a genuine one. Indeed, several notables of several urban clans of Madīna and Makka, not to mention other urban centers within Arabia and Yaman, as well as all the elders of nomadic tribes, were excluded. The urgency of the situation —used to justify this “failure” (*falta*) in the words of ‘Umar— is not a convincing argument. This exclusion not only became the rule at that time but it continued to be followed afterwards.

Abū Bakr (632-634) named ‘Umar as his Successor. ‘Umar (634-644) was assassinated, however he had the time to designate six companions and to leave instructions that one of them should be chosen as Successor. Under the reign of the third Caliph ‘Uthmān (344-356), from the Umayyad clan, the crisis worsened because he favored mainly members of his family and his clan. His nepotism provoked revolts that led to his assassination in 656 by an insurgent group (among them the son of the first Caliph and the brother of ‘Ā’isha) despite attempts by several companions, including ‘Alī, to calm the insurgency and to convince the Caliph to change his governing strategies. ‘Ā’isha had backed ‘Amr b. al-‘Ās against ‘Uthmān (Madelung 1997, p. 187). Following his assassination, ‘Alī was proclaimed Caliph by the companions who were in Madīna. However, very quickly, his authority was challenged by two coalitions:

- The first was grouped around the last wife of the Prophet, ‘Ā’isha, and two famous companions, Talha and Zubayr.
- The second was led by the cousin of the murdered Caliph, the Umayyad Mu‘āwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān, who was governor of Damascus, supported by his cousin ‘Amr ibn al-‘Ās, governor of Egypt.

The war between the armies of ‘Alī against both camps was seen by Muslims as “the great discord” in which several companions refused to take part. Proponents of ‘Alī managed to overcome, not without bloodshed, the first camp. According to several sources, more than ten thousand people died in this battle. After this victory, ‘Alī's troops

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had to face the second coalition, grouped behind the Umayyads. The conflict ended in Siffīn, in 657, by arbitration temporarily establishing two Caliphates: that of ‘Alī in Kūfa, and the Umayyad Mu‘āwīya in Damascus and with the latter’s commitment to bequeath his power after his death to ‘Alī or one of his sons. Part of ‘Alī’s supporters refused arbitration because they believed the only arbiter should be God (VI: 57, XII: 40, XII: 67). They elected ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī as their Imām. This Khārijī movement was crushed by ‘Alī’s troops at the Battle of Nahrawān in 658. Their supporters withdrew into Arabia and southern ‘Iraq. Afterwards ‘Alī spent the rest of his reign in ‘Iraq and Persia fighting various factions opposed to his Caliphate. In 661 the Khārijī ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Muljim al-Murādī killed him, precipitating the end of the period of “well-guided Caliphate.”

If we look carefully at what happened in reality: the constant state of civil war which had arisen around the succession before the Prophet’s burial, the tragic end of three out of four “well-guided Caliphs”, and the fact that the mode of access to the office of Caliph was different each time show that we are very far from the mythical account maintained in the Muslim imagination about this Golden Age. The following sections will present respectively the Sunnī and Shī‘ī theory of Caliphate.

Sunnī View

A powerful political leader is needed in order to ensure Muslims follow the *sharī‘a* (religious law). Hence the Islamic community cannot become complete unless it turns into a State; the exercise of power is understood as one of the forms of religion, as realizing God’s Will on earth. For many Muslims, history is perceived as a process by which the society of religious ignorance, based on worldly ends, should be replaced by the ideal Muslim society. The Sunnīs maintain that Muhammad’s authority had been transferred to the Caliphs, leaders designated and accepted by the community (*umma*). However the Caliphs only inherited a part of the Prophet’s power; the real power belongs to God who uses the Caliphs as channels to impose His Will.

All Muslims must submit to God’s Will embodied in the *sharī‘a*, considered supreme in society. The *sharī‘a* covers everything pertaining to the religion and the world (*dīn wa dunya*). The religious law, through the voices of the ‘*ulamā*’ (religious scholars), gives a politico-religious character to the Caliphate. The sovereignty belongs to the

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sharī'a of Allāh, not to the community. Consequently the community has no right to legislate, nor does the Caliph. The Caliph does not possess God's power of making laws; he inherited only the judicial and executive power. The sole legislator is Allāh and the Caliph has the right only to adopt rulings that are derived from the Qur'ān and the *sunna* (the spoken and acted example of the Prophet). Also the community has no right to remove the Caliph; but he can be removed if he does not follow the *sharī'a*. The Caliph must lead the community, collect canonical taxes, and supervise the application of the law. He is also the Imām, the leader in prayer, and he must himself be knowledgeable in the law and able to interpret it. Nevertheless, the community does not need the science of the Imām because he is at the same level as any Muslim capable of *ijtihād* (individual thought). The Imām does not have a superior knowledge of the hereafter. His main responsibility is for ruling, and it is only in this specific sense that he is the Successor of the Messenger (*Khalīfat al-Rasūl*). The Islamic system does not assign to the Imām any special privileges or rights; thus he should be treated the same as any other citizen.

Some Caliphs were designated by their predecessors, while others were chosen by some leaders in the community, who offered their *bay'a* (allegiance) to a new Caliph. It is by the *ijmā'* (consensus of companions) that the Caliphate is legitimized. The eagerness of some companions to elect a Successor to the Prophet proves the necessity of the *Imāma*. But after the first age, it was not a real process of election; most of the time it was recognition rather than a choice. The community accepted the authority; it did not confer it. The first duty of the community towards the Caliph was one of obedience. But in exchange the Caliph should consult the '*ulamā'* who ought to give him moral advice and exhortation. The *Imāma* is valid only if it is attributed to the best candidate of the time.

For Sunnīs, the four first Caliphs Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, and 'Alī were the well-guided ones (*rashidūn*) and succeeded each other in order of chronological merit (Ibn Fūrak, 182; al-Baghdādī, 293). When the Prophet was sick, he gave to Abū Bakr the responsibility of leading the prayers. This was a great honor conferred upon Abū Bakr and some Sunnī theologians considered this as an implicit designation (*ishāra*) of the Prophet in favor of Abū Bakr. But, for the Sunnī theologian al-Asharī (d. 324/935), the juridical validity of the *Imāma* of Abū Bakr is not based on this *ishāra* but on the contract

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(*'aqd*) by which some companions elected him (Ibn Fūrak, 185-186). While Muhammad was on his deathbed, some leaders, mainly from the helpers (*ansār*), gathered to elect a Successor at the Saqīfa (Portico) of Banū Sā'ida. 'Umar became the first to select and offer his allegiance (*bay'a*) to Abū Bakr. He then accompanied him to Saqīfa and declared that Abū Bakr was the "Successor of the Messenger of God"; afterward the other members present approved this selection. After a reign of only two years, Abū Bakr died in 634 and left a personal will appointing 'Umar Caliph; he then governed for ten years. 'Umar was succeeded by 'Uthmān, who ruled for some twelve years. During his reign the Islamic expansion was carried on. He was succeeded by 'Alī, who was renowned for his eloquent speeches and his courage on the battlefield.

One of the first to formulate the theory of Caliphate was the Sunnī Shāfi'ī jurist al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) who, in his book *Al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyya*, defined the Caliphate as being a necessity derived from the divine law. He presented a comprehensive theory of the State that has left a continuing influence on the history of Muslim political thought up to the present. Al-Māwardī's ideas derived partly from the past and partly from the current opinions of his time. He wanted to put forward a theory of the Caliphate in which everything depends on the authority of the Caliph in an ideal State. The institution of the *Imāma* is a necessary prerequisite of the *sharī'a*. The Qur'ān (IV: 58) enjoins men to obey those set in authority in society; therefore there should be a Caliph, to replace the Prophet for the preservation of religion and the administration of worldly affairs. His functions are political as well as religious:

- 1) Safeguard and defend the principles of religion;
- 2) Supervise the application of *sharī'a*; The Imām should try to settle all litigations in justice and should protect the interests of the weak against those of the strong.
- 3) Maintain law and order in the country;
- 4) Enforce the criminal code of the Qur'ān;
- 5) Protect the frontiers of Islam against foreign invasions to guarantee the security of life and property of all citizens;
- 6) To persecute those who oppose Islam or refuse to enter the protection of the Islamic State as non-Muslim subjects;
- 7) To collect taxes in accordance with the laws of the *sharī'a*;

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- 8) To give allowances and stipends to those who deserve them;
- 9) To appoint honest and sincere men to the principal offices for a sound administration and finance of the State;
- 10) To be aware of the affairs of his dominions and to be able to direct the national policy and protect the interests of the people.

The Caliph must also have certain physical and intellectual qualities, for instance: justice, integrity, chastity, courage, knowledge of religion and of the political interests of the State. He has to belong to the same tribe as Muhammad, the Quraysh (this was an argument put forward by Abū Bakr). The Sunnī jurists affirmed that it is not permitted to call the Imām Caliph of God (*Khalīfat Allāh*) because they believe no human can represent God on earth. However, the title Caliph of the Messenger of God (*Khalīfat al-Rasūl Allāh*) can be attributed to him.

The appointment of an Imām by the consensus of the Muslim community is mandatory. The *Imāma* is instituted by means of election. The electors shall consist of persons with particular qualifications. For al-Māwardī, it was possible for even only one person to elect the Caliph; usually it was the previous Caliph or one among the leaders of the community (those who bind and loose *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd*). The Sunnī jurists insist that there must be an election even if there is only one candidate, because it gives the Imām his legal status. The Imām in power can choose his Successor. For instance the first Caliph Abū Bakr appointed 'Umar and the Muslims accepted 'Umar as Caliph because they were obeying the order of the previous Caliph. Likewise when 'Umar appointed a limited council to elect his Successor, the Muslims had to follow his instructions. The Caliph can choose any suitable person as his Successor, as long as it is not his father or son. But if he designates his son, the concurrence of the *ahl al-hall wa al-'aqd* must be obtained. Once chosen, the people owe him obedience, from which they can only be released if he acts in an immoral way, holds erroneous opinions or has physical infirmities preventing him from assuming his functions (al-Māwardī, 3ff).

In the beginning, the duty of obedience was only held so long as the Caliph ordered the principles of the *sharī'a*; but later, obedience became a duty even in the case of an unjust ruler because it was thought that having an unjust ruler was better than having none at all. Thus the Sunnī Ash'arite theologian al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), after

teaching the duty of obedience to unjust leaders, explained that Muslims must not approve their injustice. They should avoid the company of the unjust ruler and rebuke him by words, as long as they do not provoke a rebellion (al-Ghazzālī, 1296, ii/4, chs. 5-6, 124ff.). If God had wanted the Muslim community to fall into the hands of a tyrannical ruler, there would not have been a necessity to send a Prophet. If the Caliph is unfair and abuses his power by controlling the army, how can the *umma* correct him?

The Caliph, according to al-Māwardī, can delegate his power to a military commander (*Amīr*) in a specific region of the empire (al-Māwardī, 32). This *Amīr* should recognize the authority of the Caliphate and only exercise power for the Caliph. In practice many Sultāns assumed the power and deposed the Caliph. Al-Ghazzālī addressed the problem by affirming that what is important is that there should be an Imām to be obeyed; who he is, and how he is chosen are secondary. The Imām is essential because religious order is necessary and implies worldly order (security of life, livelihood, dwelling...). Any *Imāma* is better than none, for any authority is better than chaos and confusion of opinions. The Imām is important for the application of the *sharī'a*. If there is no Imām, law disappears and so the community disintegrates. He should try to apply the principles of the *sharī'a* but even an unjust ruler, according to al-Ghazzālī, should not be deposed because political power is a necessity of human life; all power is a manifestation of the Will of God and must be obeyed. Law requires an Imām, and the *Imāma* is a must; but the person of the Imām is a secondary consideration, and the qualifications regarded as essential in the Imām can be ignored in order to avoid civil strife. The Imām is supposed to obey God just as Muslims should obey him, and for this reason he ought to consult the '*ulamā*', the guardians of God's law. But if he does wrong, he should not be deposed in order to avoid chaos (al-Ghazzālī, n.d., 105 ff.).

According to a general consensus among jurists, Muslims are not allowed to give allegiance (*bay'a*) to more than one Caliph. If another Caliph is given the pledge, while a Caliph is already in office, the second one should be fought until he himself recognizes the first Caliph or he should be killed; the Caliphate belongs lawfully to the one who was given *bay'a* first. Appointing a Caliph is obligatory for all Muslims throughout the world. Executing such a duty is compulsory because God decreed it. To abstain from appointing a Caliph for Muslims is a sin, for it is an abstention from fulfilling one of the most central

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duties of Islam. For upon this duty, rests the implementation of the rules of the religion and the very existence of the Islamic way of life. Where is the Caliph of the Muslims presently? Why Muslims do not elect a Caliph today?

Shī'ī View

For Sunnīs, the Qur'ān and the *sunna* constitute the whole message to complete the religion. On the contrary, for Shī'ites, the Qur'ān and the *sunna* are not enough for the guidance of Muslims. The Muslims need the Imām of the time (*Imām al-zamān*) to update the interpretation of the Qur'ān from generation to generation. For the Shī'ites, who is the Imām is not a secondary matter. The concept of the Imām implies that the cycle of prophecy must be succeeded by the cycle of the *Walāya* (Office of the Friends of God). The Keeper of the Book (*Qayyim al-Qur'ān*) must follow the Prophet. The text of the Qur'ān in itself is not enough because it contains hidden meanings, ambiguous verses, and apparent contradictions. The knowledge of such a book cannot be grasped by an ordinary scholar mastering philosophy or dialectic. The text must be “taken back to its original meaning” (*ta'wīl*) to the first intended meaning where its true signification becomes manifest. Its discernment necessitates someone inspired: a spiritual heir knowing the inner meaning (*bātin*) and the outer meaning (*zāhir*) of the Qur'ān. Through the Imām (spiritual Guide) alone, the truth of the Qur'ān can be known because he is infallible (*ma'sūm*). Because God can only be just, He must complete the cycle of prophecy by the cycle of *Imāma*. God sent Muhammad as His beneficent Grace (*Lutf*) to his generation to provide His guidance; He cannot deny His Grace to the following generations. The cycle of *Imāma* proceeds from this divine Grace, equally divided between the generations.

One is only able to know God through God. As Jesus said to his disciples in the Gospel, they can reach God only by passing through him. Jesus, in this perspective, is at the highest and closest spiritual level to God. In the same way one must discover the true essence of the Imām, who is the closest to God, in order to reach God. The Imām is the Threshold whereby He may be approached. After the Prophet who was God's *Hujja* (Proof), it is impossible that the earth should remain without a *Hujja*. The Imām must

therefore always be present on earth since he is the only one who knows all the hidden meanings of the revelation through divine inspiration.

As we already mentioned, for the Sunnīs, an elite group or the previous Caliph can base their choice on specific criteria in selecting the Caliph whereas, for Shī'ites, the Imām chooses his Successor among his male offspring. Whereas the Sunnīs rely on the *ijmā'* ("consensus") of some religious leaders as the source of decision-making, the Shī'ites reject this concept because true knowledge can come only through a contact with the infallible Imām. Humans capable of individual thought (*ijtihad*) are unable to elect the best leader; they often make mistakes and choose the worst one. God selected the Prophets, not the people; in the same manner, God selects the Imām. Muhammad, who was divinely inspired, chose 'Alī at Ghadīr Khumm; then only 'Alī, who is likewise inspired, is the best one who knows who deserves the succession. His choice is considered by Shī'ites as being approved by God. In this perspective 'Alī inherited the Prophetic knowledge of Muhammad. When 'Alī was burying the Prophet, Abū Bakr was elected as the first Caliph by leaders at the Saqīfa (Portico) of Banū Sā'ida. If the selection of the Successor was legitimate by consensus, why was 'Alī (the closest by blood to the Prophet) not invited to participate in the election? Even the second Caliph, 'Umar, admitted that there was a corrupt procedure in the election process, which was conducted in haste and without reflection (Baladhūrī, 1960, vol. 1, 581, 583). Afterward, 'Alī felt obliged to give his allegiance to Abū Bakr in order to avoid a conflict. A Shī'ī Imam does not have to impose himself by force on the society; the people must recognize him and deserve him. When the people are ready to recognize him, they will become worthy of his presence and he will provide his guidance.

When 'Alī died, many Kufans designated Hasan as Caliph but soon after, hostilities began with Mu'āwiya who refused to give his allegiance to Hasan. Subsequently many supporters betrayed Hasan who had no choice but to negotiate with Mu'āwiya and to hand him over the Caliphate. Hasan made a speech that is especially noteworthy because Hasan insisted on the particular status of the people of the house "whom God has purified thoroughly." According to Shī'ites, Muhammad had also already given his designation (*nass*) to Hasan and Husayn since he is reported to have said: "These two sons of mine are imams who will experience difficulties." (Shaykh al-

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Mufid 1981, p. 298) ‘Alī, in his speeches, had mentioned on many occasions that only the Ahl al-Bayt deserve to lead the community. He had once specifically appointed Hasan as his legate. (Balādhurī 1974, vol. II, p. 497, 504) Hasan inherited ‘Alī’s property and the real estate of the Prophet in Madīna. The day ‘Alī died, Hasan is reported to have made this speech:

There has died tonight a man who was the first among the early (Muslims) in (good) actions. Nor did any later (Muslims) attain his level in (good) actions. [...] He, peace be on him, has died on this the night on which Jesus, son of Mary, was taken up (to Heaven), on which Joshua, son of Nun, the testamentary trustee (wasi) of Moses, peace on him, died. [...] I am the (grand)son of the one who brought the good news. I am the (grand)son of the Warner. I am the (grand)son of the man who, with God’s permission, summoned (the people) to God. I am the (grand)son of the light which shone out (to the world). I am of the house, from whom God has sent away abomination and whom God has purified thoroughly. I am of the house for whom God has required love in his Book, when God, the Most High, said (XXXIII: 33): “Say: I do not ask you for any reward except love for (my) kin. Whoever earns good, will increase good for himself.” The good is love for us, the house. (Shaykh al- Mufīd 1981, pp. 280-281; Al-Isfahānī 1949, pp. 49-50 reported the same discourse see Madelung 1997, pp. 311-312.)

Unfortunately Mu‘āwiya refused to give his allegiance to Hasan, who addressed a letter to him. In this letter, Hasan argued his rights to the Caliphate on the grounds that he was the closest relative to the Prophet in blood. If the Quraysh could pretend to be more deserving of the Caliphate over the helpers (*ansar*) on the grounds that the Prophet descended from the Quraysh, the members of the family of Muhammad, who were the closest to him in every aspect, are better qualified to assume the leadership of the community. Hasan contended that Mu‘āwiya did not possess any known merit in religion (*dīn*) and that he was the son of Abū Sufyān who was the greatest enemy of the Prophet among the Quraysh. Hasan exhorted Mu‘āwiya not to rebel and to stop shedding the blood of Muslims, for he would be accountable to God for his bad actions (Al-Isfahānī 1949, p. 56). None of the arguments put forward by Hasan changed the mind of

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Mu'āwiya who arrived in Mosul with his partisans. In fact, Mu'āwiya had always been hostile to the Shī'ī cause since the battle of Siffīn and had initiated the struggle for power.

Mu'āwiya now sent him a blank sheet with his seal at the bottom, inviting him to write down whatever conditions he wanted to add. Hasan wrote that he would give his power to Mu'āwiya on the basis that he would act in accordance with the Book of God and the sunna. At the end of his life, Mu'āwiya would leave the question of his succession to an electoral council (*shūrā*). Mu'āwiya would also grant his protection to Hasan and his companions (Balādhurī 1996, vol. II, pp. 385-86). The majority of Sunnī as well as Shī'ī sources reports that Hasan died on 5 Rabī' I 50/2 April 670 (Ibn Sa'd 1416/1996, p. 91) at the age of 45 or 46 poisoned by one of his wives, Ja'da, daughter of al-Ash'ath to whom Mu'āwiya offered money to kill Hasan.

When the first Umayyad Sunnī Caliph, Mu'āwiya, died in 60/680, his son Yazīd came to power. The majority of Muslims saw the nomination of Yazīd to the Caliphate as an usurpation of the notion of consensus (*ijmā'*), the legitimate means of choosing a Caliph. When Imām Husayn (the son of 'Alī and the grandson of Muhammad) received a confirmation of the loyalty of Kūfīs from his cousin Muslim ibn Aqīl, he headed toward Kūfa. In the beginning, Husayn was opposed to the surrender of Hasan to Mu'āwiya in 41/661 and to the peace agreement recognizing Mu'āwiya as Caliph, but Hasan incited him to accept it. When several Kūfan Shī'ites proposed to rebel against Mu'āwiya, Husayn objected and insisted that he must follow the pact signed by his brother until Mu'āwiya's death (Al-Mufīd 1981, p. 300; Madelung 2004).

Husayn did not want to give his allegiance to Yazīd and he took refuge in Makka. In Kūfa, the leaders of the Shī'a wrote seven messages to Husayn urging him to join them. Husayn notified them that he was sending his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqil b. Abī Tālib to check on the situation. At first, Husayn's cousin, was successful in getting Kūfan supporters for Husayn. He wrote to Husayn, encouraging him to come rapidly to Kūfa. In the meantime, Yazīd became aware of the situation and put the governor 'Ubayd-Allāh b. Ziad in charge of crushing the movement in favor of Husayn.

Shī'ī supporters from Basra came to see Husayn. Afterwards, Husayn wrote to the people of Basra. In his letter, Husayn explained that:

God chose Muhammad, peace and blessings on him, over all other creatures. He distinguished him with Prophethood and selected him to convey His message. [...] We are from his family and those entrusted with his authority. We are his Trustees and Inheritors. We have greater right than any one else to execute the Prophet's functions. Instead, the people have arrogated to themselves our rights. We did not protest because we detested causing division and wanted the best for the community. But we knew that we were more entitled to that station than those who have usurped it. [...] I invite you to the Book of God and the sunna of his Prophet, peace and blessings on him. The sunna has surely died, as innovations become alive. If you listen to me and obey me, I will guide you to the right path. (Abū Mikhnaḥ 2002, pp. 34-35; Tabarī 1879-1901, vol. II, p. 240 see Jafri 1979 who translated one of these letters, p. 180).

Before receiving the bad news about his cousin Muslim b. 'Aqil, Husayn with about fifty members of his family and some supporters had already set out for Kūfa on 8 Dhū al-Hijja or 10 September 680 (Abū Mikhnaḥ 2002, pp. 69). His uncle 'Abd-Allah b. 'Abbās advised him not to trust the Kūfans, who had been disloyal to his father and his brother (Tabarī 1879-1901, vol. II, p. 220f, 223, 274f), and not to take the risk of bringing his women and children (Abū Mikhnaḥ 2002, pp. 70-72).

When Husayn noticed that the enemy was advancing, he asked for a delay until the following morning, which was granted by 'Umar b. Sa'd. Husayn encouraged all his followers to leave him with the members of his family. He suggested that the enemy wanted his head alone and that they could escape without being harmed (Abū Mikhnaḥ 2002, pp. 116-121; Tabarī 1879-1901, vol. II, p. 319 ff.; Al-Mufīd, 1981, pp. 346-347). Most of his followers decided to fight and protect him anyway. When the morning of 10 Muharram 61/10 October 680 arrived, Husayn dressed in the cloak of the Prophet and addressed his enemies:

O people! You are accusing me, but think who I am! Then search your hearts for what you are doing to me. Consider well if it be lawful for you to kill me and violate my sacrosanctity. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, the son of the Prophet's *Wasī* and cousin...? Did not the Prophet say of me and my brother that 'they are the lords of the youth of Paradise'? You cannot deny the truth of what I have said concerning the merits of the family of Muhammad. Are all these not sufficient to prevent you from shedding my blood? [...] If you search in the whole East and the West you will not find a grandson of the Prophet other than me. (Tabarī 1879-1901, vol. II, p. 39 excerpt translated by Jafri 1979, pp. 189-190; Abū Mikhnaḥ 2002, pp. 130-131; Al-Mufīd, 1981, pp. 351-352)

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Then Husayn had to fight the enemy even though his camp was heavily outnumbered and under-equipped. Husayn and his followers were slain mercilessly on the battlefield. An arrow in the mouth first wounded Husayn as he was trying to reach the Euphrates River to drink water. Husayn did not cease fighting until he died. In the end, he was stabbed with a spear by Sinān b. Anas b. ‘Amr. Then Sinān and Khawalī b. Yazīd Asbahī cut off his head (Al-Mufīd, 1981, p.363). His head was sent to ‘Ubayd-Allāh in Kūfa and afterwards to Yazīd in Damascus. The rest of his body was trampled by horses (Al-Mufīd, 1981, p. 364). Seventy-two men in Husayn’s camp were massacred.

Husayn cannot be tagged simply as an irresponsible rebel risking his family’s lives for his personal ambition. Conforming to the will of his brother Hasan, he respected his oath of allegiance to Mu‘āwiya as long as he lived. Husayn refused to give his allegiance to Yazīd because Mu‘āwiya, by appointing him as his successor, violated his treaty with Hasan. Husayn considered Yazīd to be an unjust ruler and following the example of the Prophet, it was therefore his duty to show his opposition toward him. He did not want to become a martyr, since he expressed his willingness to leave Iraq as soon as he would see that he no longer had any support from the Kūfans. Husayn was deeply convinced as a grandson of the Prophet that it was his duty to act as an Imām if the people wanted his guidance. Like his father, he firmly believed that the family of the Prophet was divinely chosen to lead the Muslim community.

Husayn never initiated the hostilities against the Umayyad troops, even if they provoked and insulted him. Husayn knew that the non-violent course was more powerful than the use of violence. He had been informed several times and was fully aware of the dangers and, like Abraham, he was ready to sacrifice himself, his family, and his best disciples for a just cause. He knew that the memory of his martyrdom would be everlasting. Like Socrates, John the Baptist, Jesus-Christ, al-Hallāj, and Gandhi, Husayn was not afraid to embrace death for his ideal. The massacre and the horrific procession from Kūfa to Karbalā’ of the seventy-two heads of victims on the points of lances held by Umayyad soldiers, followed by the women of the Prophet’s family, will always haunt Muslim consciousness. The head of Husayn became the scene of a barbaric public display in Kūfa before being sent to Yazīd in Damascus.

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For the Shī'ites, the shedding of the blood of Husayn has a sacrificial value evidenced by the development of the doctrine and the importance of the pilgrimage to the shrine of Husayn. The tragedy of Husayn contributed to the consolidation of the Shī'ī identity and helped in the propagation of Shī'ism. The element of passion, which became a characteristic of Twelver Shī'ism aided people to become more receptive to the doctrine. The martyrdom gave birth to the movement of three thousand *tawwābūn* (penitents) who wanted revenge for the blood of Husayn and were willing to die as a means of repentance for failing to protect the grandson of the Prophet. This tragedy helped to crystallize the opposition which the 'Abbāsids used to overthrow the Umayyad regime.

Shī'ites believe that Shī'ism originated from the time of 'Alī but "it was Husayn's martyrdom that gave it its impetus and implanted its ideas deep in the heart of the people. To this day, it is the martyrdom of Husayn that is the most fervently celebrated event in the Shī'ī calendar [...] Above all, the martyrdom of Husayn has given to Shī'ī Islam a whole ethos of sanctification through martyrdom" (Momen 1985, pp. 32-33). This event played an important role in the development of Shī'ī theology. This sad event accentuated the split between the two major branches of Islam. It marked the real birth of the Shī'ī Muslim identity because from that point on they perceived themselves as subjected to persecution for the sake of the true succession of Muhammad. A cult of martyrdom is linked to the death of the Imām Husayn. The 'Āshūrā' (the date of Husayn's death) had become elaborated upon and systematized in the articulation of the Shī'ī theology. Every year in the ten first days of the month of Muharram, the battle of Karbalā' is commemorated by Shī'ī Muslims. (Steigerwald, 2004, 387)

It is during the time of Imām Muhammad al-Bāqir and Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq that the Shī'ī theory of *Imāma* was explicitly formulated; esoteric theories about the Qur'ān became manifested, and thus so did the assertions that the 'Uthmānic Qur'ān was incomplete. The revealed text alone is a "silent Qur'ān," (*sāmit al-Qur'ān*) in contrast with the Imāms, who were the "speaking Qur'ān" (*Nātiq al-Qur'ān*) (Ayoub, 184f.). Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq is reported to have said: "Had the Qur'ān been read as it was sent down, you should have found us named in it" (Al-'Ayyāshī, vol. 1: 13; Ayoub, 183). This saying may allude to the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('Alī, Fātima, Hasan, and Husayn), who were alive

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during the life of the Prophet. According to the Shī'ites, there are many Qur'ānic verses referring to the Imāms; here are some examples:

(IV: 59): "O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those who have been given authority among you."

For the Shī'ites "those who have been given authority" are the Shī'ī Imāms, while for the Sunnīs, it refers to the Caliphs.

(V: 67): "O Apostle, deliver [to the people], what has been revealed to thee from thy Lord; and if thou did not do so, then thou has not delivered His Message, and Allāh will protect thee from the people."

If the Prophet had not revealed the mission of 'Alī at Ghadīr Khumm, he would not have delivered the complete Message of God.

(XXXVI: 12) "And We have vested [the knowledge and authority of] everything in the manifest Imām."

(III: 7): "No-one knows the interpretation of it [the Qur'ān] except God and those who are deeply rooted in knowledge (*Rāsikhūn fī al-'ilm* i.e the Shī'ī Imāms)."

(II: 256): "He who disbelieves in idols and believes in God has grasped hold of the Firmest Handle (*al-'Arwa al-Wuthqā*), which will not break."

The firmest handle is interpreted as being the *Imāma*, which is continuous until the Judgment Day.

(LX: IV: 8): "Therefore believe in God and His Apostle and the Light, which we have sent down." The Shī'ī Imāms are the bearers of Light.

According to the Shī'ī theory, the Successor must be part of the family of Muhammad (*Ahl al-bayt*) in his direct lineage. The Imām designates explicitly (*nass*) his Successor. The succession is also confirmed by a testament (*wasiyya*). As the Prophet, the Imām is also both a Guide of the material as well as the spiritual life. For Sunnīs, *Imāma* is not the foundation of faith while for Shī'ites, the Imām is at the centre of the Shī'ī faith. The love and devotion for the Imām constitutes the first of their seven pillars of Islam (in contrast to Sunnīs who have only five pillars). From a Shī'ī perspective, the Institution of *Imāma* started before Muhammad. As there is a lineage of Prophets, there is also a lineage of Imāms; usually they are very closely related by blood to the Prophet. As you can see in this chart, during the time of each Prophet there was a living Imām.

Days	Prophets	Imāms
1	Adam	Seth
2	Noah	Shem
3	Abraham	Ishmael
4	Moses	Aaron
5	Jesus	Simon Peter
6	Muhammad	‘Alī
7	—	<i>Qā’im al-Qiyāma</i>

According to a *hadīth*, accepted by Sunnīs as well as Shī‘ites, the Prophet said: “You (‘Alī) are in the same position with respect to me as Aaron was to Moses except that there is no Prophet after me,” therefore a leading Shī‘ī theologian Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) applies to ‘Alī all the Qur’ānic verses (XX: 29-35; XX: 36) describing the function of Aaron. ‘Alī and Aaron have a share in Prophecy and their role is to help the Prophet deliver the message and deputize on his behalf (al-Mufīd, 3). To understand the basis of Shī‘ī exegesis, it is also necessary to look at some passages concerning Aaron in the Bible. Aaron and his sons are designated as High Priests (Leviticus 8.1-10.20; Exodus 18.1 ff.). Aaron, especially chosen by God (Numbers 17.1-10), is appointed to be the mouthpiece of Moses (Exodus 4.14 and 7.1). The Priest’s office was given perpetually by God to Aaron and his sons (Exodus 29.9) “and the holy garments of Aaron shall be his sons after him, to be anointed therein, and to be consecrated in them. And that son that is Priest in his stead shall put them on seven days, when he cometh into the tabernacle of the congregation to minister in the holy place.” (Exodus 29.29-30) Aaron and his sons were chosen by God to receive all the tithes of the children of Israel (Numbers 18.8-9 and 18.28). After Aaron, the everlasting Priesthood continues in the descendants of his son Eleazar (Numbers 25.11-13). For the Shī‘ites, Aaron is an Imām and the notion of Priesthood refers to the *Imāma*, which continues in his direct descendants. The Imām is the one entitled to the tithes of his disciples; he has a very high rank and prestigious role in the guidance of his community.

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There are some other Prophetic *hadīth*(s) accepted by both Sunnīs and Shī'ites such as the following:

‘Alī is with the Qur’ān and the Qur’ān is with ‘Alī. They will not separate from each other until they return to me at the paradisaal pool (*hawd*). (Nīsābūrī, 927 no. 4685; Shah-Kazemi, 18)

I am the city of knowledge and Alī is its gate; so whoever desires knowledge let him enter the gate. (Nīsābūrī, 929 no. 4694; Shah-Kazemi, 19)

Some show the consubstantiality of the spiritual nature of ‘Alī with the Prophet.

Truly, ‘Alī is from me and I am from him, and he is the *Walī* (spiritual Master) of every believer after me. (Nasā’ī, 129; Nīsābūrī, 19 no. 4636; Shah-Kazemi, 18)

The Prophet said that ‘Alī was “as my own soul (*ka-naḥsī*).” (Nasā’ī, 104; Shah-Kazemi, 19)

He said to ‘Alī “You are from me and I am from you (*anta minnī wa anā minka*).” (Nīsābūrī, 924 no. 4672; Shah-Kazemi, 19)

...whoever obeys ‘Alī obeys me, and whoever disobeys him disobeys me. (Nīsābūrī, 925 no. 4675; Shah-Kazemi, 19)

There is one amongst you who will fight for the *ta’wīl* (spiritual exegesis) of the Qur’ān as I have fought for its *tanzīl* (literal revelation). Abū Bakr asked, ‘Is it I?’ The Prophet said: ‘No’. ‘Umar asked, ‘Is it I?’ The Prophet said: ‘No, it is the one who is mending the sandal.’ The Prophet had given ‘Alī his sandal to mend. (Nīsābūrī, 926 no. 4679; Nasā’ī, 217; Shah-Kazemi, 19)

O ‘Alī, there is in you something akin to Jesus. The Jews hated him to such an extent that they slandered his mother; and the Christians loved him to such an extent that they ascribed to him a rank he did not possess. (Nīsābūrī, 926 no. 4680; Shah-Kazemi, 19)

From a Shī’ī perspective, the comparison of ‘Alī with Jesus is not surprising. As Jesus unveiled the spiritual meanings of the religious law revealed to Moses, the Imām ‘Alī through his spiritual exegesis (*ta’wīl*) disclosed the inner meanings of the Qur’ān. Also Jesus at the end of time will come back and will explain how he was preparing the way for the Mahdī, the Shī’ī Imām, i.e. the Lord of Resurrection (*Qā’im al-Qiyāma*).

According to the Shī’ī collection of *hadīth*(s), the Prophet himself said: “May God take care, after me, of ‘Alī and of the Inheritors (*Awsiyā*) of my posterity, for they

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are the Guides. God gave them my understanding and my knowledge, which means that they hold the same rank as me, as regards being worthy of my succession and of the Imāma.” (Corbin, 47-48) From this last *hadīth*, we may interpret that ‘Alī is as high as the Prophet Muhammad because he has inherited his prophetic knowledge. As Haydar Āmulī says, “All the Imāms are one and the same Light (*Nūr*), one and the same Essence (*Haqīqa*) [...]. Everything that applied to one of them applies equally to each of the others.” (Corbin, 48)

The Imāms are divine epiphanies, theophanies. The Imām is the manifestation (*zuhūr*, *mazhar*) of the light of God. The soul of the Imām is comparable to a mirror, since his soul is pure and without sin, the light of God can shine perfectly over it. The Imāms are the Names of God, and as such they preserve their disciples from *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism): attributing human quality to God and *ta’tīl* (agnosticism): placing God so high that He becomes inaccessible. The function of the Imāms is to illuminate the hearts of believers. The Imāms are the Caliphs of God on Earth, the Chosen Ones and the Heirs of the Prophets. The nature of the Imām is revealed in the “Sermon of the Great Declaration (*Khutbat al-Bayān*)” attributed to the first Imām ‘Alī:

I am the Sign of the All-Powerful.
I am the gnosis of mysteries. I am the Threshold of Thresholds.
I am the companion of the radiance of the divine Majesty.
I am the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden.
I am the Face of God. I am the mirror of God,
the supreme Pen, the *Tabula secreta*.
I am he who in the Gospel is called Elijah.
I am he who is in possession of the secret of God’s Messenger (Corbin, 49).

Since ‘Alī is identified to Elijah, it is worth asking: who was Elijah? Elijah was recognized as a Hebrew Prophet and a wise man; during the reign of Ahab in the IXth century BCE; people believed that he would return to earth. Among his accomplishments, he resurrects by the power of his prayers a widow’s son who passed away. Elijah went in the southern wilderness in the desert. On his way, an angel protected him and gave him food, providing him with enough energy to wander for forty days. He finally ended his journey at Horeb, the place where God was revealed to Moses. Later on, when his disciple Elisha accompanied him, “a chariot of fire, and horses of fire” appeared and

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Elijah ascended by a “whirlwind into heaven” (2King 2, 1 11). Malachi (4, 5) considers Elijah as the forerunner of the “the great and terrible Day of Jehovah.” Therefore, Elijah, identified by Shī’ites to the Imām will have a decisive role on the Day of Resurrection.

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The Sunnīs are the people of the *sunna* (the spoken and acted example of the Prophet). Their profession of faith is: “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the Apostle of God.” To this the Shī’ites add: “And ‘Alī, the Prince of believers comes from of God.” The Sunnī way of understanding the status and function of the Successor differs greatly from the Shī’ī view. For the Sunnīs, the Successor of the Prophet is an ordinary human possessing great qualities such as: justice, integrity, chastity, courage, knowledge of religion and of the political interests of the State. Nevertheless the community does not need the science of the Imām because he is at the same level as any Muslim capable of *ijtihād*. He also has to belong to the same tribe as Muhammad, the Quraysh. His main responsibility is for ruling. According to the Sunnīs, the Prophet died without appointing explicitly a Caliph or Successor, therefore some member of the community decided to elect a Successor. The religious law, through the voices of the ‘*ulamā*’ (religious scholars), gives a politico-religious character to the Caliphate.

The Shī’ī school maintains that the need of divine guidance continued after the death of Muhammad and this could not be left merely to mortal humans, subject to the whims of passion and material life. Therefore Muhammad, who had been both a temporal and a spiritual sovereign, appointed ‘Alī as his Successor. The Caliph or Successor of the Prophet was to succeed him in both these capacities; he was to be both *Amīr al-mu’minīn* or “Prince of the believers” and *Imām al-muslimīn* or “Guide of the Muslims.” For the Shī’ites, the Successor of the Prophet is not an ordinary human. He is as high as the Prophet, if not very close. He is the only one who has inherited the knowledge of the Prophet and can update the meaning of the Qur’ān for the following generation. His main function is to guide the people in their material and spiritual life. He not only belongs to the Quraysh, but he must be in the direct lineage of the Prophet through his daughter Fātima and his son-in-law ‘Alī.

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‘Alī, the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, the husband of his only surviving daughter, Fātima, his first convert, his intrepid champion in many a war, whom Muhammad in his lifetime said would be to him as Aaron was to Moses, his brother and right-hand man, in the veins of whose descendants the Prophet’s own blood would flow. The Shī’ites have always held that ‘Alī was explicitly chosen by the Prophet at Ghadīr Khumm as his Successor and that the *Imāma* is transferred by inherited right to the Prophet’s successors of his blood. The Sunnīs, however, consider him the fourth in the succession of Caliphs.

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