

Khalifah as the Imam

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The institution of Khilafah is frequently referred to as Imamate which, in the Sunni context, is derived from the word Imam to denote, amongst other things, that the Khalifah leads the prayers as a part of his responsibilities. This is a position of extreme importance because the Imam is in effect the best manifestation of the Ummah and represents it before Allah (swt). We understand from the below hadith that believers are guaranteed great security and protection when planted firmly behind the Imam, remaining obedient to his command¹,

“ Verily the Imam is a shield...”

The Holy Prophet ﷺ further impresses this point in the following hadith²,

“The Imam is like a shelter for whose safety the Muslims should fight and where they should seek protection...”

In this hadith the Holy Prophet ﷺ not only admonishes the believers to remain firmly attached to the Imam, but that they should outwardly struggle and strive to keep hold of this blessed station of shelter. In the following hadith we are intricately reminded as to the precise degree of obedience required of us by the Imam³,

“The Imam is (appointed) to be followed. So do not differ from him, bow when he bows, and say, "Rabbana-lakal hamd" if he says "Sami'a-l-lahu Liman hamida"; and if he prostrates, prostrate (after him), and if he prays sitting, pray sitting all together, and straighten the rows for the prayer, as the straightening of the rows is amongst those things which make your prayer a correct and perfect one.”

In history there exists no greater personification of the Imam than Hadhrat Mohammad ﷺ whose characteristics amounted to nothing less than the Holy Qur'an itself. In a majestic couplet the Promised Messiah ﷺ describes the magnificence of the Imamate of Hadhrat Mohammad ﷺ writing⁴,

محمد است امام و چراغ هر دو جهان محمد است فروزنده زمین و زمان

*Muhammad is the Imam and light of both the worlds;
He it is who illuminates time and space.*

It is said that the love and obedience which the companions displayed for the Holy Prophet's ﷺ Imamate was so deep that on journeys many of them would ensure they took along with them someone who had previously travelled with the Holy Prophet ﷺ on the same journey so that he could show them the exact spot the Holy Prophet ﷺ had stopped to pray at. They would then stop at that point and pray where the 'Beloved of Allah' (Habeebullah) ﷺ had prayed.

Another illuminating sign of the importance of the Imamate is found in the Holy Prophet's ﷺ appointment of Hadhrat Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه as the Imam during his time of illness. The incident is recorded in the following hadith which is narrated by Hadhrat Aisha(ra)⁵,

“When the Prophet, became ill in his fatal illness, Someone came to inform him about the prayer, and the Prophet told him to tell Abu Bakr to lead the people in the prayer. I said, “Abu Bakr is a soft-hearted man and if he stands for the prayer in your place, he would weep and would not be able to recite the Qur'an.” The Prophet said, “Tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer.” I said the same as before. He (repeated the same order and) on the third or the fourth time he said, “You are the companions of Joseph. Tell Abu Bakr to lead the prayer.” So Abu Bakr led the prayer and meanwhile the Prophet felt better and came out with the help of two men; as if I see him just now dragging his feet on the ground. When Abu Bakr saw him, he tried to retreat but the Prophet beckoned him to carry on. Abu Bakr retreated a bit and the Prophet sat on his (left) side. Abu Bakr was repeating the Takbir (Allahu Akbar) of Allah's Apostle for the people to hear.”

The above hadith provides one of the strongest proofs that Hadhrat Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was rightfully entitled to become the first Khalifah of Islam. This fact alone shows how important the Holy Prophet ﷺ valued the position of Imamate. Discussing the Socio-Political thought of Hadhrat Shah Wali Allah رحمه الله تعالى, Muhammad Al-Ghazali writes⁶,

“As the entire life is regarded as ‘ibadah (servitude to God), therefore, the leader of the Muslim community in the temporal sphere was granted the same title as assigned to their leader in the ritual activity of salat. That is why, when the Prophet (saw) designated Abu Bakr as imam in the prayers during his last days, the Muslims generally took this to imply the Prophet's preference for him as his successor in the mundane affairs as well.”

The facts surrounding the great spiritual blessing of the Imam Mahdi's عليه السلام Imamate are so wondrous and vast that they expand beyond the remit of this article. For a most comprehensive understanding of this subject I refer you to the dazzling book of the Imam Mahdi Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad عليه السلام which is titled ‘The Need for the Imam’ (Darurat-ul-Imam). It is however worth briefly mentioning two hadiths which illustrate the importance of the Imamate of the Imam Mahdi عليه السلام, and the need for all sincere lovers of Allah(swt) and His beloved Prophet ﷺ to actively seek and locate the Imam Mahdi. The hadiths are as follows,

1.⁷ *“He who dies in a condition that he has not recognized the Imam of the age dies a death of ignorance.”*

2.⁸ *“When you hear the advent of the Mahdi then enter into his fold even if you have to walk on snow by crawling and creeping to reach him.”*

In light of the above illustrations it is important that seekers of truth cherish, and take benefit from, the Khalifat-e-Waqt by ensuring they make solemn efforts to pray as sincerely and often as possible behind our beloved Huzur عليه السلام. An especial effort should also be made to attend the Friday prayers and drink from

elixir of the fountain of spirituality which Allah (swt) has showered upon the Khalifah and Imam of the Ummah عليه السلام. The Promised Messiah عليه السلام has beautifully instructed that all believers should visit the centre (*markaz*) as often as possible because such visits offer us spiritual purification and replenishments.

¹ Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.1, Bk.4, No.830.

² Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.4, Bk.52, No.204.

³ Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.1, Bk.11, No.689.

⁴ The Promised Messiah. Kitab-ul-Bariyyah. Ruhani Khaza'in. Vol.13, pp.155-157, footnote

⁵ Sahih Al-Bukhari. Vol.1, Bk.11, N0.680

⁶ Al-Ghazali Muhammad. The Socio Political Thought of Shah Wali Allah. p.84.

⁷ Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal. Vol.4, Pg.96.

⁸ Kanzul Ummal; also footnotes to Musnad Ahmad Bin Hanbal. Vol.6, p.29-30.