

that my other brothers in Islam will also give up their intolerance.

Nawab: We are extremely grateful for your kind and learned interpretation of facts. There is still one point which disturbs us. It concerns the imamate of the twelve Imams and their names. In the past ten nights Amiru'l-Mu'minin 'Ali was the focus of our discussion.

First tell us the verse of the Holy Qur'an which proves the imamate of the twelve Imams. Second, are the names of the twelve Imams recorded in our books?

Well-Wisher: It is an appropriate question and I would be happy to respond. But it is now nearly dawn, and my answer cannot be brief.

Tomorrow is the birthday of the grandson of the Holy Prophet Imam Husain and the Qizilbash family has arranged a celebration in the Risaldar Imambara. Perhaps I will reply to your question on that occasion.

Nawab: I quite agree with you.

Last Session, Sunday, 4th Sha'ban, 1345 A.H.

[Birthday of Imam Husain](#)

A large celebration was held to commemorate the birthday of Imam Husain. The author, Sayyid Muhammad Sultanu'l-Wa'adhim Shirazi, addressed the gathering. It was his final speech, and as he promised on the previous night, he answered the question about the imamate, the number and names of the Imams in the Holy Qur'an and the hadith. He began his speech with the following ayat:

"O You who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you; then if you quarrel about anything, refer it to Allah and the Apostle, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is better and very good in the end." (4:59)

[Genuine Liberty](#)

Well-Wisher: The idea of liberty, that people should be free, has long been a popular idea. The superficial notion about freedom is that it means doing as one likes, a notion which has resulted in the rejection of divine law. But of course real freedom is submission to Allah, the Creator of all things.

The Holy Qur'an frequently commands the believers to obey Allah and those fit to be followed from among ourselves. The Holy verse which I have recited as the theme of my discourse is one such verse which indicates whom we should obey. It commands us to obey Allah, the Holy Prophet, and those vested with authority.

There is no difference of opinion among Muslims concerning the obedience due to the Holy Prophet. However, there is difference of opinion about the meaning of the words "those

vested with authority among you."

Sunnis belief concerning the meaning of "those vested with authority"

Our brothers, the Sunnis, believe that in the above verse the words 'those vested with authority' (uli'l-amr) refer to state officials. Accordingly, they consider obedience to kings and governors compulsory even though these officials may be evil. In fact this belief is wrong. Shortage of time does not permit me to make a lengthy argument in support of my point, so I will trouble you with only a short discussion.

Three ways of appointment of 'Uli'l-amr' (those vested with authority)

Obviously rulers obtain their authority in one of these ways:

1. They are appointed by ijma (consensus)
2. They gain power by force.
3. They are divinely commissioned.

If a leader gains authority by consensus of the community, it is not compulsory to obey him as one obeys Allah or the Prophet. It is not possible for all Muslims to appoint a just ruler since, however wise or conscientious they may be, and they can only judge a man by appearance. They cannot read his heart or know the degree of his faith.

Leaders of Israel selected by Moses were considered worthless

Obviously Muslims cannot claim to possess better understanding than the Prophet Moses. He selected seventy men out of several thousand for their apparent integrity and took them with him to Mount Sinai. But all of them, on examination, proved worthless because their faith was not firm. This fact has been referred to in the Holy Qur'an, verse 154 of sura 7.

If those selected by Moses proved to be unbelievers at heart, it is obvious that common people would be less competent to choose able rulers for themselves. It is quite possible that those selected for their apparent piety may eventually turn out to be unbelievers. Surely obedience to such rulers would weaken religion.

The words 'Uli'l-amr' do not refer to rulers

Certainly Allah would not require his servants to obey a sinner as they would obey Him or His Prophet. Moreover, if the appointment of the 'uli'l-amr' were made through a true consensus, an election would have to be held for each new appointment. All citizens of all Muslim nations would have to agree on the choice in every election.

During 1300 years of Islam we find that, after the Holy Prophet, no such consensus ever occurred. At present it is impossible to secure such a consensus because the Muslim world has been split up into numerous countries, each with a ruler of its own.

Moreover, if every country should elect an 'uli'l-amr' for itself, there would be numerous 'uli'l-amr,' each to be obeyed within his own country, and the people of one country would not obey the 'uli'l-amr' of other countries. Of course then there is the question of allegiance when differences arise - as they often have in the last 1300 years - between two 'authorities.' We then have Muslims killing other Muslims in the name of Islam.

But true Islam does not require such absurd behavior which would lead to mutual strife among Muslims. It follows, therefore, that the 'uli'l-amr' whom we are commanded to obey has gained his authority by consensus.

A ruler who takes power by force cannot be called Uli'l-amr'

It is equally absurd to suggest that obedience to a tyrant is compulsory. If it were, why do the Sunni ulama' condemn the oppressive rulers and caliphs, like Mu'awiya, Yazid, the wicked Ziyad Ibn Abib, Ubaidullah, Hajjaj, Abu Salma, and Muslim.

If anyone claims that obedience to wicked rulers is compulsory (and some ulama' have really said that), it would be quite contrary to the Qur'anic injunctions. Allah has frequently cursed sinners in the Holy Qur'an and has forbidden Muslims to obey them. So how is it possible that in this verse He would order us to obey sinners?

Obviously, we cannot attribute two divergent orders to Allah Almighty. Hence, Imam Fakhrud-din Razi clearly says regarding this Holy verse that the 'uli'l-amr' must possess perfect integrity. Otherwise, Allah would not have linked our duty to obey them with our duty to obey Allah Himself and the Holy Prophet.

'Uli'l-amr' must be ordained and appointed by Allah

According to the Shi'as, the 'uli'l-amr' must be free from sin and infallible. And since no one except Allah can know the deep reality of the heart, the 'uli'l-amr' must be appointed by Allah. Thus Allah, Who ordains the prophets, also ordains the 'uli'l-amr:.' An 'uli'l-amr' obviously must have the same attributes the Holy Prophet had.

In this Holy verse the word 'ati'u (obey) has been used twice: He says, "Obey Allah and obey the Apostle." When He speaks of 'uli'l-amr,' He does not use the word 'ati'u' again but uses the conjunction 'and' with 'uli'l-amr.'

Linking the words in this way it means that 'uli'l-amr' possess the same merit as the Holy Prophet possesses, except those which are peculiar to the Prophet alone, e.g. 'Wahi' (revelation), prophethood, etc. In short, the qualities of the Holy Prophet should be possessed by the 'uli'l-amr' except of course the rank of prophethood.

Accordingly, Shi'as believe that the words 'uli'l-amr' refer to the twelve Imams, that is Amiru'l-Mu'minin and his eleven descendants, the progeny of the Holy Prophet. This verse is one of the proofs of the Imamate of the twelve Imams.

Apart from this, there are many other verses supporting our point of view.

(1) For instance, the Holy Qur'an says:

"He said: Surely I will make you an Imam of men." Abraham said: And of my offspring? My covenant includes not the unjust, said He." (2:124)

(2) "The Prophet has a greater claim on the believers than they have on themselves and his wives are (as) their mothers; and blood relations have the better claim in respect of one to the other, according to the book of Allah than (other) believers or the emigrants." (33:6)

(3) "O you who believe! Fear Allah and be (always) with the truthful ones." (9:119)

(4) "You are only a warner and (there is) a guide for every people." (13:7)

(5) "And (know) that this is My path, the right one. Therefore follow it, and follow not (other) ways, for they will lead you away from His way. (6:153)

(6) "And of those whom we have created are a people who guide with the truth and thereby they do justice." (7:181)

(7) "And hold fast by the covenant of Allah all together and be not disunited." (3:103)

(8) "So ask the followers of the Reminder if you do not know." (16:43)

(9) "Allah only desires to keep away uncleanness from you, O people of the House! And to purify you with a complete purification." (33:33)

(10) "Surely Allah chose Adam and Noah and the descendants of Abraham and the descendants of Imran above the nations. Offspring, one of the other."(3:33)

(11) "Then We gave the Book for an inheritance to those whom We chose from among Our servants." (35:32)

(12) "Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth; a likeness of His light is as a niche in which is a lamp, the lamp in a glass, (and) the glass is, as it were, a brightly shining star, lit from a blessed olive tree, of neither the east or the West, the oil whereof nearly gives light, though fire touch it not." (24:35)

There are many other verses which could be quoted. Many of your prominent ulama' have reported that the Holy Prophet said, "One fourth of the Holy Qur'an is in praise of the Ahlul Bayt."

Ibn Abbas is reported to have said, "More than 300 verses were revealed in praise of 'Ali."

Now, I come to my original point that the 'uli'l-amr' must be infallible because obedience to them is linked with obedience to Allah and the Holy Prophet.

Imam Fakhru'd-din Razi in his Tafsir admits that if we do not regard the 'uli'l-amr' as infallible, it would be, in effect, affirming two contradictions as being true. Your own ulama' have confirmed that these qualities were possessed exclusively by the twelve Imams. The Holy verse of Purification (33:33) also confirms this fact.

[Infallibility of the Holy Imams generally reported](#)

Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi Hanafi in Yanabiu'l-Mawadda, ch.77, p.445 and Hamwaini in Fara'idu's-Simtain report that Ibn Abbas said: "I heard the Holy Prophet saying: 'I and 'Ali, Hasan, Husain and nine of the descendants of Husain are completely pure and infallible.'"

Salman al-Farsi says that the Holy Prophet, putting his hand on the shoulder of Husain, said: "He is the Imam and the son of the Imam, and of his descendants there will be nine Imams who will all be virtuous trustees of Allah."

Zaid Ibn Thabit reports that the Holy Prophet said: "Verily, of Husain's descendants will be born Imams who will be virtuous trustees, infallible judges."

Imran Ibn Hasin reports that the Holy Prophet said to 'Ali: "You are heir to my knowledge. You are the Imam and Caliph after me. You will tell the people what they do not know. You are the father of my grandson and husband of my daughter. Of your descendants there will be infallible Imams."

[Knowledge of the Ahlul Bayt](#)

Abu Ishaq Hamwaini in Fara'idu's-Simtain, Hafiz Abu Nu'aim Ispahani in Hilyatu'l-Auliya, and Ibn Abi'l-Hadid in Sharh al-Nahju'l-Balagha report from Ibn Abbas that the Holy Prophet said: "My progeny have been created from the same seed from which I have been created. Allah Almighty has bestowed upon them knowledge and wisdom. Woe be to him who rejects them."

Ibn Abi'l-Hadid in Sharh al-Nahju'l-Balagha, and the author of Siratu's-Sahaba, report from Hudhaifa Ibn Asaid that the Holy Prophet said: "I leave behind for you two weighty things: the book of Allah and my 'Ahlul Bayt.' If you attach yourselves to these two you will be rescued." Tabrani reports an addition:

"Do not reject their authority; otherwise you shall be ruined. Do not show any disrespect toward them or ignore them, or else you shall be destroyed. Do not try to teach them because verily they know better than you do."

In other reports Hudhaifa Ibn Asaid quotes the Holy Prophet as saying: "After me there will be Imams from my progeny. Their number will be equal to the number of Bani Isra'il's heralds, that is, twelve, of whom nine will be Husain's descendants.

Allah has bestowed upon all of them my knowledge and wisdom. So do not teach them because surely they know better than you do. Follow them since they are definitely with truth, and truth is with them."

[Why the names of the Imams do not appear in the Holy Qur'an](#)

First, this divine book is concise. It contains many general principles but few details, which have been left for the chief commentator, the Holy Prophet, to explain. Allah says:

"And whatever the Apostle gives you, accept it; and from whatever he forbids you, keep back." (59:7)

Because the names and numbers of the twelve Imams are not mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, some people do not accept them. But on that basis they should reject their own caliphs since no verse of the Holy Qur'an makes any mention of their caliphs, except 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, or of the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphs, or of the authority vested in the Community to elect a caliph by consensus.

Second, if it is necessary to reject anything which is not clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an, then you should reject many of the methods of our worship since there is no mention of their details in the Holy Qur'an.

There is no mention of units (rak'ats) of prayers in the Holy Qur'an

The ritual prayer is perhaps the central act of worship in a Muslim's life. The Holy Prophet emphasized its performance. He said: "The ritual prayer is the pillar and protector of religion. If the ritual prayer is accepted, all other religious performances will be accepted. If it is rejected, all other religious performances will also be rejected."

Of course, there is no mention in the Holy Qur'an of the number of units (rak'ats) to be performed for each prayer or any of the other specific details regarding how the prayers are to be performed. Does this mean that we should abandon the prayers? The Holy Qur'an simply says: "Establish salat (prayer). There are no details distinguishing required from optional acts. These were explained by the Holy Prophet.

In the same way other commands have been stated in the Holy Qur'an in principle only. Their details, conditions and relevant instructions were explained by the Holy Prophet. Similarly, concerning the Imamate and caliphate, the Holy Qur'an says only: "Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and those in authority among you."

And we are bound to follow the Holy Prophet's order in this regard in the same way we follow his instructions with regard to the details of the ritual prayers.

Muslim commentators, whether Sunni or Shi'as, cannot make their own interpretations of the Holy Qur'an. The Holy Prophet said: "If someone gives his own interpretation of the Holy Qur'an, his place is Hell."

Accordingly, every sensible Muslim turns to the real interpreter of the Holy Qur'an, the Holy Prophet. For many years I have studied both Sunni and Shi'as Qur'anic commentary and hadith but have never come across a single hadith in which the Holy Prophet said that 'uli'l-amr' refers to political rulers.

On the other hand, the books of both the Sunnis and Shi'as contain numerous reports that the Holy Prophet was asked to indicate the meaning of 'uli'l-amr' and he replied that 'uli'l-amr' referred to 'Ali and his eleven descendants. I will present only a few of these numerous hadith which have been narrated through sources accepted by Sunnis.

Uli'l-amr refers to 'Ali and the imams of the Ahlul Bayt

(1) Abu Ishaq Sheikhu'l-Islam Hamwaini Ibrahim Ibn Muhammad writes in his Fara'idu's-Simtain: "The Prophet told us that 'uli'l-amr' refers to 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib and the Ahlul Bayt of the Holy Prophet."

(2) 'Isa Ibn Yusuf Hamadani reports from Abu'l-Hasan and Salim Ibn Qais, who report from Amiru'l-Mu'minin 'Ali that the Holy Prophet said: "My associates are those whose obedience has been linked by Almighty Allah with His own obedience. It is they to whom He refers when He says 'Those in authority from among you.'

It is necessary that you not oppose what they say. You should obey them and follow their orders." Amiru'l-Mu'minin goes on to say, "When I heard this, I said: "O Prophet, let me know who the 'uli'l-amr' are." The Prophet said: "O 'Ali! You are the first of them."

(3) Muhammad Ibn Mu'min Shirazi, one of the most eminent Sunni religious scholars, writes in his Risala al-I'tiqadat that when the Holy Prophet appointed Amiru'l-Mu'minin his representative in Medina, the verse "uli'l-amr al-Minkum" (And those in authority from among you) was revealed in reference to 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib.

(4) Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi Hanafi in his Yanabiu'l-Mawadda, Ch.38, reports from Manaqib that it is stated in Tafsir al-Mujahid that this verse was revealed in reference to Amiru'l-Mu'minin when the Prophet appointed him as his representative in Medina.

The Holy Imam said: "O Holy Prophet of Allah! Have you appointed me Caliph over women and children?" Then the Holy Prophet said: "Are you not content that you have the same relation to me as Aaron had to Moses?"

(5) Sheikhu'l-Islam Hamwaini reports Salim Ibn Qais Hilali as saying the following: During Uthman's caliphate, I saw some Muhajirs and Ansars sitting together praising themselves. 'Ali was silent among them. The people asked 'Ali to speak.

He said: "Do you not know that the Holy Prophet said: 'I and my Ahlul Bayt were one light, which existed in His creation 14,000 years before the creation of Adam? When He created Adam, He placed that light in his spine when he came down to the earth. Then He placed it in Noah in his ark; then in Abraham's spine while he was in the fire; similarly in the pure spines of fathers and in the pure wombs of mothers, none of whom were born unlawfully."

Those in the group who were foremost in the battles of Badr and Hunain said: "Yes, we have heard these words." Then 'Ali said, "Tell me on oath whether you know that in the Holy Qur'an Allah has given preference to the foremost ones, and that in Islam no one equals me in merit." They said, "Yes, we acknowledge this."

Then 'Ali recited from the Holy Qur'an:

"And the foremost are the foremost; these are they who are drawn nigh (to Allah)." (56:10-11)

He said: "When this verse was revealed, the people asked the Holy Prophet who were the foremost ones, and about whom the verse was revealed.

Now tell me on oath if you know that the Holy Prophet told them that Allah Almighty revealed this verse about the prophets and their vicegerents. I am foremost among all the prophets and 'Ali, my wasi (vicegerent) is foremost among all the vicegerents?"

Then 'Ali said: "The Holy Qur'an tells us,

'Obey Allah and obey the Prophet and those vested with authority from among you' (4:59)

and the verse

'Verily, verily your guardian is (none else but) Allah and His Prophet (Muhammad) and those who believe, those who establish prayer and pay the poor-rate, while bowing down (in prayer).' (5:55)

and the verse

'have not taken anyone as an adherent besides Allah and His Apostle and the believers.' (9:16)

Allah subsequently ordered His Holy Prophet to identify who was meant by the words 'uli'l-amr' (those vested with authority) in the same way as the ritual prayer, fasting and the Hajj had been clarified. Accordingly, at Ghadir al-Khum the Holy Prophet appointed me over the people and declared: 'O people when Almighty Allah commissioned me to prophethood I felt apprehension that people would oppose me.'

Then the Holy Prophet continued: 'O people, do you know that Allah Most High is my Master? I enjoy more mastery over the selves of the believers than they have over themselves?'

When all confirmed that it was so, the Holy Prophet announced: 'Of whomsoever I am the master, 'Ali is his master; O Allah be a friend of him who is a friend of 'Ali and be an enemy of him who is an enemy of 'Ali.'

Then Salman stood up and asked: 'O Holy Prophet what is the significance of 'Ali's mastery?' The Holy Prophet replied: 'Ali's mastery is like my own mastery. Of whomsoever I am the master 'Ali is also his master.'

Then the verse was revealed:

'This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favor on you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.' (5:3)

Thereupon the Holy Prophet said: 'Allah is Great, Who has perfected the religion, completed His favor upon me, and is satisfied with my prophethood and is satisfied with 'Ali being the vicegerent after me.'"

This hadith confirms those hadith which I related during past nights to show that 'master' connotes complete mastery over more than one's own.

"The people then said: 'O Holy Prophet tell us the names of your vicegerents.' The Holy Prophet said: 'They are 'Ali, who is my brother, my successor, and my vicegerent and the master of every believer after me; then his son, Hasan, then Husain, then nine successive sons of Husain.

The Holy Qur'an is with them and they are with the Holy Qur'an. They will not separate from it, and it will not separate from them until they reach me at the Pool of Kauthar.'"

After recording the full report, he has recorded three other reports from Manaqib narrated by Salim Ibn Qais, Isa Ibn Sirri, and Ibn Mu'awiya showing that the words 'uli'l-amr' refer to the twelve Imams of the 'Ahlul Bayt.'

I believe that the above reports are enough to clarify the real meaning of 'uli'l-amr.' As for the number and names of the Holy Imams, I will relate hadith narrated by eminent Sunni scholars, without referring, as has been my practice, to the many reports by Shi'as scholars.

Names of the twelve Imams and their number

(1) Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi Hanafi in his Yanabiu'l-Mawadda, ch.76, reports from Fara'idu's-Simtain of Hamwaini, who reports from Mujahid, who reports from Ibn Abbas, that a Jew named Na'thal came to the Holy Prophet and asked him questions about Tawhid (Unity of Allah).

The Holy Prophet answered his questions and the Jew embraced Islam. Then he said: "O Holy Prophet, every prophet had a wasi (vicegerent). Our Prophet, Moses Ibn Imran, made a will for Yusha Ibn Nun. Please tell me who is your wasi?" The Holy Prophet said: "My vicegerent is 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib; after him are Hasan, and Husain and after them are nine Imams, who are the successive descendants of Husain."

Na'thal asked the Holy Prophet the names of those Imams. The Holy Prophet said: "After Husain, his son, 'Ali, will be the Imam; after him his son, Muhammad; after him his son, Ja'far; after him his son Musa; after him his son, 'Ali; after him his son, Muhammad; after him his son, Hasan; after him his son, Muhammad Mahdi will be the last Imam. There will be twelve Imams."

In addition to the names of the nine Imams, this hadith further states that each would succeed as Imam after his father. Na'thal made further inquiries, and the Holy Prophet described the manner of death of each Imam.

Then Na'thal said, "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that you are His Holy Prophet. I bear witness that these twelve Holy Imams are your vicegerents after you. What you have said is exactly what is recorded in our books and in the will of Moses."

Then the Holy Prophet said: "Paradise is for him who loves them and obeys them, and Hell is for him who is hostile to them and opposes them."

Na'thal then recited some couplets to the effect that "May Allah, the Exalted, shower His blessings upon you, chosen Prophet and pride of the Bani Hashim. Allah has guided us by means of you and the twelve Holy men whom you have named. Certainly Allah has purified them and preserved them from impurity. He who loves them is successful. He who hates them is the loser.

The last of the Imams will quench the thirst of the thirsty. He is the one the people will wait for. Prophet of Allah, your progeny is a blessing for me and for all the believers. Those who turn away from them will soon be thrown into Hell."

(2) The great scholar, Sheikh Sulayman Balkhi, in his Yanabiu'l-Mawadda, ch. 76 reports from Manaqib of Khawarizmi, who reports from Wathila Ibn Asqa' Ibn Qarkhab, who reports Jabir Ibn Abdullah Ansari; and also Abu'l-Fazl Shaibani and he from Muhammad Ibn Abdullah Ibn Ibrahim Shafi'i, who reports Jabir Ansari (one of the chief companions of the Prophet) as saying:

"Jundal Ibn Junadab Ibn Jubair, a Jew, came to the Holy Prophet and asked him about

Tawhid. After hearing his reply, the man became a Muslim. He said that on the previous night he had seen Moses in a dream telling him: 'Embrace Islam at the hands of the last of the prophets, Muhammad, and attach yourself to the vicegerents after him.'

He thanked Allah for the blessing of Islam. He then asked the Holy Prophet to tell him the names of his vicegerents. The Holy Prophet began by saying: 'My vicegerents are twelve in number.'

The man said that he had seen this fact in the Torah. He asked the Prophet to tell him their names, and the Prophet said: 'The first of them is the chief of the vicegerents, the father of the Imams, 'Ali. Then follow his two sons - Hasan and Husain. You shall see these three.

When you reach the last stage of your life, Imam Zainu'l-Abidin will be born, and the last thing that you have of this world shall be milk. So cling to them so that ignorance may not mislead you.'

The man said that he had seen in the Torah and in other scriptures the names of 'Ali, Hasan, and Husain as Elias, Shabbar, and Shabbir. He asked the Holy Prophet to tell him the names of the other Imams.

Then the Holy Prophet named the remaining nine Imams with their epithets and added: 'The last of them, Muhammad Mahdi, will live, but disappear. He will appear later and will fill the world with justice and equity, since it will have degenerated into injustice and tyranny. Verily, Paradise is for those who show patience during the time of his occultation. Paradise is for those who are firm in their love for him.

These are they whom Allah Almighty has praised in the Holy Qur'an and for whom the Holy Qur'an is a 'guide for those who guard (against evil). Those who believe in the unseen.' Also He says

'These are Allah's party: now surely the party of Allah are the successful ones.'
(58:22)

The number of caliphs after the Holy Prophet is twelve

Mir Sayyid 'Ali Shafi'i Hamadani in his Mawaddatu'l Qurba, (Mawadda XIII), reports that 'Umar Ibn Qais said: "We were sitting in a group in which Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud was also present. Suddenly an Arab came and said: "Who among you is Abdullah? Abdullah said: "I am." He said: "Abdullah! Did the Holy Prophet tell you about the caliphs after him?"

Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud said, "Yes, the Prophet said: 'After me there will be twelve caliphs, corresponding to the number of the Imams of the Bani Isra'il.'"

The same hadith has also been reported from Sha'bi, who reported it from Masruq, who reported it from Abdullah Shiba.

Also Jurair, Ash'ath, Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud, Abdullah Ibn 'Umar, and Jubair Ibn Samra all report the Holy Prophet as saying: "There will be twelve caliphs after me. Their number will correspond to the number of the caliphs of the Bani Isra'il." According to Abdu'l-Malik's report, the Holy Prophet added: "And all of them will be from the Bani Hashim."

Most Sunni ulama', including Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, Muslim, Sha'bi have reported the same thing.

Yahya Ibn Hasan, a great scholar of jurisprudence, has reported in his Kitab al-Umda from twenty different sources, that "Verily, there are twelve caliphs after the Holy Prophet, and all of them belong to the Quraish." Bukhari has reported from three sources, Muslim from nine sources, 'Ali Dawud from three sources, Tirmidhi from one source, and Hamid from three sources that the Holy Prophet said:

"The caliphs and Imams after me are twelve, and all of them are from the Quraish."
According to some reports, the Holy Prophet said: "All of them are from the Bani Hashim."

On page 446 Yahya Ibn Hasan says: "Some of the scholars have said that hadith in support of the view that the number of the caliphs and Imams after the Holy Prophet is twelve are commonly known.

Everyone knows that when the Holy Prophet specified the number of his caliphs to be twelve, he meant that they would belong to his 'Ahlul Bayt,' To say that he meant the caliphs who were his companions would be incompatible with the facts (since there were only four).

Nor can it be said that he meant the Umayyad kings, of whom there were thirteen. Moreover, they were all tyrants except 'Umar Ibn Abdu'l-Aziz, (although even he usurped the caliphate and forced the Imam of the time to remain confined in his house). Since the Holy Prophet had said: "They are all from the Bani Hashim," the Bani Umayyads are not to be included.

So it is clear that the rightful caliphs of the Holy Prophet were the twelve Imams who were descendants of the Holy Prophet and who excelled all others in knowledge and piety. This fact is confirmed by this consecutively narrated hadith of the Holy Prophet. "I leave behind me two great things, the Holy Book of Allah (the Holy Qur'an) and my 'Ahlul Bayt.' If you are attached to these two, never, never, shall you go astray after me.

Verily, these two shall never be separated from one another until they meet me at the Pool of Kauthar. If you are attached to these two, you will never be misled."

The Holy Prophet said: "Seek knowledge even in China." We have spent ten long nights discussing issues concerning a precious knowledge - the way of Islam. We have seen many differences between the Sunni and Shi'as sects, and we hope that historical fact and reason have clarified the nature of the differences.

If Allah wills, these discussions will convince sincere seekers of knowledge that "Whom Allah guides, no one can lead astray."

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